

Air district to unveil draft of ozone plan

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will unveil a draft plan today that aims to reduce ozone-creating emissions. A workshop is scheduled for 2 p.m. in Fresno at the district's central office. The workshop can be attended by videoconference at the district's regional office in Modesto, 4800 Enterprise Way. Ozone is the main ingredient of smog. The draft "2007 Ozone Plan" provides a list of regulatory and voluntary measures to cut smog-forming emissions. A copy of the plan is available at www.valleyair.org or by calling the Modesto office at 557-6400.

Critics: Track report lacking

By Corinne Reilly

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

A thousand-page environmental report might not sound like much of a page-turner.

But for those who packed public hearings last year to debate the merits of the proposed 1,200-acre Riverside Motorsports Park, the latest report on the controversial project provided perhaps the weekend's hottest read.

Just three days after the release of the final environmental report, many local residents, businesses, government agencies and public officials have already taken a hard look at the document.

"I've got the pages spread out all over my dining room," Merced resident Tom Grave said Monday. "I'm really putting time into looking at this."

An initial environmental review of the proposal, released in November of 2005, concluded that the project will result in traffic congestion, noise levels above county standards, increased air pollution and the loss of agricultural land.

Eighty-seven agencies and individuals submitted written comments on the report during the first public comment period, which ended in January.

The latest report includes responses to each of the comments, further studies done in response to the comments and further proposals from park developers to mitigate -- or lessen -- the project's impact on the environment.

Among the new measures proposed by park developers are a sound wall to decrease noise at the U.S. Penitentiary Atwater, a barrier to block noise impacts for residences near the park's proposed wastewater treatment plant, and plans to synchronize certain traffic signals in Atwater before and after major park events.

Park developers now also pledge to provide Foster Farms and the penitentiary with park schedules for certain high-noise and high-traffic events at least three months in advance.

The final report also comes with an overhauled traffic management plan and a new health risk assessment.

Still, the project as proposed will mean significant traffic, noise and air quality impacts for the county. The final environmental report identifies 34 "significant and unavoidable" environmental impacts still remaining, even with the proposed mitigation.

While some say the latest report adequately addresses environmental concerns, others say the project -- which the Merced County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to approve or deny in December -- still comes with far too many problems.

"The traffic issues still have not really been addressed," said Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo, director of the Merced County Farm Bureau. "The traffic studies they've done are still woefully inadequate."

Westmoreland Pedrozo, who submitted comments on the initial environmental report, said the final report failed to address how increased traffic from the park will affect nearby farmers during planting and harvesting seasons.

"The peak season for racing sports is the same as the peak season for farmers and that's a big concern for us," she said.

"As far as I'm concerned, the responses to the comments raised after the first review are fluff," said Atwater resident Judith Doucette, who submitted written concerns about noise, traffic and air impacts after the first environmental report on the project.

"I'm not opposed to racing, but the location of this project is totally inappropriate ... There is going to be such a tremendous traffic backup because of this," said Doucette.

Beth Kelly, assistant manager of environmental affairs for Foster Farms, also had a critical assessment of the latest report.

"They really didn't address any of our concerns at all," said Kelly. "They really added no new information this time around."

Foster Farms, which houses chickens in ranches bordering the proposed raceway site, submitted a lengthy written comment on the project's initial environmental review; the company maintains that noise, traffic, pollution and an increased human presence in the area will significantly affect its operations.

Others said the final review added valuable new information and mitigation measures to the project's proposal.

"We were really worried about how traffic would affect our Sunday services," said Robert Kuyper, a pastor at the United Methodist Church in Livingston. "But we've looked at the revisions to the traffic plan, and it looks like we're going to be OK."

Dave Warner, director of permitting at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, also expressed satisfaction with the report.

He said the added health risk assessment, done in response to comments from the pollution control district, adequately addressed the group's concerns.

Both the initial and final environmental studies were conducted by EDAW, a Sacramento-based environmental consulting firm.

"We're happy with the document, and we definitely feel that it's addressed all of the comments that were submitted by the public," said Mark Melville, vice president of operations for the motorsports park. "We've got an awful lot of mitigation in there."

Melville said the park is committed to completing the thorough review process as required by state environmental law.

"We're really striving to be a good neighbor," he said.

The park is proposed to cover 1,200 acres just north of Castle Airport Aviation and Development Center, and would include eight racing venues and 14 separate tracks.

The \$230 million project is expected to draw as many as 50,000 people on designated weekends, with average crowds of about 6,000.

If approved, the park is expected to open in 2008.

The Merced County Planning Commission will host a public hearing on the project next week.

The Board of Supervisors is set to take a final vote on the proposal on Dec. 12.

Local asthma rates on the rise

Study results show an increase in asthma cases from 2001 to 2003, and the Valley leads state

By Greg Ubbelohde, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

Victoria McLelland's 8-year-old daughter, Taylor, loves the family's poodle, and all she ever wants to do is walk the dog around her Visalia neighborhood.

But Taylor doesn't always get to go outside. She has asthma, an allergenic condition that affects the respiratory system, so her mother has to limit Taylor's time outside.

Taylor is one of a growing number of Tulare County residents who are being diagnosed with asthma, according to results released Monday in a study done by the University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Health Policy Research, in 2003.

The study interviewed adults, adolescents and parents in California and found that Tulare County has a higher rate of residents diagnosed with asthma and asthma-related symptoms, but haven't been diagnosed with the disease.

Roughly 32,000 Tulare County residents suffer from asthma, while about 43,000 suffer from asthma-related symptoms — about 19 percent of the county's population, according to the study. That's higher than the state average of about 17 percent.

The asthma problem isn't just affecting Tulare County. Statewide, 7.9 million Californians have asthma symptoms or asthma-related symptoms, according to the study.

When compared to the results from the same study conducted in 2001, the numbers show an alarming trend — asthma cases are on the rise.

The percentage of Californians diagnosed with asthma went up from 12 percent in 2001 to 13 percent in 2003, the study said. Numbers for Tulare County in the same time period were not available Monday.

Sue Babey, research scientist with the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, authored the study and said the situation will most likely worsen.

"Given the trends we saw from the 2001 study to the 2003 study, I think we will probably see another slight increase in asthma in the state," Babey said.

This fact troubles some Tulare County physicians.

Dr. Alex Sherriffs, who has a family practice in Fowler, said he has noticed an increase in asthma patients in recent years. That's different from Sherriffs' experience in the late 1970s, when he was a resident in training at University Medical Center in Fresno.

"There are more people in the office with lung complaints," said

Dr. A.M. Aminian, with the Allergy Institute of Visalia and Fresno, said he is especially worried about children. He said cases of asthma in children are rising faster than in adults.

McLelland agrees.

There are more children with asthma on the playground with Taylor now than there have ever been, she said.

"I hear parents saying 'She's [child] got asthma, and she didn't until the family moved here [to the Central Valley],' because the air quality is poor," McLelland said.

What's causing the increase?

Aminian said it is a combination of several factors that include air quality, lack of knowledge about asthma, poor access to medical care and other factors that may not be known yet.

Cleaning up Tulare County's air is the first thing to do to turn the problem around, Sherriffs said.

"We all have serious work to do. These results just reinforce that," Sherriffs said.

Another big part of this is education.

To help educate others about the problem, Sherriffs and Aminian will speak Wednesday at the Fresno Madera Medical Society's seminar, "The Body and the Air We Breathe."

"By proper education, people will learn not to contribute more to air pollution," Aminian said. He hopes this study will start to educate the general public on the dangers of asthma and get residents to start cleaning up their act.

The only way to solve this problem is by a collaborative effort from government agencies, health care providers and everyone living in the Valley, Aminian said. That way money can get allocated for education programs and air cleanup efforts, he said.

How to Attend

- What: "The Body and the Air We Breathe: Impacts, Challenges and Solutions to Valley Air Pollution"
- When: 1-3:30 p.m.; 6-8:30 p.m., Wednesday
- Where: Early session at UC San Francisco Auditorium, 155 N. Fresno St., and evening session at the Piccadilly Inn University, 4961 N. Cedar Ave.
- Tickets: Free by calling the Fresno Madera Medical Society, 224-4224, Ext. 110, or e-mail airquality@fmms.org. Reservations are required.

Measure R backers do big business with county

Supporters say tax will help fix local roads

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

Contributions from companies that do business with Tulare County have put at least \$38,500 into Measure R's campaign coffers, records show.

In a little over a month, the campaign for Measure R, a 30-year half-cent sales tax measure on November's ballot, has amassed a campaign war chest of \$99,335.

Most of the money was spent for campaign literature and mailings, along with consultants.

Campaign contributions filed on Oct. 6 — the first deadline to file statements — indicate that from Aug. 16 to Sept. 30, the Measure R committee raised \$99,335. The Tulare County Board of Supervisors voted Aug. 8 to place the tax on the ballot.

It would raise about \$650 million over the next 30 years, when the tax would expire or need to be renewed. The money must be spent on roads, and an oversight committee of citizens will keep the county on task.

Touted as a sales tax that will generate \$652 million to repair and construct roads, Measure R contributions came largely from Tulare County construction, residential development, paving, engineering, concrete and farming interests.

Among these contributors are Kaweah River Rock Co. Inc., The Lockwood Agency, KRC Safety Co. Inc., CM Construction Services, Lane Engineers Inc., TPG Consulting, South Valley Materials Inc., Mitchell Brown General Engineering Inc., Lee's Paving Inc., Penas Disposal Inc., Desert Aggregates, Rising Sun Construction, Glen Wells Construction Company, which according to vendor contracts have done more than \$5 million in business with the county since Jan. 1, 2005.

The \$38,500 from the companies that do business with the county accounts for more than a third of the contributions made toward Measure R. The rest comes from major development companies, farming interests, and private parties.

About 20 percent comes from two developers — Mangano Homes, a major developer based in Visalia, and Yokohl Ranch Company, a San Diego-based company that is planning to build a 36,000-acre community in east Tulare County.

Measure R is a half-cent sales tax that will provide funding to repair streets, highways and intersections throughout Tulare County and its cities.

It will also repair potholes, improve safety and [air quality](#), complete bike paths and improve transit, supporters say.

While the election is less than a month away, leaders of Measure R say there is more money to be collected.

Dave Harrald, general manager of the Kaweah River Rock Company and vice-chairman of the Measure R steering committee, said earlier this month the total should double.

Clean chimney sweeps away winter chills, worry about safety

By Laura Casey, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

A crackling blaze and a warm hearth reminds Jennifer McBride of the holidays, Christmas specifically.

The Oakland resident recently bought a home in the hills with a fireplace — a gorgeous pit with sand-colored tiles and Western carvings that likely date back to when the home was built in 1926.

This year she wants to spend her winter by the fireside, so she called a chimney sweep to clean and inspect the fireplace to ensure its safe use.

The doorbell rings one chilly October morning and, when McBride opens the door, a woman clad in black Carhardt overalls crosses the threshold. Her name is Sally McKnight and she is a 21st-century chimney sweep working out of the Bay Area. Her company is The Irish Sweep, based in Alameda.

McKnight, 61, fills the room when she enters it. She is tall and her silver hair is cut in a sharp bob. Her cell phone rings with the song, "Chim Chim Cheree."

Her voice is clear and strong as she talks about the one subject she says she has an "amazingly isolated, big chunk of knowledge" on and that is fireplaces.

A traditional fireplace like McBride's — of brick masonry, built in an older home in the East Bay — is a polluter, McKnight says.

"There's no question about it," she says directly.

The fireplace doesn't provide much heat to a house, she says, because they actually suck heat out of rooms and up chimneys. A fireplace only warms if a person is standing near it, she adds.

But, she acknowledges, there is something about having a fire in the home. Some of her customers use their fireplace every day in the cold season, and she cleans those chimneys every six months. Others see their fireplaces as a space for recreation.

"A lot of people curl up with a book at night, and poking and prodding and playing with the fire is their type of play," she says. "It's what they like to do for the evening."

Fireplaces also do something for McKnight. She started off in the business as a clerical worker for a chimney sweep then went on a sweep one day. Soon, she was a part-time clerical worker and part-time sweep. In a few years she bought the business, which has been operating since 1979.

"It's so unique (being a chimney sweep)," she says. "You're out in the air, out of the office. You are going to fabulous houses like this one. It's way too much fun."

The Irish Sweep has three employees, including McKnight, who is a member of the National Chimney Sweep Guild and has served as a board member and as ethics committee chair. She is also a member of the Golden State Chimney Sweep Guild and has served one term as its president.

She and Ralph Borrman of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District say the worst fireplaces to have in the home are traditional masonry hearths and wood-burning stoves built before 1990. These burners cause a large amount of air pollution indoors and outdoors.

"If I am burning something in my fireplace I am going to get (soot pollution) and it's going to pancake around my neighborhood," Borrman says.

The best thing to do, the two professionals agree, is replace old wood stoves and fireplaces with newer wood stoves, built after 1990, or with pellet or gas stoves.

A comparison of the pollution produced by the heating methods is striking. A standard wood stove or fireplace releases 60 grams of pollution an hour, Borrman says. A pellet stove releases 6 grams, and a new gas fireplace releases .07 grams.

Yet, Borrmann and McKnight are careful not to demonize the fireplace. They say it can be used as long as the user is educated about what to burn and when.

First, heed wintertime "Spare the Air Tonight" warnings, which like Spare the Air days, are periods of dangerous-level air pollution.

Next, the experts agree, start your fire with soft wood kindling rather than paper. This kindling burns hot and fast and will heat the firebox and flue quickly. Never burn colored paper like Christmas wrap.

Burn dry hardwoods like oak and cherry, which burn slower and more evenly, producing less smoke. Never burn painted wood, plywood or particleboard.

McKnight and Borrmann also warn to never burn plastics, rubber, garbage, paint, solvent, coal (or charcoal) or oil. These produce some of the worst airborne toxins.

McKnight suggests that homeowners clean their chimneys every three years or once every 75 burns. The best time to think about a cleaning, she says, is in the spring. The Irish Sweep is booked up until Thanksgiving, at least.

The process of cleaning a chimney is relatively painless. McKnight moves all fixtures from McBride's home fireplace and her assistant Javier Sanchez spreads a big, white cloth over the living room floor. He spreads cardboard on the cloth then gears up for soot removal.

Nearly an hour passes by as McKnight and Sanchez brush the bricks and string a long brush with a big, fluffy end up the chimney.

Bad news, she says as she inspects the fireplace after it has been swept. Bricks on the back of the hearth are loose, the grate is not the right size and the chimney needs a damper.

It will be at least a month before McBride can use it.

"I was expecting that there was work that needed to be done," McBride says, "so I wasn't expecting to use it right away. I don't want to use it if it is not right."

Schwarzenegger takes greenhouse gas initiative east

By Karen Mathews, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Fresno Bee and other papers, Tuesday, Oct.17, 2006

California will join seven northeast states in a partnership meant to combat global warming beginning in 2009 by allowing the most polluting power plants to buy credits from those that are cutting their greenhouse gas emissions.

New York Gov. George Pataki and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger formally announced the alliance Monday after touring the Solaire, a green residential building in lower Manhattan touted as one of the country's largest and the first high-rise of its kind.

Schwarzenegger said he would sign an executive order on Tuesday that calls for a program allowing his state to work with the Northeast's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

The goal of the initiative is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions at power plants. Under the program, power plants in participating states will be granted a limited number of carbon credits, equal to the amount of carbon dioxide they are allowed to emit. Those that exceed their limits must purchase credits to cover the difference, while those that produce less carbon dioxide can sell the surplus credits.

The partnership is the first step in creating a system that helps California's largest manufacturers comply with stricter environmental regulations. Industrial corporations and utility companies in the state must cut their greenhouse gas emissions by roughly 25 percent by 2020 as part of a landmark global warming law.

Linking California to the Northeast program could help California power plants meet their obligations under that state's new law.

"Our cooperation can be a model to the rest of the states and to other countries actually," Schwarzenegger said.

Pataki said that a "market-driven cap and trade system" would benefit both the environment and industry. The Northeast system involves seven states -- Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Vermont. Maryland is expected to join in June 2007.

The executive order is Schwarzenegger's latest move to address global warming -- an issue that has often put the Republican governor at odds with the Bush administration. Schwarzenegger, up for re-election in November, has urged the governors of Western states to join California in a regional trading system and signed an agreement with British Prime Minister Tony Blair to develop new technologies to combat global warming.

Pataki helped craft the Northeast system after President Bush withdrew from the 160-nation Kyoto Protocol on global warming in 2001, saying it would hurt the U.S. economy.

California's global warming law imposes the country's first mandatory statewide cap on greenhouse gas emissions, a move that has been criticized by manufacturers and cement makers -- two of the largest emitters of the greenhouse gases that scientists blame for rising temperatures in many parts of the world.

The emissions-trading approach to fighting global warming gained adherents in the last few years but has critics as well.

"There are concerns about whether such programs actually achieve the planned reductions," said Bill Magavern, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club in Sacramento. "There are concerns among California community groups that pollution trading will increase air pollution in the low-income and minority communities that already bear a disproportionate burden."

Schwarzenegger has touted California's new global-warming law as a key component of his environmental record. It has also distinguished him from Bush, who has said companies should voluntarily reduce emissions.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg was to hold a fundraiser for Schwarzenegger later Monday at his home. "I think Schwarzenegger has tried to do something different and good," Bloomberg said. "He's tried to take on some of the entrenched powers and say, 'We can do better. We can do different.'"

Associated Press Writer Samantha Young in Sacramento contributed to this story.

State gains anti-smog allies

At least 8 Eastern states to join 'cap-and-trade' approach; governor also receives campaign help.

By Kevin Yamamura - Bee Capitol Bureau
Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

After signing legislation last month to cap greenhouse gas emissions in California, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced Monday in New York that his administration will work with at least eight Eastern states to enable businesses to trade pollution credits thousands of miles away.

The Republican governor emphasized last month that a "cap-and-trade" method was crucial to legislation he signed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions an estimated 25 percent by 2020. Under the new state law, the California Air Resources Board will develop market-based procedures that likely will enable companies to purchase credits from emissions-reducing businesses if they cannot cut pollution themselves at prescribed levels.

Schwarzenegger appeared Monday with two prominent New York moderate Republicans who visited the governor last month in California. Schwarzenegger stopped by a greenhouse gas emissions trading desk at banking firm Credit Suisse with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg before appearing with New York Gov. George Pataki at an environmentally friendly residential building.

New York and six other Eastern states last December signed the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a "cap-and-trade" plan to reduce power plant emissions 10 percent by 2019. An eighth state, Maryland, is scheduled to join the group next year.

"But no state, of course, can fight this war alone," Schwarzenegger said. "I think we all have to work together. It truly is a global problem. And states, regions, nations -- all have to work together in order to conquer this problem."

Schwarzenegger intends to sign an executive order today instructing Linda Adams, secretary of the state Environmental Protection Agency, to have the state's market-based program work in conjunction with the multistate initiative. The executive order also outlines various other responsibilities for Adams in the state's implementation of the emissions law, such as forming an advisory committee to explore a market-based emissions credit system.

Pataki appeared with Schwarzenegger in September as the California governor held a lavish ceremony on San Francisco's Treasure Island to promote the signing of Assembly Bill 32, the new greenhouse gas law. The event, partly paid for by corporations through a nonprofit jobs commission that works closely with the governor, also featured a speech from British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who spoke via a live satellite feed on a big screen situated right in front of San Francisco Bay.

Craig Noble of the Natural Resources Defense Council said states are acting where the federal government has not.

"It's certainly a signal of the direction climate policy is taking in this country," Noble said. "We're not getting any leadership at the national level, so the states are carrying the water here."

Angelides, in a meeting with the San Francisco Chronicle that aired live on the Web, accused the governor of making "another PR stop" when "he's really there for fundraising." Schwarzenegger defended the fundraiser as necessary to pay for his expensive re-election effort.

"First of all, I am very happy that while we are here and working to clean our environment and to fight global warming and coming up with a great partnership between Northeastern states and California, that we have also a fundraiser here tonight," Schwarzenegger said. "Those are very important because, as you know, it costs money to run a campaign. So we are very happy the mayor is having this fundraiser and is helping us in that regard."

Schwarzenegger used campaign funds to pay for his own travel to New York, according to the governor's office. Both candidates have held out-of-state fundraisers in addition to their persistent efforts to attract more cash in the campaign's final stretch.

As of Sept. 30, Angelides had \$2.8 million in cash, while Schwarzenegger had \$2.4 million, records show. Since then, the Republican governor has raised \$2.1 million. The Democrat has raised \$1.5 million, nearly a third of which came from the state Democratic Party.

Núñez slams governor on emission law

Mark Martin, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

(Sacramento) -- Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez and some environmental groups charged Monday that an executive order Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger plans to sign today undermines an agreement the governor struck with Democrats on the state's landmark global warming law.

Schwarzenegger will sign an order giving the secretary of the Environmental Protection Agency the duty of overseeing parts of the law's implementation and emphasizes the development of a new market allowing companies to buy and sell greenhouse gas emissions credits.

Núñez said that the executive order gives more power to the executive branch than the law calls for and that the governor's emphasis on a market-based approach to lowering greenhouse gas emissions ignored other aspects of the law. He suggested the governor was reinterpreting the law based on proposals he had suggested to lawmakers during negotiations over the legislation this year but that had been rejected by the Legislature.

"You can't rewrite a law through executive order," said Núñez, D-Los Angeles, who carried the bill. "This is totally inconsistent with the intent of the law and with the way that it is written."

Schwarzenegger spent Monday in New York, where he met with Gov. George Pataki and announced his intent to set up programs with Northeastern states and the European Union that would allow California companies to trade emissions credits with companies in Europe and the Northeast.

The governor also was in New York for a campaign fundraiser hosted by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Administration officials said the executive order, which the governor announced Monday but can't sign until today, when he returns to California, was intended to clarify the legislation, AB32. Linda Adams, Schwarzenegger's secretary of the EPA, said she would be coordinating many aspects of the new law but that the state's Air Resources Board would ultimately adopt rules governing the state's target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020.

"It's critical that I continue to play that oversight role and coordinating role," Adams said.

At issue are two sticking points from negotiations earlier this year between Democratic lawmakers and Schwarzenegger.

The governor had proposed that a group of Cabinet secretaries oversee the development of programs aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, but lawmakers insisted that the Air Resources Board have the power to set regulations requiring industries to lower emissions.

Schwarzenegger also insisted that the legislation require that a market-based trading system be implemented to help companies reduce emissions. The final version of the bill does not require the system, however, instead requiring the Air Resources Board to consider it as one way to meet the new greenhouse gas caps.

Schwarzenegger signed the legislation in August during lavish ceremonies in San Francisco and Santa Monica, and is using the global warming fight as a centerpiece of his re-election agenda.

The executive order Schwarzenegger announced Monday directs Adams to create a committee of experts to make recommendations on how to implement an emissions market, and gives her authority to develop an economic analysis regarding various efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

Some environmentalists noted that the law gives that authority to the Air Resources Board.

"He's trying to get back by executive order what he failed to get in negotiations with the Legislature," said Bill Magavern, a lobbyist with the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club supported the legislation but has backed Schwarzenegger's opponent in the governor's race, state Treasurer Phil Angelides.

And environmentalists had argued during negotiations that the board, which has implemented most of the state's key environmental protections during the past decades, was the appropriate group to set greenhouse gas rules. While the board is made up of gubernatorial appointees -- just as the Cabinet is -- it typically acts independently of the governor.

Adams said her role was to help the board develop rules, saying "AB32 left some questions unanswered."

Núñez, however, said the role of the board was very clearly defined in the bill.

"He's injecting a new agency into this that was never agreed to in the legislation," said the speaker, who said he would call Schwarzenegger today to discuss the executive order.

Many environmental groups are skeptical of an emissions trading system, saying past efforts to use markets to reduce pollution haven't always worked well.

Jane Williams, director of the group California Communities Against Toxics, argued that a trading system could result in continued pollution in some areas. Companies operating high-polluting power plants, for example, could buy credits from another company and continue running the plant, which emits both carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to localized air pollution.

That is why her group fought hard during negotiations to make sure a trading system was not mandated.

She said Monday she was concerned that Schwarzenegger was trying to ensure that an emissions trading system was implemented, instead of allowing it to be one option the board considers.

Other options include requiring better energy efficiency in buildings or enforcing laws that require automakers to build cleaner-burning cars and electric utilities to increase their use of renewable power.

"We are very disappointed in the governor's actions," Williams said.

The executive order was applauded by one business group that opposed the legislation.

"The governor has taken important first steps to help lessen the burden of California's new global warming law," said Jack Stewart, president of the California Manufacturers and Technology Association. "He has ordered market mechanisms to be developed concurrently with regulatory measures so that industry can comply with reduction mandates in the most cost-effective manner."

Cal Joins Northeast Global Warming Fight

By KAREN MATTHEWS, The Associated Press

Published in the Washington Post, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006; 7:20 AM

NEW YORK -- After visiting a "green" high-rise apartment in Manhattan, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that California will join seven northeastern states in an alliance to combat global warming.

Schwarzenegger and New York Gov. George Pataki on Monday toured the 27-story Solaire, touted as the country's largest environmentally sensitive residential building.

Schwarzenegger then said he would sign an executive order on Tuesday that calls for a program allowing his state to work with the Northeast's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

The goal of the initiative is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions at power plants, beginning in 2009.

Under the program, power plants in participating states will be granted a limited number of carbon credits, equal to the amount of carbon dioxide they are allowed to emit. Those that exceed their limits must purchase credits to cover the difference, while those that produce less carbon dioxide can sell the surplus credits.

By joining the Northeast program, California could help its industries and utilities comply with the state's new environmental regulations. Such companies must cut their greenhouse gas emissions by roughly 25 percent by 2020 as part of the state's landmark global warming law.

"Our cooperation can be a model to the rest of the states and to other countries actually," Schwarzenegger said.

Pataki said that a "market-driven cap and trade system" would benefit both the environment and industry.

Participants in the Northeast system are Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Vermont. Maryland is expected to join in June 2007.

The executive order is Schwarzenegger's latest move to address global warming _ an issue that has often put the Republican governor at odds with the Bush administration. Up for re-election in November, Schwarzenegger has urged the governors of Western states to join California in a regional trading system and signed an agreement with British Prime Minister Tony Blair to develop new technologies to combat global warming.

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Associated Press Writer Samantha Young in Sacramento contributed to this story.

Julia Roberts supports Proposition 87 oil tax

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

Actress Julia Roberts has added her name to a growing list of celebrities and politicians supporting a California ballot measure that would tax oil to fund alternative energy research.

"We're all victims of this state's tragically poor air quality," she said. "California has the worst air pollution in the nation."

Roberts toured the Mattel Children's Hospital at UCLA on Monday while urging the public to vote for Proposition 87. She joins actors James Caan and Geena Davis, as well as former President Bill Clinton and former Vice President Al Gore, who are supporting it.

The measure would tax companies drilling for oil in California until it has generated \$4 billion, money that would be set aside for loans, grants and subsidies to promote alternative fuels and more energy-efficient vehicles.

After her tour, Roberts talked about pollution links to cancer, premature death and asthma. She also quoted Clinton who said that by the age of 2 months, babies in Los Angeles have breathed enough toxins to reach the EPA's lifetime limit for cancer risk.

Oil pumped in California accounted for 37 percent of the state's demand in 2005, according to the state Legislative Analyst's Office. Twenty-one percent of the state's oil comes from Alaska, while the rest is imported from abroad. The initiative would tax California oil producers between 1.5 percent and 6 percent depending on the per-barrel price of oil.

Opponents say oil companies that do business in California pay the fifth-highest taxes in the country. They say adding another tax would deter them from pumping California oil and eventually lead to higher gas prices.

Firms target U.S. coal reserve

Proposals for 154 new plants raise dilemma over unproven, expensive, but cleaner method

By Steve Quinn, Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006

DALLAS — A building boom that would add scores of new coal-fired power plants to the nation's power grid is creating a new dilemma for politicians, environmentalists and utility companies across the United States.

Should power companies be permitted to build new plants that pollute more but are reliable and less expensive? Or should regulators push utilities toward cleaner-burning coal plants, even if it means they will cost more and are based on newer, yet still unproven, technology?

Nowhere do these competing interests play out with such force as in Texas, where 16 new coal-fired plants are proposed — 11 of them by Dallas-based TXU Corp., the state's biggest power company.

The scope of TXU's 5-year, \$10 billion plan is considered bellwether and being closely watched by industry analysts, lawmakers, competitors and environmentalists across the U.S.

"TXU put its stake in the ground and said it will (build the plants) faster and cheaper than anyone else," said Daniele M. Seitz, analyst with investment firm Dahlman Rose. "So they have something to prove."

Some 154 new coal-fired plants are on the drawing board in 42 states. Texas and Illinois are the only states where 10 or more plants are planned, according to the National Energy Technology Laboratory.

Energy analysts say factors driving coal's resurgence are soaring power demands, volatile natural gas prices and a favorable investment market.

Coal now accounts for about 50 percent of the power generated in the U.S. By the year 2030, that share will increase to 57 percent, according to Energy Department forecasts.

The U.S. has the world's largest coal reserves, enough to last for the next 200 to 250 years, analysts believe.

Larry Makovich, managing director for consulting group Cambridge Energy Research Associates, said the urgency to bring more power-generating plants online cannot be understated.

"A fundamental reality of the power business is there is no single fuel of choice, so if you are going to survive in the long run, you need to have a good mix of fuels and technologies," he said. "If we are going to keep supply and demand in balance, you're looking at a five-year lead time, so you have to get started building these plants now."

The argument over how TXU should build power-generating plants plays out almost daily with critics and proponents weighing in on the potential merits and drawbacks of the company's plans.

TXU says the proposed plants will meet the state's growing demand for power, give a sorely needed economic boost to nearby small towns, and will reduce toxic emissions by replacing older, less efficient plants.

"The coal plant of today is so much cleaner; it makes so much less emissions than what most Americans and Texans can conjure," said Mike McCall, a chief executive at TXU.

Critics, however, counter the company is driven by profits and is rushing to beat more stringent federal restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions in an era of escalating concerns over global warming. Texas already produces more carbon dioxide than any other state.

The debate soon could end up in federal court. Dallas attorney Rick Addison recently announced plans to sue TXU, alleging potential violations of the federal Clean Air Act.

The battle lines were drawn April 20, when TXU Chief Executive John Wilder announced the company's plans shortly after much of Texas underwent a rolling power blackout. Since then, each side has assembled a team of backers comprised of affected residents, lawmakers, and lawyers.

In Colorado City, Texas, a town of 4,100 about 10 miles from where TXU wants to place one of the plants, civic leaders and lawmakers support the venture. They believe it will be an economic boon to the sleepy West Texas town, said Mayor Jim Baum.

But Dallas Mayor Laura Miller and Houston Mayor Bill White recently formed a coalition of 17 mayors opposing the TXU's 11 proposed plants and five others being considered by other Texas companies. The group has lined up law firms statewide bracing for a courtroom battle.

Miller recently spent a week visiting existing TXU plants, as well as a coal gasification plant in Tampa, Fla., that turns coal into gas and removes the pollutants before the fuel is burned.

Coal gasification plants can cost up to 20 percent more to build than a conventional plant. But they also can be more efficient to operate and save utilities the hassle and expense of adding pollution-control devices.

For its part, TXU says turning the coal into synthetic gas remains an unproven technology and not as reliable as burning pulverized coal — the process the company's new plants would be designed to use.

"For purposes of generating electricity, a pulverized system is well-proven," said John Mead, who heads the Southern Illinois University Coal Research Center in Carbondale, Ill.

"Gasification has much more limited commercial experience," Mead said. "There are still some unknowns as to just what the operating costs would be and how reliable would such a system be."

Old habits die hard as Indonesia haze crisis persists

By Ahmad Pathoni, Reuters

Published in the Washington Post, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006; 10:01 AM

LANGGAM, Indonesia (Reuters) - Armed with buckets and a newly installed electric pump powered by a portable generator, Iwan Marwan and five others struggle to put out embers on a smoldering two-hectare field in Indonesia's Sumatra island.

The men say they don't know who started the fire but they believe it was not intentionally lit.

"I'm helping them put out the fire to prevent it from spreading to my family's plantation," says Marwan as he pours a bucket of water on a smoky ember.

"We know it is illegal to use fires to open land. Maybe someone threw a cigarette butt. During a dry season like now peat land is easy to burn," the 32-year-old tells Reuters.

Others in the field surrounded by palm oil plantations decline to answer most questions but one says the land belongs to a military officer who lives in the provincial capital Pekanbaru, a three-hour drive away over a rough road.

"The owner is taking a military course in Jakarta," says the man, who declines to give his name.

The Langgam blaze for which no one claims responsibility highlights the difficulty in tackling annual forest and brush fires on Sumatra and the Indonesian part of Borneo which produce thick smoke choking widespread areas of Southeast Asia.

Farmers in those regions traditionally use fires to convert land into plantations cheaply and it is unlikely the fire Marwan and the others tried to put out was accidental.

Smoldering swathes of forest land with blackened tree stubs dot the area, in Pelalawan region of Sumatra's Riau province.

Haze from the Sumatra and Borneo fires blanketed neighboring Malaysia and Singapore in past weeks, sending air quality to unhealthy levels and disrupting flights and sea navigation.

"Unless action is taken against the offenders, mainly large plantation and timber companies, we will continue to choke on haze in the coming years," Hapsoro, a forest campaigner for Greenpeace Southeast Asia, tells Reuters.

But Riau police chief Ito Sumardi says fires and haze have significantly decreased in Riau thanks to firm law enforcement.

Cheap slash-and-burn practices are a local custom difficult to eradicate but adoption of the method by large plantation companies had exacerbated the situation, he says.

"Large plantation companies are taking advantage of an ancestral practice to open land cheaply and efficiently," Sumardi tells Reuters.

He says companies often pay locals to do the clearing and later evade responsibility for fires by claiming their land had been encroached upon.

Law enforcement has been hampered by lack of funds and difficulty in gathering evidence, he adds.

"We are overwhelmed by detainees. Now we detain more land-clearing suspects than other criminals," Sumardi says, adding that so far 70 people in Riau have been prosecuted on charges of starting fires.

One way to reduce slash and burn practices is by preventing burned land from being used pending a court verdict, he suggests.

But there were no signs that the smoking fields in Pelalawan had been impounded.

FRUSTRATED NEIGHBOURS

Indonesia's neighbors, particularly Singapore and Malaysia, are increasingly frustrated with Jakarta's failure to prevent or extinguish the annual dry season fires.

Environment ministers from the three countries as well as Thailand and Brunei gathered in Pekanbaru last Friday to discuss ways to end the crisis but failed to agree on a detailed plan.

A proposed special regional fund to deal with the haze could not be operational unless Indonesia ratified a 2002 Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) haze treaty, ministers said.

Indonesia has pledged to ratify the pact but it is still being studied by parliament.

Jakarta has argued extreme weather and poverty severely limit the effectiveness of government efforts to curb the fires. Officials also say many fires are on peat land, resulting in thick smoke and making it harder to extinguish them.

Khairul Zainal, head of the environmental impact control agency in Riau, estimates the cost of the haze at 10 trillion rupiah (\$1.09 billion) for affected Indonesian regions.

Not far from Langgam village, plantation worker Suyanto says the return of the haze this year has made him unhealthy.

"I have just recovered from a cough. Now it looks like I'm sick again," he says while having lunch with his co-workers in a wooden house in the middle of a palm oil plantation.

"This morning it was very dark. I couldn't see far enough," he said.

[N.Y Times Editorial, Saturday, Oct. 15, 2006:](#)

Science Ignored, Again

The Bush administration loves to talk about the virtues of "sound science," by which it usually means science that buttresses its own political agenda. But when some truly independent science comes along to threaten that agenda, the administration often ignores or minimizes it. The latest example involves the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to reject the recommendations of experts inside and outside the government who had urged a significant tightening of federal standards regulating the amount of soot in the air.

At issue were so-called fine particles, tiny specks of soot that are less than one-thirtieth the diameter of a human hair. They penetrate deep into the lungs and circulatory system and have been implicated in tens of thousands of deaths annually from both respiratory and coronary disease. The E.P.A., obliged under the Clean Air Act to set new exposure levels every five years, tightened the daily standard. But it left unchanged the annual standard, which affects chronic exposure and which the medical community regards as more important.

In so doing, the agency rejected the recommendation of its own staff scientists and even that of its Clean Air Scientific Advisory Council, a 22-member group of outside experts that had recommended a significant tightening of the standards. Stephen Johnson, the agency administrator, claimed there was "insufficient evidence" linking health problems to long-term exposure. He added that "wherever the science gave us a clear picture, we took clear action," noting also that "there was not complete agreement on the standard."

One wonders how much evidence Mr. Johnson requires, and how "complete" an "agreement" must be before he takes action. A 20-2 vote in favor of stronger standards seems fairly convincing to us; likewise the unanimous plea for stronger standards from mainstream groups like the American Medical Association.

The environmental and medical communities suspect that the administration's main motive was to save the power companies and other industrial sources of pollution about \$1.9 billion in new investment that the more protective annual standard would have required. But here, too, the administration appears to have ignored expert advice. Last Friday, the agency released an economic analysis showing that in exchange for \$1.9 billion in new costs, the stronger annual standards could save as many as 24,000 thousand lives and as much as \$50 billion annually in health care and other costs to society. Studies like these always offer a range of possible outcomes, but even at the lower end -- 2,200 lives and \$4.3 billion in money saved -- the cost-benefit ratios are very favorable.

In the next year or so, the administration must decide whether to tighten the standards for another pollutant, ground-level ozone, which causes smog and is also associated with respiratory diseases. The scientific advisory committee has tentatively recommended that the ozone standard be tightened, citing new evidence of smog's adverse effects. This time Mr. Johnson should pay more attention to the scientists and less to the political strategists in the White House.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006](#)

Daniel Weintraub: Green and greener in the contest for governor

By Daniel Weintraub

When the California League of Conservation Voters began contemplating its endorsement in the race for governor this year, the environmental group's leaders realized that they might be in a position to make history by choosing Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as the first Republican candidate for that office to get the league's seal of approval.

Tom Adams, a Bay Area lawyer and president of the league, said Schwarzenegger has been a "different Republican." He has made some solid appointments, been a leader in pushing for renewable energy, fought offshore oil drilling and signed the state's landmark global warming legislation. By backing the governor, Adams said, the league could have sent a message that Republicans who favor sound environmental policies will be rewarded with support from the activists who care most passionately about the subject.

"It's going to be better for the environment if the environment is not perceived as a partisan issue," Adams said.

In the end, though, the league did not endorse Schwarzenegger, opting instead to back his Democrat opponent, Treasurer Phil Angelides. There were just enough blemishes on Schwarzenegger's record to give the group pause, and Angelides' record as treasurer suggests that he could be the greenest governor California has ever seen.

Despite his past as a real estate developer who tangled with regulators, Angelides as treasurer has been a leader for eight years in pushing to use the state's massive investment funds to encourage more environmentally conscious development, Adams said. And he already has pledged to sign several bills that Schwarzenegger vetoed.

The decision the league faced is the same one that voters who consider the environment a top priority will have to confront as they decide for whom to vote on Nov. 7. And the easiest way to boil it down is this: Schwarzenegger is a governor who cares deeply about the environment and will push for far-reaching policies to protect the state's water, air, forests and coastline. But as he does so, Schwarzenegger will hedge those priorities against his commitment to protect California's employers against burdensome regulation. Angelides is more likely to come down on the side of environmental regulation.

Here's another way to look at it: Schwarzenegger says he believes California can protect the environment without hurting the economy. Angelides says he believes that protecting the environment is crucial to the future of California's economy.

It's a subtle difference perhaps, a matter of emphasis. But it can play out in important ways.

This year, for example, Schwarzenegger vetoed a bill that would have required half the cars sold in California by 2020 to include technology that allowed them to run on alternative fuels. Angelides says he would have signed that bill.

Schwarzenegger also rejected legislation that would have levied a \$30 fee on each of the large containers that importers use to bring goods through California ports, with part of the money going to relieve air pollution caused by freight traffic in and around the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Angelides says he would have signed that bill, too.

Both measures were among the top five legislative priorities of the Sierra Club, and were near the top of the League of Conservation Voters' list as well.

More broadly, the league said Schwarzenegger sided with environmentalists on fewer than 60 percent of the bills the group was tracking during his first two years as governor. That compares to about 4 percent for Republicans in the Legislature. But Democrats average about 86 percent, and former Gov. Gray Davis was consistently above 70 percent.

Environmentalists were also disappointed that Schwarzenegger helped lead the campaign for Proposition 64 in 2004, a measure backed by the state's business community to limit lawsuits under the state's "unfair competition" law. Environmental groups opposed the measure because it required plaintiffs to have actually suffered damage before suing.

And while many of Schwarzenegger's appointments have won praise from green groups, others have rung alarm bells. Adams says that three of the governor's four appointees on the state Coastal Commission have been pro-development. And Schwarzenegger appointed industry insiders to key positions in forestry protection, housing, air quality and water resources.

Angelides, as treasurer, has not dealt with as many environmental issues as the governor. But he has used his position on the state's pension boards to push for billions in state investments designed, the candidate says, to "curb sprawl, spur economic progress in urban, inner city communities and promote energy-efficient and sustainable development practices."

Because he believes the coast is a valuable asset that draws high-wage employers to California, Angelides is proposing a major initiative to identify and purchase sensitive coastal lands for preservation from development. And he supports Proposition 87, which would levy a tax on oil drilling to pay for alternative fuels research. Schwarzenegger opposes Proposition 87.

If the environment is important to you and you want someone who is likely to govern in the image of the Sierra Club, Angelides is the candidate for you. If you want a governor who believes in environmental protection but is going to balance that priority against the wishes of the state's employers, then Schwarzenegger is probably your man.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006:](#)

Recycle an old idea

Reading my Voter Information Guide, I was astounded how politics can make even a noble idea an excuse for spending millions of dollars.

While I am all for breathing cleaner air, reducing our dependence on foreign oil and looking for viable "green" alternatives, why can't we look at simple, existing options first? When the used car we bought in Europe last year cost more than \$100 to fill up, we simply spent an extra couple of hundred dollars to convert it to use a mixture of propane and butane.

We cut our spending at the pump by 55% and even reduced our emissions. Our savings outweighed the expense in just a few tanks!

This idea is nothing new. Cars running on this mixture have been in existence for more than 20 years in Europe. Perhaps our first step in being energy conscious is to recycle an old idea.

Dana Zupanovich Lucka, Fresno

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006:](#)

Focus on GET

I'm not against the purpose of Measure I, but I want to focus on the exclusion of a major benefit to the public. The youth, the elderly, the mobility challenged and mostly the working public have no real choice when it comes to transportation. We hear it all the time, do your part to clean the air; car pool, walk, ride a bike, take the bus, spare the air days. How much benefit are we receiving from this rhetoric?

Kern County needs its public transportation system expanded and improved along with safe road conditions. Measure I must include this in its plan to be a meaningful tax burden to the public.

It simply takes too long to move throughout the city. The GET system's design (accessibility) is outdated in comparison to the city's growth. Our neighborhood planning designs made it tough to design effective routes. But let's not make that paradigm our 10-ton giant. Think outside the cul-de-sac.

I propose the elimination of the Chester Avenue and Valley Plaza transfer points. This city does not need a hub and spoke system any longer. The city has grown. Restructure routes into a grid system. People can transfer at route intersections. It serves no one to have a bus sitting idle at these hubs.

It's no secret the city and county has expanded its roads (without Measure I). The car driving public is realizing the convenience of these roads, so let's put buses on them too.

Measure I must support this change or Measure I should not pass.

-- ANTHONY MERANTE, Bakersfield

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006:](#)

Growing pains

Is anybody concerned with the growing population of Bakersfield? In a 2000 census, the city's population was 247,057. Now, in 2006, the population has grown to 311,824 people.

This may not seem like much, but the people living here can sure tell. The governing board of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District recently moved forward and declared that they are voluntarily seeking the "extreme" classification under the federal Clean Air Act.

Because the SJVUAPCD has been unable to demonstrate attainment of air quality standards required under the 2005 deadline for the current severe classification, this move will provide an additional five years to meet federal health standards for ozone pollution.

How are we going to be able to improve our air quality with so many people moving to Bakersfield? The population increase is causing continuous construction of houses, stores and streets. This is causing a decrease in clean air and it creates more problems involving the ozone layer.

I have lived in Bakersfield all of my life. I would like to continue living here, but not with the air being polluted and the trees being cut away for more people.

The new population came somewhat unexpectedly, causing the schools to cram people into classrooms. A classroom that is only supposed to hold 30 students now contains about 40.

Is there anything we can do to help fix this problem without putting the burden on the people who have lived here all of their life?

-- ASHLEY SALLEE, Bakersfield