

Environmental coalition criticizes clean air strategy

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, April 26, 2007 (3:36 p.m.)

For Kings County residents to breathe cleaner air, farmers and truckers will have to bite down harder on the clean air bullet, according to a clean air strategy announced Wednesday by a coalition of environmental groups.

Five such groups joined forces Wednesday at a Fresno press conference to say that the current San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff proposal to clean up the Valley's smog-choked air doesn't go far enough or fast enough to clean up emissions from diesel sources that pump pollutants into the air.

"Farmers will complain. People who operate diesel equipment will complain," said Kevin Hamilton, a Fresno doctor with Medical Advocates for Clean Air.

"Why should Fresno school children be prohibited from playing at recess or playing sports on bad air days while operators of dirty diesel equipment spew pollution? We all must do our share to clean our air," added Hamilton.

Hamilton was referring to the Fresno Unified School District, which curtails sports and recess activities on bad ozone days

The Kings County Farm Bureau couldn't be reached Wednesday for comment.

Ozone is the main ingredient of summer smog that makes San Joaquin Valley air pollution among the worst in the nation.

The district proposal to be voted on Monday extends compliance with a strict new federal ozone standard until the year 2024, 11 years beyond a 2013 deadline established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. District officials say that they need the additional time because of the extreme difficulty of achieving the necessary reductions.

District officials say their plan would bring 90 percent of the Valley in line by 2020, with more polluted areas meeting the standard by 2024.

Environmentalists said Wednesday that compliance can be 95 percent achieved by 2013 and completely achieved by 2017.

District officials dispute that claim, saying that it is impossible with current technology to get enough reductions in tailpipe emissions, by far the biggest culprit in smog formation.

Environmentalists say there are several strategies the district should commit to, one of them being mandatory shutdowns on high pollution days for dirty-diesel trucks, construction equipment and tractors.

The district proposal lists the concept as a future possibility.

The shutdowns would be a last-ditch effort if the state air resources board fails to get enough reductions through tighter tailpipe emissions standards and incentives to retrofit or replace dirty engines, a press release from the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition stated.

Under the requirement, diesel engineer operators would have five years to get cleaner burning models before the shutdown days begin.

"It needs to be in the plan and something they commit to actually doing," said Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Tony Barba, Kings County supervisor and a member of the air district's governing board, said the district doesn't have the authority to order any diesel trucks off highways.

"The U.S. EPA says that's interstate commerce," Barba said.

Barba said the air district's control is limited to stationary sources and off-road diesel equipment.

Barba also questioned where the incentive money would come from to help diesel engine operators replace their equipment.

"The people who live in the district don't want to pay the extra money to eliminate smog," Barba said.

Kelly Deming, Kings County's environmental representative on the air district's citizens' advisory committee, called the 2024 attainment proposal "a very good plan" that's "got flexibility to it."

"I would have to say that we can only do what we can do in the Valley as far as economics and quality of life. We have to support our economic base as well as try and strive to do better (on air)," Deming said.

Barba said the current district proposal "makes sense."

"You go out there on (Highway) 99 and (Interstate) 5, there's truck after truck after truck. And we have no control over those," Barba said.

Agency seeks extension on clean air

By MATT LEEDY, THE FRESNO BEE

In the Modesto Bee, Friday, April 27, 2007

Clean-air activists conceded for the first time Wednesday that smog can't be completely cleared from the San Joaquin Valley by the 2013 federal deadline.

They are now pushing to have the valley's dirtiest pockets cleaned by 2017.

However, officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District say it's impossible to erase the haze from one of the country's dirtiest air basins in time to satisfy the latest deadline proposed by environmental groups.

District officials Monday will ask the agency's governing board to approve a 1,200-page proposal to have all valley residents breathing clean air in 2024. That would require an extension of a 2013 federal deadline.

Environmental groups are discouraging the district from seeking that extension but admit it might take an extra four years to clean up the smoggiest pockets.

"2017 is merely an expression on our part that we are not unreasonable," said Brent Newell, a San Francisco attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Newell and other air activists say 95 percent of the valley's air basin should be clean by 2013.

However, Air District Executive Director Seyed Sadredin isn't budging. He said the activists' latest demands are unreasonable and impossible to achieve.

The district proposes to have half of the valley's residents breathing clean air by 2015, and 90 percent by 2020. Four years later, the remaining dirty-air pockets would be cleaned.

The district is "preparing to let us all down" by backing away from the 2013 deadline, said Lisa Kayser-Grant, a Merced resident and member of a group of mothers pushing for the smog to be lifted as soon as possible.

June deadline for proposal

Environmental groups want the district to spend six more months looking for additional ways to rid the valley of smog.

The district is trying to meet a June deadline to submit a clean-air plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. But activists say the district could receive an 18-month grace period

The environmental groups want the district to seek additional local, state and federal grants to help trucking companies and farmers buy clean running vehicles and shelve their diesel-powered trucks and tractors.

Those who reject such incentives should not be allowed to run their diesel engines during the valley's

smoggiest days, activists suggest.

Air activists also want the district to prepare an environmental report detailing health problems that residents could suffer if the valley's smog problems persist through 2024.

Research has connected smog with lung disease and early death.

The valley tied the Los Angeles area last year with 86 smoggy-day violations — the most in the nation.

Valley air district officials say they're doing all they can to shake the dubious distinction. Sadredin said that even if the district receives a deadline extension to 2024, it "will do everything possible to beat that deadline."

Lawnmower trade-in program available

By Sentinel Staff

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, April 28, 2007

Kings County residents can still trade in their old, gas-burning lawnmowers for clean, electric mowers through a Valley Air District program.

A limited number of vouchers are available for Kings County residents to purchase a brand-new, cordless, electric mower valued at \$418 for just \$150 with the trade-in of their old, gas-burning mower.

Vouchers can be requested by calling the Air District in Fresno at 559-230-5850 and leaving a name, mailing address and phone number. The district will issue a voucher, which may be taken with the old mower to J & H Metals in Hanford. The voucher holder will then be issued a recycler verification code, which will be used with the voucher when calling the Neuton Lawnmower Co. in Vermont to order the new mower. Mower will be shipped directly to a customer's home. The discounted price includes shipping.

Group serves up Earth Day fun

Fresno leadership class organizes food and games downtown for families.

By Chris Collins

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, April 29, 2007

At Fresno's Earth Day celebration Saturday, 11-year-old Jarred Julian did one thing right and one thing wrong.

Right: Jarred went through a bike rodeo course that taught him how to make hand signals, stay balanced and navigate quick turns.

Wrong: He didn't want to wear a helmet.

"I've got a hard head," the Fremont Elementary pupil said.

Melissa Isaksen, a 19-year-old Fresno State student volunteering at the bike rodeo, told him that wasn't an option.

Julian was one of dozens of kids who were at downtown Fresno's Eaton Plaza working their way through a series of obstacle courses -- including a bounce house, a rock-climbing wall and the bike rodeo.

Meanwhile, dozens of families mingled through 40 booths hosting city services departments, environmental groups and even cell phone companies.

Ribs cooked all morning long on a giant grill. The smell of barbecue sauce wafting through the air mixed with live music.

Later, about 100 people sat down at an outdoor amphitheater and watched a recycling-themed magic show.

And, of course, there were plenty of recycling bins for Earth Day-goers to dispose of the free water bottles and soda cans on tap.

The event -- run by about 60 volunteers -- was the brainchild of Leadership Fresno Class XXIII, a group of about 30 people enrolled in an 11-month service-training program sponsored by the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce.

This is the first year the leadership class has organized Earth Day Fresno.

Though there's no guarantee the celebration will become an annual event, one of its planners, Denise Lanier, said she hopes future leadership classes will keep it alive.

"This needs to continue," she said.

During a two-person discussion panel later in the morning, Peter Weber, a member of Gov. Schwarzenegger's California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, and Jaime Holt, the public information officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, told a small crowd that changes in human behavior will have the biggest impact on air quality.

That includes things like carpooling, driving hybrid vehicles and using electric lawn mowers.

"There are sacrifices we need to make," Weber said, adding that he is confident the Valley can reach its clean-air goals by 2023 or earlier.

He noted that asthma rates for kids in the Valley are staggering.

About 24% in Fresno County have asthma; the state average is 10%.

Holt, who is also a city of Fresno planning commissioner, said residents must be more vocal about setting standards for developers that will encourage less vehicle commuting and more bicycling and walking.

"As a community, we need to be asking for these things -- even demanding it," she said.

Don Napoli, a 61-year-old retired electrician living in Sanger, listened to the panelists but was less optimistic about Valley residents changing their behaviors soon -- unless gas prices shoot up.

"Californians love to be in their cars one person at a time," said Napoli, who said that he just bought a Jeep Cherokee to help haul the trailer he takes on vacation trips.

'Fresno Green' aims for better air

Mayor announces plan calling for cleaner city operations by 2025.

By Brad Branan

The Fresno Bee, Friday, April 27, 2007

The city of Fresno wants to help improve air quality in one of the country's most polluted regions, Mayor Alan Autry announced Thursday.

Better air is among the goals of "Fresno Green," a strategic plan intended to guide city actions during the next 18 years, Autry and other city officials said at a news conference.

Working with the general plan approved in 2002, "Fresno Green" will make Fresno more environmentally sustainable by 2025, Autry said.

The news conference was held at the city's Municipal Service Center, which has received awards for its use of solar power. Autry and other officials stood in front of city hybrid cars and trucks that run on natural gas.

The environmental plan calls for cleaner city operations involving such things as vehicle use and construction. What the plan will mean for residents is unclear.

Although the plan briefly mentions updates to the city's zoning and building codes to encourage infill development, it doesn't explicitly call for new regulations. Instead, it lists 25 strategies for improved environmental health, such as expanding affordable public transportation, promoting environmentally friendly building standards and creating a "Fresno Green Scorecard" to measure progress.

Council President Henry T. Perea, who helped draft the plan, said he expects the City Council will have to address some of the changes, including any proposal that would require the city to spend money.

Local environmentalists question how effective the plan can be without the weight of law.

"We want to applaud their efforts," said Heather Anderson of the Tehipite chapter of the Sierra Club. "But we want specifics."

Although the city's goals sound great, Sierra Club member Chris Acree said, "we haven't really seen a lot of leadership from the city on the environment."

The city lacks regulatory authority to effectively reduce air pollution, Acree said.

Autry cautioned that the city can only play a partial role in the effort to improve air quality in the region.

But, he added, "Fresno Green" is "not just another document that's going to sit around," and said it contains a number of specific actions.

The plan calls for a 50% reduction of particulate matter and smog-forming emissions from city vehicles. Some of the reductions will be achieved through replacing all of the city's gas-operated light-equipment vehicles with hybrids. Having the support of Autry means the city administration will work hard to carry out the goals, Perea said.

Kohl's in Visalia to go solar

Store is part of plan to convert 75 percent of company's California stores to solar power

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, April 28, 2007

The Visalia Kohl's is going solar.

Kohl's says it will convert at least 75 percent of its California stores to solar power, and the Visalia store will be one of the first, along with a location in Laguna Niguel.

Kohl's spokeswoman Kelli Ramey said construction at Visalia's Kohl's should be complete by August. About 2,300 solar panels placed on the roof will provide about 40 percent of the store's power.

It's a trend that Kohl's will initiate locally, Ramey said, because of California's solar incentive program. California has set a goal to create 3,000 megawatts of new, solar-produced electricity by 2017 - moving the state toward a cleaner energy future and helping lower the cost of solar-power systems for consumers.

The initiative offers cash incentives on solar-power systems of up to \$2.50 a watt. These incentives, combined with federal tax incentives, can cover up to 50 percent of the total cost of a solar-power system.

Twenty-four of Kohl's 80 California stores are scheduled for the rooftop solar conversions, with 40 others stores targeted to go solar by the end of 2008.

Kohl's initial purchase of solar power will generate more than 35 million kWh of renewable energy. In the first year of operation, Kohl's clean energy output will offset more than 28 million pounds of carbon dioxide - the equivalent of taking 2,500 cars off the road, Ramey said. Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas directly linked to global climate change. SunEdison, based in Maryland, will install, operate and maintain the solar-power systems. Kohl's will buy power from SunEdison at a fixed rate over 20 years, Ramey said.

Each project will take about 12 weeks of installation, and all projects are expected to be completed by the end of next year.

Kohl's also is considering solar-power projects for stores in five other states, including Wisconsin - the location of Kohl's corporate headquarters.

Kohl's isn't the only company looking to go solar in Tulare County.

Peninsula Packaging Co. in Exeter had a 4,000-panel solar farm, the largest in the San Joaquin Valley, installed last year.

The solar farm supplies the packaging plant with at least 30 percent of its power, resulting in savings around \$40,000 a month.

Low-energy bulbs increasingly in limelight

By JOHN HOLLAND

Modesto Bee, Sunday, April 29, 2007

Fluorescent lights went in, and incandescent bulbs went out, at Juan and Paty Garcia's home in Turlock four years ago.

They are among the people who have found that fluorescents use about a quarter of the energy needed for conventional lighting.

"It probably reduced our (total) bill by half because most of our electricity would go to lighting," Juan Garcia said Saturday.

He talked about the bulbs while visiting the Beyond Earth Day event in Riverbank, where the Modesto Irrigation District displayed several models.

Fluorescents are in the limelight more than ever. Environmentalists tout them as an easy way to reduce air pollution and the threat of climate change from fossil fuels. A member of the California Assembly has proposed banning incandescent bulbs as of 2012.

Advocates point out that fluorescents have come a long way from the models of the 1970s — those long tubes with an annoying hum and a cool light that often was not flattering to faces.

Today's fluorescents have various shapes that fit into table lamps, chandeliers, porch lights and other fixtures. Shoppers can find models that don't hum, that don't flicker and that don't give off that ghastly glow.

"It seems like it's a little bit softer light," said Kim Grover of Modesto, another visitor to Beyond Earth Day.

Fluorescents cost more than incandescents, but they last several times longer.

"I just put one in my porch light because I was changing the other ones nonstop," Grover said.

Starting Tuesday, MID will offer up to \$20 in rebates per year to residential customers who buy fluorescents. This is on top of the \$60-plus that a typical household can save on power bills each year by making the switch on five high-use fixtures, according to the district.

New incandescents on way

Old habits might die hard. Incandescent lighting, after all, is pretty much the same technology that Thomas Edison used when he invented the light bulb in 1879. The problem is that these bulbs turn much of the electricity into heat rather than light.

General Electric Co., the company founded by Edison, announced this month that it is developing a new generation of incandescent bulbs that will be twice as efficient as current bulbs.

It plans to have them on the market in 2010. An even more energy-stingy version — equal to fluorescents — could be in stores by 2012.

"We want consumers to know they will have an energy-efficient incandescent choice," said Kim Freeman, a spokeswoman for GE's lighting division. "It does not have to be one or the other."

Climate change activists say there's no time to wait. They see fluorescent lights as one of the key first steps in reducing the use of fossil fuels, which are believed to contribute to global warming and the resulting droughts, crop damage and other effects.

Using one fluorescent bulb prevents 450 pounds of carbon dioxide and other climate-changing gases from reaching the atmosphere, according to 18seconds.org, a group promoting the technology.

"Every little bit helps, right?" said Grover, the Beyond Earth Day visitor.

The Los Angeles Times contributed to this report.

Court Adheres to 2003 Clean Air Rules

By PETE YOST, Associated Press Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Monday, April 30, 2007

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Supreme Court on Monday dealt the utility industry its second setback this month on a program designed to clean up pollution at aging, coal-fired power plants.

The justices refused to review Bush administration standards favored by the companies and blocked a year ago by some state and local regulators and environmental groups.

The court's action, however, is undercut by a new Bush administration regulatory proposal that would relax clean air standards at coal-fired plants. Environmental groups say the rule, if adopted, would give the industry what it could not win in the courts.

The court's action Monday leaves in place a March 2006 court decision that went against both the Bush administration and the utility industry. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia declared Environmental Protection Agency regulations were so lenient that they violated the Clean Air Act.

The 2003 EPA rules on a program called New Source Review would allow older coal-fired facilities to undergo extensive changes without having to install pollution controls.

The office of then-New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer led the fight against the 2003 regulations in the lower courts, saying the Bush administration was trying to "gut" federal clean air law.

Last week, the Bush administration issued its latest proposal. It would undercut an April 2 Supreme Court decision and the court's decision Monday not to consider the 2003 EPA rules.

In the April 2 decision, the court ruled against Duke Energy Corp., which has been resisting regulators' demands to install pollution controls in units in North and South Carolina. The Duke ruling impacts other pending Clinton-era enforcement cases against several utilities.

The cases are EPA v. New York, 06-736, and Utility Air Regulatory Group v. New York, 06-750.

Tanker fire collapses crucial connector Mayor warns 'difficult days lie ahead'

By Kristin Bender, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, April 30, 2007

OAKLAND — After his truck exploded and collapsed part of a freeway, driver James Mosqueda thought he was dying as he walked with second-degree burns to his hands, face and arms nearly a mile to a gas station, where he found a cab driver to take him to a hospital.

"He walked up to me and said, 'I'm dying. Please, please take me to the nearest hospital. I'm burning, I'm burning,'" said Metro Cab driver Anthony E. of San Jose, who was pumping gas at the Arco station at the intersection of West Grand Avenue and Market Street sometime after 4 a.m. Sunday. The cab driver declined to give his last name.

Mosqueda, 51, was behind the wheel of a speeding tanker truck carrying 8,600 gallons of gasoline that crashed and exploded early Sunday, causing part of one overpass in the MacArthur Maze to weaken and collapse onto an interchange below. Traffic is expected to be disrupted for months.

After the explosion, nothing remained of the truck. Left behind was a 250-yard chunk of the crumpled interchange that was twisted into a mass of charred steel and concrete.

Mosqueda crawled from a passenger window, spoke briefly to a worker at the nearby East Bay Municipal Utility District wastewater-treatment plant and then walked through the darkness to the gas station where he found help.

The cab driver said he first thought Mosqueda was a dirty homeless man panhandling for change.

"But then he got close, and the first thing he did was show me his hands," which were red and bubbling with blisters, he said.

The cab driver tried to persuade a hysterical Mosqueda to call an ambulance. But the injured man begged the cabbie to run every red traffic light to get him to the nearest hospital.

"He was in pain and he started crying. I tried to calm him down. I kept telling him, 'You'll be all right,'" the driver said.

The cabbie said the cab's interior smelled of burnt hair as the two sped the 10 minutes to Kaiser Hospital on West MacArthur Boulevard in Oakland.

"He kept saying, 'No more (truck) driving for me. That's it. That's it.'"

At the hospital, Mosqueda tried to pay the \$8 cab fare.

"He got out money and I said, 'No, no, no. I don't need it. Just go.' He's a lucky man," the cab driver said.

Mosqueda of Woodland, near Sacramento, was treated at Kaiser and later transferred to St. Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco for further care.

The crash occurred on the MacArthur Maze, a collection of interchanges on the edge of downtown Oakland about a half-mile from the Bay Bridge toll plaza.

Although the bridge itself was not damaged, the labyrinth of three converging freeways delivers traffic to and from San Francisco and includes some of the Bay Area's most congested routes.

No one else was reported injured.

Officials said a major public safety disaster likely was averted because the crash happened early on Sunday.

Police said Mosqueda has worked for Sabek Transportation out of San Francisco for 10 months. Early Sunday, he was driving an 80,000-pound double tanker truck, about 10 times the size of a standard passenger car. His driving record was not available Sunday.

The CHP has set up a task force to investigate the crash and the trucking company, Cross said.

A Sabek company tanker was involved in a crash last June in Vallejo, which spilled up to 4,000 gallons of diesel fuel into two storm drains leading to the Bay. In that crash, the tanker overturned and the driver was not injured.

"The company is going to have some responsibility with this crash," said California Highway Patrol Officer Trenton Cross.

Police said Mosqueda's tanker was traveling from a refinery in Benicia to a gas station on Hegenberger Road in Oakland when it crashed into a guard rail on the interchange connecting the westbound lanes of Interstate 80 to southbound Interstate 880 at 3:45 a.m.

Cross said an early investigation shows Mosqueda was driving too fast in the 50 mph zone as he navigated the curving road, but neither alcohol nor drugs appeared to be a factor in the crash.

Cross said there was "one huge explosion" followed by a few smaller explosions.

"When I first arrived my first thought was, 'Wow! It's unbelievable.' And what's even more unbelievable is that no lives were lost," Cross said.

Mosqueda, a divorced father of four children and two grandchildren, lives in Woodland with roommate, Cedric McGowan, 53. McGowan said Sunday he feared the worst when he heard about the explosion on the news.

"I pray to God that he's OK," said McGowan, who said he had planned to launch a truck company with Mosqueda.

The driver's parents, Conception and Alicia Mosqueda, said they had little information about the condition of their son Sunday but had spoken to him briefly.

The family issued a statement through the Bothin Burn Center at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital Monday morning.

“We are relieved that James is alive and in stable condition. We are grateful that no one else was hurt and thank God that James is on the road to recovery.

"The family sends a heartfelt thank you to the taxi driver and the Saint Francis Memorial Hospital staff. We ask that the news media please understand how traumatic this has been for James and his family and please respect our privacy," the statement read.

Witnesses to the fire reported flames shooting 200 feet into the air.

San Francisco cab driver Philip Liborio Gangi, 55, was one of those witnesses. Gangi had finished a 10-hour shift with Arrow Cab Company at 3:15 a.m. Sunday and took a brief nap — one that may have saved his life — on a couch at headquarters before heading back home to Pittsburg. He usually takes the route where the explosion occurred, he said.

"I might have been right behind the thing if I had been there a few minutes earlier," Gangi said.

Gangi said he stopped his car and tried to spot the truck in the flames as he snapped photos.

"I couldn't see it. It looked like it was in the bottom of the fire. All I saw was flames and flames," he said.

Experts said that ordinarily it isn't that easy to knock down a freeway. But the fireball apparently erupted precisely at the Achilles' heel of the skyway — the underside of the pier where all of the supporting steel girders are bare and unprotected by concrete or anything else, said Berkeley civil engineering professor Abolhassan Astaneh-Asl.

The fire burned for three hours before it was contained.

State transportation officials said it could take months to repair the damaged interchanges, which they called the worst disruption for Bay Area commuters since the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake damaged the Bay Bridge and collapsed the Cypress structure of I-880 in West Oakland.

The three-lane I-580 connector serves about 45,000 vehicles per day while the I-880 handles about 35,000 vehicles daily, said Caltrans District Director Bijan Sartipi. The upper ramp was built during the 1950s, while the lower was rebuilt and widened during the 1990s.

Caltrans Director Will Kempton said that when an agency has a 55,000-mile highway system, "you're not going to have a picnic every day."

A tanker explosion near the same spot closed the freeway, killed one and injured at least seven in February 1995.

Officials advised motorists to use public transit into and out of San Francisco. They said that even if drivers choose to take alternate routes today they will face nightmarish commutes.

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums held a news conference Sunday at the Caltrans headquarters, praising cooperation among local, county and state agencies but warning that difficult days lie ahead.

"The impact can be absolutely enormous to the city (of Oakland)," Dellums said, adding that the ripple effect throughout the region could be "astronomical."

[City Councilwoman Nancy Nadel, whose district includes the area around the collapsed freeway, said she is concerned about how extra traffic diverted through industrial and residential West Oakland will affect safety and air pollution.](#)

Nadel urged drivers to stay on designated detour routes and to remember that alternative routes between the East Bay and San Francisco run through busy city streets. She asked that drivers allow extra time to reach their destinations.

MediaNews staff writers Leslie Griffy, Meera Pal, Jim Smith, Ian Hoffman, Erik N. Nelson, Angela Woodall and Ray Chavez contributed to this report. Wire services contributed to this report.

Experts Meet on U.N. Report but Time Running Out

By David Fogarty, Reuters

In the N.Y. Times and the Washington Post, Monday, April 30, 2007

BANGKOK (Reuters) - After two gloomy U.N. reports on global warming, scientists and governments began on Monday looking at how to fight climate change, with green groups saying the world has the means to cut emissions at little cost.

"Science certainly provides a lot of compelling reasons for action," Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said as experts from more than 100 nations gathered in Bangkok to debate a raft of solutions.

"The IPCC doesn't have any muscle, it has grey matter. The muscle will have to come from somewhere else," he said when asked how its third report of the year to be issued on Friday could be converted into government action.

Delegates will wade through 140 pages of nearly 1,000 proposed amendments to the draft 24-page report, which says time for inexpensive fixes is running out because of a surge in greenhouse gas emissions.

Major polluters such as United States, China and top oil producer Saudi Arabia are expected to seek to water down the report, wary of language that prescribes targets to cut emissions or threatens their oil and gas industries.

The head of U.S. delegation, Harlan Watson, said it was crucial for the report to reflect the best science in tackling global warming.

"The U.S. is actively reducing projected emissions growth by increasing energy efficiency and reducing barriers for the wider use of clean energy technologies that also ensure greater energy security and continued economic growth," he said in a statement.

The U.N. climate panel issued its first report in February, saying it was at least 90 percent certain that mankind was to blame for warming. The second report on April 6 warned of more hunger, droughts, heat waves and rising seas.

ACT FAST, GREEN GROUPS SAY

Green groups say the time for bickering is over.

"The key thing is whatever they decide here, it cannot be ignored anymore that climate change is happening in a big way," said Stephan Singer, head of the WWF's Climate Change Policy Unit.

"It's happening much faster. We have more solutions out there than before and it's not as costly as some people want us to believe it is," he added.

The report estimates that stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions will cost between 0.2 percent and 3.0 percent of world gross domestic product by 2030, depending on the stiffness of curbs on rising emissions of greenhouse gases.

Under some scenarios, GDP growth might even get a tiny net spur from less pollution and health damage from burning fossil fuels, blamed as the main cause of warming.

The conclusions broadly back those by former World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern, who estimated last year that costs of acting now to slow warming were about one percent of global output -- and 5 to 20 percent if the world delayed action.

More than 1,000 amendments have been proposed to the draft 24-page summary for policymakers. Some countries complain it is hard to understand and too laden with scientific jargon.

The report lays out solutions such as capturing and burying emissions from coal-fired power plants, a shift to renewable energies such as solar and wind power, more use of nuclear power, more efficient lighting and insulation of buildings.

But it says temperatures will rise by at least 2 to 2.4 Celsius (3.6 - 4.2F) above pre-industrial levels even under the most stringent curbs. The European Union says a 2 C rise is a threshold for "dangerous" changes to the climate system.

The more deep and rapid the emissions cuts, the more costly to economies, says the draft report, which gives a range of stabilization levels of greenhouse gases in the future. Rise to 650 ppmv (parts per million volume) of CO₂-equivalent are 0.2 percent of global gross domestic product, it says.

Greenhouse gas concentrations are now at about 430 ppmv of carbon dioxide and rising sharply.

South African delegate Peter Luckey said any talk of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations at 650 ppmv "is quite disturbing to us" as too high.

He worried that some governments would try to water down the draft recommendations.

"Our major mandate is to defend the document as much as possible," Luckey, chief director of air quality management in South Africa's Department of Environment Affairs and Tourism.

Top Court Won't Hear Power Plant Pollution Rule

By REUTERS

In the N.Y. Times and the Washington Post, Monday, April 30, 2007

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Supreme Court on Monday refused to hear a Bush administration appeal defending its rule that would allow older factories, refineries and coal-burning power plants to upgrade their facilities without installing the most modern pollution controls.

The justices declined to review a U.S. appeals court ruling in March 2006 that struck down the Environmental Protection Agency's rule for violating the federal Clean Air Act.

According to the rule that was adopted in 2003 but has never taken effect, modern antipollution controls would have to be installed only if plant upgrades cost more than 20 percent of the replacement cost of the plant.

At issue is the ability of U.S. electric companies to overhaul and expand their aging fleet of about 500 coal-fired power plants to keep them running.

Utilities want to modify their aging power plants, some decades old, without triggering Clean Air Act rules that require them to spend billions of dollars on emission-reduction equipment. Oil refineries and other industrial factories are also subject to those rules.

Environmental groups said the plan would allow plants to spew more nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide -- precursors of acid rain and smog linked to respiratory diseases like asthma.

The Electric Reliability Coordinating Council, a utility group that has lobbied hard in favor of the rule changes, said the Supreme Court decision was "not totally unanticipated," because the court recently ruled on a similar case involving power plants owned by Duke Energy Corp.

Environmental groups and 14 states sued in challenging the rule. They argued it would allow plants to expand production without cutting pollution emissions and would undermine the Clean Air Act's new source review enforcement provisions.

The appeals court agreed. It said the rule was "contrary to the plain language" of the Clean Air Act, and said the EPA's rules make sense "only in a Humpty Dumpty world," a reference to the children's nursery rhyme.

"Looks like all the king's horses and men at the EPA could not put Humpty Dumpty together again," quipped John Walke, an attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group that has opposed the EPA's rule change.

The Bush administration appealed to the Supreme Court and said the appeals court had erred in invalidating the rule. A group representing auto manufacturers backed the appeal by the Bush administration, as well as a separate appeal by a group representing electric utilities.

The 14 states, led by New York, and the various environmental groups opposed the appeals. The Supreme Court rejected both appeals without any comment or recorded dissent.

A Universe of Promise (and a Tankful of Caveats)

By Jim Motovalli
In the N.Y. Times, Sunday, April 29, 2007

At the moment, hydrogen seems to be the most practical way to power vehicles that do not emit carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas. But despite considerable research, many hurdles remain. Here are some questions and answers:

Q. Where does hydrogen come from?

A. Hydrogen, an odorless, colorless gas, is the lightest and most plentiful element in the universe. It is found in water and in most organic matter, but it is usually bound with other elements. For that reason, it is called an energy carrier, meaning that energy has to be expended to extract it.

Q. But can't it be burned in an engine?

A. Fuels like coal, natural gas or oil can be taken from the ground and used with relatively little energy-intensive processing. But hydrogen must be turned into a fuel - and because it takes so much energy to produce, it should not be thought of as a direct replacement for fuels like gasoline. Rather, it is energy in a portable form, somewhat akin to electricity.

Q. Then why bother?

A. Because aside from being plentiful, it is very clean. Cars running on hydrogen produce very little tailpipe pollution and no greenhouse gases - they leave only a trail of water. In this way, cars running on fuel cells - which produce electricity by a chemical reaction of hydrogen and oxygen - would produce no tailpipe emissions.

Q. What is hydrogen used for today?

A. It has several uses. About nine million tons of hydrogen are produced annually in the United States, mostly for chemical production, petroleum refining and metal treatment.

Q. What is the cost of a unit of hydrogen with the same energy content as a gallon of gasoline?

A. That question has many answers. Hydrogen is certainly expensive to produce now, with costs somewhat dependent on the source material. A kilogram of hydrogen has about the same energy content as a gallon of gasoline, but hydrogen proponents point out that fuel cells can have double or triple the efficiency of gasoline engines. Hydrogen is most commonly produced by a process called steam reforming, which extracts the hydrogen from natural gas. The cost of natural gas reforming, which has been the cheapest method, has been affected by the rising price of natural gas. A kilo of hydrogen produced by steam reforming costs from \$4 to \$8 today.

It can also be made by electrolysis, which separates water into hydrogen and oxygen. The cost of hydrogen produced from water is tied to the price of electricity, which fluctuates by region and by type of generation. If grid electricity sold for 5 cents per kilowatt-hour, hydrogen could be produced through electrolysis for \$3 per gallon equivalent. But electricity is typically 10 to 14 cents today, so electrolytic hydrogen from grid electricity is often \$6 per gallon equivalent or more. These high costs make hydrogen generated from renewable electricity sources like wind farms or solar power more attractive.

A federal National Renewable Energy Laboratory report in February estimated that a kilogram of hydrogen could be produced for \$3.63 using solar power and for \$3.10 using wind.

"The solar technology is promising, but it won't happen quickly," said Robert D. McConnell of the laboratory's solar energy program.

Q. Can nuclear power be a source of inexpensive hydrogen?

A. Yes. Dr. Kenneth R. Schultz, operations director of the energy group at General Atomics, a research and development firm in San Diego, said that by 2025 the nuclear industry could be able to produce hydrogen for \$1.50 to \$2 a kilogram. But Amory B. Lovins, chairman and chief scientist at the Rocky Mountain Institute, a nonprofit energy research organization in Snowmass, Colo., described both the process and the price as "aspirational."

Q. How will we use hydrogen in a motor vehicle?

A. There are several options. In the most common prediction, compressed hydrogen gas is stored in a reinforced tank aboard a car, then fed to a fuel cell. The cell is not an engine, but a small chemical factory that converts the pressurized gas to electricity, which runs an electric motor. The only emission is water.

Liquid hydrogen offers excellent energy density per volume, but it would have to be carried in cryogenic tanks because hydrogen doesn't liquefy until it reaches minus 423 degrees Fahrenheit.

Metal hydrides offer an opportunity to store hydrogen in solid form, but such a system is heavy and therefore reduces the vehicle's travel range.

Hydrogen can also be burned in internal combustion engines. BMW and Ford, among others, have programs exploring hydrogen combustion, and BMW has a small fleet of bi-fuel 12-cylinder Hydrogen 7 vehicles on the road. No carbon dioxide is produced when hydrogen is burned.

Q. Is hydrogen safe? Isn't it very explosive?

A. That's the question on everybody's minds. Hydrogen definitely has safety challenges. It is extremely flammable (as the 1937 Hindenburg accident demonstrated), and burns without a visible flame while radiating very little heat. Because it is the lightest element, it can easily leak out of very small holes, pipe joints and even some metals. Once leaked, it can concentrate in a sealed space like a garage roof, presenting a fire hazard because hydrogen in a confined space can catch fire more easily than gasoline.

But hydrogen's lightness is also an advantage, because the gas dissipates in the air 12 times faster than gasoline vapor, making it harder for a fire to start. And automotive hydrogen fuel tanks, often made of composite materials, are designed to minimize leakage even in a severe impact. Quantum Fuel Systems of Irvine, Calif., says the hydrogen tanks that it makes go through two dozen tests and are shot with guns, suspended over fire, put through pressure cycles and subjected to temperatures ranging from minus 40 degrees to 130 degrees Fahrenheit.

Q. How will hydrogen be distributed to gas stations?

A. Very carefully, because hydrogen is such an escape artist that it is difficult and expensive to move. The hydrogen infrastructure is embryonic: There are about 700 miles of hydrogen pipelines in the country, compared with a million miles for natural gas. One challenge is that hydrogen pipelines have to be very tightly sealed and specially treated so that they do not become dangerously brittle. Trucking hydrogen not only burns fossil fuel, but requires energy-consuming compression, and even then a truck can carry far less energy than an equivalent gasoline tanker.

Q. How long before I can buy a hydrogen-powered car?

A. Honda says it will offer a limited number of its new-generation FCX fuel-cell vehicles for lease in 2008. Several companies, including BMW, General Motors and DaimlerChrysler, are building test fleets of as many as 100 hydrogen vehicles. Currently, the high cost of manufacturing the vehicles and setting up the hydrogen infrastructure mean it could be two decades before affordable hydrogen-powered cars and trucks are widely available. And it might never happen at all.

Gore Calls Canada Climate Plan a 'Fraud'

The Associated Press

In the Washington Post, April 29, 2007

TORONTO -- Al Gore condemned Canada's new plan to reduce greenhouse gases, saying it was "a complete and total fraud" because it lacks specifics and gives industry a way to actually increase emissions.

Under the initiative announced Thursday, Canada aims to reduce the current level of greenhouse gas emissions 20 percent by 2020. But the government acknowledged it would not meet its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol, which requires 35 industrialized countries to cut greenhouse-gas emissions by 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. The country's emissions are now 30 percent above 1990 levels.

The conservative government's strategy focuses both on reducing emissions of gases blamed for global warming and improving air quality. But the plan failed to spell out what many of its regulations will look like.

Gore said the plan did not make clear how Canada would reach its 2020 emissions goal. He also criticized the plan for allowing industries to pollute more if they use emissions-cutting technologies while increasing production.

"In my opinion, it is a complete and total fraud," Gore said Saturday. "It is designed to mislead the Canadian people."

He said "intensity reduction" _ which allow industries to increase their greenhouse gas outputs as they raise production _ was a poll-tested phrase developed by think tanks financed by Exxon Mobil and other large polluters.

Canadian Environment Minister John Baird rejected Gore's criticisms.

"The fact is our plan is vastly tougher than any measures introduced by the administration of which the former vice president was a member," Baird said in a statement.

Baird also invited Gore to discuss climate change and the government's environmental policies with him.

Gore was in Toronto to present his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," at a consumer environmental show. He acknowledged that as an American, he had "no right to interfere" in Canadian decision.

However, he said, the rest of the world looks to Canada for moral leadership, and that was why Thursday's announcement was so "shocking."

Canadian opposition Liberal Leader Stephane Dion said Sunday that Gore was right.

"Mr. Baird is embarrassing Canada around the world," Dion said. "The world expects Canada will do its share -- more than that, that Canada will be a leader and we are failing the world. We are failing Canadians."

Chance to Clear the Air

What You Don't See Inside Needn't Hurt You

By Allan Lengel, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post, April 28, 2007

Coughing, wheezing, sneezing.

Camille Martone didn't want to hear any of that in the new addition to her house -- particularly when it came to her 11-year-old daughter, who has asthma.

So she used insulation with no harmful airborne particles, paint with low fumes, and chemical-free wood that came from dismantled farmhouses in Maine for floors and kitchen counters.

Air quality "was definitely a consideration," said Martone, an architect and now a stay-home mother of four who lives in American University Park in Northwest Washington.

In a world where factories, cars, buses and planes discharge pollutants every day, many people don't realize that the air inside a home may be two to five times more polluted than the air outside, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"The good news is that most indoor air issues in homes are completely preventable and can be remedied with straightforward approaches," said Anna Duncan, associate director of the EPA's indoor environments division.

Some, like Martone, are taking big leaps into the 21st century, using eco-friendly materials that experts say are less likely to trigger physical ailments or, for that matter, long-term chronic disease.

Some people are taking smaller, often less costly steps, such as buying air purifiers and dehumidifiers to reduce allergens and molds and replacing carpet with wood floors to battle the thousands of dust mites that live in more places than we might care to know.

The American Lung Association's nationwide program Health House provides guidelines, conducts inspections, and educates builders and consumers about healthier homes.

Doctor-turned-developer Ernest Coburn is a Health House adherent. Coburn, a nuclear cardiologist and diagnostic radiologist, is developing a 204-home subdivision in Southwest Virginia, in Abingdon off Interstate 81. He plans to build at least half the homes there along Health House guidelines, using many materials similar to those Martone used in the addition to her home in Washington.

He will sell the remaining lots, hoping the buyers also build healthy houses, which could cost 8 to 10 percent more than regular ones.

"Because of my specialty in radiology, I see a lot of lung disease, and that got me interested in trying to improve the indoor quality," he said. "We're getting quite a bit of interest, even from people around the country. People are willing to spend more to have that indoor air quality."

Exactly what lurks inside our homes -- in the carpet, behind the basement wall or in our favorite couch -- may not always be clear.

Yet some things are a given, health experts say.

Daniel Ein, chief of the division of allergy at George Washington University School of Medicine, said microscopic dust mites are in practically every home, feeding off the shedding of human skin. Their feces primarily trigger the allergies, sinus problems and asthma, he said, but so do their bodies after they die.

They burrow in beds, pillows, couches, stuffed animals and carpets. The scary thing? Nearly 100,000 can congregate in one square yard of carpet.

"The bad news is they're really ugly. The good news is you need a microscope to see them," Ein said.

"Carpeting is one of the richest sources," he said. "If you're really suffering from them, pull up the carpet in the bedroom. That's where you spend a third of your time."

Ein also said you can battle the mites by dusting frequently with a damp cloth, cleaning wood floors with a damp mop, vacuuming, keeping humidity low, covering bedding with special anti-allergen covers or, at a minimum, washing sheets and covers in hot water weekly.

"A warm-water cycle is like a shower," he said. "Hot water will kill them."

Clutter in the home -- including bookshelves -- can also attract dust, which can be made up of skin, dander, pollen, dust mites and other materials. A good idea, he said, is to use bookshelves with protective glass.

In some homes, the things we dearly love can trigger adverse physical reactions.

Dogs and cats often top that list, allergy doctors say.

"If you have a child who's cat or dog allergic, the main thing is keeping the door closed in the child's bedroom to keep the allergens out," said Anupama Kewalramani, assistant professor of pediatrics in the division of pulmonology and allergy at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "If they do pet the cat or dog, make sure they wash their hands afterwards" to keep from spreading the allergens to their eyes or nose.

Kewalramani said using a stand-alone air cleaner with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter "can modestly reduce allergens in the air." But she advises against buying ionic air purifiers, like the ones sold at high-end specialty stores.

"The problem is they actually produce ozone," she said. "They can trigger the allergies."

The Sharper Image, a chain that sells a popular ionic air purifier, said last week that the product was effective and safe and met the government's safety standards.

Experts say air conditioning and filters in the heating and cooling system can also tamp down allergens in the air, as long as the windows stay shut to keep out pollen and other unwanted materials.

But health experts say filters, which need to be changed regularly, don't address some problems, such as carbon dioxide and radon, two odorless, colorless gases with serious health implications.

Carbon monoxide, which can kill quickly, can build from poorly working fuel-fired appliances such as stoves, leaky chimneys and furnaces, and car exhaust from attached garages.

Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive element, is common outdoors, but there it is diluted to harmless levels, according to the American Lung Association. In confined spaces, it can reach dangerous levels. It often seeps into the house through cracks in the foundation, unsealed pipes, sumps, drains, walls and crawl spaces. Radon is considered the second-leading cause of lung cancer.

Home experts recommend installing radon and carbon dioxide detectors, having proper ventilation, and hiring a professional to address the problem if necessary.

Health experts also say humidifiers can actually promote mold and help dust mites flourish if the humidity gets too high.

They recommend keeping humidity down year-round and using a hygrometer, which can be purchased at a local hardware store, to measure humidity.

"Dust mites can be controlled by keeping the humidity down to 50 percent," said Janice Nolen, assistant vice president of national policy and advocacy for the American Lung Association in Washington. "It's also important to have the humidity below 50 percent to control mold, but you also have to make sure you fix leaks and have the house well ventilated, particularly the bathroom and kitchen and places like that."

Dehumidifiers can be especially helpful in the warmer months and in damp basements where mold can fester and trigger allergies, asthma and other respiratory problems.

The mention of asbestos in homes often conjures fear. It's found mostly in older homes, in tiles or insulation. The EPA says there's actually no need to do anything if the material remains intact. If it begins to crumble, the agency advises getting an expert to figure out if it needs to be removed.

The same can be said for leaded paint. Experts say it can pose a threat if the particles become airborne during construction or if a child eats the paint. Otherwise, if it's not peeling, they recommend leaving it alone or painting over it.

Martone, who recently added about 1,900 square feet to her Dutch Colonial house, replaced her kitchen; expanded her basement and attic; and added a new bedroom, a den and an enclosed back porch. Her husband is a contractor. She is an architect by trade. Together, they were the general contractors.

For paint, she said, she used a water-based product with low volatile organic compounds.

"I didn't want the fumes from the paint," she said.

She used the chemical-free farmhouse wood for the new floors in the kitchen, den and upstairs bedroom; the kitchen counter; and the open kitchen shelves. She treated the wood with a water-based stain and a water-based polyurethane finish.

Additionally, she said, "Our kitchen cabinets are solid wood. They contain no formaldehyde. Formaldehyde has been known to be harmful to your health."

For insulation, she used a foam called Icynene, which is considered environmentally friendly and effective in saving heat.

"It doesn't have the fiberglass, it doesn't have the airborne particles," Martone said.

Still, Martone uses some old reliables, including a HEPA filter the doctor recommended for her daughter's room upstairs.

"She's allergic to dust mites. Anything that encourages dust is bad for her."

Sinsi Hernandez-Cancio, 37, a health policy analyst, is also allergic to dust mites and has an immune deficiency.

Three years ago, she bought a house in Springfield with thick wall-to-wall carpet.

"We spent thousands of dollars to rip out the carpeting," she said. She and her husband installed wood floors in one bedroom, the dining and living rooms, and the hallway. Two of the other bedrooms already had wood parquet floors underneath the carpet.

She also installed a special filter in her heating and cooling system and put a stand-alone air purifier in her bedroom.

Has all that helped?

"It helps incredibly," she said.

D.C. Area Sees Spike In Rate of Emissions

Carbon Dioxide Increases 13.4% In 4-Year Period

By David A. Fahrenthold, Staff Writer

Washington Post, April 29, 2007

The Washington area is in the middle of a carbon dioxide binge, with emissions of this greenhouse gas from vehicles and electricity users having increased at more than twice the national rate between 2001 and 2005, according to a Washington Post estimate.

That estimate, which appears to be the first to track the region's emissions from those two key sources, found a 13.4 percent increase. Nationally, those emissions from grew by 5.6 percent in the same period.

The Post used traffic statistics and utility records to track the two major components of greenhouse gases; other sources, such as farms and airplanes, were not easily quantified.

Environmentalists say that these numbers illustrate an unwanted legacy of Washington's recent economic boom: Population grew, but emissions grew faster. As exurbs have crept out to farms and forests, the region has required more energy for home air conditioners and long-distance commutes.

The estimate also gives a sense of the task facing local governments, which are taking their first steps toward measuring and reducing greenhouse gases. But with emissions increasing so quickly, their goals appear to be receding even as they are set.

"The first stage is understanding the problem and committing to trying -- and I don't think we've gotten there yet," said Paul Ferguson (D), chairman of the Arlington County Board. In January, Arlington began a program to conserve energy and tap renewable resources such as wind. "We're nowhere close," he said.

Emissions jumped the most in suburban Virginia, where the estimate shows an increase of more than 18 percent. Emissions from the Maryland suburbs grew less, about 11 percent, but that rate still outpaced the country's.

The brightest news came from the District, where emissions grew 6.7 percent. D.C. officials said they think the relatively low increase is partly a sign of changing behavior: Residents were leaving their cars at home and walking, biking or taking public transit.

Carbon dioxide, which is produced when fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal are burned, is one of several gases that accumulate in the Earth's atmosphere, trapping heat from the sun. Scientists blame such emissions for a gradual warming trend over the past few decades. They worry that more emissions, and more warming, could trigger widespread changes in nature.

In the United States, national statistics show that carbon dioxide makes up about 84 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. The data also indicate that about 58 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide comes from two sources: power plants and the tailpipes of cars and trucks.

But much less information is kept at the local level. When the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments voted this month to establish a committee on climate change, its first request was that the committee measure emissions. That task is expected to take months.

The Post estimate began with data on miles traveled by cars and trucks in local jurisdictions and the amount of kilowatt hours used by utility customers.

Then, using methods from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, those figures were used to calculate the total amount of carbon dioxide emitted from vehicles and power-plant smokestacks. [See the chart for details.]

The figures from those calculations leave out greenhouse gases from other sources, such as agriculture, planes, boats and oil furnaces. Those missing figures could account for half of all emissions.

Still, the figures provide a glimpse of the Washington area's contributions to a global problem. They show that, even as climate change was becoming an urgent issue, residents were producing steadily more of the pollutants that cause it.

Jonathan Cogan, a spokesman for the Energy Information Administration, reviewed The Post's calculations and said the agency's formulas appeared to have been used correctly. "This doesn't represent everything, but it does represent two major sources of emissions," he said.

Carbon dioxide pollution is different from smog, which is composed of gases that cause problems closer to the Earth's surface. By contrast, carbon dioxide winds up in the upper atmosphere. The Washington area does not meet the Environmental Protection Agency's smog standards; the EPA does not have regulations on carbon dioxide.

Across the area, carbon dioxide emissions increased faster than the population, which grew about 5.5 percent from 2001 to 2005. Environmental groups said that this is an indication that the problem is not only growth but the way in which the region has grown.

"People have moved farther and farther out and drive more and more miles," said Frank O'Donnell, president of the District-based Clean Air Watch. "What it's telling you is, sprawl is causing a big increase in greenhouse gases."

In the past few months, several jurisdictions have pledged improvements.

Maryland has joined the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a pact among Eastern states to reduce emissions from power plants. Last week, Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) signed a "clean cars" bill to impose tougher standards on autos.

Last year, the District became the first major city in the country to mandate that some large new developments have "green" buildings designed to conserve energy. Montgomery County has a similar rule.

And in Virginia this year, Arlington and Fairfax counties have announced plans to reduce emissions. Fairfax's program, called a "cool counties" initiative, includes a proposal to buy 10 percent of the electricity for county government from wind farms, which produce no greenhouse gases.

Some residents are taking advantage of green-friendly policies. State Department employee Ed Fendley, for instance, commutes from his home near Ballston by bicycle. His zero-emissions trip is made possible by Arlington's bicycle lanes and the showers and bike rack provided by his employer -- and his willingness to endure rain, snow and bad drivers.

"It still beats sitting in traffic," said Fendley, who is a member of the Arlington County School Board.

But much bigger changes will probably be necessary over the next few decades for the D.C. area to reduce emissions. Development will have to be clustered around mass transit, experts say. In far-flung suburbs, residents might one day rely on plug-in hybrid cars, which can run for long distances without burning gasoline.

And utilities will have to build plants that capture carbon dioxide or use non-fossil fuels.

That day seems far off. In Virginia, the Dominion power company has proposed a new plant to keep up with growing demand for electricity. The facility, planned in Wise County in the southwestern part of the state, would have pollution-reducing features.

But it would still burn mainly coal.

"Until a fuel comes along that can produce the same amount of megawatts with the same cost," coal won't be supplanted, Dominion spokesman Dan Genest said.

Still, many people concerned about pollution said last week that they are hopeful-- encouraged by the attention being paid to climate change.

"We are starting," said Matthias Ruth, director of an environmental research institute at the University of Maryland. "We are asking the right questions."

China to Act on Pollution, Warming Gases

By ALEXA OLESEN

The Associated Press

Washington Post, April 27, 2007

BEIJING -- Premier Wen Jiabao pledged Friday to help clean China's air and water and combat global warming by phasing out tax breaks and discounts on land and electricity for highly polluting industries.

"More work on energy conservation and emissions reduction is urgently required to deal with global climate change," Wen said. "Our country is a major coal producer and consumer, and reducing polluting emissions is a responsibility we should bear."

China's coal habit has made it a major contributor to greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide, which scientists say contribute to global warming.

China accounted for 15 percent of the world's greenhouse gases in 2000, second only to the United States' 21 percent, but the fast-growing Chinese economy is expected to surpass the U.S. in emissions in the next couple of years.

China's 3-decade-old boom has left waterways and coastlines polluted by industrial and farm chemicals and domestic sewage. Towns are littered with garbage and construction waste, and its cities are enveloped in smog.

"We must clearly recognize that the situation the nation faces regarding energy conservation and emissions reduction is still quite grim," Wen said at a meeting of other top government leaders, in a speech posted on the government Web site.

He noted that China has failed to meet earlier goals to reduce emissions and conserve energy.

It committed itself to cutting 20 percent of its energy use for every unit of gross domestic product by 2010, but last year it failed to meet the first phase -- a 4 percent reduction. Instead, energy use fell by only 1.2 percent. Sulfur dioxide and other polluting emissions, meanwhile, are supposed to fall by 10 percent by 2010, but last year they rose slightly.

In his speech, Wen took aim at local governments that routinely offer free or cut-rate real estate and utilities to developers looking to set up job-creating businesses, such as steel mills or chemical plants. The premier said the government would "clean up and rectify preferential policies that give land and electricity discounts or tax breaks to energy-intensive or highly polluting industries."

He didn't lay out further details of the plan or say when it would be implemented.

Despite such central government mandates, Beijing often has difficulty ensuring that conservation initiatives are enforced at the local level, where many officials reap the rewards of China's rapid industrialization at the expense of the environment.

"The question is how are they actually going to implement it?" asked Elizabeth Economy, an Asia specialist at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. "What exactly will they put in place to make it more difficult for local bank officials to approve those local steel plants, small coal mines and concrete factories?"

Wen also said China should work harder to create a system whereby polluters pay for environmental damage they cause, and enterprises investing in clean energy are rewarded. He also called for continued price reforms on natural gas, heating fuel and water to encourage energy conservation, without giving a timeframe for price increases.

China is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gases, but as a developing nation it is exempt from its mandatory cutbacks.

Consultant Peter Fusaro, of New York's Global Change Associates, said China's clean-up campaign is motivated by the spotlight of the 2008 Olympics, to be held in Beijing, a growing grass-roots environmental movement in China and increasing media attention on China's pollution problem.

"It's not great to be the biggest polluter in two years," Fusaro said. "That's not going to help them attract business."

AP correspondents Charles J. Hanley and Sarah DiLorenzo in New York contributed to this report.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sunday, April 29, 2007:](#)

Open Forum

A question of power, not global warming

By Damien Schiff

Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency broke federal law when it refused to decide whether carbon dioxide from automobile emissions endangers public health. The commonwealth of Massachusetts, along with other states and many members of the environmental community, had petitioned the EPA to set carbon-dioxide emission standards for new cars. Yet contrary to many interpretations of the case, the court did not force the EPA to regulate auto emissions in the name of fighting global warming. Rather, the court only decided that the EPA hadn't adequately explained its decision not to do so.

In fact, most of the court's opinion, and much of the controversy surrounding the case, focused on a point unrelated to the issue of global warming. Did Massachusetts have the legal standing under the Constitution to challenge the EPA's denial of Massachusetts's rulemaking petition? The court determined that Massachusetts did have standing, largely because of a "special solicitude" for the "quasi-sovereign" interests of Massachusetts in protecting the coastal property of its citizens. On that basis, the court's decision may offer little hope to the environmental community that the judiciary's power to rule on abstract policy debates will be relaxed.

Although the court ruled the EPA had to act on Massachusetts's rulemaking petition, and could not delay its judgment for policy concerns, the court nevertheless gave the EPA an "out." Specifically, the court stated that the EPA can lawfully decline to regulate carbon dioxide from auto emissions for global warming effects "[i]f the scientific uncertainty is so profound that it precludes EPA from making a reasoned judgment as to whether greenhouse gases contribute to global warming." It is possible that the EPA may still justify its refusal to regulate on the grounds that any regulation would have a very minimal effect on global warming. Therefore, failure to regulate couldn't reasonably be seen as endangering the public health or welfare. In other words, the EPA may still win the policy battle if it can show that regulating global warming through new auto emission standards is like trying to bail out a sinking ship with a teaspoon: It has a measurable effect, but ultimately the result is the same.

Unfortunately, a case like Massachusetts vs. the EPA is easy to over-read. A cursory review might lead one to see the decision as a judicial approval of one side of the global warming debate, or as a rejection of the Bush administration's policy. Yet the case, at its core, is not about global warming policy, but rather about political theory -- specifically, what the proper role is for the judiciary in questions of great national import. Unfortunately, the court appears to have been swayed by the principle that the ends justify the means, and that principles of standing and deference to agency decision-making must give way to the crisis of the day, in this case global warming.

Justice Antonin Scalia, in dissent, responded to the court's instrumentalism: "No matter how important the underlying policy issues at stake, this court has no business substituting its own desired outcome for the reasoned judgment of the responsible agency." Although the first legal skirmish over global warming has concluded, the war is far from over.

Damien Schiff is a staff attorney with the nonprofit Pacific Legal Foundation, which submitted an amicus brief arguing that plaintiffs in Massachusetts vs. EPA had no standing to bring their lawsuit, in part because they had not sufficiently identified a causal relationship between carbon dioxide emissions from cars and the effects of "global warming" in the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, April 29, 2007:](#)

Why the rush to delay clean air?

Air board will do no service to those who live in the Valley by seeking to delay federal deadline.

The Valley air district will meet tomorrow with a crucial item on the agenda: Should it seek a delay in the federal deadline to clean up the Valley's air? We don't think so, but don't be surprised if the district runs up the white flag.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is considering -- most believe it has already decided -- whether to seek an extension of the deadline from 2013 to 2024. District staff has recommended the move, contending that it's impossible to meet the existing deadline. By moving into the "extreme" non-attainment category, the district would gain another 11 years to address the Valley's dirty air.

But a large number of scientists, medical experts, environmentalists and Valley residents take exception to that notion. They believe, as we do, that much more could be done, short of making Valley residents wait another 11 years for clean air. Critics of the district's plan complain -- with good reason -- that their suggestions and objections have been met with disdain, and even outright hostility, from air district staffers and governing board members.

And everyone is wondering why the district is rushing so hard toward this decision. The district has a June deadline to submit a clean-air plan to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. But missing the deadline only starts an 18-month sanctions clock. A year-and-a-half of ticking would give plenty of time for all the objections to be carefully examined in public hearings, without threat of sanction. So why move so aggressively to impose a delay?

That's a hard question to answer, but there are several possible explanations.

The district has suffered from the status-quo disease almost since its inception. That's owing in large part to the structure of its governing board, which is heavily dominated by members of the boards of supervisors from the eight counties that make up the district. They owe much to constituencies in their districts -- such as the ag and oil industries -- that help put them in office.

Those industries are loathe to accept changes that, in many cases, are costly. So it's no surprise that elected leaders they support are also less eager for change.

The California Air Resources Board is expected to release its own plan for cleaner air in June. Much of what is done in the Valley will rely on that statewide plan. So why not wait until we know what the state board intends to do before taking this drastic step at the federal level?

The Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a group of scientists, environmentalists, medical providers and residents, has offered a number of suggestions along with its objections to this rush to delay on the air district's part.

Among them:

The district should set a new course toward a "severe" attainment designation that would culminate in clean air by 2017, rather than 2024, as under the "extreme" designation. That represents a shift, which critics say is an effort at compromise, from their earlier insistence that clean air could be achieved by 2013.

The district should implement a Clean Air Days plan, which would create incentives to retrofit or replace older, dirtier diesel engines -- so-called "mobile sources" such as big rigs and farm tractors. After a phase-in period, the use of such older engines would be forbidden on Clean Air Days (which would, in fact, be the worst air days in the Valley).

Prepare an environmental impact statement on the proposed changes, which the district has not done for its "extreme" plan.

That last suggestion raises another point: Previous plans have included EIRs. Why not this one? Can the district seriously suggest that postponing clean air for another 11 years will have no environmental impacts?

And another point: The district hardly has a history of submitting plans on time. Why is it so critical on this occasion -- especially when a grace period is available before sanctions kick in?

Too many questions remain about the district's rush to delay clean air in the Valley. If the governing board chooses to brush aside these and other objections and postpone clean air for the Valley, it will surprise few. But it would be no service to many thousands in the Valley who already suffer physically and economically from the effects of dirty air, and it would cause many thousands more to suffer in the near future.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Sunday, April 29, 2007:](#)

We can't afford delay in cleaning valley's air

When something is difficult to do, there are always reasons not to do it: Timing is wrong, too few resources, problem is too big, powerful people are opposed. ... The bigger the issue, the longer the list.

When it comes to cleaning the air we breathe — that our children and grandparents breathe — we're tired of excuses. We urge Stanislaus County Supervisor Bill O'Brien and Ceres City Councilman Chris Vierra not to listen to reasons that admit failure and then rush into reclassifying our valley as being in "extreme non-attainment" for federal ozone levels.

O'Brien and Vierra sit on the 11-member San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board. Monday, district staff will present a smog plan that will change the valley's designation to "extreme" from "severe" under federal Environmental Protection Agency standards.

Such a designation might appear obvious. From Bakersfield to Stockton, our valley has had more days of unacceptable ozone levels than any other in the nation. But changing the designation also changes the time frame for fixing the problem. A "severe" classification means, essentially, that we would have until 2018 to meet federal standards; "extreme" would set a 2024 deadline.

We've been in "severe" noncompliance nearly since standards were set in 1990. Last year, our numbers were "good," with only 86 days above the ozone standard. In 1999 we exceeded acceptable levels 117 days; in 2003 it was 134 days.

Our air is getting better, due in part to the air district's work. But that's yet another reason that this move is premature. Many believe that if the district is given more time to comply with standards, it will take longer to reach them. The district will also rely on remedies that don't yet exist. That will condemn valley residents to seven additional years of breathing bad air.

At what cost? Our children already are three times more likely to have asthma than those who live on the coast. We spend \$3 billion a year more for health care due to bad air; school and work days lost to air-related illness cost each of us \$1,000 a year; breathing higher levels of ozone and particulates, such as soot, cause lung irritation and infections, diminishes our immune systems and weakens our hearts. Living in a "severe" area is like living with a smoker, but the smoke is ever-present.

The air district says it is pursuing a "dual strategy to clean Valley smog as expeditiously as possible." But its plan would not require improvement in all areas until 2023. Acting more quickly would cost an estimated \$60 billion; and some improvements would rely on technologies not yet "available."

Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, says obstacles are too numerous to surmount in a mere decade. Others, including members of the California Air Resources Board, insist residents shouldn't be given false hope by delaying redesignation.

Yet some people, also with impeccable credentials, are asking "what's the rush?" They insist we can reach our goals in the next decade. They have reason for optimism.

James Lents was executive director of the South Coast Air Quality Management District — the only basin actually worse than ours through the 1990s. In seven of the past eight years, South Coast's ozone numbers have been better than ours. Lents is acknowledged worldwide as an expert on airborne pollution. He suggests:

Greater incentives for modifying or replacing diesel engines in trucks, tractors and irrigation pumps with models that burn 80 percent cleaner.

"Clean Air Days," allowing dirtier (but cheaper to operate) engines to be used on days when the air is clear but requiring use of cleaner diesel engines on days when the ozone count is higher.

Better computer modeling to help the district predict smoggy days and take proactive measures.

Improved modeling is especially important here. Earlier this year, we complained that the district's particulate matter computer models are largely unreliable, resulting in more no-burn days than were justified in Stanislaus County. We have no greater faith in the district's ozone models than we have in its PM models.

Lastly, we wonder why the district wants to move so quickly. The June deadline is meaningless. The federal EPA has no penalties even when plans are 18 months late. That would provide plenty of time to look more closely at other ideas and concepts that have worked elsewhere. Besides, the district is not known for meeting its deadlines.

The district's board — dominated by supervisors from the eight-county region — is expected to ignore objections and approve this hasty and costly plan. That will make some people happy, but will doom others to years of asthma attacks, labored breathing and poor health. Approval could lead to a court challenge.

O'Brien and Vierra represent Stanislaus County on the board; Supervisor Leroy Ornellas represents San Joaquin County. We implore all three to tell district staff that they're tired of excuses; that they want a plan that provides solutions. And that they want to breathe cleaner air sooner rather than later.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Friday, April 27, 2007:](#)

Don't delay cleaning up our air

This week's Californian editorial correctly claimed it will be a long, tough battle before the valley has clean air. It also recommended a badly needed reform in the makeup of our air district board. But, the editorial mistakenly claims the best way to move forward in air quality improvements is for our valley air district to ask the federal Environmental Protection Agency for a lot more time.

To purposely add an extra 10 years onto a deadline which is already six years down the road is not necessary. One problem with this kind of extreme request is the district will get to rely heavily on future technological developments as a major part of their plan to clear the air. Unfortunately, wishes and hopes for future breakthroughs in technology is not what we need at this time.

The economic benefits of clearing the air sooner, rather than later, are tremendous. Not only are billions in health costs saved but the entire valley becomes more attractive to investment. The potential improvement in quality of life from cleaner air is immeasurable and the projected increase in crop yields could be a huge boom to our agricultural economy.

This request to delay compliance with air standards means a child born today will graduate from high school without a chance to breathe clean air on most of our hot summer afternoons. It means the residents of this valley will continue to pay for a long time over 3 billion dollars per year in pollution caused health costs.

Does \$1,000 per resident annually seem a reasonable cost for subsidizing polluters?

An independent group of air quality experts has recently shown our air district how they can clean our air much earlier than the proposed 2023 deadline. The California Air Resources Board can find nothing wrong with this alternative plan, yet our air district will not acknowledge its legitimacy.

The alternative plan would clean our air 95 percent by the current deadline and 100 percent by 2017. It does not require draconian measures, only a tough determination to do everything practical in the near term.

Why is it so difficult for our air district to put stricter controls in place on trucking firms, construction sites, mega-dairies and composting operations?

These are obvious areas where the air district has the power to reduce pollution, yet they throw up their hands and say we can do nothing until future technologies come along.

It is imperative that our air board does not take the easy way out and rubber stamp this minimalist plan. They need to let air district staff know that this kind of procrastination is extremely undesirable.

If the alternative plan on the table has not been fully examined, then let's take the time to see what it has to offer. There are six months left before a final decision on this plan has to be made. We should not rush into unnecessary delay and suffering when another way exists. This is the time for progressive leadership.

Tom Frantz is the president of the Association of Irrigated Residents and a math teacher at Wasco High School.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial April 28, 2007:](#)

Our View: New clean air deadline stinks

The proposal to delay the timeline for cleaning up the Valley's air cheats our children

Cough. Choke. Wheeze. It's just about summer -- and it's also just about time for the air we breathe to become thick with pollution.

Each year, more and more hot air is expended by the windbags at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to tell us how the air is going to be cleaned up -- and then nothing much happens but more coughing, choking and wheezing. Their inability to chart a course to clean the air has helped lead to alarmingly high rates of childhood asthma and countless other breathing-related maladies that deteriorate our health and pillage our pocketbooks with medical bills.

Something has to be done, but the air district just keeps marking time -- and on Monday, the district's board will vote on an ultimate delay: a proposal to extend the federal deadline to clean up our dirty air from 2013 to 2024.

We, frankly, think that idea stinks.

The Valley shouldn't have to wait 11 more years for clean air. If the board approves the extension on Monday and it does indeed take until 2024 to clean up our air, an entire generation of Valley children will have grown up inhaling some of the nastiest air in the country. We must do better than that. And what about the air district itself? Isn't calling for another 11 years just an affirmation of the board's abject failure to do its job? We think so. The district's professional staff should be ashamed to put forth such an embarrassing delay.

We also can't figure out why the district staff is so antsy to get the delay pushed through. The district has until June to submit a clean-air plan. If the deadline is missed, an additional 18-month grace period kicks in before the federal Environmental Protection Agency demands action. Why can't the district just take the year-and-a-half to hold hearings and come up with another strategy?

There are better ideas out there. The Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a self-described group of scientists, medical providers, environmentalists and residents, has a sensible plan that would result in clean air by 2017, rather than 2024. This is a compromise from the group's earlier insistence on cleaning the air by 2013.

Merced County Supervisor Mike Nelson represents Merced County on the board. He's told CVAQC members that he has not made up his mind. We urge him to vote "no" on the extension, which we think would be a hasty and misguided decision made under a false sense of urgency.

Let's clean up the air sooner rather than later.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, April 28, 2007:](#)

Force EPA's hand

Valley air district should join with governor against federal agency.

The board and staff of the Valley's air district have an excellent opportunity -- thanks to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger -- to step up to the bully pulpit on behalf of Valley residents afflicted with poor air quality.

Stephen L. Johnson, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is dragging his feet on granting a procedural waiver that will help California clean its air and reduce emissions that cause global warming.

Schwarzenegger threatened Wednesday to sue the federal EPA if Johnson didn't act soon on California's 17-month-old waiver request. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District ought to second Schwarzenegger's call, and be prepared to join the lawsuit if it is filed.

The governor has every reason to be impatient. Johnson has said for months that he couldn't act on the petition until the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling on whether regulators have authority to control greenhouse emissions from vehicles.

Well, the court affirmed that regulatory authority on April 2, but Johnson continues to dawdle. In an interview with Roll Call this week, Johnson said his agency "in coming weeks" will start the process for reviewing California's petition. A ruling may come "this year," Johnson said, but he couldn't even commit to that.

At issue is a five-year-old state law that requires new automobiles sold in California after 2009 to reduce tailpipe emissions of carbon dioxide. This law is a key element of the state's overall strategy for reducing greenhouse pollution from the transportation sector, which accounts for 41% of California's total emissions.

Under the Clean Air Act, California has authority to enact air pollution laws tougher than the federal government's, but it must first obtain a waiver from EPA. California requested this waiver in December of 2005, and has since waited. And waited.

The Bush administration is deliberately stalling for time to help its friends in the domestic automobile industry, which continues to oppose regulatory efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

It is outrageous that California must use taxpayer money to sue the EPA over this waiver, but the governor has little choice. But he shouldn't have to act alone. California's congressional delegation also needs to apply pressure.

And so should the Valley air district. District officials are constantly telling us that their hands are tied when it comes to the Valley's largest pollution problem -- emissions from vehicles. They also tell us that they spend a lot of time lobbying behind-the-scenes with federal and state authorities who do have such powers. Well, here's a chance to stand up in public and shout about our concerns by backing the governor's lawsuit threat in loud voices.

As is happening with Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the EPA's Johnson is losing friends in Congress as he dithers and dodges. Congress should insist he uphold the law, and not force states to keep using the courts so that the EPA -- the Environmental Protection Agency -- can actually live up to its name.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, April 30, 2007:](#)

Time to ban those unhealthy drive-throughs

Drive-through lanes are a huge contributor to global warming.

Cars sitting idle, burning fossil fuels and emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and for what? You aren't going anywhere.

I once waited in a drive-through line at McDonald's for 25 minutes, and a Starbucks line for 15 minutes, intervals twice as long as any red light.

If California really wants to crack down on greenhouse gas emissions, I suggest continuing the development of other energy sources and the production of cars run by alternative methods -- like hydroelectric or electric power, but I also think we should ban drive-throughs.

People can wait in line inside, It's healthier for them to wait standing in line rather than sitting in a car, and it's better for the environment, too.

*Selena Farnesi, Age 17
Bullard High School, Fresno*

Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, April 28, 2007:

2024 is too long to wait for clean air

The American Lung Association State of the Air Report shows Bakersfield, Visalia, Fresno, Merced, Hanford/Corcoran and Modesto among the top 13 most-smog-polluted cities in the nation! There are many health costs related to dirty air in the San Joaquin Valley, such as childhood asthma rates three times the national average and approximately \$1,000 per person lost annually due to school absences and lost work days.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff is proposing to clean up ozone pollution (smog) in the valley, but not until 2024. Our valley is a "serious" nonattainment area for ozone pollution. By law, a serious area has until 2013 to clean up the air. The SJV staff has created a plan to move to the extreme nonattainment designation, giving staff until 2024. This is too long to wait.

If you want to breathe clean air before 2024, do one of the following: Attend the board public hearing April 30 at 4800 Enterprise Way in Modesto at 11 a.m. Call the district's board members and let them know your concerns. Contact The Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition for more information, or, if you need car-pooling assistance, call 385-5490.

MELISSA KELLY-ORTEGA, Merced

[Letter to editor, Washington Post, April 28, 2007](#)

The Capitol Power Plant's Impact

The April 21 front-page article "Reliance on Coal Sullies 'Green the Capitol' Effort" was a beautifully balanced piece of reporting -- it managed to annoy both environmentalists and the fossil fuel industry, I'm sure.

But is The Post open to a little scientific editing?

Coal combustion is a major source of some noxious effluents but not others. The article took note of carbon monoxide emissions, but modern coal-fired power plants emit little carbon monoxide or soot. They do emit sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury, carbon dioxide and particulate matter. Soot, also called black carbon (think of the stuff that collects inside a fireplace), is not synonymous with particulate matter, which can have any chemical composition. Sulfur dioxide leads to acid rain but not photochemical smog (ozone).

Washington is in violation of the ambient air quality standard for ozone, and oxides of nitrogen are the main culprit. Carbon monoxide plays little role in global warming or damage to vegetation, but it is toxic.

As for the article's statement that "no one knows how much carbon dioxide is emitted from the plant," high school chemistry will get you a good estimate. Each ton of coal produces about 3.7 tons of CO₂, so the 17,108 tons of coal burned last year at the Capitol Power Plant produced about 60,000 tons of CO₂. Calculations for natural gas and oil are similar.

Want to stop global warming? Start with scientific literacy.

-- **Russell R. Dickerson**, *College Park*

The writer is chairman of the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Science at the University of Maryland.

[Washington Post, Letter to the Editor, April 29, 2007:](#)

Hope Is in the Air

Court's EPA Ruling Might Make a Difference Here

On April 2, the Supreme Court made big news by announcing a ruling that faulted the Bush administration for refusing to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

That same day the court issued a less noticed ruling -- in *Environmental Defense et al. v. Duke Energy Corp.*-- that strengthens the prospect that dirty, old, coal-fired power plants, such as the one operated by

Mirant Corp. in Alexandria, will be forced to clean up their acts at last, provided the government implements the decision.

As the ruling was announced, Alexandrians received a colorful brochure from a group called Bright Ideas Alexandria projecting a positive image of the 58-year-old Mirant plant.

The brochure states that the plant "supplies reliable and economical electricity for our community's growing needs." The truth is, Mirant's Potomac River plant provides no electricity to Alexandria and, according to Mirant's own testimony, has not done so since 1986. The electricity Mirant generates in Alexandria is generally sold on the PJM Northeast power grid, with some providing low-cost reserve power for the District -- but not for long. Pepco has told the Energy Department that it won't need backup from Mirant when new power lines are completed in June.

The brochure states that Mirant has "eliminated 99.7% of [its] total output of ash, dirt and soot." The fact is, Mirant's 2006 proposal to increase the height of its smokestacks stated that plant dust or particulate pollution is expected to increase more than six times over 2002 and 2003 levels. That's more than 2,700 additional tons each year. Moreover, sulfur dioxide emissions would rise from 3,200 tons annually to more than 15,000 tons. According to a 2005 Mirant study, these changes would probably exceed national ambient air quality standards. Mirant has also added hundreds of tons of trona, a caustic powder that an Energy Department analysis found is likely to "double or triple the quantity of fly ash generated by the plant." This fly ash is driven in trucks on Alexandria streets en route to a landfill in Prince George's County, and it can eventually leach into the Chesapeake Bay.

Furthermore, 2005 Energy Department data indicate that the Mirant plant, as it operates now, could be expected to result annually in as many as 23 premature deaths, 31 heart attacks among adults and 440 asthma attacks among children. The analysis projects that emissions from the plant will cause the loss of some 2,488 workdays by affected people. Despite this grim scenario, the Bright Ideas brochure assures Alexandrians that Mirant wants to be part of the city's "green future." The fact is, Mirant wants to modify the plant by merging its smokestacks and to increase emissions above this year's output, all the while contending that this change is too minor to require upgrading its pollution controls, as normally required under the Clean Air Act.

Here is where the Supreme Court's less-publicized April 2 ruling enters the picture. The ruling reaffirmed the requirements of the Clean Air Act for the use of "best available technology" at old power plants that make changes and increase emissions. Mirant's Potomac River plant is such a plant.

The *more* widely heralded April 2 ruling is also relevant to Mirant's operations. It determined that greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, are meant to be regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Air Act when they can potentially endanger health and welfare. The Energy Department calculates that the Mirant plant will produce slightly more CO₂ in 2007 than it did in 2006, or about 2 million tons.

This is not our idea of a green future. A coal-fired power plant is not compatible with a residential and historic area such as ours. If this plant is to continue to operate, at the very least it should be required to meet the same emission standards as power plants built in the past 10 years.

-- **Richard M. Moose** -- **Mary C. Harris**, *Alexandria*