

Valley can clean its air quicker, study says Local district official contends researchers relied on old data.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Valley residents can breathe clean air 11 years sooner than the local air district has predicted and save more than \$5 billion in health-care costs, a Southern California air research group said Tuesday.

The nonprofit International Sustainable Systems Research Center released a study that encourages swifter cleanup of diesel pollution and tougher rules for businesses - such as forbidding the use of older, polluting farm tractors on bad smog days.

"We're not trying to imply this is easy," said researcher Nicole Davis. "It is a choice that the Valley will have to make."

Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, replied that even if he followed all the suggestions, the Valley would still come up short.

He said the research center used outdated estimates of the Valley's pollution emissions. Sadredin said the center's estimates are short by more than 100 tons of pollution per day, meaning more reductions should have been identified to clear the air.

"It's like having a football game where the goal is on the 50-yard line," he said.

The district last week announced a proposed smog cleanup plan that would not clear the air until 2024, which is 11 years later than the current federal deadline of 2013.

Last year, the Valley and the South Coast Air Basin each recorded 86 violations of the smog standard - tying them for the most bad-air days in the country.

But after the district's new smog cleanup plan was announced last week, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, said he thought the district staff was "raising a white flag too soon" on the 2013 deadline.

Florez announced Tuesday that he would convene a hearing of his Senate Select Committee on Air Quality on Feb. 20 in Sacramento to discuss the new study. Florez has introduced several air-quality bills that have helped to regulate pollution from fireplaces, dairies and traffic from city sprawl.

"Yes, there may be some flaws in the assumptions of this study," Florez said. "But I like the points being made. We should find out if there are more reductions we can get."

The study suggests changes on more than a dozen rules, including more stringent regulation of far more dairies, which produce one type of smog-making gas.

The recommendations also address further restriction of farm irrigation engines and wine fermentation. Another suggestion would regulate composting and green waste facilities years earlier than the district anticipates, according to the study.

But those changes would affect only 30% of the problem. The study noted the air district does not have direct control over 70% of the problem - vehicles.

The state and federal governments regulate vehicles, planes, trains and other so-called mobile sources.

Diesel and other vehicle pollution are the biggest obstacles to a smog cleanup.

The center suggested helping diesel truck owners buy better pollution-control equipment for their engines now rather than waiting possibly decades for engine replacement. Funding would be needed to pay for part of the costs, the study said.

"The retrofit devices are very effective," said researcher Davis. "The idea is to target the right engines - the ones that are used the most."

The research center's study, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, is likely to attract wide interest in California, especially among health advocates.

The center's leader is the former top executive of the South Coast Air Basin, James Lents. He presided over the South Coast cleanup between 1986 and 1996, when the area made big strides in pollution reduction.

"It is a matter of will and how much you want clean air," Lents said Tuesday. "A lot of things in this study are fairly straightforward and accepted."

Sadredin said the study did not take into account the differences in air problems between the Valley and South Coast.

He said the Valley needs to focus more on reducing oxides of nitrogen, one of the two building-block gases in the formation of ozone, the main ingredient of smog. Yet the study does not identify enough of such reductions to make the standard by 2013, he said.

Said Sadredin, "Nothing would please me more than if someone came up with a big idea that we missed. Unfortunately, this study does not do that."

Report: Cleaner valley air possible by 2013

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2007

Cleaner air that meets federal smog standards by 2013 is possible with tougher industry regulations and by prohibiting certain engines from running on bad air days, according to a new report released Tuesday.

"This study shows (clean air) is not only possible, it's achievable by 2013, just six years from now," said Nicole Davis, vice president of the International Sustainable Systems Research Center, which conducted the study on behalf of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The report challenges a plan released last week by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District that said it will take 10 more years beyond the current deadline of 2013 to come into compliance with the federal air standard.

District officials were critical of the report Tuesday, saying the research was based on outdated information. But state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, said the new study is worthy of consideration and has scheduled a hearing on the report's findings before the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality, which he chairs, on Feb. 20.

Compared to the air district's plan, the study released Tuesday proposes more drastic regulations for dairies, greenwaste facilities, composting and biosolid industries and development.

It also calls for prohibiting the use of certain engines on days when air quality is bad. Vehicles and equipment affected include agriculture equipment, off-road recreational vehicles, boats and lawn and garden equipment. That means last year, the prohibition would have been in effect on about 138 days.

The independent report pegs the price for meeting the 2013 deadline at about \$2.3 billion while the air district's plan would cost about \$3 billion over the next 16 years.

But the air district cast doubt on the report's findings.

"Nothing would please us more than someone coming forward with a bright idea that we have missed," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley air district. "Unfortunately, this plan doesn't do that."

Sadredin said the report is based on numbers from October, when the district last released a previous version of its smog cleanup plan. But new information has recently shown the amount of emissions that need to be cut has gone up, he said.

In addition, the report relies on cutting smog by reducing the two agents in the air that combine to form it. But new research shows reducing just one of those agents is the most effective approach, he said.

The authors of the report stood by their findings. They acknowledged that reducing just one of the smog-forming agents is a more effective approach, but noted that their report still identified a larger reduction of that one agent than the district's plan.

The authors also acknowledged that emissions estimates change but they said their approach for reducing emissions is still valid.

"The strategies identified (in our report) remain the same regardless of the changing numbers," Davis said. "If it doesn't get us to clean air ... it still gets us a long way toward it."

District officials and Florez doubted whether prohibiting certain engines to run on bad air days was realistic.

But Florez said critics of the report shouldn't be so quick to dismiss the other recommendations "as some unachievable, pie in the sky."

"We need to determine if this (new) report makes things seem too easy or if the district is making it seem too hard," Florez said. "I think ultimately the answer lies somewhere in the middle."

STUDY: CLEANER AIR POSSIBLE IN 6 YEARS

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer
The Record, Wed. February 7, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley could comply with federal ozone standards within six years - a decade less than air officials estimate, an environmental research firm says in a study released Tuesday.

While Stockton's air already meets the standard, some parts of the Valley may not reach compliance until 2023, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced last week. The district's previous goal had been 2013.

The 2013 mark is still viable, the International Sustainable Systems Research Center claims, adding that any further delay is "unacceptable."

"Clean air is not only possible, it's affordable," said Nicole Davis of the center, based in Diamond Bar. "Every single recommendation is a proven strategy."

Ozone, a precursor to smog, and particulate matter pollution result in hundreds of premature deaths each year in the Valley and cost billions of dollars in hospital admissions and lost productivity.

To meet the standard the Valley must reduce smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions by about 75 percent. The air district's plan released last week relies heavily on incentives - about \$188 million per year - to replace older polluting engines in cars and other equipment.

The report released Tuesday calls for fewer incentive funds and stricter enforcement of rules governing agriculture, industry and growth. Restrictions could include prohibiting the operation of high-pollution equipment on days in which the air quality is expected to be poor, the report says.

Not meeting the standard on time means the Valley will be declared in "extreme" nonattainment, which district officials called "disheartening" in a recent open letter to all Valley residents. Ninety percent of Valley residents will reach smog compliance by 2020, said air district Executive Director Seyed Sadredin.

"All Valley residents will benefit from measurable improvements in air quality quickly, with steady progress towards cleaner air over time," Sadredin said last week.

Critics have said the air district's plan is actually an excuse for not meeting the ozone rule on time.

Study challenges plea for an extension to cut Valley smog

By GARANCE BURKE, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Bakersfield Californian, Sacramento Bee & other papers Wednesday, February 7, 2007

FRESNO, Calif. - A new study claims the San Joaquin Valley could reduce smog pollution earlier than regional air regulators projected when they asked for an 11-year extension last week to meet federal air quality requirements.

The report, released Tuesday by a Los Angeles-area firm that also consults on air pollution projects in Mexico City, claimed the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District could lower ozone emissions in the valley by 2013, within the original deadline set by the federal government.

"Their rules addressing the agricultural sector and older diesel vehicles could be made tougher," said James Lents, president of the International Sustainable Systems Research Center, which was hired by the Hewlett Foundation to write the analysis. "We hope this stimulates further thought on the part of the board to get to clean air faster."

The San Joaquin Valley, stretching 240 miles from Stockton to Bakersfield, is one of the dirtiest air basins in the country for emissions that create ozone, the main ingredient of smog.

The district proposed the extension in its draft cleanup plan last week to avoid facing sanctions that could cut off more than \$2 billion in federal transportation funds to the eight-county region, air district officials said.

Lents said the extra time wouldn't be necessary if the air district implemented new technologies that would help reduce ozone pollution from businesses, traffic and the agricultural industry. One proposal recommends requiring that dairies with more than 50 cows control and capture their pollution emissions.

District officials said the alternative proposal used outdated emission target numbers and ignored new scientific data that showed automobiles - rather than dairies and other stationary industrial polluters - were the biggest source of smog.

"Nothing would please the district more than someone coming up with a bright idea, but we have looked at this plan and it has major flaws," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, said Tuesday he had scheduled a legislative hearing on Feb. 20 to give both sides an opportunity to testify regarding their different approaches to meeting federal ozone pollution standards.

"People in the valley aren't going to be pleased with the air district throwing up the white flag and saying we need 11 more years to get to clean air," said Florez, who chairs the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality.

The district will hold a public workshop on its draft plan Thursday, and will consider the new study's recommendations and other comments before seeking approval from the district board and the California Air Resources Board, Sadredin said.

Regional air regulators plan to present a final plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by June 15.

Breathing hard as air goes bad

By Michael G. Mooney, Bee Staff Writer
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, February 7, 2007

No, it's not your imagination.

Over the past few days, the air in Modesto and the Northern San Joaquin Valley was as bad as, or worse than, it was in Fresno and other Central Valley locations.

That's a bit unusual, conceded meteorologist Shawn Ferreria, but it can and does happen here when weather conditions are just right.

"Basically a strong high-pressure system has moved over California, creating a lid over the entire San Joaquin Valley," said Ferreria, an air quality project planner at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

With mountains on the east, west and south, a "bowl" effect is created, Ferreria said. Dust, ash, smoke and soot become trapped and hang in the air.

"This started in the Modesto area on Saturday," Ferreria said. "Now, we're feeling the full effects."

Robert Martella, pharmacist-in-charge at the Safeway pharmacy in Modesto, can attest to that.

"The albuterol is flying off the shelves," Martella said. "So are the other inhalers, especially for children."

Martella said he noticed a weekend sales spike in medicine used by asthmatics, which coincided with poor air quality recorded in and around Modesto.

With the high pressure in place, Ferreria said, air movement is at a minimum, causing it to grow increasingly dirty and increasingly unhealthy to breathe.

Although everybody suffers to some degree, experts say those with allergies, asthma and other chronic lung or serious cardiac diseases are especially at risk.

Dr. Wallace Carroll, a Modesto allergist and chairman of the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition, said his caseload has remained about the same.

"Hopefully, the people who are well-controlled (through medication) are staying indoors," he said.

Carroll added that it's not uncommon for people at the edge of respiratory illness to be pushed over the edge during a spate of bad air days.

But relief is on the way.

"By Thursday, things should be improving," Ferreria said. "Wednesday should be a transition day. We're starting to see the (air pollution) numbers slowly coming down."

That's because that problematic high-pressure system is moving east and weakening.

As it heads toward Nevada and Utah, Ferreria said, winter storm fronts once more will move into the Pacific Northwest and Northern California, perhaps as soon as today.

That same high-pressure ridge, Ferreria said, also played a key role in the cold and dry January the area just experienced. At that time, he said, the ridge was hanging over the eastern Pacific Ocean.

Ferreria said the high-pressure system's position in January allowed cold, dry Arctic air to move through the region.

A few days ago, Ferreria said, the ridge settled directly over California, trapping pollution in the atmosphere throughout the entire eight-county Northern San Joaquin Valley.

More often, Ferreria said, high-pressure systems set up south of Stanislaus and Merced counties. When that happens, air pollution generally is not as serious here.

Although the region has experienced below-normal rainfall so far, Ferreria said, it's too early to begin forecasting drought.

He conceded, however, that the storms expected to move through the area today and Thursday could bring more rain than snow.

"The (National Weather Service) is predicting these will be warm storms, with snow above 6,500 feet," he said.

Council votes against proposed bio-lab

By John Upton

Tracy Press, Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Irene Sundberg, Steve Abercrombie, Evelyn Tolbert and Suzanne Tucker voted 3-1 on Tuesday night to direct the city manager to write and send a letter to opposing the establishment of a biological research laboratory near Tracy.

The city of Tracy will tell the Department of Homeland Security and other government agencies that it opposes a proposal to build an anti-biological terrorism laboratory near city limits.

Councilwoman Irene Sundberg, Councilwoman Evelyn Tolbert and Councilman Steve Abercrombie voted Tuesday night to oppose a proposal by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to build the bio-lab at Site 300 in the hills southwest of Tracy, even though the council has no jurisdiction over the site.

Acting Mayor Suzanne Tucker voted against opposing the lab, after arguing that it is too early to make a decision.

"I think there are some great benefits to Tracy for this facility," Tucker said, "and I for one think that we need to keep the door open."

Tolbert said the council should take a position on the bio-lab, since Lawrence Livermore had asked for community feedback.

"If we're told that they want to have our input and they want to know where our community stands, then I take it on good faith that this is the time that they want to know our community concerns," Tolbert said. "Let's keep in mind that this is not going to shut down our neighbor, the lab."

University of California Vice Provost for Research Lawrence Coleman asked Tracy City Council to not take a position on the bio-lab until the Department of Homeland Security provides more information later this year. The University of California operates Lawrence Livermore for the Department of Energy.

Sundberg criticized Lawrence Livermore for taking too long to clean Site 300 contaminants.

"You've not cleaned it up yet," Sundberg said. "You've got no money to clean it up. And now you want to put more stuff in my backyard."

"I don't want you here; I have residents that have told me they don't want you here."

Abercrombie, who last week said it was too early to take a position on the bio-lab because Homeland Security would visit the site within a month, said he had learned that Homeland Security might not visit the site until May. Site 300 is one of 14 under consideration for location of the lab that is expected to be built by 2014.

"The problem that we have is that we don't have any idea what they're going to do up there, and we may never know what they're going to do up there," Abercrombie said.

During nearly two hours of sometimes-emotional debate, seven residents from Tracy spoke in opposition to the bio-lab.

"I don't agree with putting it so close to civilization - there are plenty of places to stick it in California," said Tracy resident David Dyson. "I don't want it around me."

Activist Bob Sarvey played an audio tape from a Nov. 15 public forum on the bio-lab, in which Lawrence Livermore spokeswoman Susan Houghton acknowledged that human errors could occur at the bio-lab and that homeowners might need to warn potential homebuyers about the facility.

A Mountain House and a Tracy resident supported the proposal - a Lawrence Livermore employee and a retired Lawrence Livermore employee, respectively.

Lawrence Livermore biologist Pejman Naraghiarani, who has worked on molecular detection devices for the lab, said "we have the capability to know if and when there's a release."

"The probability of something catastrophic happening with this laboratory is absolutely minimal," Naraghiarani said. "We are talking about 75-milliliter vials - that's the maximum that I can think of that we will be using."

Naraghiarani said it would take "hundreds of gallons" of pathogens to cause a disaster equivalent to a nuclear explosion.

A virologist at the lab said all vials that contain the pathogens would be unbreakable and would be stored in a freezer at minus 80 degrees, and that they would die if an earthquake or other event caused the freezers to fail.

Stockton resident Mike Robinson, president of the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau, and Livermore resident Darrel Sweet, a past president of the California Cattleman's Association, said the agricultural industry supports building the bio-lab at Site 300 in part because it would help speed up detection of exotic diseases in California's agricultural stock.

Other residents from outside of Tracy also urged the council to either delay its vote or to vote in support of the bio-lab.

At press time, the council was considering its position on a planned increase in outdoor explosives tests at Site 300. An appeal hearing against a [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) permit allowing the tests will be heard today at 10 a.m. in Modesto.

Tracy Hills, which plans 5,500 homes near Site 300, has dropped its appeal against the permit, spokesman John Palmer told the council.

Former Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment director Sarvey had also appealed against the permit.

Tracy resident Jeff Bonacci on Tuesday evening showed council results of his 10-year old daughter's medical results, which showed she has higher-than average levels of uranium, which he said he suspected could have been caused by outdoor test explosions at Site 300. All names and personal details on the medical report had been blacked out.

Bonacci asked the council to test volunteer Tracy residents for uranium levels.

"The only way we came across this was through a fluke," said Bonacci, who was testing his daughter's dietary needs because of an illness.

Democrats Rip EPA Chief Over Reforms

By ERICA WERNER, AP Writer

In the Washington Post, S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times & other papers Tues., February 6, 2007

WASHINGTON -- The head of the Environmental Protection Agency faced down hostile critics Tuesday in his first committee appearance before the Democratic-led Congress, denying accusations that agency decisions last year rolled back environmental safeguards.

"These decisions and actions all accelerate the pace of environmental protection. They all deliver environmental results," EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Nobody's fooled by this," responded the new committee chair, Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer of California.

"EPA has gone too long without meaningful oversight," she said, contending the changes "benefit polluters' bottom line and they hurt our communities."

At issue were a number of changes EPA made last year, including a new policy that reduces the role of scientists in setting air pollution standards; a move to raise the threshold for reporting releases of toxic chemicals; and the shuttering of five agency libraries where the public could look at scientific and health documents.

A Government Accountability Office study released Tuesday said that EPA did not adhere to its own rule-making in making the changes to toxic chemicals reporting. The Toxic Reporting Inventory changes, said GAO, "will likely have a significant impact on information available to the public about dozens of toxic chemicals" at facilities nationwide.

Johnson said the new rule encourages businesses to adopt better waste management practices by allowing them to reduce emissions reporting if they do so. "My interest is to do anything I can to encourage businesses to reduce emissions," he said.

The EPA libraries were closed, Johnson said, because they got barely any visitors and the information they housed was being put on the Internet.

Boxer confronted him with internal agency e-mails and Web postings indicating more libraries were closed than he seemed to be aware of and suggesting EPA staff was ordered to throw away scientific journals at one library.

Johnson said some journals were discarded after they were contaminated by mold in a flood, and that in some cases documents were destroyed if there was more than one copy of them.

"Mr. Johnson, you're reading those notes very well, but you're unaware of what's happening in the agency," Boxer said.

Several Republicans on the panel defended Johnson, praising him for streamlining agency regulations and ridiculing the idea that poorly attended libraries were necessary.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., held up a series of books and videos he said were at EPA libraries. One was "The Lorax" by Dr. Seuss. Another was called "Fat Chicks Rule! How to Survive in a Thin-centric World." There was also a pilates exercise video and a computer software guide from 1983

City of Turlock building CNG facility

Turlock Journal Saturday, February 3, 2007

The construction of a compressed natural gas maintenance facility at the City of Turlock corporation yard is back on track.

The city council on Jan. 9 that allocated an additional \$97,000 to the project that was originally approved on April 25, 2006.

When the project was originally approved, it was anticipated that city staff would be heavily utilized to manage the project. However, the city engineer originally assigned to the project resigned. The city engineering staff was then unable to manage the project, requiring significant assistance from the project architect, Menghetti Construction. Menghetti Construction is the same company that is currently rebuilding Turlock fire station No. 1 downtown.

The maintenance facility will be used for work on the city's buses that run on compressed natural gas. The city has five of these buses. This facility is being constructed adjacent to the current city vehicle maintenance building. The buildings will not be connected in anyway, as facilities working with natural gas have separate safety standards from those for normal maintenance facilities. For example, the compressed natural gas maintenance facility cannot have any open flames, and the current vehicle maintenance facility contains pilot lights for heaters. The California state building code is what regulates those standards.

The project was passed last spring with a cost of \$1.13 million. According to Turlock's lead maintenance supervisor Tony Aguiniga, the facility will have a special heater system, along with a special lighting system. These special systems are designed to prevent accidents with natural gas such as explosions. The facility will also have an alarm system that will automatically open doors and windows to ventilate the building in case a leak is detected.

"The project is slow moving," said Aguiniga. So far the walls of the facility have yet to be constructed. Work on the concrete floor is still being done. The concrete would have been laid earlier, but the architect insisted on installing drains in the floor. Now the concrete re-bar must be taken out, the drains installed, and then the concrete will be laid. Broad speculation for the project's completion is set for sometime in the summer.

The city has 31 vehicles that run on compressed natural gas. Only five of those are Bus Line Service of Turlock (BLAST) buses. The compressed natural gas maintenance facility will be used mainly to repair and maintain the buses. According to Aguiniga, the facility will be able to handle any future growth of the city's natural gas bus fleet, up to anywhere between 20 to 25 buses. The buses will not be stored at the facility. They will be stored at their current place in the corporation yard.

Board grants revised permit for landfill

From Times Staff and Wire Reports
L.A. Times Wednesday, February 7, 2007

County supervisors voted 3 to 2 Tuesday to approve a revised permit for the Sunshine Canyon Landfill, restricting the flow of trash into the site and limiting operations to 30 years.

The permit for the landfill near Granada Hills includes a prohibition on accepting trash from outside the county and on operating before 6 a.m. The landfill must also record complaints, monitor air quality and correct pollution problems.

Boxer rips EPA chief as bowing to industry

Official says policies speed up benefits to the environment

By Robert Coile, Chronicle Washington bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Washington -- California Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer ripped the Environmental Protection Agency's top official Tuesday for rules changes that could limit the input of scientific advisers into agency decisions and reduce public access to information about toxic substances in communities.

Boxer, using her clout at her second hearing as the new chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, accused EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson of bending to the wishes of industry rather than protecting public health.

"I want to send a clear signal to EPA and to this administration: We are watching," she said. "No longer will EPA rollbacks quietly escape scrutiny."

Johnson defended the Bush administration's record on the environment, saying his agency had pursued policies aimed at cutting the costs of regulation and giving companies incentives to reduce their pollution.

"These decisions and actions all accelerate the pace of environmental protection," Johnson said. "They all deliver environmental results."

Boxer devoted the hearing to shedding light on half a dozen controversial decisions made by the EPA late last year, which she said received little scrutiny from the formerly Republican-led Congress. Among them:

- The decision to shut down or cut access to seven EPA libraries across the country. The libraries are used by scientists, agency employees and citizens looking for information about public health and environmental hazards in their neighborhoods.
- The agency in December eased the rules on industry for the reporting of their discharge of toxic chemicals. Previously, companies that released 500 pounds of chemicals were required to file a detailed report. Under the new rule, firms would file detailed accounts only after releasing 2,000 pounds of chemicals.
- The EPA in December proposed changing its decades-old policy that asked scientific advisory boards to study and develop new air quality standards before the agency would announce them. The move to lessen the influence of the advisory boards would strengthen the hand of the agency's political appointees in setting policy.

Democratic senators on the committee complained that the agency's decisions seemed designed to satisfy the requests of key industry groups.

The Battery Council International, a trade group of battery manufacturers and lead smelters, sent a letter to the EPA in July urging it to revoke the ambient air quality standard for lead -- which the agency said in December it is considering. The trade group also asked the EPA to expedite the decision by changing how the agency and scientists review its proposals.

Boxer warned that "if the standard is revoked, there is no assurance that lead will be monitored in air across the country. Polluters could emit dangerous levels of lead without being detected."

Johnson insisted he is committed to reducing emissions of lead, which pose health risks to humans, especially children, even at low levels.

In written testimony, he noted that lead concentrations in the air had fallen by 95 percent since leaded gasoline was banned but said it was too early to say whether the lead standard would be revoked.

Boxer and Johnson got into a testy exchange over the EPA's closure of its libraries. Johnson called it an effort to modernize the libraries now that many people are accessing agency data and scientific reports on the Internet. He said the reports kept in the libraries either would be made available online or would be donated to other libraries.

But Boxer read e-mails from EPA librarians that detailed the destruction of agency reports and other documents.

"There's something about Americans, they don't like things being destroyed -- libraries, books, movies, things like that," Boxer said. "The image of it is discomfoting."

"We have not been disposing of documents," insisted Johnson, who noted that the agency halted plans to close more libraries because of the outcry.

But Johnson received a little help from Republicans on the committee. Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the panel's ranking Republican, accused critics of the EPA's library plan of being "hysterical" and motivated by the desire to save a few union jobs.

Inhofe asked Johnson if he knew that the EPA's libraries held titles including "Memoirs of a Geisha," "Fat Chicks Rule!: How to Survive in a Thin-Centric World," and the Dr. Seuss book, "The Lorax." Johnson smiled as each title was read, saying he was aware the EPA had those books.

Boxer, annoyed by the scripted exchange with Inhofe, commented sarcastically: "I'm amazed that the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency would know what books are in the library. ... You're a multitasker, that's for sure."

It's not the first time Boxer and Johnson have clashed. The California Democrat held up Johnson's nomination to head the EPA until the agency dropped a program that paid parents to monitor the health effects of pesticides on their children.

Boxer warned Johnson that he should expect to spend more time in her hearing room explaining his agency's decisions.

"It's over in terms of your not having to come before the committees of Congress to respond to them," she said. "This is just the start."

Thieves Stealing Pollution Devices

By DAVID SHARP, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times and other papers, Tuesday, February 6, 2007

Bangor, Maine (AP) -- Thieves have long targeted car stereos, air bags, high-intensity headlights, even pocket change from the ashtrays. But now they are slithering under vehicles and cutting away the catalytic converters.

The anti-pollution devices contain small amounts of platinum, rhodium and palladium, and the value of these precious metals has been rising sharply, making catalytic converters a hot commodity in more ways than one at scrap yards from Maine to California.

"These thieves catch on quicker than us honest people," said Kennie Andersen from Andersen Sales and Salvage Inc. in Greeley, Colo.

In Bangor earlier this month, thieves brazenly removed catalytic converters in a busy hospital parking lot in daylight. Police also have fielded reports of thefts in recent weeks in Alabama, California, Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and Tennessee.

Old catalytic converters are usually sold for scrap. The prices paid by scrap yards for once of the devices have generally risen from \$5 to \$30 a decade ago to \$5 to \$100 nowadays. Some models can fetch up to \$150.

Frank Scafidi, National Insurance Crime Bureau spokesman in Sacramento, Calif., had no immediate figures on catalytic-converter thefts. "We have regular reports of these things being stolen, but it's sporadic. It's not the kind of thing that's an epidemic," he said.

Stealing one of the devices often requires little more than a battery-powered metal saw to cut through the exhaust pipe, and takes only minutes. Once the catalytic converter is gone, the car may look fine, but the exhaust lets out a NASCAR-like roar when the driver turns the key.

While some unscrupulous scrap dealers ask no questions, the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries issues e-mail alerts whenever thefts of converters are reported, and urges members to screen suppliers and photocopy the driver's licenses of those who sell them, said Bryan McGannon, spokesman for the trade group.

"Playing by the rules is good business," he said. "Nobody wants to be tied up in a police investigation where your materials are tied up for weeks."

In Bangor, medical secretary Karen Thompson was summoned by hospital security to the parking lot, where someone had cut away the converters from a couple of vehicles, including her 2006 Toyota Tundra pickup. When she started up the truck, it rumbled as if there was no muffler.

"It was really, really loud. The rearview mirror shook," Thompson recalled. The cost of replacement and repairs at her Toyota dealership was \$2,100.

Millions of catalytic converters have been put on cars and trucks since they were introduced in 1974. Inside most of them is a ceramic honeycomb coated in a material that contains platinum, rhodium and palladium, which serve as a catalyst to reduce tailpipe emissions of unburned hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides.

The growth in thefts has accompanied the rise in value of these precious metals, said Ashok Kumar of A-1 Specialized Services and Supplies of Croyton, Pa. Platinum, for example, was selling for \$400 an ounce in August 2001; the price is more than \$1,100 today, Kumar said.

Police said the thieves are often drug addicts looking for fast cash. Thieves tend to target sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks because they do not have to be jacked up. A thief can simply crawl under the vehicle.

NJ sues feds over emissions from Pa. coal-fired plant

BETH DeFALCO, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, February 7, 2007

TRENTON, N.J. - New Jersey on Tuesday filed a lawsuit against the federal Environmental Protection Agency over air pollution from a coal-fired power plant in Pennsylvania that drifts across the Delaware River into New Jersey.

In the lawsuit, filed in federal court in Trenton, New Jersey claims the EPA violated the Clean Air Act by failing to respond when the state objected to a permit renewal application from the plant in Portland, Pa., run by Reliant Energy Inc.

The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to respond to such petitions within 60 days. More than 200 days passed without response, according to Attorney General Stuart Rabner's office.

New Jersey filed papers on Dec. 7 citing the state's intent to sue.

On Tuesday, EPA spokeswoman Donna Heron said the agency wouldn't comment on the lawsuit because it had not yet had an opportunity to review it.

New Jersey Environmental Protection Commissioner Lisa Jackson on Tuesday called the EPA's failure to act on the New Jersey petition "unconscionable."

"The EPA continues to show little concern for the environmental and public health issues we have raised regarding the Portland Generating Station," Jackson said. "With today's filing, we are putting the EPA on notice that we will not tolerate being ignored."

New Jersey claims that the owner of the plant, Reliant Energy Mid-Atlantic Power Holdings, modified the facility significantly but did not install pollution controls as required under federal law.

The state also claims there are no limits on the amount of coal the Portland Generating Station can burn hourly, which makes pollution monitoring unreliable. The problem with this type of monitoring means that facilities can test pollution levels when the plant is using a certain amount of coal, but the pollution changes if the facility uses more coal, according to the state.

No one answered the phone Tuesday at a number listed for Reliant in Portland, Pa.

New Jersey is downwind from the plant, which is less than a mile from its western border. The state claims in its filing that prevailing winds carry sulfur dioxide and other pollutants into the state.

New Jersey officials say the plant is at least partially responsible for rural Warren County exceeding ambient air quality standards for sulfur dioxide.

"This facility is directly across the river from New Jersey and has emitted more than 30,000 tons of sulfur dioxide annually," said Gov. Jon S. Corzine. "We will take every action we can to force EPA to do its job and to protect the citizens of this state."

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, a new permit has not yet been issued for the Portland generating station, which is operating under its existing permit.

New Jersey is a litigant in several similar lawsuits, all seeking to ensure that coal-fired plants in upwind states install stringent pollution controls for sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and fine said, said Deputy Attorney General Kevin Auerbacher.

In addition, the EPA last year issued a new rule governing air pollution that moves across state lines. It takes effect in 2015 and impacts the eastern 28 states.

County joins Chicago Climate Exchange

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Sacramento County supervisors voted 4-0 Tuesday to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by joining the Chicago Climate Exchange, a voluntary "market" where members buy and sell carbon reduction credits.

Members who exceed pollution reduction goals sell extra credits to members who fail to meet their goal. Members set the sale price, similar to the prices on the stock market.

Under the binding agreement, the county will be required -- by 2010 -- to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions to 6 percent less than 2000 levels.

By taking the action now, the county can take credit for the millions of tobacco litigation dollars spent replacing its diesel garbage truck fleet with trucks powered by cleaner liquid natural gas.

County Executive Terry Schutten said that move cut the air emissions from the county by 5 percent.

[Op Ed in the Washington Post, February 7, 2007](#)

Global Warming and Hot Air

By Robert J. Samuelson

You could be excused for thinking that we'll soon do something serious about global warming. Last Friday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) -- an international group of scientists -- concluded that, to a 90 percent probability, human activity is warming the Earth. Earlier, Democratic congressional leaders made global warming legislation a top priority; and 10 big U.S. companies (including General Electric and DuPont) endorsed federal regulation. Strong action seems at hand.

Don't be fooled. The dirty secret about global warming is this: We have no solution. About 80 percent of the world's energy comes from fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas), the main sources of man-made greenhouse gases. Energy use sustains economic growth, which -- in all modern societies -- buttresses political and social stability. Until we can replace fossil fuels or find practical ways to capture their emissions, governments will not sanction the deep energy cuts that would truly affect global warming.

Considering this reality, you should treat the pious exhortations to "do something" with skepticism, disbelief or contempt. These pronouncements are (take your pick) naive, self-interested, misinformed, stupid or dishonest. Politicians mainly want to be seen as reducing global warming. Companies want to polish their images and exploit markets created by new environmental regulations. As for editorialists and pundits, there's no explanation except superficiality or herd behavior.

Anyone who honestly examines global energy trends must reach these harsh conclusions. In 2004, world emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂, the main greenhouse gas) totaled 26 billion metric tons. Under plausible economic and population assumptions, CO₂ emissions will grow to 40 billion tons by 2030, projects the International Energy Agency. About three-quarters of the increase is forecast to come from developing countries, two-fifths from China alone. The IEA expects China to pass the United States as the largest source of carbon dioxide by 2009.

Poor countries won't sacrifice economic growth -- lowering poverty, fostering political stability -- to placate the rich world's global warming fears. Why should they? On a per-person basis, their carbon dioxide emissions are only about one-fifth the level of rich countries. In Africa, less than 40 percent of the population even has electricity.

Nor will existing technologies, aggressively deployed, rescue us. The IEA studied an "alternative scenario" that simulated the effect of 1,400 policies to reduce fossil fuel use. Fuel economy for new U.S. vehicles was assumed to increase 30 percent by 2030; the global share of energy from "renewables" (solar, wind, hydropower, biomass) would quadruple, to 8 percent. The result: by 2030, annual carbon dioxide emissions would rise 31 percent instead of 55 percent. The concentration levels of emissions in the atmosphere (which presumably cause warming) would rise.

Since 1850, global temperatures have increased almost 1 degree Celsius. Sea level has risen about seven inches, though the connection is unclear. So far, global warming has been a change, not a calamity. The IPCC projects wide ranges for the next century: temperature increases from 1.1 degrees Celsius to 6.4 degrees; sea level rises from seven inches to almost two feet. People might easily adapt; or there might be costly disruptions (say, frequent flooding of coastal cities resulting from melting polar ice caps).

I do not say we should do nothing, but we should not delude ourselves. In the United States, the favored remedy is "cap and trade." It's environmental grandstanding -- politicians pretending they're doing something.

Companies would receive or buy quotas ("caps") to emit carbon dioxide. To exceed the limits, they'd acquire some other company's unused quotas ("trade"). How simple. Just order companies to cut emissions. Businesses absorb all the costs.

But in practice, no plausible "cap and trade" program would significantly curb global warming. To do that, quotas would have to be set so low as to shut down the economy. Or the cost of scarce quotas would skyrocket and be passed along to consumers through much higher energy prices. Neither outcome seems likely. Quotas would be lax. The program would be a regulatory burden with little benefit. It would also be a bonanza for lobbyists, lawyers and consultants, as industries and localities besieged Washington for exceptions and special treatment. Hello, influence-peddling and sleaze.

What we really need is a more urgent program of research and development, focusing on nuclear power, electric batteries, alternative fuels and the capture of carbon dioxide. Naturally, there's no guarantee that socially acceptable and cost-competitive technologies will result. But without them,

global warming is more or less on automatic pilot. Only new technologies would enable countries -- rich and poor -- to reconcile the immediate imperative of economic growth with the potential hazards of climate change.

Meanwhile, we could temper our energy appetite. I've argued before for a high oil tax to prod Americans to buy more fuel-efficient vehicles. The main aim would be to limit insecure oil imports, but it would also check CO2 emissions. Similarly, we might be better off shifting some of the tax burden from wages and profits to a broader tax on energy or carbon. That would favor more fuel-efficient light bulbs, appliances and industrial processes.

It's a debate we ought to have -- but probably won't. Any realistic response would be costly, uncertain and no doubt unpopular. That's one truth too inconvenient for almost anyone to admit.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, February 7, 2007:](#)

It's good to see Fresno joining the 'climate fight'

I was very pleased to read in Bill McEwen's column (Jan. 28) that according to our city manager, Mayor Alan Autry is "good to go" and will sign the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement.

Props to Mayor Autry. This is no longer a partisan issue. In his State of the Union address, President Bush acknowledged "the serious challenge of global climate change," and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has been championing legislation to combat global warming. What's more, our mayor has supported several initiatives to clean up our city's air.

This Valley, already infamous for its hot weather, may wilt if our summers get much hotter. And the potential disappearance of the Sierra snow pack should give our farmers and skiers nightmares.

So, I thank the mayor for joining the climate fight.
Don H. Gaede, Fresno

[Letter to the Editor in The Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, February 7, 2007:](#)

Get tough on air quality

Re "Take a deep breath and feel your lungs weaken," Feb. 4: Thank you for your editorial about two new studies on the health impacts of air pollution. We agree that these studies are making an increasingly compelling case to strengthen air quality standards.

However, California needs more urgent action in developing a plan to attain the current air quality standards for smog and fine particles. Under the Clean Air Act, California is required to submit a plan this June to show how we will attain the eight-hour ozone (a.k.a. smog) standard by 2021, and in April 2008, a plan for how we will attain the fine particles standard by 2014.

Unfortunately, the California Air Resources Board, the state agency charged with protecting our health from air pollution, is pushing for a delay and seems unwilling to commit to specific reduction strategies to ensure that we achieve clean, healthful air by these deadlines.

California's current dependence on petroleum and millions of old, high-polluting vehicles and equipment presents real challenges. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration has demonstrated leadership on global warming. Achieving clean, healthy air will require at least as much leadership, investment and action.

Tim Carmichael, Sacramento
President, Coalition for Clean Air

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the report released by International Sustainable Systems Research Center. For more information, contact Maricela at \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Asegura senador que controlar la contaminación ahorra en gastos médicos

Un análisis de la Fundación William y Flora Hewlett confirma el cálculo de la Oficina Distrital de Control a la Contaminación del Aire en el Valle de San Joaquín, sobre la necesidad de más recursos y tiempo para cumplir metas federales

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, February 7, 2007

El presidente del Comité para la Calidad del Aire del senado de California, el demócrata Dean Florez (sic), informó que cumplir metas federales de control a la contaminación en la región norcentral del estado costaría unos ocho mil millones de dólares, y cada año la región invertiría tres mil 200 millones de dólares en servicios de salud por la contaminación.

El legislador se basó en un análisis de la Fundación William y Flora Hewlett que confirma un cálculo de la Oficina Distrital de Control a la Contaminación del Aire en el Valle de San Joaquín, sobre la necesidad de más recursos y tiempo para cumplir metas federales.

El Valle es la segunda región con aire más contaminado en el país después de Los Ángeles, sufre sobre contaminación uno de cada tres días del año y el deterioro provoca 460 muertes anuales.