

Stefanie Sorrells

To: WebMaster
Subject: In The News -- Dec. 31, 2007

Keeping warm over the winter

By Nzong Xiong - THE FRESNO BEE
in the Modesto Bee, Saturday, December 29, 2007

Brrr! It's cold outside. What better time to make use of the wood-burning fireplace or pellet stove in the living room? You'll need to first check with your local government to see if you can light up wood, pellets or manufactured logs.

If all systems are go, all you need is fuel for the fire.

Whatever you use, "you should burn as cleanly as possible," says Janelle Schneider, a spokeswoman with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

There are generally two types of logs used in wood-burning fireplaces: real wood logs and manufactured logs. Real wood logs should be hardwood, such as oak or maple. Boxes of split hardwood, from 0.8 to 1.55 cubic feet, cost \$7.49 to \$13.19. Wrapped bundles, six to eight pieces, cost \$5.69 at Orchard Supply Hardware.

Wood from fruit trees also can be used. Many stores sell peach, apple and almond. They're sold in various quantities. For example, they cost between \$38.50 and \$49.95 for a 4-by-4-by-4-foot bin.

With wood logs, be sure they are dry and have time to cure, Schneider says.

"The higher water content (a piece of wood) has, the more smoke it produces," she says. "The worst wood you can burn is raw wood that's not dry and seasoned."

Alternatives to real firewood are manufactured logs, of which there are two main types.

The popular, more commonly found manufactured logs are made of about 50 percent wood or agricultural fibers, such as ground nut shells, and about 50 percent wax, says Chris Caron, vice president of brand development at Duraflame in Stockton.

"The wax may be petroleum, although newer formulations contain natural waxes from plant and vegetable oils," he says. "The wax component of the logs helps bind the materials together, and makes the logs easy to light. The wood wax logs are normally wrapped in a paper wrapper, making them clean to handle."

Duraflame, Pine Mountain and Java-Log products are some that fall in this category. They're sold by the case or by individual logs. The logs are typically individually wrapped with paper, which you don't have to remove and can light to ignite your fire, says Amber Smith, associate brand manager for Pine Mountain and Java-Log products in Muncie, Ind. At OSH, the cost of individual logs starts at \$1.89 or \$10.99 for a case of six. The Home Depot sells cases with nine logs for \$12.98.

The other kind of manufactured log is made of 100 percent compressed wood chips and includes no wax, Caron says.

"The compressed wood logs, often referred to as 'Presto' logs, also burn very cleanly -- particularly when burned in a wood stove -- but are very dense and difficult to light," he says. "And like wood, you have to burn multiple logs to sustain a fire."

At OSH, a 21-pound box of compressed bricks costs \$5.99.

"They burn a long time and burn clean," says Tim Wilson, the store manager at OSH.

If what helps keep you warm at night is a pellet stove, then bags of pellets are readily available.

"There are some quality differences" with pellet fuel manufacturers, says Dianne Cloyd, co-owner of Ponderosa Hearth and Home in Clovis. "Most of the difference is in the density and the level of

moisture" in the pellets. "The more dense and drier, the better the quality. You'll find less sawdust in the bag."

Pellets are sold by 40-pound bags or by the pallet or ton, which consists of fifty 40-pound bags. Cost of individual bags is \$5.99 and a ton costs \$269 at OSH; at Home Depot, it's \$4.89 for individual bags and \$234 for the pallet.

If you're using your pellet stove as your main source of heat, buy by the ton, Cloyd says. Keep bags of pellets out of the rain as much as possible.

Kern's environment and health in 2007

By Stacey Shepard and Emily Hagedorn
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, December 31, 2007

Good news/bad news for Kern air

Kern County choked on news that it will take 17 years, possibly more, to reduce smog. Regional air regulators released a smog cleanup plan requiring an 11-year extension on the federal government's 2013 deadline to clean the air. Environmental and health advocates fought for stricter rules on business, given the enormous public health burden. A few tweaks were made, but nothing substantial enough to clean the air before 2024.

On the bright side, Kern County had significantly fewer smoggy days. During the summer smog season, Bakersfield violated the federal limit for smog on 15 days, the lowest number in two decades.

In October, a state bill was signed that will expand the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Governing Board to include an air pollution scientist, a doctor and two more city council representatives. Currently, the board is made up of eight county supervisors and three city council members from throughout the valley.

Refinery rumble

Big West of California's refinery on Rosedale Highway made the news several times. Plans to increase fuel output alarmed the public when they learned Big West planned to use hydrofluoric acid, a dangerous and toxic chemical. When spilled, the chemical forms a traveling cloud that could injure or kill those in its path. Big West later revised its proposal to use a modified form of the acid with less danger if spilled. The county put the expansion project on hold for more study.

In April Kern officials cited the refinery for venting gas. Big West officials said the releases were due to power outages and the company is upgrading electrical equipment to prevent further ventings.

Part of the refinery was shut down for a few days in June to locate the source of oil flowing into a groundwater monitoring well. A *Californian* investigation later found that numerous leaks and spills at the facility in the past 20 years had created an extensive plume of soil and groundwater contamination, some if it close to drinking water sources. Despite the situation, regional water quality regulators never issued any formal cleanup orders even after former owner Shell shut down the only cleanup system on site in March 2005.

After the story was published, the water board issued an order that required Shell to restart the cleanup system by Nov. 1 and ordered investigations into the full extent of pollution. Shell restarted the cleanup system in early October.

Waste handlers fined

Kern County took two waste companies to task.

In November, Kern officials levied a \$30,000 fine against Hondo Chemical, a company on Stockdale Highway near Enos Lane that mixes oil-field wastewater with fly ash to make a cement-like product used for dust control. That was on top of \$23,000 it owed the county Environmental Health Department in fines and late fees for a May order. County officials charged

that the company stored exotic, industrial wastes in an improper manner, posing a threat to groundwater. As of Dec. 21, the company had not paid.

In June, a cease-and-desist order was issued to Community Recycling after food wrappers, plastic bags, bottle caps and other solid waste were found in the compost on nearby farmland owned by a company official. The facility, near Arvin, makes compost from rejected supermarket produce and Los Angeles' yard waste. In October, county supervisors slapped a \$5,000 fine against Community Recycling for stockpiling 300,000 tons of smashed wallboard and concrete on farmland without a permit. The company has paid the fine.

Water woes

Dwindling numbers of an endangered fish, the tiny Delta smelt, resulted in an unprecedented federal ruling in August that will significantly reduce State Water Project deliveries. Local water officials said the impact on farmers could be devastating. Mother Nature was no help. Just 2.97 inches of rain had fallen in Bakersfield by late December. With normal annual rainfall of 6.5 inches, 2007 was on track to become the fifth driest year since 1889, National Weather Service officials said.

A win for wildlife

A beaver's life was spared after public outcry in December over plans to kill the rodent that had chewed down city trees along the Kern River bike path. City parks officials asked the state wildlife agency for help with the problem. California Department of Fish and Game officials said the agency doesn't relocate beavers and issued a permit to exterminate the animal. Parks officials revoked the permit after learning of the plans and receiving more than 50 e-mails and phone calls overnight from city residents and beaver lovers as far away as upstate New York and Indiana. They now plan to relocate the beaver, or find a way to allow it to remain where it is.

HEALTH

Children sickened with E. coli

Eleven people, mostly children, were sickened by E. coli bacteria in April and May.

The Kern County Department of Public Health believes two children were sickened between April 16 and 24, and then spread it to other children at parties. Then those children made other children and family members ill from close contact.

The health department still doesn't know what originally sickened the first two children, said interim County Public Health Officer Dr. Claudia Jonah on Dec. 18.

Two of the children were hospitalized with hemolytic-uremic syndrome, a condition seen in serious foodborne illnesses and marked by kidney failure.

Elijah Walker and Jane Maberry, who were both 6 years old when hospitalized, are doing well and show no lasting effects of the illness, their parents said on Dec. 18.

Kern No. 1 for West Nile

Kern County was ground zero for West Nile virus.

As of Dec. 20, 379 people had been infected with the mosquito-borne virus statewide, with 138 in Kern County. Four Kern residents died from complications of the virus.

Health officials scrambled. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger declared an emergency in Kern in August. A plane sprayed pesticide twice over much of Bakersfield.

Some officials pointed to green, unkempt swimming pools -- potential breeding grounds for mosquitoes -- as a reason for Kern's high number of cases and asked Realtors, brokers and agents to help report the pools to vector control.

An aerial survey of Bakersfield in August by the Kern Mosquito and Vector Control District found 1,200 suspect swimming pools.

Hospital expansion

To meet the demands of Bakersfield's growing population, one hospital finished a major construction project while another inched closer to completion.

San Joaquin Community Hospital dedicated its \$72 million, five-story North Tower in April. This added about 70 beds to the 178 beds the hospital is licensed for.

Bakersfield Memorial Hospital is also in the midst of a five-story tower addition, slated to be done in 2008.

OB/GYN controversy

Kern Medical Center's OB/GYN conflict started a couple years ago when the contracts of several OB/GYN physicians were criticized for paying too much and too many perks, including malpractice insurance that covered the doctors in their private practices.

In March, county supervisors voted to stop providing the insurance for six OB/GYN physicians when they are working outside the county hospital.

In June, potential infighting came to light.

Dr. Nicole Sharkey, who was then a fourth-year resident, filed a claim against the county, the hospital and two KMC physicians for damages she said she suffered through being sexually harassed. The physicians, Drs. George Alkhoury and Joseph Mansour, denied any wrongdoing. Mansour said Sharkey was being used by several other OB/GYN physicians to discredit him because Mansour went to county supervisors with the contracts, he said. The turmoil could also cost KMC the OB/GYN residency program.

In October, a "mock accreditation" report, preparation for a re-accreditation survey, found "the faculty is divided into two camps" and that faculty misbehavior "could lead to summary withdrawal of the (residency program), without recourse to appeal."

Dr. Leonard Perez, former department chairman, also was suspended by current interim chairman Dr. Robert Wallace. County officials wouldn't comment on the reason for Perez's suspension; some claimed Wallace was given the top OB/GYN job because he once worked as an adviser for Supervisor Michael Rubio.

Lastly, Sharkey filed a claim against the county, the hospital and several other medical residents in early December for damages she says she suffered after the physicians inappropriately accessed her medical records.

Furor over tattoos

What started as a disagreement between a doctor and patients escalated into threats, name-calling on the blogosphere and a media circus garnering the attention of local radio programs -- even a mention on "The Colbert Report," a national comedy news show.

On Feb. 7, Tasha Childress took her toddler to Dr. Gary Alexander Merrill's F Street office with an ear infection.

Childress, 24, said they were refused care because of three visible star tattoos she and her husband have behind their ears.

"We just like to be upfront with everything," said Merrill, of Christian Medical Services. "Our policies all reflect consideration for conservative clientele in a traditional atmosphere ... a sort of refuge from the crudeness and vulgarity of the public sector."

Know the new environmental laws?

By Alex Breitler, Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Monday, December 31, 2007

A solar water heater for your home, alternative fuels for your car and toys free from toxic chemicals are among the goals of new environmental laws set to take effect in 2008 and beyond.

One year after California passed landmark global warming legislation, 2007 was a year of transition as officials hammered out ways to reduce greenhouse gases not only on paper, but also in practice.

Some proposed environmental laws were left behind.

"I would say the story of 2007, more than anything, was what didn't get done," said Rico Mastrodonato, communications director for Oakland-based California League of Conservation Voters.

Failures, he said, include bills that would have cleaned up the state's three largest ports, helped solve the state's water woes and restore the Delta, and established green building standards for state facilities.

Here are some of the laws that survived and have the potential to affect residents in 2008 and years to come:

» **Alternative fuels:** Vehicle registration fees are set to increase July 1 to pay for research into alternative and renewable fuels, retrofitting of truck engines and the removal of high-polluting cars from the roadways.

Registration will increase about \$3 under AB118 (Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, D-Los Angeles).

» **Solar water heaters:** A new law promotes solar water heaters to reduce demand for natural gas. About 200,000 solar heaters must be installed in homes and businesses by 2017 under AB1470 (Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael).

The bill provides incentives and rebates for homeowners and businesses to get solar water heaters.

Solar water heating could provide 5 percent of the greenhouse gas reductions required by California by 2020. It also could lower the cost of natural gas by 25 percent to 35 percent, saving consumers money, according to a report by Environment California, a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization.

» **Illegal dumping:** AB679 (Assemblyman John Benoit, R-Bermuda Dunes) increases fines for people convicted of illegal dumping, a serious problem in San Joaquin County.

On top of regular penalties, dumpers would pay \$100 to \$200 extra that can be used by cities or counties to crack down on other dumpers.

» **Air pollution:** The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will have a new look thanks to SB719 (Sen. Michael Machado, D-Linden).

The law requires a doctor and scientist be added to the district board, which regulates pollution from homes, businesses and farms. The air board traditionally has been made up mostly of farming interests.

» **Toxic toys:** AB1108 (Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, D-San Francisco) outlaws the manufacture or sale of toys and child-care items that contain certain quantities of phthalates.

These are chemicals used to make plastics flexible and add fragrance to certain products; phthalates can disrupt hormones and human reproductive systems.

This law does not take effect until January 2009.

» **Energy and water conservation:** The California Energy Commission must come up with new efficiency standards for lights by the end of 2008 under AB1109 (Huffman).

The ultimate goal is to reduce average energy use by 50 percent for residences and 25 percent for businesses by 2018.

Under a separate bill, the commission must also come up with water efficiency standards for new buildings.

Rules of the road to expand in '08

Talking on a cell phone when driving, unless you're using a hands-free device, becomes illegal in California on July 1

By Aaron Crowe, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Sunday, December 30, 2007

With 2008 two days away, it's a good time to look ahead to some of the new laws for motorists that will ring in the new year.

The most anticipated law, SB 1613 -- due to take effect July 1 -- prohibits drivers from using wireless telephones without a hands-free device. In addition, motorists younger than 18 will not be allowed to use a cell phone even with a hands-free device.

During the 2007 legislative year, 964 bills were passed and 750 were signed into law -- including more than 167 changes to the California Vehicle Code. Many of the changes -- regarding traffic safety, air quality and consumer protection -- take effect Jan. 1, while others will take effect July 1.

Here are some of the new laws that will take effect Jan. 1, unless indicated otherwise.

Traffic safety

- **Wireless telephones:** Prohibits the use of wireless telephones while driving, unless the telephone is used with a hands-free device. Base fine for a first offense: \$20, and \$50 for each subsequent offense. The law provides an exemption for emergency purposes. Takes effect July 1.
- **Wireless telephones, younger than 18:** A person younger than 18 is prohibited from operating a motor vehicle while using a wireless telephone, even when equipped with a hands-free device, or while using a mobile service device. The law provides an exemption for emergency purposes.
- **Bicycle safety:** A person operating a bicycle during darkness is required to utilize illumination devices while riding on a highway, a sidewalk or a bikeway.
- **Traffic violation dismissals:** The courts are prohibited from dismissing through completion of traffic school or another court-approved program of driving safety serious traffic violations, such as driving under the influence, hit-and-run and reckless driving.
- **License plate coating:** The use or sale of a product (spray coating) that would impair the reading or recognition of a license plate by an electronic device, such as a red-light camera, is prohibited.
- **Driver responsibility:** Requires applicants for a driver's license renewal to sign a declaration acknowledging that being under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs impairs the ability to safely operate a motor vehicle.

Consumer protection

- **Restitution for victims:** Authorizes the DMV to order restitution to victims who have suffered financial loss or damage by a vehicle dealer, manufacturer, distributor or transporter. The law allows restitution when the occupational license is suspended or revoked.
- **Consumer recovery fund:** Creates a fund to compensate consumers who have suffered monetary losses as the result of a vehicle dealership closure or insolvency. Funded by a \$1 fee collected by the DMV on all vehicles sold by a dealer or lessor/retailer.

Air quality

- Minor passengers smoking ban: Prohibits smoking in a vehicle in which minors are present, whether the vehicle is in motion or at rest. Law enforcement can't stop a vehicle solely to determine whether a violation has occurred.
- Air quality fees: The smog abatement fee, the vehicle registration fee, the vessel registration fee and the identification plate fee will be increased, effective July 1. Additional revenues collected will be used to fund a variety of fuel and vehicle technology projects through the Bureau of Automotive Repair, the California Air Resources Board and the California Energy Commission.
- Reduction in diesel emissions: The Healthy Heart and Lung Act will be established as a means to reduce diesel emissions. It will prohibit the registration, renewal of registration or transfer of ownership of a heavy-duty diesel vehicle if the vehicle owner or operator has an outstanding emissions-related citation.

Online

For a complete list of new driving laws in 2008, go to <http://www.dmv.ca.gov>.

In 2007, county turned efforts to environment

By Julia Scott, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, December 31, 2007

Call it a trend: 2007 proved San Francisco isn't the only forward-thinking city on the Peninsula when it comes to going green.

Wider knowledge of the impacts of global warming at the local level led several cities across San Mateo County to take the step of publicly acknowledging the problem and committing, at least on paper, to doing something about it. Meanwhile, 2007 also had its share of public health threats, concerns over a potential sea level rise and an oil spill that soiled birds and shut down beaches. Here are some of San Mateo County's top environmental stories of 2007:

County seeing green

Since the launch of the Sierra Club's Cool Cities campaign in March 2007, no fewer than six cities (Atherton, Menlo Park, Redwood City, South San Francisco, Millbrae and Burlingame) have adopted the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

Signing the Climate Protection Agreement commits a city to surpass the Kyoto Protocol target of reducing global warming pollution levels to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. That means committing to changes across the board, from creating walkable communities to adding green building requirements to a city's planning and building code, or converting city cars and trucks to run on biodiesel or vegetable oil.

It's been a banner year for environmental awareness in San Mateo County, said Rafael Reyes, director of the Sierra Club's Loma Prieta chapter.

"We're particularly optimistic that green building standards will be established throughout the region. There seems to be a lot of energy around that," he said. "We also believe there's huge opportunities around solar."

Several cities, including Burlingame, Redwood City, Menlo Park, San Carlos and Belmont, also created "green-ribbon" task forces to help brainstorm solutions and hold leaders accountable.

The county Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a similar agreement, the Cool Counties Climate Stabilization Initiative this year as well. It takes an even more aggressive stance on climate change, committing the county to reduce CO2 emissions by 80 percent of present levels by 2050.

Two cities earned special plaudits for putting ideas into action this year.

San Mateo takes lead

San Mateo adopted the emissions reductions equivalent to the county's goals, which dovetail those of AB32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act. To achieve this lofty goal, the city paid consultant Jill Boone, formerly of RecycleWorks, to determine exactly what its CO2 emissions levels are by source. Then it formed an advisory committee to meet those targets.

When it is formally approved in January, San Mateo will become the first Peninsula city to initiate a comprehensive climate action plan. Among its proposals is a requirement that the city quadruple the rate of solar panel installations, and that all new buildings meet a recognized green building standard.

Boone said she thought water consumption would be the biggest issue San Mateo and other cities would consider in the coming year.

"We need to plan for the fact that we don't have an endless water supply, not to mention the fact that we have growth," she said.

Brisbane focuses on developers

Brisbane became the first city in San Mateo County to require developers to meet green building design requirements before they can obtain a permit this year. The new rules affect commercial projects larger than 10,000 square feet, which must be "green" enough to qualify for a silver rating from Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and housing developments of 20 units or more. The city passed the new rules in anticipation of two major upcoming construction projects in Brisbane.

Oil spill shuts down beaches

It took some time to arrive, but the fallout from the Cosco Busan oil spill finally started to take its toll on San Mateo County on Nov. 11 as frightened, oiled birds began washing up on Pacifica beaches, followed by toxic tar balls that forced the county to close several beaches a few days later.

A few committed volunteers combed the beaches for the birds, eventually rescuing 30 live birds and finding four dead ones between Pacifica's Mussel Rock and Princeton's Pillar Point Harbor. Dozens of concerned San Mateo County residents attended training sessions in Pacifica and Half Moon Bay to learn how to safely remove the tar balls that began appearing on Pacifica beaches Nov. 15, but their efforts were for naught. After two visits from cleanup crews hired by the owners of the Cosco Busan, the beaches were deemed clean enough to be reopened.

Millbrae bans Styrofoam

It may have seemed radical at the time, but the Millbrae City

Council ignored the naysayers and voted unanimously in June to ban all polystyrene containers from local businesses in June, becoming the first city in San Mateo County to take the leap. The solid "clamshell" containers restaurants use for takeout contain benzene and styrene that are harmful to the environment and marine life, according to city officials.

Going solar is neighborly

Following Portola Valley's lead in 2006, large groups of residents in Woodside, San Carlos, Menlo Park and Atherton saved money by buying solar panels in bulk from SolarCity, a leading Foster City-based installer.

As state and federal incentives for homeowners to go solar continue to decline with better technology, it makes sense for homes to buy in bulk, said SolarCity CEO Lyndon Rive.

The more people who convert their homes to solar, the more opportunity there is for savings on installation, labor, travel and permitting costs, he said.

In Menlo Park and Atherton, the 42 households that collectively installed 175 kilowatts of solar power will save 4.4 million pounds of carbon emissions over the next 30 years, according to the company.

Burlingame sued over sewers

Burlingame had an uncomfortable light cast on its aging sewer pipe infrastructure in October when Baykeeper, a San Francisco-based environmental group, announced that it intended to sue the city for alleged multiple violations of the Clean Water Act between 2002 and the present.

Baykeeper said the city's own records showed it had responded to over 250 sewer system overflows in the past five years, due mainly to weather backups or broken pipelines in a system city officials estimated to be 100 years old.

Baykeeper took action against the city, whose water discharge permit is overseen by the Bay Area Regional Water Quality Control Board, in the hopes that it would act as a deterrent to other Peninsula cities that may have put off fixing their sewer and water infrastructure.

But Baykeeper never followed through with the lawsuit, choosing instead to sit down with Burlingame officials to glean more evidence of the ongoing maintenance and capital improvements the city already has under way, according to Public Works Director Syed Murtuza.

The city has already committed \$89 million to an ongoing multiyear sewer infrastructure improvement campaign.

"They have a very valid interest in making sure there are no public health impacts and we share that interest," said Murtuza. "We will meet with them again and find out if they're satisfied."

Rise in sea level threatens cities

Cities across San Mateo County are just beginning to take stock of the threat of a rise in sea level and what it might mean for their planning and development.

A Times special report revealed that the Bay water level could rise by as much 3.3 feet by 2100 due to climate change, according to scientists' predictions.

If it does, more than 200 square miles of land are at risk, including all of Foster City.

While some cities have urban boundaries that prevent them from developing too close to the water's edge, others are built out or continue to plan new housing in the danger zone, such as Redwood City's former Cargill salt-pond site.

Both Foster City and San Francisco International Airport simply plan on building higher levees if necessary, but sandy Coastside cities have no such luxury.

Low-lying environmental gems such as Ano Nuevo State Reserve and Fitzgerald Marine Reserve could bear the brunt of a rising water level combined with higher waves, which have eroded cliffs and beaches with great speed.

Pacifica is constantly replacing its sea wall fortifications but has not incorporated a rise in sea level in its planning policies.

Car dealers sue over tougher vehicle emission standards

By Sue Major Holmes, Associated Press Writer
Contra Costa Times, Saturday, December 29, 2007

ALBUQUERQUE-Three car dealerships have sued the state Environment Department and other agencies, seeking to overturn New Mexico's "Clean Car" regulations before they go into effect.

Zangara Dodge Inc. of Albuquerque, Auge Sales and Service Inc. of Belen and Phil Carrell Chevrolet-Buick Inc. of Carlsbad, in a 20-page lawsuit filed Thursday in federal court, seek to block enforcement of the regulations, which would apply to the 2011 model year.

The dealers contend the tougher vehicle emissions standards for greenhouse gases conflict with the federal Clean Air Act and are pre-empted by federal law because they would "supplant and conflict with federal law and regulations governing the fuel economy of new motor vehicles."

The New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board and the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board adopted the strict standards Nov. 27, following the lead of California. Those two agencies, state Environment Secretary Ron Curry and Albuquerque Environmental Health Department Director Alfredo Santistevan also are named as defendants in the lawsuit.

Supporters of tougher standards say they will lower emissions of greenhouse gas and force the manufacture of vehicles with improved fuel economy and the use of new technologies to produce "zero emission vehicles."

The three car dealers allege the standards will prohibit them from selling new vehicles that don't meet the emission requirements, thus reducing sales of new vehicles, costing them profits and goodwill and irreparably injuring them.

Older model cars would be exempt from the requirements.

State District Judge Robert Robles of Las Cruces decided Dec. 17 not to hear a separate lawsuit filed against the regulations by a group of Democratic legislators, car dealers and a farmer. Robles did not address the merits of the case, but rather ruled that the lawsuit should have been filed with the state Court of Appeals rather than district court.

The state court lawsuit argues that New Mexico law prevents the board from adopting air quality regulations more stringent than federal air quality requirements, and that the Legislature must change New Mexico law before California standards could be approved.

Curry has maintained that New Mexico has the authority to adopt the California emission standards under provisions of state and federal air quality laws.

Under the federal Clean Air Act, California has the authority to set its own vehicle pollution standards. Other states can use either federally mandated standards or California's rules.

Automakers challenged the California requirements, contending the standards are, in effect, a mandate for higher fuel economy and that only the federal government can set such requirements. A federal judge, however, ruled Dec. 12 that California has the authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

California adopted its standards in 2004 in response to a law enacted two years earlier regulating automobile emissions to lower greenhouse gases. The standards were put on hold while California was awaiting a waiver from the Environmental Protection Agency.

In mid-December, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson rejected California's request to implement its regulations on the tailpipe emissions. California has said it would fight that decision. California's rules essentially require automakers to improve vehicle fuel efficiency since vehicles that burn less fuel would emit less carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas. Johnson maintained that a new federal 35-mile-per-gallon auto fuel economy requirement achieves what California wants.

Missouri mandates ethanol in gasoline

By David A. Lieb, Associated Press Writer

Found in Modesto Bee and Washington Post, Monday, December 31, 2007

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. - Pushing the button for regular 87-grade octane, Steve Smith said he thought he was filling his SUV with ethanol-free gasoline.

"I don't buy super unleaded, knowing that it's ethanol," Smith said, citing concerns about how ethanol could affect his vehicle.

But Smith was buying ethanol-blended gasoline, just as he had done several times before. Although many pumps don't announce it, almost all the gasoline sold in Missouri has contained a blend with 10 percent ethanol for at least the past several months.

A law taking effect Tuesday makes Missouri just the third state - behind Minnesota and Hawaii - to implement a wide-ranging ethanol mandate. Because the corn-based fuel is cheaper than gasoline, most of Missouri's gas stations quietly made the switch months in advance.

Like Smith, "most consumers in the state of Missouri have been using E-10 for months and probably don't know it," said Ron Leone, executive director of the Missouri Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association. "That's why we anticipate the January 1 transition to be a nonevent."

Ethanol-blended gasoline - E-10 refers to the blend that is 10 percent ethanol - has become increasingly common nationwide.

Part of the reason rests with a federal standard for alternative-fuel production. More than half the states have joined the federal government in offering incentives to ethanol producers or retailers. And because it burns cleaner than petroleum, ethanol-blended gasoline is the norm in numerous cities facing Environmental Protection Agency mandates to improve their air quality.

Fourteen states have no requirement that gasoline pumps be plastered with ethanol labels, according to the American Coalition for Ethanol. Missouri repealed its labeling requirement in 2002 - four years before passing the law that mandated ethanol in gasoline by 2008.

The Break Time convenience store, where Smith filled up, has voluntarily sold ethanol-blended gasoline for years and until recently had posted an ethanol label over its 89-octane gasoline. Many motorists thought that was the only grade of gas containing ethanol. In reality, all the pumps dispensed an ethanol blend, and even the 87-octane button likely supplied an 89-octane ethanol blend.

Break Time stores are owned by MFA Oil Co., a major distributor of ethanol.

"We have had no problems with ethanol," said MFA Oil President Jerry Taylor. "It's, in our judgment, actually a better product - it's higher octane, burns cleaner and helps engines last longer."

A 10 percent ethanol blend should have little effect on gas mileage, said Chad Tharpe, a Break Time station manager.

The federal renewable fuels standard called for oil companies to buy 4.7 billion gallons of ethanol and biodiesel in 2007. Oil companies are expected to use about 7 billion gallons, but ethanol plants have produced about 7.5 billion gallons, said Gary Marshall, chief executive officer of the Missouri Corn Growers Association.

That oversupply, combined with government tax incentives for ethanol, has caused ethanol-blended gasoline to be about 5 to 10 cents cheaper per gallon at the retail level than traditional gasoline.

That motivated many Missouri gas stations to make the ethanol switch ahead of the mandate. The new law includes an exception automatically suspending the ethanol mandate anytime the price of ethanol exceeds that of traditional gasoline.

By this fall, 85 percent to 90 percent of Missouri gas stations already were selling ethanol blends in their regular unleaded gasoline, said Ron Hayes, the fuel quality program manager for the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

That came as quite a surprise to Smith, who thought he had been avoiding ethanol. But upon learning he has been using ethanol, he said he hadn't noticed any problems as a result.

"I don't know that it matters" said Smith, 48, of Jefferson City. But he added, "it would be nice to know that."

[Commentary, Fresno Bee, Saturday, December 29, 2007:](#)

Be suspicious of ag's claims of air progress

By Kevin Hall

The Bee report "Fighting for Air" has added to my list of myths about Valley agriculture. Most everyone has heard the top two: first, that farmers in the San Joaquin Valley have transformed a desert into an irrigated garden, and second, that we're "feeding the world."

Now we can add myth No. 3: that farmers have joined the fight to clean the Valley's toxic air.

Regarding the first two myths, the Valley is a lush mix of grasslands and wetlands ringed by blue oak woodlands. It was never a desert. And the rest of the world is not dependent on our specialty crop exports.

As for clean air, the farm industry has simply joined the local air district, state air board and federal Environmental Protection Agency in a highly cynical -- and for Valley residents, ultimately deadly -- charade.

Together, they claim that in less than two years, agriculture has reduced its pollution by a stunning 85 tons per day.

In the long history of the Clean Air Act, no industry anywhere at any time has ever performed such an amazing feat. Practically overnight, more than 6,000 previously unregulated sources of pollution adopted new technologies and management practices at a compliance rate of greater than 90%!

How, one must ask, was this regulatory miracle accomplished? The answer: on paper.

How it happened

You see, a few years ago, the regulatory agencies, and the industries they hate to regulate, found themselves in a predicament. Their failure to have reduced particulates had put the Valley in the worst pollution category, one that comes with an important mandate: an annual 5% reduction. Failure to make that reduction would result in sanctions on industrial polluters and put a halt to freeway construction.

Around the same time, those of us truly fighting for clean air had won a significant lawsuit to strike down the illegal California law exempting ag from air pollution rules. State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, then did a masterful job of crafting meaningful legislation requiring real regulations for farms.

On the one hand, we had desperate regulators; and on the other hand, we had an industry very resistant to regulation. So, the local air district got together with Valley farm lobbyists and under the watchful eye of the EPA, crafted a false solution:

- Regulators would assume that all farmers were farming in ways that created the maximum amount of pollution possible, thus creating a grossly inflated baseline or total inventory of ag pollution.
- Farmers agreed to fill out paperwork describing the size of their farms, crops grown and, through a simple checklist, some existing farm practices
- The air district would then apply an assigned value to each practice and take credit for it as if it were a new reduction.

Defective network

The last step in their deadly charade was verification. Unlike every other source of pollution, farms would not be subject to specific reduction goals or on-site pollution monitoring. Instead, the air district would "verify" the reductions through use of their defective network of fewer than 20 monitoring stations spread out along the eastern side of the Valley.

At this point, the lie grew exponentially. First, because the vast majority of these monitoring stations are nowhere near the regulated ag sources, and second, because the few that are

continue to show that local air quality violates the national standards for particulate pollution. This, of course, should be no surprise since there have been no new reductions.

But the federal EPA (that agency of the Bush administration, remember) has come to the polluters' rescue with a characteristically Orwellian solution. According to the EPA, recent years' violations of air pollution standards, even though these pollution levels are consistent with what has existed for decades, can now be ignored as "exceptional" under a new rule created by the EPA.

The Valley and state air boards, on behalf of the ag industry, have been more than happy to accept the EPA's poisonous gift and claim a job well done. Not only has the district used paper games to claim it has met the required 5% reduction per year, it has now claimed the entire Valley is attaining the air pollution standard for particulates -- thereby removing the need to get any further reductions from any other polluter.

So, once again, we must turn to the courts and engage in an expensive, years-long legal battle while the epidemic of human suffering, disease and death continues unabated. Adding insult to this terrible injury is the new myth of farmers fighting to clean our air.

Kevin Hall is the air quality chair for the Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter.

[Guest Commentary, Contra Costa Times, Saturday, December 29, 2007:](#)

Do-nothing EPA sadly stops others from trying

By John M. DeCicco

THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL Protection Agency delivered a stunning blow earlier this month when it refused to allow California and 16 other states (Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont and Washington) to regulate global warming pollution from cars.

Doing nothing about global warming is bad enough, but going out of the way to block state leaders who are taking action is just plain shocking.

Below is a rebuttal to the two key arguments the EPA used to justify its decision:

1) The California Clean Cars program secures deeper pollution reductions faster than the new Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards for gas mileage that were included in the energy bill -- not slower as the EPA contends -- by getting more efficient cars on the road at a faster rate.

In other words, if EPA had granted the waiver, it would have had a greater impact on the cumulative greenhouse gases that cause global warming that are emitted by our vehicles.

Environmental Defense has done computer modeling comparing the two scenarios: the new CAFE standards alone versus the new CAFE standards coupled with EPA approval of the waiver. The results are striking.

If we look at the 17 states that were ready to take action if EPA had approved, by 2020 the new CAFE standards alone would reduce greenhouse gases in those states by 418 million metric tons. However, if EPA had approved the waiver and allowed these states to proceed with improved standards, the cumulative reduction in heat-trapping gases is estimated at 723 million metric tons. That is more than 300 million metric tons less global warming pollution.

Furthermore, the improvements in cumulative greenhouse gas reductions with the waiver in place would continue through following years.

More important, the 17 states that were denied the waiver account for 105 million registered vehicles or 42 percent of the traffic in the nation. These states are such a large portion of the auto industry sales that automotive manufacturers would be compelled to improve technologies for all vehicles rather than utilize inefficient two-tier production lines.

The bottom line is that the EPA waiver could be an essential tool in fighting the growing global warming crisis. Every ton of global warming pollution we prevent today is critical in stabilizing the climate.

2) Global warming facilitates urban smog formation that remains a major health program so the California standards do in fact "meet compelling and extraordinary conditions" required by the Clean Air Act.

In 2005, the California Air Resources Board, or CARB, estimated that pollution created by moving goods into, around and out of the state was causing 2,400 premature deaths and about \$19 billion in health costs, lost productivity and lost days at school each year.

California cannot afford to be complacent about global warming. It is a global issue, but it is particularly relevant to the state. Its severe problem with urban pollution was the basis for the waiver provision in the Clean Air Act in the first place and air pollution has been worsening since the law was enacted.

Second, California is the most populated state in the country. Its large urban populations and agriculture industry are deeply dependent upon snow pack to provide water. Global warming poses extraordinary challenges because it will create longer hot and dry periods and thus reduce snow pack. Increasing global temperatures also will fuel wildfires near urban centers, a reality that was all too evident in the recent Southern California fires.

Finally, as a result of the severe impact global warming is having on California, state leaders enacted the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB32) to reduce heat-trapping pollution by 30 percent by the year 2020. Approval of the waiver by the EPA would have contributed substantially in achieving its target reduction.

Fortunately, CARB does have the authority to seek additional reductions from other polluters, although the state is determined to go forward with the battle to exercise its rights.

Given the grim urgency of the global warming crisis, EPA's decision to stop states from taking action is more than folly. It is tragic.

DeCicco, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at Automotive Strategies Environmental Defense in Michigan. E-mail him at jdecicco@environmentaldefense.org.

[Commentary, Fresno Bee, Monday, December 31, 2007:](#)

MIAMI HERALD: The longer the delay, the higher the climate cost

As the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases, the United States should take the lead in efforts to abate global warming. Proposals to curb carbon emissions already are being proposed by state and federal lawmakers. Happily, those efforts may actually cost less than you think.

Power plants and various industries, which produce more than half of the nation's emissions, should be offered incentives to reduce their carbon output. At least seven proposals in Congress would do this with "cap-and-trade" plans. This approach allows companies to buy and sell credits for the gases that their operations release into the atmosphere. Companies with emissions below the cap can profit by selling credits. Polluters who exceed the cap would pay more to offset emissions by buying credits.

The cap-and-trade approach sounds good, and it appeals to politicians. But it is a less reliable proposition than carbon fees. With cap-and-trade, for example, reducing carbon emissions would depend on how the government sets the caps and distributes the credits - a process susceptible to fraud and political meddling. Moreover, giving away credits would reward polluters. Conversely, auctioning credits would increase costs for the firms with the worst carbon emissions.

A better, more-direct approach is to assess fees for carbon emissions, an idea supported by most economists, by FPL Group chief executive Lewis Hay III and by Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore. This approach would impose a fee for every ton of pollutants. The fee, or tax if you prefer, would fix penalties based on emissions.

Companies like FPL, which has invested in cleaner technology for years, would pay less - and that's as it should be. Companies with coal-fueled operations - the worst emitters of carbon - would, and should, pay more.

The carbon fee would raise prices for electricity and many other products. FPL estimates that \$5 to \$7.50 would be added to a residential customer's monthly bill initially. That would climb gradually, reaching up to \$50 a month by 2050.

FPL customers have paid and continue to pay for its investment in cleaner electricity. But consumers who now rely on cheaper, dirtier coal power may see bigger cost increases. To mitigate the rise in prices, some, if not all, of the carbon-fee revenues should be returned to consumers via lower income taxes. Cap-and-trade would raise prices, too, without a tax rebate. Ideally, Congress would reward or penalize companies according to their emissions performance.

Congress and President Bush, to their credit, recently approved an energy bill that for the first time since 1975 will significantly increase fuel-efficiency standards for cars and light trucks and, thus, reduce carbon-dioxide emissions. Unfortunately, soon afterward the Environmental Protection Agency barred 16 states, including Florida, from setting even-stricter emission standards.

Congress and the administration need to act more consistently to curb global warming. The longer action is delayed, the higher the cost and greater the damage. Election-year or not, the United States needs to act quickly and set an example for the rest of the world. The planet's health depends on it.

[Commentary, Modesto Bee, Saturday, December 29, 2007:](#)

Things aren't so bad in California

By Daniel Weintraub

As we end 2007, it's time for my annual California Quality of Life Index. The index reflects a series of snapshots of about a dozen indicators I have chosen to give us a sense of how the state is doing.

The numbers don't paint a complete picture of California's well-being. That's impossible in a place as diverse as this state, with 38 million people. The index is simply one small attempt to step back from the partisan debate that typically embroils public policy and try to use facts to see how conditions change from year to year. I've used the most recent numbers available, which in some cases reflect year-end numbers for 2006.

How are we doing?

Our incomes are up, employers have added more jobs (although the unemployment rate is higher) and the poverty rate has declined for the first time in several years. More people have health insurance, but more people are also going without. The number of people on public assistance went down again. The violent crime rate crept up for the first time in many years, but the property crime rate declined after several years of modest increases. The rate of homeownership increased slightly. California farms got less money for their output and their owners saw a big drop in their incomes, but overall, exports through California's ports are up. Our air was cleaner this year. In the schools, our kids are doing slightly better in English and slightly worse in math, and our universities are graduating more people than ever before.

This year I have again looked back a decade, when possible, to see how these numbers have changed over time. On almost every measure, California is doing far better today than it was 10 years ago.

Here is the detail:

Income

Per capita personal income increased in 2006 by 5.6 percent, to \$39,358 from \$37,283, according to the Department of Finance. The increase was 2.7 percent after inflation. Median

family income -- the point at which half the families make more and half make less -- increased by 3.3 percent, to \$62,005. The increase was 0.6 percent after inflation.

Between 1996 and 2006, per capita income increased by 27 percent after inflation. Median family income increased by 16 percent.

Jobs

California employers added an estimated 109,000 jobs between October 2006 and October 2007, according to the Employment Development Department, a net increase of 0.7 percent. The number of civilian jobs stood at 17.2 million. The unemployment rate rose from 4.8 percent in October 2006 to 5.6 percent a year later.

The biggest increases in jobs by industry came in education and health services, which added about 51,000 jobs, and government, which added about 45,000. Leisure and hospitality added 27,000 jobs, while business and professional services added 23,000. Trade, transportation and utilities added 12,000 jobs.

The biggest declines came in construction, which lost 31,000 jobs, and finance, which lost 13,000. Manufacturing shed about 12,000 jobs.

Compared to 10 years ago, California has added 2.3 million people to its civilian labor force while adding about the same number of jobs. The unemployment rate has declined from 6.2 percent to 5.6 percent.

Poverty

California's poverty rate declined by one percentage point in 2006, from 13.2 percent to 12.2 percent, according to the U.S. Census. About 4.4 million Californians had incomes below the poverty line, a drop of 300,000 from the year before. Families of four earning less than about \$20,000 a year are defined as living below the poverty line.

Ten years ago, the poverty rate in California was 16.9 percent. Between 1996 and 2006, the state's population grew by about 4 million while the number of people living in poverty declined by 1 million.

Welfare

The number of families on public assistance declined to about 455,000 between July 2005 and July 2006, a drop of about 2 percent, according to the state Department of Social Services.

The total caseload has declined by 51 percent since its peak in 1995. Some of that is due to economic growth and increased opportunity while some of it is attributed to the federal welfare reforms of 1996, which set time limits on aid and encouraged more welfare recipients to seek job training, education and work.

Health insurance

The number of people covered by private or public health insurance increased by about 250,000 between 2005 and 2006, according to the Census Bureau, from 29.2 million to 29.4 million. The number of people without coverage at some point during the year also grew, by about 40,000, to 6.8 million. About 53.2 percent of Californians are covered by employment-based health insurance.

Between 1996 and 2006, the number of people covered by health insurance in California grew by about 3.5 million. The number of people without coverage also grew, by about 250,000.

Home ownership

California's home ownership rate increased slightly in 2006 to 60.2 percent from 59.7 percent the year before, according to the U.S. Census. Only New York and Washington, D.C., had lower rates of home ownership. The national average was 68.8 percent.

Over the past 10 years, the rate of home ownership in California has steadily increased. In 1996, 55 percent of Californians owned their homes.

Exports

The value of goods exported through California's ports was up 11.6 percent for the first 10 months of 2007 compared to the same period a year earlier, according to the World Institute for Strategic Economic Research, which tracks state trade numbers. For all of 2006, exports were up \$22 billion, or 17 percent above 2005 levels. Compared to 10 years ago, exports through California have more than doubled.

Agriculture

The value of the output from California farms and ranches declined in 2006 by about \$900 million, or 2.5 percent. The biggest percentage decline was in livestock, the value of which shrunk by more than 9 percent. The value of crop production was about flat, and forestry increased slightly.

Net farm income declined even more dramatically, due to increasing costs for labor, seeds, fuel, pesticides and utilities. Farm income was down more than \$4 billion, or 42 percent, according to numbers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Compared to 10 years ago, the value of the goods from California's farm sector was up 34 percent, but the costs climbed even faster, pushing net income down 8 percent.

Education

California schoolchildren appear to have leveled off in their mastery of reading and math. In 2007, 51 percent of fourth-graders were rated proficient or better in reading and writing, compared with 49 percent the year before. In seventh-grade math, 39 percent were proficient at grade level, compared with 41 percent in 2006.

The achievement gap between the economic classes also persisted. Among students described as economically disadvantaged, 36 percent were proficient or above in fourth-grade English, compared with 72 percent for the rest of the students. In seventh-grade math, 27 percent of poor kids were proficient or advanced, while 53 percent of the children from more affluent families met that standard.

Since 2002, the percentage of fourth-graders proficient in English skills has increased from 36 percent to 51 percent. The percentage of students proficient or better in seventh-grade math has grown from 30 percent to 39 percent.

Higher education

The number of bachelor's degrees granted by the University of California was up 2 percent in 2006, and the number of degrees granted by the California State University system increased by 4 percent. The number of two-year associate degrees granted by the California Community Colleges was up 1.6 percent, according to the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

Over the past 10 years, the number of degrees granted by California public colleges and universities has climbed twice as fast as the population, an indication of the increasing access to higher education. While the population has grown by about 17 percent, the number of bachelor's degrees granted by the University of California has increased by 40 percent, and at the CSU system, the number of degrees granted grew by 31 percent. The number of two-year degrees granted by the community colleges increased by 49 percent.

Crime

California's violent crime rate inched up by 1.2 percent in 2006, the first increase in more than 10 years. Murder was down 2.9 percent, rape was down 2.8 percent and assaults were down 3.6 percent, but robbery increased by nearly 11 percent, according to preliminary figures from the California Department of Justice.

The property crime rate resumed its long-term decline, dropping by 3.2 percent, after several years of small increases. Burglary was down 2.4 percent, motor vehicle theft declined by 6.7

percent, and larceny-theft involving more than \$400 increased by 0.1 percent. Arson was also up, by 2.1 percent.

The violent crime rate has decreased by 53 percent from its peak in 1992, and the property crime rate has dropped by 43 percent from its peak in 1989.

[Air quality](#)

The number of days on which California's air basins exceeded the federal limit for ozone declined in 2007 in every region of the state, according to the Air Resources Board.

In Sacramento, the number of bad air days declined from 42 to 16. In the San Joaquin Valley, they declined from 86 to 65. In the South Coast Air Basin around Los Angeles, the number of days exceeding the federal standard went down from 85 to 79. In San Diego they dropped from 14 to eight; in San Francisco from 12 to one and in Ventura from 17 to six.

Year-to-year comparisons are difficult when measuring air quality because weather conditions can contribute significantly to the number of days exceeding the standard. But in 1997, the state's major air basins had 290 officially smoggy days. In 2005, that total was 198, in 2006 it was 258, and this year it was 175.

Considering the challenges of absorbing a growing population, including many immigrants with little or no education, California is doing well. Despite adding 4 million people over the past decade, California today has fewer people in poverty and fewer people on public assistance than it did 10 years ago. But many challenges remain. The achievement gap in the schools between poor kids and those who are better off is a troubling harbinger for the future, and the softness in the job market might mean more problems in the year ahead.

[Commentary, N.Y. Times, Sunday, December 30, 2007:](#)

Red, White or Green?

By Tyler Colman

Waccabuc, N.Y. -- Wine enthusiasts love to discuss the aromas of wine - the raspberries, the leather, the fresh-cut grass - but are we ignoring a prevailing whiff of petroleum? With some wines emitting three times their weight in greenhouse gas, the answer is yes. Wine, like virtually every consumer product, has a "carbon footprint" - that is, a certain amount of carbon dioxide is emitted in its production and transportation. And although the difference between organically and conventionally grown vineyards is relatively small in terms of carbon intensity, the journey that wine takes from the winery to the shop is not.

Indeed if your New Year's resolution for 2008 is to reduce your carbon footprint, don't serve wine from California at your New Year's Eve party. Instead, try wines from the tri-state region.

A Napa Valley wine can emit 2.6 pounds of carbon dioxide on its journey from growing the grapes, making the wine and transport to San Francisco. But the same bottle making the truck trip to Connecticut would emit 5.7 pounds of carbon dioxide in total. Ship it by air and its footprint would quadruple because it takes so much fuel to keep a plane aloft.

Why? Because of glass. A 40-pound case of wine probably has more than 20 pounds of glass in it. Alternative packaging products like Tetra Pak or bag-in-box have less carbon intensity because they are lighter and can be packed more efficiently in a shipping container. The lighter alternative packaging means that the carbon used for transporting wine is used for just that - wine, not glass. (Glass adds mass; the greater the mass, the less efficient the transport is.)

The amount of greenhouse gases associated with transport also, surprisingly, means that drinking wine from overseas may be more environmentally sound than buying from American vineyards. Holding the growing method, winery practices and bottle size constant, it is more carbon-efficient for people in Connecticut to drink a bottle of wine from Bordeaux than from Sonoma. The short truck route on both ends of the efficient miles of container shipping means the French wine has 50 percent less carbon dioxide emissions, about three pounds.

If that same wine were loaded onto a truck, it wouldn't be until Ohio that the two bottles reached a break-even point. This makes a "green line" for wine. East of Ohio, a bottle from Bordeaux creates less carbon dioxide emission; to the west, California wine has the edge.

Better yet, now that wine is made in all 50 states, you can reduce your carbon footprint by trying wine from the vineyard down the road from you. Residents in the tri-state region can draw on more than 200 wineries in New York - and a few dozen more in Connecticut and New Jersey.

In New York City, which has long been a showcase for the area's wines, there are at least two wine bars that pour only wines from New York. Several city restaurants feature wines from Long Island and the Finger Lakes. And with some grapevines growing in the Queens County Farm Museum, a vineyard planned in Staten Island and the much anticipated debut of what's being called an urban winery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, local wine will soon be even closer.

But even if wine is worth more than its weight in carbon, it remains an hors d'oeuvre in our overall carbon diet, and wine consumers, like all consumers, should consider offsetting their consumption. Purchasing a carbon offset is one option, as is turning down the thermostat, riding a bicycle to work and eating less meat, since one cheeseburger has a bigger carbon footprint than a bottle of California wine consumed in New York. So Monday night as the clock approaches midnight, enter the New Year with global warming in mind, by taking a pass on bubbly from Champagne or California and pop a cork on the sparkling Lieb Pinot Blanc. Providing you can find a bottle - there's now a two-bottle limit on the popular wine at the winery's tasting room in Mattituck.

Tyler Colman blogs at DrVino.com and is the author of the forthcoming "Wine Politics: How Governments, Environmentalists, Mobsters and Critics Influence the Wines We Drink."

[Guest Commentaries, Modesto Bee, Monday, December 31, 2007](#)

Visting editors find fault, favor with 2007

Manuel H. Díaz:

Late for the party: The Crows Landing-West Park debate of 2007 pits shortsightedness against providing industry and good-paying jobs. Twenty years ago, a strong board, a wheelin'-dealing developer and an electorate that wanted to fit into the future instead of regret the past would have made past-due vital improvements -- and Stanislaus County would not be a late entrant to the 21st century.

Dollars & sense: In the latter part of 2007, district representation is winning and is defining the difference between politicians and the Modesto electorate. It's apparently a matter of dollars and sense. Dollars define the interests of the council; sense defines the wishes of everybody else.

Ray Newman:

Three positives: First, the intestinal fortitude of Modesto's mayor and City Council in enacting the memorandum of understanding and rent stabilization ordinance. Second, the group that hammered out those documents. Third, the support of our troops as seen in the turnout for the Veterans Day ceremony at the Gallo Center for the Arts.

Three negatives: The refusal of Equity LifeStyle Properties to join the memorandum of understanding and rent stabilization ordinance. Second, the reduction of police and firefighter positions, which will lead to the third negative: an even greater increase in violence and gang activity.

Steve Bonrepos:

Our heroes: I appreciate what local police, sheriff's deputies, firefighters, Highway Patrol officers, and other safety officials do for us. We ought to thank these heroes whenever we see one.

Vote English: Why do we provide ballots in foreign languages? Yes, our citizens might come from non-English-speaking cultures. But in the five years or more it takes to become a citizen, is it unreasonable to expect the new citizens to learn enough English to vote?

Jerry Jackman:

Carbon footprint: About 4 a.m., the rumble of commuter noise begins. All that gas guzzling drives up fuel prices, [pollutes our air](#), and clogs our highways. Weekday evenings the same vehicles rumble back home.

Greetings from the commute: But it's thanks to a long stop-and-go commute that my daughter phones to pass the time. When she swings onto Interstate 880, it's full of Googlers pressing north from Silicon Valley. It's the future arriving.

Marian Kaanon:

Developing networks: The Central Valley Public Relations Organization celebrated its second year in 2007 with 78 members -- quite a feat for a relatively new professional association. Lest you think this is a shameless plug, my point is that CVPRO and professional associations like it are great avenues for professional peers to network, share best practices and build partnerships. Professional associations also are good business, and good for local business.

Dangerous drivers: Our roads are even more dangerous during the holidays than at other times. In the past few weeks, a young man traveling on McHenry Avenue was critically injured, followed by the death of a Columbia College student on Highway 108. Several days later, three people were killed in a head-on collision on Claribel Road followed by the death of a mom on Scenic Drive. Last week, there were three deaths in Grayson. These are roads I travel. It's a sobering reminder that some drivers will risk their lives and ours.

Michael Frantz:

Silver lining: Prices for homes in Stanislaus County have fallen substantially and forecasters say they will continue to fall. This is a good thing for first-time home buyers and for builders stuck with large inventories. Prices escalated to unreasonable levels, and this return to normalcy is a good thing. Employers, buyers, builders -- we all benefit from affordable homes in our county.

Where's the water? The majority party in Sacramento seems to think we can conserve our way out of this water crisis. Because of population growth, consumption continues to rise, even though farmers and urbanites use less water. Clearly, our Legislature needs to make increasing storage capacity its No. 1 priority. This issue transcends partisan politics.

Bernardo "BJ" Mora:

Religious disorder: The year's most interesting story was the Diocese of San Joaquin leaving the Episcopal Church USA to join another Anglican province in South America. Individual churches have been leaving their mainline denominations to join or form other churches; San Joaquin is the first large regional church body to do so.

Sweet despair: The biggest disappointment in 2007 is the closing of the Hershey plant in Oakdale. The local impact is significant, as well as being a symbol of American companies' shortsightedness in pursuing cheap labor and huge profit over the well-being of our economy and society.

Connie Ollis:

A higher minimum: Looking back, we see the largest minimum-wage increase in nine years. Minimum wages rose from \$5.15 per hour at the beginning of 1998 to \$7.50 per hour on January 1, 2007 -- an 11.1 percent increase since 2002.

Problems with police: Looking back at the past year brought frustrations over the lack of police response in curtailing citywide drug problems. Modesto police gave their usual cry of not enough officers, not enough funds and a shortage of vehicles.

Robert Fores:

Way cool: After 43 years, Davis High School gets air conditioning in its classrooms.

Not cool enough: After 43 years, Davis still has a lot of classrooms without air conditioning. Besides students and teachers, a lot of school board members and administrators have come and gone in 43 years. The squeaky wheel gets the grease: Parents, students and teachers should demand that this job be finished.

Bill Moore:

High notes: Absentee votes are up, the Stanislaus County Fair had a good year (more than 219,000 visitors and no problems), the Virginia Corridor bike trail is making progress, the county is not No. 1 on two important "worst" lists (stolen vehicles and meth use).

Low notes: Roads continue to deteriorate, home values are down and the number of foreclosures is up. Overall voting is down. The number of students has dropped, causing some schools to reduce teaching staff. [Pollution is still bad](#). Gangs.

Eileen Wyatt:

Going up: Community building projects are moving forward -- Gregori High School and Ceres Community Center sites are loosening the soil. Measure E projects at MJC are in various stages. California State University, Stanislaus, broke ground on a new student recreation and sports complex. St. Stanislaus Church presents a reverent gateway to Modesto. The Gallo Center for the Arts is open and already a landmark.

Going down: The residential housing and real estate industry is moving backward. Construction projects are canceled, postponed or frozen. "For sale" signs abound. Foreclosures are at record numbers. There is no recovery in sight. And, if you're a NASCAR fan, there's no raceway, either.

[Editorial in the Washington Post, Saturday, December 29, 2007:](#)

Replenish and Recycle: Principles to Grow By Throughout the New Year

By Joel M. Lerner

New Year's resolutions are opportunities to do something you have always wanted to do, often for self-improvement. In the spirit of the season, here are some that will help you improve the environment, too.

Resolve to:

- *Recycle.* A mature tree will produce just 14 newspapers. The energy saved by recycling one aluminum container will run a television for three hours. Recycling one glass bottle will save enough energy to light a 100-watt bulb for four hours.
- *Cut air-conditioning use by planting trees around your house.* One estimate is that three mature trees around a house can cut air-conditioning needs by 10 to 50 percent. If 100 million trees were planted around homes and businesses, the nonprofit conservation group American Forests estimates, \$4 billion would be saved in energy costs. Planting trees anywhere will also help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to offset the damage from burning fossil fuels.
- *Help trees establish a balance with their growing medium.* Drastic changes to the root system of a tree will severely stunt its growth or kill it. Don't change the grade over roots of trees, not even by one inch, and don't drive over roots with tractors or trucks. Just one time can crush enough absorption roots to hinder a tree's ability to renew.
- *Save mature trees.* They remove particulate pollution and, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, increase property value. Trees can boost a property's value 10 to 20 percent, depending on the siting and variety, the government says. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that in 50 years, one tree generates \$30,000 in oxygen, recycles \$35,000 in water and removes \$60,000 worth of air pollution.
- *Consider the soil's needs before planting.* One of the most difficult ingredients to retain in soil is organic material. In a natural world, trees drop leaves. Smaller plants, grasses and

wildflowers die, providing stems and leaves that decay and leave a rich layer of humus. Most plants depend on humus or compost-rich soil for air, moisture and nutrients. The Friends of the National Zoo reports that we discard 24 million tons of leaves and grass annually. Compost your landscape debris.

- *Replenish the mantle of topsoil with compost.* Disappearing original prairie and woodland topsoil is at a premium. It takes about 1,000 years for nature to make just an inch with the precisely right mix of minerals and organic materials. But we can make that in a day. Test your soil pH and correct as needed for more acid or alkaline conditions. Amend earth with three to four inches of compost on the surface, and more dug into the top 10 to 12 inches of soil. Lay two inches of compost over trees' root systems, and let gravity do the rest.
- *Consider every plant's longevity.* Install trees far enough apart that they can mature into specimens in 12 to 15 years. Design perennials to enhance areas and encourage healthy biodiversity.
- *Help clean up local air quality.* It's time to act when the local weather report includes daily air-quality warnings to stay indoors. Make yourself less dependent on fossil fuels when purchasing your next vehicle. If you have a greener car, you are helping. There are hybrids in every size and shape: some that use electricity, others that use clean diesel, corn oil and hydrogen conversion.
- *Recycle batteries and cellphones.* Batteries can be toxic when discarded improperly. An organization that can advise you where to recycle batteries is Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corp. (<http://www.rbrc.org>). An estimated 130 million cellphones are trashed annually. That's a lot of plastic and rechargeable batteries. Use yours as long as possible, and then donate it to a good cause, such as those that participate at <http://www.charitablerecycling.com> and <http://www.collectivegood.com>.
- *Recycle human waste.* Composting has entered the bathroom. Use of these toilets generates substances that create valuable organic materials for gardens and keep almost 5 percent of our fresh-water supply from being flushed away. Odor-free, waterless urinals are also becoming more common. They have been installed for IBM, the Marine Corps and the city of Beverly Hills and at numerous highway rest areas. This saves 40,000 gallons of fresh water per fixture annually.
- *Use less pesticide.* Start with safe alternatives, and use the more toxic material only if absolutely necessary. For example, we have been able to plant near the wall of our house because we chose to monitor for termites with a nontoxic system, targeting treatment to the spot termites were working. When the bugs take a chitin synthesis inhibitor back to the termite colony, that disrupts molting and eliminates the colony without affecting other wildlife.
- *Design native plants into gardens.* Indigenous wildlife depends on them for food and shelter. Go to <http://environmentaldefense.org> for a list of ways to help the world and environment.
- *Ensure that plant roots get oxygen,* from air space in earth that has been deeply dug and amended with compost, facilitating drainage and air circulation. Install plants in moist, well-drained soil. Drought-tolerant plants, such as catmint (*Nepeta X faassenii*), lamb's ears, dianthus and some evergreen hybrids of holly and boxwood, must have well-drained, moist but not soggy conditions. Plants will suffocate in perpetually wet soil.
- *Conserve natural resources.* Use drip irrigation for trees, shrubs and flowers. For lawns, a low spray in early morning on a day without wind is best. Collect rain and the water from your dehumidifier for indoor and outdoor plants. Irrigate with bath and dishwashing water as long as there are no phosphates in it.

Joel M. Lerner is president of Environmental Design in Capitol View Park, Md. E-mail or contact him through his Web site, <http://www.gardenlerner.com>

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Dec. 30, 2007:](#)

Not a panacea

I am always skeptical when I read a letter to The Bee regarding electric cars. The writers think they are the answer to pollution and a low-cost means of transportation.

I believe they could help with smog. But I am afraid they will not be a low-cost means of transportation. I can imagine electricity prices would soar, to the point that there would be very little money saved.

Can you imagine large numbers of people trying to plug in their cars to charge them all at the same time? Especially after work, when the electrical grids in the summer are often times overworked? Remember the rolling brownouts just a few years back? Or how about the constant ads to not use major appliances in the evening?

I don't know where all the electricity would come from. Remember, it doesn't just arrive at our wall outlets. It has to be generated at a cost -- a cost that never seems to go down, only up.

Rod Jenson, Fresno

Curiously silent

I'm surprised state Sen. Dean Florez missed two opportunities this week to get his face and name in the paper. He hasn't called for the banning of tigers in zoos and fireworks on the Fourth of July (air pollution) yet. He must have taken Christmas off!

Jim Vaux, Fresno

[Letter to the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, December 31, 2007:](#)

They're bad news

Editor - The problem is cars. Think about all of the bad news you read every day. Think about how much of it can be attributed to the automobile. Cars are a leading cause of global warming and air pollution, not to mention significant contributors to water and soil pollution. They are the direct cause of over 44,000 human deaths every year in our country alone, not to mention wildlife. They are the catalyst for urban sprawl and overdevelopment of our open spaces. Their unchecked proliferation leads to traffic congestion and gridlock that only gets worse. They are the perfect symbol for our insulated, self-centered, shortsighted, and materialistic lifestyles. Just think how much better our world would be without so many cars infesting it. Just think about it.

David Noble, Fairfax

[Letters to the Editor, Stockton Record, Sunday, December 30, 2007:](#)

Emissions standards would help

December 30, 2007 6:00 AM

I believe it is important for America to establish a national standard for auto emissions. California has started the trend of trying to reduce greenhouse gases by 25 percent by 2020.

The federal government should force the entire country to abide by these policies. Global warming is at the forefront of the national agenda.

The effects of pollution will be devastating in the near future. Reducing emissions will make a significant dent in the amount of pollution.

Americans should try to adjust other parts of their lives to help improve the environment.

To preserve our planet, everyone should replace their light bulbs with more-efficient ones, take shorter showers, recycle and turn off the lights when leaving a room.

I strongly believe that if everybody adopted these few simple measures, it would have a tremendous positive impact.

I encourage every American to push for a national reduction in auto emissions.

We should try to do our part by conserving energy and buying cars with a lower emissions rating.

America's decisions will affect the rest of the world, so we should also consider their welfare, not just our own.

Bianca Sievers, *Stockton*

Four hundred prominent scientists gave testimony to the Senate this year, debunking the idea of man-made global warming.

Recently, the founder of the Weather Channel, John Coleman, stated: "Global warming: It is a scam. It is the greatest scam in history."

Science is beginning to refute a great lie that The Record and most major media have bought into. We should not be wasting effort and money on an invented problem.

John Wise, *Stockton*

I read with interest The Record's headline "Arctic is screaming," Page A1, Dec. 12.

Then I found, buried in the back section, a small article stating that Greenland was at one time warm enough to support forests and thriving colonies of Viking settlers, hence its name.

Hmmmm.

There was no global warming then, no private jets, no oil refineries and no SUVs. Isn't that interesting?

Roma Nunez, *Manteca*

[Letter to the Editor, Lodi News Sentinel, Saturday, December 29, 2007:](#)

Here's wishing you a happy and fulfilling 2008.

Jerry Brown is back

Just when you thought California politics could get no worse, back comes Jerry Brown.

But now, as our attorney general, he is taking it upon himself to pressure auto makers and the Bush administration to reduce greenhouse gases within the state.

Did this fool read his own mission statement? To enforce and apply our laws ... His office exists to enforce laws, serve as legal counsel and assist state and local law agencies. How about enforcing the death penalty? Or addressing prison overcrowding? That's your job, Jerry, not posturing for another run at governor (God help us!).

By the way, what did you do to lower emissions as mayor of Oakland? Former mayor of a city mired in violent crime, now our top cop. His biggest priority: vehicle emissions. I would like anyone to give me just one reason they would vote for this lifetime politician. Good job, California. Now all that's left is electing Willie Brown to ... something.

Jim Watson, Lodi

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California's plan against air pollution as being more complete, flexible and viable than the Federal plan for the entire nation. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Plan de California contra la contaminación, más completo y viable que el federal

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, December 31, 2007

La presidenta de la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California, Mary Nichols dijo el fin de semana que el plan estatal de California contra la contaminación del aire es más completo, flexible y viable que uno que presentarían autoridades federales para todo el país.

Hay 16 estados que apoyan a California y tienen leyes réplicas de la de este estado contra la contaminación.

Las autoridades federales y el presidente, George W. Bush consideran que los planes estatales serían "parches" separados para un problema general.

El 2008 iniciará sobre el tema con audiencias legislativas para revisar las razones por las que el gobierno federal considera que esos planes son como parches.