

Calendar contest

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, September 27, 2006

Budding artists have until Thursday to submit work that they'd like to see included in the 2007 Clean Air Kids Calendar, a bilingual yearly production of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Valley students in kindergarten through 12th grade are eligible to enter. Artists should place the page so the paper is 8½ inches high and 11 inches wide. Artwork should be in color and contain a written clean-air message. Students should include name, address, phone number, age, grade and school on the back of the artwork and mail it flat, not folded, to 2007 Calendar Contest, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno 93726. Entries should be postmarked or may be submitted in person at a district's office by Thursday. The Modesto office, at 4800 Enterprise Way, is open 7:30a.m. to 5:30 p.m. On the Net: www.valleyair.org.

Student art sought for 2007 clean-air calendar

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006

The deadline for Fresno-area students to submit artwork for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District 2007 Clean Air Kids Calendar will be Thursday.

Students in kindergarten through 12th grade are eligible to enter. Art must be in landscape orientation and on paper that is 8 1/2 inches deep and 11 inches wide. The art must be in color and must contain a written message about a way to help clean the air.

All artwork submitted must include the student's name, address, phone number, age, grade and school on the back and must be mailed flat, not folded, to 2007 Calendar Contest, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno 93726.

Details: Northern Region (209) 557-6400, Central Region (559) 230-6000, Southern Region (661) 326-6900, or visit: www.valleyair.org.

What's New

ValleyVoice, September 27, 2006

A large wildfire in Ventura County that started on September 4 is now creating air-pollution problems in the San Joaquin Valley, and could create air-quality concerns as far north as Merced County. Meteorologists from the Valley Air District expect that smoke from the fire will begin working its way further north into the Valley. Due to the fire's increasing size, combined with winds continuing to come from the south and southwest, the smoke is expected to create poor air quality the next several days in the Valley portion of Kern County, as well as Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Madera and Merced counties.

Big air issue is on the horizon as the Valley Air Board asked the valley air basin to tighten up emissions even more over the next few years to meet the 8 hour standard mandated by EPA. A report of the issue will be released next month with the Air Board making a decision next spring. "I don't know where we are going to get 400 tons more of Nox and VOCs," says ag industry leader Manuel Cunha, "particularly when the Air Board has no control over mobile emissions that make up a huge part of the problem." Farms that Cunha are working with are planning the valley's first diesel plan that could help cut emissions in the valley by mandating that all diesel be blended with a small portion of biodiesel for example. "We want to grow all the crop to produce it right here, not truck or train them in."

Members of Congress press EPA to OK Calif auto emissions waiver

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- More than 100 members of Congress urged the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday to allow states to adopt strict vehicle emissions standards that California regulators adopted two years ago.

In a letter to EPA administrator Stephen L. Johnson, the lawmakers said the agency should not block the tailpipe standards, which were designed to cut greenhouse gas emissions from passenger cars and light trucks by 25 percent and from sport utility vehicles by 18 percent beginning in 2009.

Ten other states have also adopted those standards, which are opposed by automakers, but the rules can't be implemented until California receives a waiver. EPA has yet to grant one.

"States are leading the way in tackling the most dangerous environmental threat we face. We strongly support the states' efforts to protect their citizens and their economies," said Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif.

EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said the agency was reviewing the waiver request.

Automakers, which are trying to block the standards in federal court, have said the law amounts to an attempt to set new fuel-economy standards, which is under the domain of the federal government. The auto industry has said the standards, if adopted, would lead to drastically higher vehicle costs.

Since California began regulating pollution before the federal government, it has special authority under the Clean Air Act to set its own vehicle pollution standards if it gets a waiver from the EPA. Other states are allowed to adopt either the federal standards or California's rules.

As a Test Lab on Dirty Air, an Ohio Town Has Changed

By Felicity Barringer

N.y. Times, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006

STEUBENVILLE, Ohio, Sept. 23 — For three generations, people here commuted beneath the scraggly bluffs along the Ohio River to jobs where they made the steel from which 20th-century America — the cars, the skyscrapers, the cans — was built.

Then, starting in the 1970's, Steubenville residents began contributing more personal raw material to a different sort of endeavor. They provided details about their lung function and cardiac rhythms, about the manner of their lives and the cause of their deaths, to the science on which 21st-century air pollution policies are built.

Data from Steubenville have played a central role in many decisions by the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) on air pollution regulations, including two of the more controversial — one in 2005 setting the first limits on mercury emissions, and another last week to tighten one but not both of the standards for lethal fine soot particles.

Three decades ago, Steubenville's reputation for having the country's foulest air made it a magnet for researchers in the young field of environmental epidemiology.

"Steubenville is a perfect environmental laboratory," said James Slater, a chemistry professor at Franciscan University of Steubenville. Two large steel mills and two plants that turned coal into furnace-ready coke for those plants operated nearby, he said, and the Ohio River Valley is prone to temperature inversions that trap polluted air. "We have it all," Dr. Slater said.

They had it worse, a half-century ago. Much of that pollution, along with a noxious odor that seemed part burnt toast and part burnt metal, has disappeared along with the jobs at the larger steel plant, across the river in Weirton, W.Va. As the pollution receded, mortality rates declined.

This trend factored into seminal studies on the health consequences of air pollution, including an oft-cited 14-year research project on the health impact of soot concentrations in six industrial cities. Douglas Dockery, a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health, led the research. Between the first period of the study, from 1974 to 1989, and an eight-year follow-up period, from 1990 to 1998, soot concentrations declined 24 percent and mortality rates dropped 19 percent.

Steubenville “provided the benchmark that we compared everything else to,” Dr. Dockery said, and the study was a crucial underpinning of the first federal regulations on soot, which went into effect in 1987.

In Steubenville and the other cities, Dr. Dockery recruited older adults and first graders.

“I loved it when we got pulled out of class,” said Dr. Slater’s daughter Beth Atkinson, now 38 and a homemaker in Skaneateles, N.Y. She remembered her classmates filing up to the stage of the Steubenville elementary school.

“There were three different machines, three different lines,” Ms. Atkinson said. “You had your own tube. They hooked it up to each machine.” Then, “when you blew on it, the plastic part would go up.”

As the daughter of a chemist, she said she had an idea that the people with stronger lungs could make the plastic rise higher in the tube, and she wondered about the harm caused by the pollution.

“I’d picture some ‘Little House on the Prairie’ place,” with clear air and blue skies, she said. “I’d imagine those children blowing into the machine. I’d wonder how much they could blow. I’d wonder if our lungs would be as good as theirs.”

The studies — at least three are under way right now — have been going on so long they have involved two generations. In the late 1990’s, Ms. Atkinson’s nephew, Wesley Myers, then about 9, lugged a small air-sniffing backpack everywhere he went for two weeks. “Every half-hour I had to write where I was, what I was doing,” said Wesley, now a senior at Catholic Central High School in Steubenville. “I did it for the money” — \$100 — he said.

Dr. Slater, Wesley’s grandfather, is the scientist on the scene for researchers from [Harvard](#) and the [University of Michigan](#). He tends a cluster of monitors on the Franciscan campus, harvesting the data.

He takes visiting scientists to the Hunan restaurant in the old downtown, where Alice Wong, the proprietor, remembers the visitors’ tastes, if not their names. “The Harvard people, they liked vegetable fried rice,” she said.

Other residents, who remember when the air was dirtier and the streets and their bank accounts were fuller, speak of the scientists and their science less fondly, linking them to the town’s decline. From 1980 to 2000, census figures show, the Steubenville-Weirton population dropped faster than that of any urban area in the nation.

Franciscan University’s executive vice president, Bob Philby, recalled that when the subject of pollution came up among steel mill workers in the 1970’s, “They would say: Don’t go there. That’s pay dirt.” Since then, 9 of 10 steel jobs have vanished.

Jim DiGregory, whose family owns a garden center, was born in Steubenville in 1926, nine years after the entertainer Dean Martin. Mr. DiGregory and his wife, Loretta, were part of the original Harvard study.

Decades ago, the air "didn't smell too good," Mr. DiGregory said. "Maybe people died from it. But who knew what they died from then? They'd say, 'He died of old age.' They'd say it if he was 60 years old."

His wife died in 1988 from a rare heart ailment, becoming part of the studies' mortality statistics. He still fills out postcards the researchers send to see if he is still alive. Is the air cleaner? "Yes." Is it worth the trade-offs? "I don't think so."

The town of 19,000 has half the population it did 60 years ago, and the outlook of many residents has changed. "Certainly 30 years ago, that was a prevailing sense here in the valley that if there's dirt on the air there's food on the table," said Adam Scurti, 61, a lawyer. "Now, that would not be tolerated."

Pacifica OKs biodiesel plan

Plan involves using food by-products to power city's wastewater facility

by Julia Scott

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, September 26, 2006

PACIFICA — The City Council re-affirmed Pacifica's reputation for alternative energy initiatives in a vote Monday night to move forward on installing a biodiesel production facility to run the city's wastewater treatment plant.

The council voted unanimously to ask city staff to prepare a request for proposals to go out to more than a dozen California biodiesel production companies — anyone who would like to bid on installing a new vegetable-oil-recycling facility at the Calera Creek Wastewater Plant.

City officials said that up to six local companies had already expressed interest in building the production facility, which would convert fryer oil collected from restaurants throughout the Bay Area into biodiesel. Once converted, it would act like diesel, powering the wastewater plant's generators at peak hours and the city's own fleet of diesel vehicles.

Although cities like San Francisco and Berkeley have made strides in converting many of their own municipal vehicles to run on biodiesel, the idea of running a wastewater plant on biodiesel has no regional precedent, according to Councilman Jim Vreeland.

The project, conceived a year ago by Vreeland and Public Works Director Scott Holmes, is part of the city's effort to move toward freeing itself from a "petroleum-based economy," according to Vreeland. The city recently installed \$3 million worth of solar panels next to the wastewater treatment plant for the same purpose.

"We saw the electrical crisis coming down the road, and this is another investment in our future," said Vreeland.

The project also makes good business sense. By generating its own energy at peak hours rather than relying on PG&E, the wastewater plant's costs would be reduced by up to \$60,000 a year, according to officials. The business with the winning bid would agree to build the facility at no expense to the city, and sell the biodiesel at a discount.

In return, the city would let its wastewater filtration system be used for a secondary purpose: removing nitrogen oxide, a toxic byproduct of biodiesel production, from the veggie-oil production process.

According to a 2002 report on alternative fuel emissions, replacing petrodiesel with biodiesel in a vehicle reduces carbon monoxide output by 48 percent, hydrocarbons by 67 percent, and particulate matter by 47 percent. Nitrogen oxide emissions, in contrast, increase by 10 percent.

The technique proposed by Pacifica to remove the pollutant is so new that Vreeland said the city might look into patenting it. City officials will have to prove that it works before the California Air Resources Board will approve its use to power generators, which can release harmful air particles. Until then, the city plans to install a 2,000-gallon tank of biofuel as a backup power source for the plant; that doesn't require state approval.

But the entire project still faces the California Coastal Commission's approval process.

Pacifica is already home to a citizen-run biodiesel co-op, which has gained dozens of new members in the past year and a half. Two other biodiesel co-ops, one in San Mateo and one in Half Moon Bay, have sprung up in the past few months.

Between 2004 and 2005, American biodiesel production tripled to 75 million gallons, according to the National Biodiesel Board, a trade group. That number was projected to reach 150 million gallons by the end of 2006.

Co-ops are not the only part of the industry on a growth trend. James Justice, co-owner of two Bay Area companies that pick up recycled fryer oil from restaurants, estimated that the Bay Area produces about 5 million gallons of veggie oil a year. Three new biodiesel production companies set up shop in the area in the past five months, he added.

"It's a grassroots sort of thing. People are doing this from the bottom up, not the top down," said Justice. "People are realizing that every gallon of biodiesel consumed is one less gallon that we have to buy across the ocean."

Justice's companies, A Cleaner Earth and Blue Baiyo, are partly owned by Bay Area Biofuel, a Richmond-based production facility that Justice said was keen to win the Pacifica contract and relocate all its operations to the wastewater treatment plant.

The city will take the next few months to review the project bids it receives with the goal of beginning construction in January 2007.

Plant would boost energy in Hayward

by Janis Mara

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Hayward may get a big energy boost if plans for a new \$140 million electric generating facility in the city are approved, officials with Eastshore Energy Center said in news released Monday.

The Eastshore Energy Center is expected to open in 2009 and would provide enough energy to power 85,000 homes, supplying backup power for Hayward and improving the reliability of Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s power delivery system for the Bay Area, according to Eastshore Energy.

The company has applied to the California Energy Commission for certification to build the center. Eastshore Energy is a subsidiary of Tierra Energy, a Texas-based firm that specializes in wind and natural gas-fueled generation.

When peak demand hits, as it did during this year's sweltering July, the center would be called into action, the company said. The plant, planned to be built on Clawiter Road near PG&E's

Eastshore substation, would only operate during peak demand periods, according to the company.

Eastshore signed a 20-year power purchase agreement with PG&E in April. This is significant because having a major customer like PG&E is key to the success of such facilities.

Along these lines, Calpine Corp., the bankrupt San Jose energy producer, last week won court approval to sell a stake in its Hayward power plant, the Russell City Energy Center, to preserve a 10-year contract with PG&E. A judge approved the sale of Calpine's 35 percent share and the plant's assets to GE Energy Financial Services for \$44 million. The money will help build the 600-megawatt plant.

The Eastshore plant would use less water annually than five residences, the company said, with its engines cooled by a closed-water system. It would be built using state-of-the-art air emissions control technology.

Waking Up To Global Warming

ValleyVoice, September 27, 2006

Tulare County - California will be the first state in the US to require industries, including farmers, to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger long ago broke ranks with President Bush over this issue adamantly declaring that global warming threats are real and California needs to do something about it.

With the agreement of the Democrats in the legislature a bill mandating the state to cap greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by 2020 will be signed into law. That will require a reduction of about 25 percent of CO2 emissions from cars and trucks, power plants, refineries, industry and cows. Greenhouse gases include CO2 mostly from fossil burning and methane from petroleum systems, landfills, natural sources, swamps and cattle.

A key component of the new law would be to authorize carbon caps and trades for various industries once an inventory of emissions is done. An emission market would allow a business the flexibility of choice between investing in technology that would reduce emissions or buy a credit from elsewhere. Basically you tax the so-called "bad actors" that emit carbon into the atmosphere. As far back as 1897 a scientist predicted carbonic acid released into the arctic region would raise temps 8 to 9 degrees. That was when CO2 in the atmosphere was a third lower than today.

Cleaner Cars Will Help

Sources say about one third of the emissions cut will come from lower tail pipe emission standards already passed into law last year in California - a law being challenged by American car makers. Last week a Fresno judge said he would rule on a request to throw out an automobile industry challenge to the new law set to go into effect on 2009 models of cars sold in the state. Under the legislation, cars and light trucks would cut their exhaust emissions by 25 percent.

The remainder will come from a combination of approaches including switching more of the state's fuel to biofuel including ethanol. The state ARB is expected to approve a plan to up the percentage of ethanol in California gas tanks to 10 percent from 5.7 percent currently in the next few months. Ethanol releases far fewer greenhouse gas emissions. Likewise a plan to add biofuel to all diesel fuel sales in the state is being considered. The plan would extend the state fuel supply while lowering greenhouse gases. The more gas tanks you fill with ethanol the less CO2 wafts into the air trapping heat. The spread of E-85 stations in California will enable more cars to use 85 percent ethanol fuel.

Pushing solar electricity, Schwarzenegger will try to get more solar energy installed in the state, promote wind power to increase our electricity supply and push more plug-in hybrid cars.

Stumping for the plan Schwarzenegger said last month that the measure "strengthens our economy and cleans our environment." The governor believes the mandate to require more efficient and renewable sources of power will stimulate innovation in the business sector.

Methane, which is 20 times more potent in trapping heat compared to CO₂, will now face new controls.

Significantly for dairymen methane is identified as other greenhouse gases that will be covered but offers no details on how it will be cataloged, monitored or regulated.

"Who is going to pay for the research?" asked Michael Marsh, CEO of Western United Dairymen. He is concerned about how a mandated reduction would effect small and large dairies who have different levels of emissions to comply with what could be costly technology.

But some believe the law could stimulate the use of biomethane to produce power that both sequesters the problem gas and provides a financing mechanism to do it - power or gas sales. Biomethane is a natural gas substitute. It will be up to state regulatory agencies who, by 2008 must limit gas emissions of the largest producers in the state according to the bill, AB32.

California Becoming Third World?

Critics of the whole idea, including the Competitive Enterprise Institute, criticized the legislation with headlines that "California Votes to Join the Third World" points to the high costs businesses in California will have to pay in an era when jobs and whole industries are fleeing California due to high costs.

"This will drive jobs to other states," they say.

Others say Schwarzenegger's push of this legislation is strictly symbolic and is a clear political ploy in an election year.

If power companies are mandated to cut their emissions they will simply buy power from out of state-some of who use coal to generate electricity - a fuel source very high in CO₂, argue critics.

Even supporters agree that California's emission reduction will be small on a world-wide basis if other states don't follow by adopting the same plan. California produces about 10 percent of the U.S. emission of carbon dioxide and 2.5 percent of the world's CO₂. But Senator Diane Feinstein hailed the legislation, pointing to the fact that seven Northeast states in the U.S. are forming a cap and trade emissions plan similar to the one being envisioned by California. Europe has a cap and trade emission program. Schwarzenegger says he believes like other trends in which California leads the way, history suggests other states will follow the plan to curb the greenhouse gases.

Indeed, a carbon trading program will be key to making the plan work, says its author, and the emission trading could go on nationally or even internationally. At least one major oil company with a big presence in California vowed to cooperate with Schwarzenegger's plan. In a statement released September 4th, BP Oil said they were ready to sign up.

"After speaking with Governor Schwarzenegger, I believe that, through his leadership, a fully functioning market will become an integral part of the system to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," said BP Group Executive John Brown. "Having an emissions market will help California achieve the lowest solutions and spur innovation of new technologies supporting lower greenhouse gas emissions."

BP annually reports its greenhouse gas emissions and has made significant reductions in those emissions over the years. The company has long advocated the use of emission “cap and trading” programs to achieve emissions reductions and is an active participant in the European Union emissions reduction market.

Whatever comes out of the debate over the costs of cutting emissions, Schwarzenegger has made it clear in several major state reports that the cost of not fighting global warming is higher still.

Plagues and Pestilence

A recent state report from the California Climate Change Center to the California Energy Commission found warmer temps from global warming would likely continue but moderate depending on how much we cut greenhouse emissions in the next few years. Figuring we cut these heat-trapping emissions enough to cut back the warming range to just 3 to 5 degrees F by 2070, California would still suffer a 30 to 60 percent loss in Sierra snowpack, a rise of 6 to 14 inches of sea level, 2 to 2.5 times as many heat waves, a 25 percent increase in smoggy days, up to a 1.5 times increase in critically dry years, up to a 6 percent increase in electricity demand, up to a 14 percent decrease in forest yields and as much as a 35 percent increase in the risk of wildfires. All together, it's not a pretty picture. If emissions are not controlled the temps could warm on average 8 to 10 degrees and the litany of plagues would be even worse, says the report done by the state agency.

The July heat storm, as it is now being called, that generated several hundred millions in damage to Tulare County crops may be a wake up call to farmers who are watching the global warming debate. The same report suggests continued high emissions will push up demand for water, in turn making water supplies less reliable, raise ozone damage that reduce crop yield, increase pest outbreaks and diseases. Increasing temps will impact fruit development, reduce chill hours for fruit and nuts for example, reduce milk supply, cause increasing quality and pest problems in grapes for example, expand the spreading of ag weeds, increase the pink bollworm spread in cotton for example. At the same time our Sierra snowpack is reduced there will be less summer power production coming from hydro plants sending power costs higher.

Farm industry and all Californian's can debate how this new cap and trade system will work and the state appears ready to use market mechanisms proven in other parts of the world and the US to clean up emission producing industry and cars by the time it goes into effect in 2012.

Mandating higher efficiency in the power and oil fuel vehicles we use could get us a long way toward reducing these emissions, say experts. An example a German company passed out one free long lasting light bulb to all its customers and it was cheaper than building another power plant. Likewise in fuel efficiency where US customers are now learning the benefit of hybrid and electric cars vs fuel guzzlers that require increasing oil imports from unstable parts of the world. California has recently mandated increased standards for homes and buildings.

Utilities In The Way?

Some say it's fine of the state to push renewable energy, but some effort has to be made to make sure the big private utilities don't get in the way.

That was the case in Visalia some months ago when a group of farmers led by nut farmer Brian Blain wanted to start a biomass plant next to the City of Visalia's wastewater treatment plant. The deal fell short when it became clear that utility stand-by costs were so high it made the project uneconomical even though it would have recycled wood waste into electric power.

Europe, where they are leading the way in technology to develop more renewables like wind, solar and even ocean generated power, is moving toward 25 percent reliable on renewable energy vs traditional oil, coal and nuclear supplies. Japan too is moving toward renewables

California temperatures are on the rise

Tuesday, September 26, 2006
Special to the Madera Tribune

FRESNO - Following California's historic action on global warming two weeks ago, a new report released Sept. 14 by the Environment California Research and Policy Center shows that this year's unprecedented heat wave is part of a broader trend of rising temperatures. In California, July 2006 was the third warmest July on record, with the average temperature 3.7°F above the historical average.

"Global warming is happening, and Californians are feeling the heat," said Environment California Field Organizer Moira Chapin. "California is taking the lead on solving global warming, and now it's time for the rest of the country to be held to the same standard," continued Chapin.

In the continental United States, the first seven months of 2006 were the warmest January-July of any year on record, according to the National Climatic Data Center. The average temperature was 3.2° F above the 20th century average, making it the warmest January-July on record.

To examine how these recent temperature patterns compare with temperatures over the last 30 years, Environment California researchers analyzed temperature data from 255 major weather stations in all 50 states and Washington, DC for the years 2000-2005 and the first six months of 2006. This recent data was compared to "normal" temperatures for the three decades spanning 1971-2000.

Nationally, between 2000 and 2005, the average temperature was above normal at 95 percent of the locations, indicating widespread warming. In addition, nights are getting warmer; the average minimum (nighttime low) temperature was above normal at 92 percent of the locations examined.

In Fresno, the average temperature from 2000-2005 was 1.9° F above normal.

In California, unchecked global warming threatens to:

- Cause a massive rise in sea levels, inundating California's coast.
- Cause serious future water shortages, as California's snowpack-fed rivers and streams dry up.
- Cause more frequent and severe heat waves, which will increase deaths and illnesses from extreme heat and smog.

With the world waiting for the United States to take action on global warming, the California Legislature passed the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32) on August 31, positioning California to be the national leader in the effort to solve global warming. However, to avoid the worst consequences of global warming, the entire country must stabilize global warming emissions within the next decade, begin reducing them soon thereafter, and cut emissions by 80 percent by the middle of this century.

"The good news is that we already have the tools to substantially reduce global warming pollution. California has been putting these solutions to work, and with AB 32 we are planning to go even further. Now the rest of the country needs to do the same," said Chapin.

In August, Environment California released a report showing how the U.S. could cut global warming pollution by nearly 20 percent by 2020 by making our homes, cars, and businesses more efficient, switching to renewable energy sources, and giving Americans more alternatives to driving, paired with strong, mandatory limits on global warming emissions.

"These are win-win solutions because they also will improve America's long-term economy and energy security by reducing U.S. dependence on oil and other fossil fuels," stated Chapin.

This summer Rep. Henry Waxman of California introduced legislation, called the Safe Climate Act (H.R. 5642), to harness clean energy solutions and reduce U.S. global warming emissions by 15 percent by 2020 and by 80 percent by 2050.

"While our leaders in Sacramento are working to solve global warming, Washington has failed to take action. Congress needs to get serious about global warming. We're calling on Congressmen Costa and Cardoza to cosponsor the Safe Climate Act," concluded Chapin.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Commentary, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006:](#)

Railing against a car-dominated Valley

The San Joaquin Valley is growing at an explosive pace. As this area continues to expand, this growth will present Valley residents with many challenges to solve. But, it will also provide opportunities to improve our communities.

Take transportation, for example. At first glance, it may not seem like Visalia needs alternatives to driving. Traffic in this area has not yet reached the crisis point. But, as more residents arrive, they will bring more vehicles, which will lead to more traffic congestion on our roads and highways. Cars also contribute to sprawl, by encouraging developers to build car-oriented communities with parking lots instead of parks.

Worse yet, all of these extra cars will add to our air pollution. Our smog levels are already as bad as in many major cities. Some of it floats in from the Bay Area and some of it is generated by local farms and dairies, but a significant amount comes out of our cars' and sport utility vehicles' tailpipes. More cars will only make our air pollution worse.

Clearly, a solution is needed. Mass transit can be part of that solution. Throughout California and the west, mass transit - especially rail - has proven to be an effective and efficient traffic and pollution fighter. San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose, San Francisco, Sacramento, Portland, Salt Lake City, Denver, Dallas and Houston have all built light rail systems. In the Los Angeles region, five counties joined forces to create Metrolink, a commuter train network with tracks linking San Bernardino to Oxnard and Oceanside with Lancaster.

We can learn lessons from Southern California. First, never assume that change is impossible. For years, Los Angeles was known as the "car capital of the world" - and the city wore that badge with pride. But, over time, as the traffic situation grew worse, attitudes changed. You can forget the old autocentric stereotype. Today, L.A. has an expanding rail transit network and (not coincidentally) a revitalized downtown.

For Visalia, the first step should be to beef up the regional bus system - you have to learn to walk before you can run. But, the ultimate solution should include some form of rail - most likely commuter rail in Tulare County, with Fresno/Clovis a likely candidate for light rail.

Fortunately, a lot of the infrastructure that we need is already in place. Seemingly invisible and often unnoticed, railroad tracks (and former rail right-of-ways) crisscross the Valley. The Union Pacific main line, which parallels Highway 99 from Tulare to Fresno, could become the basis for a successful commuter train line. There are also rail lines connecting Visalia with Porterville, Hanford and other communities.

To make this dream a reality, we will need money. Measure R will provide Tulare County with much-needed transportation funds, but a lot of the money generated by the tax increase will go

toward road repairs and expansion. Shifting some of that money into transit - buying more buses to place on more routes, for example - would place Tulare County on the right track (no pun intended) for a better future.

We should also vote yes on statewide bond measures such as Proposition 1B, which would provide the Valley with millions of dollars for transportation improvements.

Growth will bring many changes, and change can be scary. But, if we come up with creative and exciting solutions to our problems, instead of falling back on the same old fixes, we can create a San Joaquin Valley where diverse people will want to live for years to come.

James Fujita is a member of the Transit Coalition of Southern California.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Commentary, Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2006:](#)

New construction hurts Valley air quality

Has anyone noticed the eyesore northwest of Highway 99 and Highway 198 as you enter into Visalia: It's the new car lot. We no longer have a beautiful corridor as we are entering the city limits; instead we have an asphalt jungle and a lot of lights.

What has happened to us, how did we allow the construction gurus to destroy our beautiful trees and our clean air? Is it because we all forgot about what we learned in school, that trees and plants are the key element in keeping our air clean?

Plants and trees are necessary for our mere survival, without sufficient trees and plants to clean our air; we will soon have to wear a gas mask in order to leave our homes.

I understand that construction is inevitable, but I know that the planning department has to approve all construction plans. Maybe it should make it mandatory for these construction companies and the new homeowners to incorporate more green into the general plan. New construction is everywhere you look, taking away our farmland.

Do we really need that many new houses?

Are people still buying homes as fast as they are built, or are they sitting on the market for months at a time?

If the construction continues at this rate, soon we will have no trees, no plants and no waterways and above all no clean air.

I know we cannot stop the effects of global warming, but we sure as heck can slow it down in our little community. We all need to take a real hard look at our present direction and decide what kind of town we want to live in. I know we, as a community, can come up with a solution to correct these problems, before it is too late. I, for one, do not want to wear a gas mask to go shopping.

If you need or want more information on how we can help to clean our air with trees and plants, please visit <http://arborday.org/>.

We all need to work together to achieve a cleaner place to live.

ROXANNE ROBINSON, Visalia

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006:](#)

Park ill-advised

I recently became aware of the proposed off-road vehicle park north of Bakersfield. I contacted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District Office in Fresno and they faxed me a copy of their comments to our county planning department.

Their conclusion was after reviewing the EIR that this project would have a significant impact on our air quality.

At this time Bakersfield meets the 24-hour federal standards for particulate matter but not the annual standards, which are 65 micrograms per cubic unit.

They also told me that they expect this amount to be lowered to 35 micrograms in the near future which we will really have trouble meeting. We just cannot afford to contribute more dust to our valley air. The health effects would be immense.

At this time, this project is 11,000 acres with an expected 100,000 annual visitors. The Poso Creek runs through this area and is one of only three creeks that enter into our valley.

Once the vegetation around this creek is destroyed, that creek will dry up. There are quite a few archeological sites that would also be affected.

I agree that the OHV community are entitled to areas for recreation. But please not in the San Joaquin Valley.

-- NANCY MILLS, Bakersfield

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006:](#)

Think of air quality

I was amazed to read your editorial in support of the state off-highway vehicle area. Here we are, living in one of the dirtiest air basins in the U.S.! Infants born and raised here will never have the high functioning lungs that they would have had if they had been raised in cleaner air. Their futures in recreation, athletics or general health over a lifetime of 75 years will be less than maximal.

This park is planned just north of Bakersfield. Do we really want thousands of people creating air pollution at our very door? The Kern County Planning Department admits that the air pollutants that accompany this project can't be mitigated. There will be thousands of big rigs, RVs and cars with their exhaust coming into this park; 121 fire pits; gas cans opened. Thousands of OHVs will be kicking up dust and valley fever spores into our air, along with their exhaust.

Why would we want this so very close to where we live? Why would we want this in the San Joaquin Valley air basin where our cars, fireplaces, ag, construction and businesses have been regulated to cut air pollution? Very illogical.

As a person recently diagnosed with lung disease, I was asked by my pulmonologist how long I had lived in the Bakersfield area. Makes you think, doesn't it? I request that the Planning Commission and our supervisors give priority not to your unspecified "public benefits," but to the tangible public benefits of clean air.

-- LUCY CLARK, Bakersfield

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2006:](#)

OPEN FORUM

Governor to sign global-warming bill

Why Sept. 27, 2006 will be a day to remember

By Daniel M. Kammen

There is a saying that "life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." Such an event takes place today in San Francisco, and warrants a place in history.

In the environmental arena, the September 1962 publication of "Silent Spring" was such an event. Rachel Carson's book alerted America to the destruction we were causing to birds, fish and to ourselves, and launched the modern environmental movement.

Earth Day, April 22, 1970, was another milestone, when millions gathered across the nation to take heed of Wisconsin U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson's warning, that, "we have only one Earth, we need to take care of her." Shortly thereafter, Congress passed the Clean **Air** Act, arguably the single-most important and successful piece of environmental legislation to date.

The June 1992 "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro was an unprecedented U.N. conference where heads of state, non-governmental groups and almost 10,000 journalists gathered to deliver the message that changes on a grand scale were needed, and were possible through a mix of local action and international accords, to protect the planet.

To this list we can now add Sept. 27, 2006, the day Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will sign a piece of landmark legislation that has been agreed upon by a coalition of Republicans, Democrats, climate and energy scientists, activists and a cadre of industry leaders: Assembly Bill 32 (AB32), the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

AB32, introduced by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, and Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, calls for a cap on greenhouse-gas emissions statewide, and a 25 percent reduction by 2020. More important than the target, which is itself dramatic, is the fact that California will establish emission controls on the largest industrial sectors, including utilities, oil refineries and cement manufacturing, and will use market mechanisms -- emissions trading -- to find the economically most-efficient ways to reduce global warming.

An important program to curb greenhouse-gas emissions from power-plants by 10 percent, or 24 million tons, by 2019 already exists in New York state, New Jersey, Delaware and four New England states. In California, AB32 is economy-wide and would result in 174 million tons of emissions reductions. Together these state and regional programs chart a new course of environmental and economic policy that send powerful, but collaborative, signals to business and industry.

Instead of opposing AB32, the market-based flexibility that the bill embraces has convinced the giant Northern California utility, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), to support the bill, as do a wide range of Silicon Valley companies and venture capitalists, that have been investing heavily in the clean and renewable energy sector. In fact, studies from my research group at UC Berkeley, as well as macroeconomic models of the state economy prepared for the California Environmental Protection Agency, both find that an investment in clean energy will likely bring economic benefits to the state in the form of significant numbers of new jobs and export opportunities for what is becoming known as the "clean tech" sector.

AB32 will have a transforming effect on power generation and greenhouse-gas emissions far beyond California. Power providers, that sell into the huge California market, will be subject to the cap-and-trade provisions through the utilities, including PG&E, that sell their energy. California has thus effectively utilized market forces to not only find the most cost-effective ways to reduce

emissions and inefficient uses of energy, but also to encourage innovation to bring solar, wind, clean bio-fuels and other forms of renewable energy into the market.

Shortly before her death, Rachel Carson wrote: "Man's attitude toward nature is today critically important because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself ... (We are) challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves."

Today, a vital step is being taken to meet that challenge.

Daniel M. Kammen is the Class of 1935 distinguished professor of energy at the University of California, Berkeley. He co-directs the Berkeley Institute of the Environment and is founding director of the Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory (RAEL). He has appointments in the Energy and Resources Group and the Goldman School of Public Policy.