

[Tracy Press, Editorial, Thursday, 01 March 2007](#)

Site 300 to show it's a good neighbor

We know Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory is a good employer, since there are more than 800 Tracy residents working there, including at Site 300, the nonnuclear explosives testing facility in Corral Hollow Canyon.

We'll leave the decision of whether Site 300, which is six miles southwest of downtown Tracy, is a good neighbor to the beholders: Some Tracy residents think it is, some don't.

Lab officials are making more of an effort these days to communicate its Department of Energy mission. The public affairs department is presenting the federal government's definition of Site 300's role in post-9/11 national security. Skeptics label the lab's renewed interest in our community as public relations spin so the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will next week reject an appeal from a rural Tracy resident against further outdoor explosive testing at Site 300.

Since last fall, the lab has given public presentations, culminating in the appearance at the Feb. 6 meeting of the Tracy City Council. The council then voted 3-1 to support further testing at Site 300 of nonnuclear components of our nation's weapons, such as the triggers for nuclear warheads.

Since 2000, most of the testing at the 52-year-old, 7,000-acre site is done in the Contained Firing Facility to minimize blast pressure and noise off site and blast debris on site. The blast facility has worked, its manager says.

Even if future aboveground test blasts are bigger, lab officials promise the off-site sound levels will not change and that the blast emissions will remain within Environmental Protection Agency standards. Under the new permit, the lab must commit to reducing toxic materials used outdoors.

But doubts linger, stoked by Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment, a citizen watchdog group.

So the lab is giving its side of the Site 300 story through public tours of the facility the first and third Fridays of the month. The first one begins at 10 a.m. Friday; reservations are required. Tour highlights include a view of the Contained Firing Facility, a look at the site's environmental remediation facilities and wetlands and stops at observation points for wildlife and surrounding property.

While the public won't get to see Site 300's secrets, we encourage local residents to take the lab up on the invitation. The open house is one perspective of whether Site 300 is a good neighbor.

Illnesses plaguing valley's young, old

Stanislaus hospitals having difficult time keeping up

By KEN CARLSON - BEE STAFF WRITER

Modesto Bee, Saturday, March 3, 2007

This winter has sickened the Northern San Joaquin Valley with a nasty array of afflictions, from norovirus illness to RSV and drug-resistant pneumonia to respiratory problems possibly tied to air pollution.

February was a tough month for patients and health providers, and some are saying the health issues could continue until the end of March or later.

Among those most severely stricken have been older adults, young children and people who have chronic diseases that make them vulnerable, health providers said.

Hospitals, which were inundated with patients in early February, haven't seen much of a letup.

Memorial Medical Center in Modesto had 1,600 patients pass through its emergency room in the past week, with about 300 requiring hospitalization, said Cindy Young, emergency department manager.

In a normal week, she said, the hospital sees 1,400 patients and has a lower admission rate.

Doctors are concerned about the large numbers of children with RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus.

The coldlike sickness is common in babies younger than 6 months, often causing only a runny nose, light fever and cough. But it can spread to the lungs, resulting in pneumonia and respiratory distress.

At one point, pediatricians with the Sutter Gould Medical Foundation in Modesto were seeing five to seven RSV cases a day, said Dr. Alberto Cajigas, chief of the pediatrics section.

"We hospitalized so many kids, we were at the point we ran out of beds in the hospitals," he said.

Children with RSV are mainly given supportive care because antibiotics are not effective against the viral illness.

Cajigas had no explanation for the surge in RSV but said there was a similar wave two years ago.

Hospitals also have been caring for children with asthma and serious pneumonia not related to RSV. In February, Cajigas was getting one or two pneumonia cases a day, which was alarming, he said.

The sickest children needed to have fluid drained from their lungs. In some cases, the lung infections were resistant to common antibiotics.

Some hospitalized children were given intravenous vancomycin, a potent antibiotic. Cajigas said he had two patients transferred to intensive care at Children's Hospital Central California near Madera.

Beds unavailable at times

Health experts believe certain strains of pneumonia-causing bacteria have become resistant because of overuse of antibiotics.

Doctors Medical Center in Modesto admitted 104 children in February, many with RSV, asthma and pneumonia, said Karen Hall, patient care director in the emergency department.

The hospital was seeing older adults with complex medical issues, too. Hall said she arrived at work some mornings in February to find several ER patients had waited overnight for hospital beds.

"The entire month of February was pretty crazy," Hall said.

Tina Gresio of Turlock said her husband's lung condition has been perplexing. He had fluid drained from his left lung after coming down with flu-like symptoms in December and needs the procedure again, although tests seemed to rule out pneumonia, she said.

"He is seeing a specialist who said he had four other patients with the same thing," she said.

Because of the heavy patient loads, Doctors, Memorial, Emanuel Medical Center of Turlock and Oak Valley Hospital of Oakdale were on system saturation for almost 257 hours in February, compared with 136 hours the previous month and more than any month in 2006.

When the protocol is declared — to relieve pressure on emergency rooms — dispatchers have ambulances distribute patients evenly to the hospitals in Stanislaus County.

"For two weeks at the beginning of the month, we were having daily conference calls with hospital administrators (to discuss how to manage patient volumes)," said Doug Sisk, deputy director of Mountain Valley Emergency Services Agency. "This past week has not been so bad."

Young said Memorial was admitting fewer patients with cardiac and respiratory issues since the air quality improved in the latter part of February.

Stanislaus County's health officer issued an advisory Feb. 8, expressing concern that a spike in hospitalizations for cardiac and respiratory problems could be related to air pollution.

[The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) assisted Walker with the advisory and has done the same for health officers in other counties.

As yet, there are no plans to try to track hospitalizations on bad-air days, but that's not to say it couldn't be done, said [Jaime Holt, an air district spokeswoman](#).

In early February, area schools saw a drop in attendance because of illness, but "we kind of hit our peak a couple weeks ago," said Bonnie Folkes, lead nurse for Turlock Unified School District.

Turlock schools had a 10-day period in which students were out with colds, or stomach symptoms similar to norovirus illness. The district did not attempt to confirm whether the students had noroviruses, which cause vomiting and diarrhea.

"Since we came back from the Presidents Day holiday, we are just seeing the average number of students with sore throats, colds and fever," Folkes said.

Modesto City Schools said absences because of illness were normal this week.

Since Nov. 1, the county has had a dozen confirmed outbreaks of norovirus illness in nursing homes, long-term care facilities and assisted living centers, the most recent reported Feb. 12, said Trudi Pevette, communicable disease nurse with the Health Services Agency.

Quarantines help control spread

State health officials recommend that the facilities control the outbreaks by confining symptomatic residents in their rooms, restricting group activities and restricting new admissions.

Dale Commons Assisted Living was under voluntary quarantine for two weeks in December because of the gastrointestinal illness, General Manager Cheryl Martin said.

The outbreak sickened about 20 of the 103 residents, and eight or nine employees, she said. Three residents were taken to the hospital.

Residents of the Dale Road complex were served meals in their apartments instead of dining areas, and signs were posted advising visitors of the health threat.

Martin said the outbreak was no fun and they celebrated after lifting the quarantine.

According to Martin, some years seem worse than others for norovirus. Except for a few cases in November, it was the first norovirus outbreak since one occurred shortly after the complex opened in 2002.

When norovirus is reported at one senior citizens center, others take precautions to keep their facilities free of the illness.

Gary Collins, administrator of Garden City Health Care Center in Modesto, said he posted signs asking visitors not to enter if they had drippy noses or any symptoms.

The restrictions are a pain for patients' relatives but prevent a lot of suffering, he said.

"We have the same policy with our employees," he said. "If they are coming down with something, we tell them to stay home and take their sick days."

Stanislaus bucks trend toward fewer wood-burning bans

By Michael Mooney

Modesto Bee, Friday, March 2, 2007

While there were fewer wood-burning bans this winter around the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Stanislaus County bucked that trend.

Designed to reduce wintertime air pollution by restricting residential wood burning, the "Check Before You Burn" program runs from Nov. 1 to the end of February.

Air district records show Stanislaus County recorded nine bans this season, up from three in 2005-06.

Spokesman Anthony Presto said there could be a number of reasons for the increase, including everything from cold weather to more precise air monitoring equipment.

"We've had an extremely cold winter," Presto said. "When it's cold, people burn more wood."

Stagnant air also could have played a role in the spike.

Wintertime pollution problems in the valley often begin with weather. When a high-pressure system settles over the region, a "ceiling" of warm air hangs above the valley's floor. Cooler air, meanwhile, hangs closer to the ground.

As temperatures rise during the day, pollutants such as soot and industrial ash become suspended in the atmosphere.

Each day that passes without wind, precipitation or moisture causes pollutants to build.

Air district officials, however, said new monitoring equipment also could have played a role by providing more accurate data.

"With the addition in Turlock of a real-time monitor for PM 2.5 (particulate matter measuring 2.5 microns and smaller)," said district atmospheric scientist Shawn Ferreria, "the district was able to get more accurate air quality information about that area than in previous years."

While the southern end of the eight-county air district usually records more bans, that wasn't the case this year.

Kern County reported half as many days when lighting wood-burning fireplaces or stoves was prohibited — eight compared with 16 in 2005-06.

Kings County had two prohibited days, down from 13 in 2005-06.

Tulare County, meanwhile, recorded three days of fireplace and woodstove prohibitions, down from nine.

Fresno County recorded 12 curtailment days this year, compared with 11 last season.

Merced, with two curtailment days, San Joaquin, one, and Madera, two, were unchanged from last year.

"For the past three years, the district has made great progress in reducing wintertime air pollution," said Seyed Sadredin, air district executive director, in a statement released earlier this week.

Sadredin continued: "We are now in attainment for the harmful pollutant PM 10 (particulate matter 10 microns and smaller). We give a lot of the credit for reaching attainment to the fireplace rule and the excellent response by residents."

The restrictions on residential wood-burning do not apply to natural gas or propane devices; homes and businesses in areas with no natural-gas service; homes and businesses at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher; and homes in which no other heating device exists and wood burning is the sole source of heat.

Seasonal burning restrictions lifted

Special to the Madera Tribune, March 2, 2007

A program to reduce winter time air pollution by restricting residential wood burning ended Wednesday.

Madera had only two residential wood-burning curtailment days within the 120-day restricted period. Fresno had 12 restricted days, Kern County had 16 restricted days, Kings County had two restricted days, San Joaquin County had one, and Merced County had two restricted days.

Wood burning is discouraged when air quality is projected to be unhealthy for sensitive groups.

"Wood burning restrictions for agriculture is a different thing, a separate issue," said Janelle Schneider with San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Fresno County had 12 residential wood burning curtailment days this year compared to 11 in 2005-2006 and Stanislaus had nine curtailment days this season, up from three last year. Madera, Merced and San Joaquin counties each logged the same number of curtailments as last season.

"For the past three years, the district has made great progress in reducing winter-time air pollution and we are now in attainment for the harmful pollutant PM 10 (particulate matter 10 microns and smaller). We give a lot of the credit for reaching attainment to the fireplace rule and the excellent response by residents," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

A press release from the district said wood-burning fireplaces and woodstoves can generate up to one-third of all particulate matter pollution on unhealthy air days in the winter, 151 and above on the Air Quality Index. The Check Before You Burn program prohibits burning solid fuel on those days.

When wood burning is prohibited, violators may receive a Notice of Violation and be subject to fines beginning at \$50.

The restrictions on residential wood-burning do not apply to natural gas or propane devices, homes and businesses in areas with no natural-gas service, homes and businesses at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher, and homes in which no other heating device exists and wood burning is the only source of heat.

Almond growers raising environmental consciousness

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, March 03, 2007

MANTECA - It was too blustery to be buzzing about Dave Phippen's almond orchard on Friday - only one bee could be found pollinating the white blossoms.

There was plenty of sweet talk, though, about farmers' efforts to aid the environment.

For the third time, the Almond Board of California hosted a tour promoting the crop and the way it is grown.

"Everyone who farms in this Valley usually has their families living in it, too. We have lots of incentives to take care of the environment," said Doug Flora of the equipment dealer Exact Harvesting Systems in Modesto.

Pesticides used on crops drain into creeks and streams. Harvest equipment belches out exhaust that worsens the Valley's air quality.

But there are solutions, farmers said.

New equipment includes a shredder that collects orchard prunings and tears them into fine debris that decomposes into the ground - a far better solution than burning, which contributes to air pollution. The shredder costs nearly \$300,000 and hundreds of dollars an hour to operate.

"Growers really have to walk a tightrope between economic viability of their farms and keeping the environment safe at the same time," said Dave Baker, who heads an environmental committee for the Almond Board.

In the orchards, pests are still a problem. But old habits of automatically spraying have changed.

Take the navel orangeworm. The worm burrows into "mummies" - unharvested almonds that fall to the ground or are left on trees over the winter.

At Phippen's farm, workers use equipment to shake mummies off the trees and blow them onto the green orchard strips, where they are mowed down and destroyed. That keeps the worms from infesting the following year's crop.

"You can spray till you're black and blue," said orchard manager Nick Gatzman, adding this is a better solution.

It's the responsible thing to do, he said, but there is another incentive. Growers typically face penalties if their crops yield a certain number of almonds that must be rejected due to worm infestation; high-quality crops bring a premium.

"It's going to pay us back in yields," Gatzman said.

More jobs available if workers show up

Madera Tribune, Saturday, March 03, 2007

FRESNO - The Regional Jobs Initiative representatives Friday announced that more than 12,000 jobs have been created since 2003, and nearly 20,000 jobs may be available in the next three years if the appropriate workforce is there to fill them.

At the annual meeting, "Building on the Momentum," representatives gave business, industry and community leaders an update on the progress and reviewed the work ahead.

"The good news is we are seeing a real impact on our community - local businesses are growing, innovation and entrepreneurship are valued and supported, and we are seeing excellent growth opportunities around water technology, clean energy, software and information processing" said Ashley Swearingin, the initiative's chief operating officer. "We are pleased by the momentum and are confident that if we stay the course, we will continue to see results."

Unemployment for Fresno and Madera counties has been reduced by 45.6 percent from 2003 to 2006, translating into 16,884 people coming off the ranks of unemployment, the initiative said. A total of 12,816 non-farm and non-government jobs was created between 2003 and 2006.

The initiative's five-year plan is based on the idea that regional economies are made up of a series of related industries - or clusters - that benefit not only the businesses within the industries but one another.

Public and private businesses and organizations have been working together to create growth in each of the clusters - advanced manufacturing, construction, food processing, healthcare, information processing, logistics, renewable energy, software, tourism and water technology.

"We have been doing the heavy lifting locally, but the state and federal governments are now stepping up to the plate to help address issues that are regional in nature, such as [air quality](#), water and transportation, which are fundamental to job creation and quality of life," said Pete Weber, the initiative's co-chair. "The RJI lobbied hard for the creation of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, and the payoff to the region is going to be huge."

The annual meeting included a panel discussion on the important interplay between economic, human and community development.

"We understand that employers and our region cannot truly thrive without investing in human capital," said Deborah Nankivell, CEO of the Fresno Business Council. "We must invest in people and make sure everyone has the knowledge and skills to thrive in a global economy. As a community and as individuals, we must all be committed to life-long learning."

Based on a recent study by the Fresno County Workforce Investment Board, employers are reporting that there are more than 2,500 jobs open today, and nearly 20,000 more jobs projected to be available in the next three years.

"The efforts of the RJI partners are paying off, but now we must address the single, largest challenge of all - preparing our workforce with the skills they need to fill the jobs," Swearingin said. "We are pleased to report that we are lined up on the track - now we need to reinforce our connection and get the train moving."

The initiative is entering its fourth year of implementing its five-year plan to create 25,000 to 30,000 new jobs by 2008 - as well as develop the hard and soft infrastructure for a sustainable economic environment.

Lawrence Livermore Laboratory to offer tours of its bomb test-range, Site 300

By Niko Kyriakou - San Joaquin News Service
Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, Mar 02, 2007

Starting today, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory will offer tours of its bomb test-range, Site 300, which is just outside Tracy.

Visitors must call ahead to go on the twice-monthly tours, which are already booked full through April 6.

The 2-hour trip through Site 300 starts with a presentation of the work done at the lab and a history of the test site. Visitors, who must be 18 years old or older, will then be bused along a network of roads that pass by the places munitions are made and stored. They also get to see where the bombs are exploded.

Site 300 is authorized to test 200 bombs a year that include radioactive materials such as depleted uranium and tritium, but no bombs will be blown up on tour days, a lab spokeswoman said.

Visitors will see an outdoor testing location as well as an indoor-explosion arena.

The two-story-high Contained Firing Facility has 6-foot walls of reinforced steel and concrete and

is used to test bombs of up to 120 pounds.

Site 300 is also a Superfund site — which means it is on a government watch list as a heavily polluted area — and tourists will be shown the lab's toxic waste cleanup operation.

"We're doing a lot of environmental cleanup due to past practices in the area," said spokeswoman Lynda Seaver. "You won't get up close and personal with it (on the tour), but you'll see some of the work going on."

Seaver said people on the tour might also glimpse some wildlife.

"Site 300 is home to quite a bit of diverse California wildlife and protected species," Seaver said. "It's not uncommon to see deer and coyotes running around."

The laboratory has long offered tours of its main facility in Livermore, but this is the first time that Site 300 will offer regular public tours.

Asked why the 52-year-old site is starting tours now, Seaver said, "It seemed like the time was right."

Site 300 is the subject of a heated debate in the Tracy community.

Lawrence Livermore recently asked the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to permit test blasts at Site 300 as large as 350 pounds, up from the previous 100-pound limit.

Earlier this month, a proposal to build a laboratory at the site that would test incurable biological agents was met with resistance by the Tracy City Council.

EPA calls for cuts in diesel exhaust

By John Heilprin, Associated Press

Washington Post, Tri-Valley Herald, Contra Costa Times and San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, March 3, 2007

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency announced a plan Friday that would do away with most of the smog and soot caused by diesel-burning trains and boats.

It's an ambitious move supported by many environmentalists and air pollution officials.

"Every major metropolitan area in the country will benefit from the huge emissions reductions expected from this long-awaited rule," said Bill Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies.

"We estimate the emissions benefits will be equivalent to taking three-quarters of a million diesel trucks off the road each year. EPA deserves a 'thumbs-up' for this proposal," he said.

EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson proposed the new emission standards for diesel locomotive engines, tugs, barges, ferries and recreational marine engines. The toxic chemicals, soot in diesel exhaust contribute to smog, cause cancer.

"By tackling the greatest remaining source of diesel emissions, we're keeping our nation's clean air progress moving full steam ahead," Johnson said in a statement.

The standards, if adopted and fully phased in, would reduce particulate pollution from these engines by 90 percent and smog-forming nitrogen oxides by 80 percent, the EPA said.

The EPA proposes tightening pollution standards for remanufactured locomotives, new locomotives and marine diesel engines and longer-term technology upgrades to them. The

standards for rebuilt trains would apply as early as next year, while those for new locomotive and marine diesel engines would be phased in starting in 2009 and take full effect a decade from now.

The Diesel Technology Forum, an industry group, said the EPA's approach toward cutting diesel pollution from trains and boats already is succeeding with highway trucks, but that along with cleaner-burning engines it's important to promote more use of ultra-low sulfur diesel.

The proposed rule is similar to ones adopted by EPA since 2000 for large diesel trucks and buses, and for construction, mining and agricultural equipment, which cut diesel exhaust through the use of low sulfur diesel fuel and improved engine designs, the group said.

"Meeting EPA's new proposed emissions standards will be no simple task and will require a large development effort on the part of engine and emissions control equipment manufacturers," said Allen Schaeffer, the group's executive director.

Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy group, said the EPA plan could be held up by General Electric, since it is the nation's biggest locomotive maker. GE wrote the EPA in December, seeking weaker smog standards for train engines than what EPA proposed. The company said it did not believe the technology would be available to make the cuts that EPA wants.

NRDC attorney Richard Kassel said that GE's response was typical of companies fighting regulation, but that history shows companies find ways to innovate and meet new standards.

Costs of the new pollution requirements are estimated at \$600 million by 2030, adding less than 3 percent to the price of a locomotive and 1 percent to 3.6 percent to the price of boats using the cleaner engines.

Health benefits are estimated at \$12 billion by 2030, including 1,500 fewer premature deaths, 1,100 fewer hospitalizations and 170,000 more work days by people breathing easier.

"EPA is clearly on the right track in proposing to address the dangerous diesel exhaust from trains and ships," said Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense, who was joining Johnson in announcing the proposal at Port Elizabeth, N.J.

The proposed rule is similar to ones adopted by EPA since 2000 for large diesel trucks and buses, and for construction, mining and agricultural equipment, which cut diesel exhaust through the use of low sulfur diesel fuel and improved engine designs, the group said.

"Cleaning these engines up will prevent death and disease," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch advocacy group.

New Emissions Curbs For Diesel Trains, Ships

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer

March 3, 2007

The Environmental Protection Agency issued stringent new rules yesterday curbing harmful emissions from diesel locomotive and marine engines.

Over the next quarter-century the regulations -- which cover 40,000 marine vessels and nearly 21,000 diesel locomotives -- will cut these engines' annual emissions of nitrogen oxide, a key ingredient in smog, by 80 percent and fine particulate matter, or soot, by 90 percent.

EPA officials estimated that by 2030 the health benefits associated with the new standards will outweigh the costs by 20 to 1, preventing 1,500 premature deaths and 1,100 hospitalizations a year.

"By tackling the greatest remaining source of diesel emissions, we're keeping our nation's clean-air progress moving full steam ahead," EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson told reporters in a telephone news conference yesterday. "Over the last century, diesels have been America's economic workhorse, and through this rule, an economic workhorse is also becoming an environmental workhorse."

The federal government has already tightened diesel emissions from cars, sport-utility vehicles, trucks and non-road vehicles, prompting Johnson to call yesterday's rule "the last piece of this clean-diesel puzzle." Last year, the EPA revised its estimates for diesel train emissions and concluded that, without further action, these locomotives would generate nearly twice as much pollution in 2030 as administration officials previously projected.

Environmentalists praised the administration's decision. William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, said diesel locomotive emissions rank as the largest remaining uncontrolled source of pollution in the Washington area.

"Every major metropolitan area in the country will benefit from the huge emissions reductions expected from this long-awaited rule. We estimate the emissions benefits will be equivalent to taking three-quarters of a million diesel trucks off the road each year," Becker said. "EPA deserves a 'thumbs-up' for this proposal."

Richard Kassel, a senior attorney who works on fuel and vehicle issues for the Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy group, said the engines covered by the regulations emit pollution equivalent to 150 coal-fired power plants. The new rules will cover all diesel trains in the United States, as well as ferries, tugboats and yachts, but not the foreign ships that make up the majority of ships in U.S. ports.

"Living near a rail yard or port is like living near the dirtiest of coal-fired power plants," Kassel said.

Initially, the regulations call for manufacturers to meet stricter standards on existing engines when overhauling them. By 2009 they must modify newly built diesel train and ship engine and combustion systems. By 2014 marine engine manufacturers must treat their exhaust through technological improvements, and a year later makers of locomotive engines must do the same.

General Electric, the country's largest locomotive engine manufacturer, had opposed the new rules on the grounds that they were not technically feasible. A GE spokesman did not return calls seeking comment.

Johnson said, however, that he was confident the nation's train and ship manufacturers could meet the stricter standards over time. "Through the ingenuity of the domestic manufacturers, we believe they can achieve these aggressive but practical standards," he said.

Environmental Agency Proposes Strict Standard for Some Diesel Engines

By FELICITY BARRINGER

N. Y Times, Saturday, March 3, 2007

WASHINGTON, March 2 —The Environmental Protection Agency, which for a decade has been ratcheting up its controls on off-road diesel equipment, diesel trucks and diesel fuel, proposed stringent new pollution standards Friday on diesel locomotives and marine vessels operating in the United States.

The new controls would gradually cut engine emissions of two air pollutants, with the cuts accelerating sharply by 2030. By then, the agency estimates, most existing engines would have been retooled or replaced.

An engine's emissions of nitrogen oxides, which are a precursor to things like acid rain and ozone, would be reduced by 80 percent; the direct emission of lethal fine soot would be reduced by 90 percent in 2030, after the new controls were phased in, the agency said.

But because of the longevity of older, dirtier engines, and the expected growth of the fleet, the overall reduction in marine and railroad emissions of both pollutants would really be closer to 45 percent by 2030, according to the agency's supporting documents.

The proposal was announced by Bush administration officials at the Port of Elizabeth in New Jersey, against a backdrop of ships and trains. The E.P.A. administrator, Stephen L. Johnson, called it "the last piece of the clean diesel puzzle," following earlier curbs.

The agency's analysis said that by 2030, if the rule was made final in its present form, it would cost the marine and railroad industries \$600 million, prevent 1,500 premature deaths and achieve overall health benefits worth \$12 billion annually.

While other sources are responsible for more fine soot, the most lethal air pollutant regulated by the agency, few do as much as locomotives to deposit the pollutant into the air and lungs of the people who ride trains or live or work near rail lines.

In a conference call after the announcement, Mr. Johnson said environmentalists, engine manufacturers like General Electric and railroads like CSX had widely differing opinions about the standard.

"Some were concerned about technology not being available in the time frames we were talking about," Mr. Johnson said. "Others believed it would be."

The new standards are designed to force the development of new control technologies. A decision on the new rules is expected by year's end.

Environmental groups were enthusiastic about the new proposals; railroad industry officials were more subdued, indicating more lobbying would come from both sides.

Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, said the proposed rules were "the final frontier when it comes to the really big sources of pollution." In a later e-mail message, he said that without the rules, "diesel trains collectively will emit almost double the pollution by 2030 than all the trucks on the road combined."

Tom White, of the Association of American Railroads, said in an interview, "We're very supportive of improving efficiency and reducing the pollution from our locomotives." But, Mr. White said, "your biggest concerns always are that you have a timetable that you can meet and also that what is put out there is something doable; the technology to do this still does not exist."

Patrick Jarvis, a spokesman for the transportation division at General Electric, echoed some of Mr. White's concerns, adding, "We want to make sure the technology we bring to market is reliable and can sustain itself for the useful life of the locomotive."

The controls on marine vessels, many of which use a heavy, pollution-rich oil that packs the most power per pound, address vessels like Great Lakes freighters, ferries, fishing boats and tugboats, as well as smaller recreational boat engines.

As with locomotives, the proposed rules would take effect in stages. The first phase would affect the smallest marine diesel engines beginning in 2009; most other engines would come under the new mandate in 2012. The proposal sets long-term standards for new large marine diesel engines beginning in 2014.

The E.P.A. does not have direct authority to regulate the oceangoing vessels that burn the dirtiest fuel.

Train, ship soot to be cut 90% by 2030

The EPA proposes tougher regulations on nitrogen oxide and fine particulate matter, but the AQMD is critical of the long phase-in.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Saturday, March 3, 2007

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Friday unveiled proposals to slash diesel soot from freight trains and marine vessels by 90% by 2030, winning guarded praise from environmentalists, but a scathing rebuke from Southern California's top air quality regulator.

Under rules announced by EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, existing and new train locomotives would have to meet increasingly tougher controls on emissions of nitrogen oxide and fine particulate matter. Both substances lodge deep in people's lungs and have been linked in numerous studies to respiratory disease, cancer and other serious health problems.

Johnson said the regulations, which he would push to have completed by year's end, would result in thousands of saved lives and substantial healthcare cost savings by 2030, while costing industry about \$600 million.

"By tackling the greatest remaining source of diesel emissions, we're keeping our nation's clean-air progress moving full steam ahead," he said. "This will ensure that black puff of smoke from diesel locomotives goes the way of the steam engine."

But South Coast Air Quality Management District Executive Officer Barry Wallerstein said the region was "being thrown table scraps" with rules designed to benefit industry, which will allow thousands of Californians to continue to die prematurely for decades.

Greater Los Angeles is exposed to pollution from diesel engines more than anywhere in the nation, with 40% of all goods shipped to the U.S. funneled through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach on diesel-powered ships and trains. The air that Southern Californians breathe contains more than half of all the diesel particulate emitted in the U.S. each year. Air regulators estimate that 2,400 lives are cut short annually statewide because of pollution from the movement of goods.

State air officials also questioned the lengthy phase-in, saying it would not help them meet looming air-quality deadlines imposed by the EPA.

"We are grateful ... but we are disappointed in their timing. It makes it really hard for us to meet federal attainment requirements," said Mike Scheible, deputy executive officer of the state Air Resources Board.

William Wehrum, acting assistant administrator of the EPA's office of air and radiation, responded to that criticism by noting that existing engines that are rebuilt would be required to reduce emissions as soon as next year, and by 2010 at the latest.

"Then our standards get increasingly stringent, with the most stringent standards effective on all new engines as of 2015," he added. "We're going to begin seeing improvements very quickly,

substantial improvements."

Both Wehrum and Johnson acknowledged that because locomotives can last as long as 40 years, it could take until 2030 for the full benefits of the new rules to be seen.

Absent from the EPA proposals are regulations on large diesel engines in ocean-going vessels. EPA officials said they are trying to negotiate international standards for those heavily polluting vessels, and are still studying whether national regulations could legally be placed on foreign-flagged vessels entering American ports. Ferries, tugboats, yachts and marine auxiliary engines would be covered under the new rules, however.

Manufacturers and trade groups said the technology to meet the new rules does not yet fully exist but is being actively researched. They insisted they want further reductions in emissions and said the 2030 timeline for final compliance would help.

"There are some concerns about whether the locomotive manufacturers will be able to meet ... the standards, but we are committed to working with the locomotive builders and after-market manufacturers to do everything practical to reduce locomotive emissions," said Burlington Northern Santa Fe spokeswoman Lena Kent.

But Wallerstein said that the technology does exist, and that the industry groups were dragging their heels to save money at the expense of public health.

"In Europe they are putting particulate filters on locomotives today," he said, adding that the AQMD is funding demonstration programs of the technology on commuter trains because the freight railroads "have delayed and delayed and delayed.... this is a technology transfer, not the creation of new technology."

Mark Davis, a spokesman for Union Pacific, said the company is already replacing most of the "switcher" engines in Los Angeles-area rail yards with a new technology using truck engines, but said it would take years to develop new technology for long-haul locomotives.

Environmentalists who have fought for three years for the rules largely cheered the news. Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense, who stood at Johnson's side as he announced the regulation at Port Elizabeth in New Jersey, said later, "It's very good, it's very strong, and it would take an enormous amount of ... pollution out of the air. We were there to thank Steve Johnson and the EPA for getting on the right track."

He said the lack of regulations on marine vessels was "unfinished business" that must be addressed. As for the AQMD's concerns, he said, "well, it does take time for the manufacturers to retool." He said he thought most emissions reductions would be achieved by 2015, before California has to meet EPA deadlines.

Others said they would keep a close eye on the proposals as they move through public hearings and rewrites.

"There are many details of this proposal yet to be worked out — and we hope EPA can accelerate the pace of cleanup — but this proposal is a giant step in the right direction," said Frank O'Donnell of Clean Air Watch in Washington, D.C.

Representatives of international marine shippers did not return calls seeking comment.

Local ports help fund hybrid tug project

From the Associated Press

In the L.A. Times, Saturday, March 3, 2007

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are teaming with a tugboat operator to give the shipping industry's grimy workhorse an ecological makeover, adding a hybrid electrical system to the vessel's powerful diesel engines.

"It should have a profound impact on tug technology in the decades ahead," Port of Los Angeles spokesman Arley Baker said.

The first boat from Foss Maritime Co., a leading U.S. tug and barge operator based in Seattle, may start production this year and be delivered next year to the Los Angeles area, home of the nation's largest port complex, officials said Thursday.

Foss' hybrid design is similar to the technology used in cars such as Toyota Motor Corp.'s gasoline-electric Prius, although the tug's engine was more directly inspired by diesel hybrids used in some railroad vehicles.

The hybrid tug will still have diesel engines, which provide the horsepower needed to guide massive containerships or pull loaded barges. But when idling in a harbor or doing less-strenuous tasks, the hybrid will rely on electric batteries for its power.

Because diesel engines burn fuel less efficiently at lower speeds, switching to battery power may cut particle and nitrous oxide emissions by 44%, along with reducing fuel use and noise, Foss said.

The pilot project is part of continuing efforts to cut pollution from the locomotives, trucks and ships that flood the country's two busiest container ports. Use of the hybrid tugs may be expanded if they perform to the standards set by their dirtier cousins, port officials said.

The hybrid is based on a conventional tug model that usually costs about \$6 million. Adding the new hybrid engine increases the price by as much as \$3 million, said Susan Hayman, a Foss vice president.

Los Angeles and Long Beach port officials are contributing about \$1.3 million to the project. In exchange, Foss agreed to base the first hybrid tug at the twin ports for five years.

A Beating at the Pump Drivers dig deeper as prices rise

By KEN CARLSON - BEE STAFF WRITER and DALE KASLER - THE SACRAMENTO BEE
Modesto Bee, Monday, March 5, 2007

As gasoline prices headed toward \$3 a gallon, Teresa Garcia of Modesto was bracing for the hit on the family budget.

At that price, she and her husband, who commutes to work in Fairfield, will spend \$150 to \$200 a week for fuel, she said.

"I stay at home, and I'll go through \$50 a week myself," said Garcia, while buying gas for her sport utility vehicle Sunday at the Quik Stop at Burney Street and La Loma Avenue. "I would take public transportation, but in Modesto you can't get anywhere taking the bus."

The average price per gallon in California shot past \$2.80 this week, the result of rising consumption, a fresh surge in crude oil costs and a host of planned and unplanned refinery outages, including a fire at an oil refinery in Texas.

San Francisco's average price hit \$3.01 a gallon last week, the highest of any major market in the state, and analyst Denton Cinquegrana predicted the rest of California could hit \$3 soon. Consultant David Hackett of Stillwater Associates in Irvine said he thinks prices will go up an additional 5 cents or so.

Gasoline was selling for just over \$3 a gallon for regular at some stations in Modesto, but as of Sunday, the average price was \$2.88, which is 35 cents higher than a month ago, according to AAA.

The average prices were \$2.91 in Stockton and \$2.96 in Merced.

Cinquegrana said Californians are unlikely to repeat the roller-coaster experience of last year, when prices hit a record \$3.38 in May and then tumbled nearly \$1 in the next five months.

But California's gas supply remains precarious. Analysts said gas production was hurt by a January fire at Chevron's Richmond refinery and a glitch last week at ExxonMobil's Torrance plant.

At the same time, California refiners have been wrapping up planned maintenance projects and going through the annual late winter conversion to summertime fuel blends, which are costlier to make. That puts an added squeeze on production.

The spread has gotten bigger

Tim Dodge, a self-employed delivery driver in Modesto, said the rising prices put a squeeze on his business. He said he was selling recycled paper to earn extra cash — and it was all going into his tank.

Dodge said he doubted the price increases are because of supply shortages. "The oil companies are making record profits and people like me are going out of business," he said.

Rossen Townsend, who is moving from Sonoma County to Modesto, said the price increases are predictable.

"It's typical that the price of gas goes up when the weather is conducive for going on vacation," he said. "It always follows the ebb and flow of what the market will bear."

California prices have risen more quickly than in the rest of the country. The traditional spread of 20 cents to 30 cents, caused in part by California's tougher fuel specifications, has grown to 46 cents.

Two other factors are leading to higher prices, in California and across the country.

The price of crude oil has risen about \$10 a barrel in the past six weeks. And motorists are putting more upward pressure on prices. For the four weeks ending Feb. 16, gas and diesel consumption was up nearly 4 percent from a year ago, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

One consumer advocacy group, Santa Monica's Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, called this week for "immediate action by Congress and California lawmakers to regulate gasoline supplies and curb price gouging by oil companies and refiners."

The foundation added, "If oil companies won't increase their refinery capacity and gasoline storage in the state, government must do it."

But industry spokesmen said California's high prices are the result of legitimate supply constraints that can't easily be remedied.

California's unusually tough, hard-to-duplicate fuel formula, designed to reduce air pollution, makes it difficult to find replacement supplies when one of the state's 14 refineries suffers a problem, they say. And government red tape has hindered efforts to increase refining capacity in

the state, said Joe Sparano, president of Sacramento-based Western States Petroleum Association.

Even at the wintertime prices, gasoline costs are a problem for the elderly, said Virginia Head of Modesto.

She was making daily trips to Kaiser Manteca Medical Center and Emanuel Medical Center in Turlock when her 70-year-old husband was hospitalized in December, she said.

While recovering from a stroke, he spent 10 days in a Modesto nursing home. She and her daughters were making three crosstown trips a day to the nursing home to help feed him and sit with him.

"We were going through the gas like crazy," she said.

Jessie Galvez, 27, of Modesto, said the prices make him want to replace his Ford Mustang GT with a gas saver. But he probably won't go that far.

"You feel it in the pockets, but if you are working you have money coming in," he said, after topping off his gas tank Sunday.

Dairies aim to cut methane emissions

One effort will use trucks that run on fuel from cows

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Saturday, March 3, 2007

People in the dairy business are looking at two routes for improving the environment.

One is literally a truck route. Western United Dairymen, based in Modesto, is launching a study in which four milk tankers supplying Hilmar Cheese Co. will run on methane derived from cow manure.

The yearlong project could reduce air pollution from diesel fuel while helping dispose of manure in a way that protects air and water, said Michael Marsh, the group's chief executive officer.

The second effort involves a marketplace for credits that businesses could earn by reducing emissions believed to contribute to global warming.

Scientists say methane is one of the most potent of these gases if it is allowed to simply waft into the atmosphere from manure and other sources. Burning it to make energy — for heating, electricity generation and other uses — makes it much less of a threat, they say.

Under the credit system, a dairy farmer who controls methane from manure could receive certificates that could be sold to businesses that exceed emission standards.

Joseph Gallo Farms, a major cheesemaker in Atwater, already gets the credits with a manure digester installed in 2004. The farm captures about 30,000 tons of methane a year, and each ton is worth about \$3.70 at the current price on the Chicago Climate Exchange, Gallo General Manager Carl Morris said.

"It's not a fortune, but it's not insignificant either," said Morris, one of the speakers at a forum on the credits at the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center last week.

The credit income is on top of the money Gallo has saved by using methane in place of conventional fuels in its operations.

Global warming is believed to be caused by a buildup of atmospheric gases that trap the sun's heat. The phenomenon, disputed by a minority of scientists, could disrupt agriculture and wildlife habitat, intensify heat waves and storms, and raise sea levels as polar ice melts.

Carbon dioxide, mainly from fossil fuels, is believed to be the main contributor by volume. But each ton of methane, from livestock manure and other sources, does almost 20 times as much harm, Morris said.

About 20 manure digesters are in place at California dairies, a tiny slice of the total farms. They and future digesters could help the state meet its goal of reducing climate-changing gases 30 percent by 2020.

"Agriculture stands to gain a lot from being able to control emissions," said Ladi Asgill, a Modesto-based project manager for Sustainable Conservation, an environmental group that works with businesses.

The specific rules for measuring the reductions are being devised. Speakers at the forum said the system, at least for now, will not provide credits for feed crops planted by dairy farmers. The plants absorb carbon dioxide from the air as they grow.

The milk truck project is funded by a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Over the next year, liquefied methane from manure will be used in place of diesel in tankers supplying Hilmar Cheese from a Tulare County dairy farm, Marsh said.

The dairy group and several partners will try to see if this is a practical use of methane and whether it might be expanded to other wastes from farming and food processing, he said.

Science Watch: A way to pay if you pollute

SMUD invites users to atone for harmful emissions, fund green projects.

By Edie Lau - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Sunday, March 4, 2007

Responsibility for global warming is about to get personal in Sacramento.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District plans soon to start a voluntary program in which customers can calculate their greenhouse gas emissions -- then atone for the pollution by paying into local green energy and carbon storage projects.

"It enhances our customers' understanding of how their lifestyle impacts global warming," said Paul Lau, SMUD manager of customer strategy. "We want to empower customers to be part of the solution."

The program is modeled after "carbon offset" programs now cropping up nationwide.

A handful of businesses started the trend a decade or so ago, countering emissions by funding environmentally friendly projects such as solar or wind energy installations and reforestation.

The pace of participation has quickened in recent years, bringing offset programs to individuals. SMUD is taking the trend one more step in a new direction by emphasizing local use for the green bucks generated by customers.

Programs commonly fund clean energy projects around the country or abroad. SMUD is in the process of identifying projects that would be paid for by participants.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. also is starting a carbon offset program. Customers who opt into "Climate Smart" will pay a surcharge to support forestry projects in California to make up for emissions caused by their electricity and natural gas consumption. Those projects, too, have not yet been identified.

PG&E estimates the average participating customer will pay \$4.31 a month. Its program is slated to start this spring. SMUD's is scheduled to debut in December.

Sean Clark, director of offset programs at the Climate Trust, a Portland-based nonprofit organization that buys carbon offsets for companies as well as individuals, said the average American household is estimated to be responsible for emissions of about 20 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year.

Carbon dioxide, methane and related gases are called greenhouse gases because they trap heat in the atmosphere. Since the Industrial Revolution, humankind has put massive and increasing amounts of these gases into the air, chiefly by burning fossil fuels and through deforestation.

Earth's rising temperature is blamed as the major force driving changes in climate patterns, raising risks of extreme weather such as heat waves and hurricanes, and shifting latitudes and altitudes at which many plants and animals can live.

"SMUD has a direct stake in trying to do something to try to mitigate the impact," said SMUD General Manager Jan Schori. "The reasons it's imperative to me is, the temperature is going to go up in Sacramento. The hydro is going to go down."

SMUD obtains 25 percent to 30 percent of its electricity through hydroelectric generation. If the Sierra snowpack diminishes, electricity made by the force of water running through turbines will be less plentiful.

Victoria Evans, assistant director of the Air Quality Research Center at the University of California, Davis, said the concept of local offset projects is becoming more popular because of "co-benefits" -- the idea that green projects such as tree planting or renewable energy installations help improve local air quality and livability, on top of avoiding greenhouse gas emissions.

Funding nearby projects also may have more credibility with would-be participants. Clark at the Climate Trust said not all offset programs offer independent verification that the money is being used for legitimate purposes.

Obadiah Bartholomy, a mechanical engineer in SMUD's renewable generation department and the staff member who came up with the idea of a Sacramento-based offset program, offered examples of possible projects:

- Providing electricity at truck stops for heating and cooling truck cabins so drivers need not keep their diesel-burning engines running to stay comfortable during rest stops.
- Helping dairy farmers pay for "digesters" that capture methane from decomposing cow manure to generate electricity.
- Funding customer rebates for solar hot-water heaters.
- Helping industrial customers pay for energy-efficiency upgrades.

Keith Roberts, energy coordinator for the city of Sacramento, said the city is interested in buying offsets to help reach its goal of reducing by 25 percent its annual greenhouse gas output of 80,000 metric tons by 2030.

SMUD's new program might be a good fit, Roberts said: "It's nice to try and stay local."

The concept of carbon offsets already has proved popular in some quarters -- and not just because it helps ease ecological guilt.

Evans, the UC Davis scientist, paid \$20 last year to a program called Driving Green to counter a year's worth of emissions from her Prius.

"They snagged me at a conference," she said, admitting that what attracted her wasn't the virtue of offsetting her car's pollution, but the green T-shirt that came with the purchase.

It proclaims: "I emit no gas."

Corporate ecology gets seriously green

An environmental ethic is growing on business

L.A. Times, Sunday, March 4, 2007

Since the first Earth Day almost 37 years ago, U.S. companies have been eager to trumpet their environmental good deeds, even when they were more about public relations than clean air or water.

But increasingly, corporate America is going green in new, serious and costly ways. After years of being prodded — and in some cases punished — by protesters, lawmakers, regulators and, now, even Wall Street, businesses are looking beyond the bottom line.

"You see a growing awareness that these issues are significant and evolving, a sense that the public has expectations of responsible corporate citizenship and that increasingly extends to the environment," said Tom Jacob, a Western regional executive for DuPont Co., a chemical company with a history of being criticized by environmental activists and regulators.

And it's not happening just in California, the Northwest and other ecologically minded areas. In Texas, a group of private investors last week agreed to pay about \$32 billion for the largest utility in the state. The private equity firms pledged to back U.S. legislation on global warming and to build no more than three of 11 planned coal-fired power plants.

Environmental concerns are spreading quickly, said Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club. "Other states now think that California is onto something that is good for business," he said. They "are talking about the fact that since 1970, California's economy has grown faster per capita than their states."

Although some activists and business executives are skeptical that a change in attitudes is at hand, business is increasingly paying closer attention to the environment — including the environment's effect on the financial bottom line.

Amy Domini, manager for Domini Social Investments, which manages \$1.6 billion in investments intended to be socially responsible, calls corporate environmentalism "the big hot topic on Wall Street these days."

Just how hot became evident Monday after private equity investors led by Texas Pacific Group and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. announced that they were buying Texas' TXU Corp. in a deal that included commitments to scrap most of the coal-fired power plants planned by TXU.

Environmentalists, who sat at the table during part of the negotiations, also won a promise from investors to double investments in wind power and other sources of alternative energy.

The agreement is the latest sign that corporations and environmentalists can do business together, said Denis Hayes, the coordinator of the first Earth Day in 1970.

"There is the beginnings of a new corporate ethic driven in some large measure by responsiveness to consumers and by the infiltration of a new generation of people into management," he said.

The emerging environmental ethic is starting to influence corporate decision-making across the country.

Chevron Corp., BP and other oil companies are spending billions of dollars to develop alternatives to petroleum-based fuels. Farmers are turning fields of corn into ethanol used to run cars and trucks.

Auto companies, led by Toyota Motor Corp., are selling tens of thousands of almost emission-free hybrid vehicles and are moving toward developing so-called plug-in hybrids that can take commuters to and from work on a single charge.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the nation's largest retailer, has embarked on a \$500-million-a-year campaign to save energy in all of its U.S. stores and distribution centers.

And even Hollywood is adding a touch of green to its color palette. The organizers of last week's Oscar ceremony boasted that they hosted a "carbon neutral" event by using recycled paper, ferrying people in hybrid vehicles and serving organic food.

The entertainment industry has been instrumental in raising public consciousness about climate change. Hollywood producers Laurie David and Lawrence Bender, for example, made "An Inconvenient Truth," former Vice President Al Gore's Oscar-winning, top-grossing documentary about global warming.

Environmental investments by venture capitalists are soaring. This week, Cleantech Venture Network, a green-business clearinghouse, reported that North American and European investments in alternative energy and eco-friendly technology reached a record \$3.6 billion last year, up 45% from 2005.

Much of that investment came out of Silicon Valley and elsewhere in California, where business executives have decades of experience dealing with tough laws to control pollution, clean up toxic waste and protect the public from cancer-causing chemicals.

California and, increasingly, its neighbors are continuing that kind of environmental leadership. This week, governors from five Western states pledged to cooperate in enlisting government agencies and the private sector in the fight to curb global warming. The governors of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington said they were taking action because of a lack of leadership from President Bush and Congress.

"We are working on every angle to fight global warming," California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said.

The TXU deal and the governors' agreement are two signs that environmental concerns are forcing business to move beyond the public relations campaigns that critics denounce as so-called green-washing.

No longer is it enough for Chevron to brag about how it protects the endangered El Segundo Blue butterflies living near a refinery. Now, it's about making major investments in technologies that will calm public fears about rising ocean levels, an effect of global warming.

"There has been an evolution here in our approach," Chevron spokesman Donald Campbell said. "The cost savings, the impact on the environment, the public's concern about emissions and the business opportunities were all starting to come together in different parts of the company within the last few years."

Chevron, based in San Ramon, Calif., has invested in researching the use of biodiesel and next-generation ethanol fuels. It has reduced its own energy use and runs a subsidiary that sells energy-saving projects to governments and companies.

"We've gotten beyond green-washing," said David G. Hawkins, head of the climate program for the Natural Resources Defense Council, who helped negotiate the TXU sale. "Businesses are realizing that global-warming solutions have to be a core element of a business strategy."

Companies like TXU that have followed a traditional investment model in which the environment isn't a high priority are seeing their plans dashed by "public opinion, legal challenges and jitters in the financial community," Hawkins said.

Building all 11 coal plants could have become a financial disaster if the federal government eventually began to tax and regulate greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

Now, industry is "becoming increasingly aware of the opportunities with getting on this bandwagon — that it could be good for business," said Dorothy Rothrock, vice president of the California Manufacturers & Technology Assn.

Power plant developer to address concerns

Hayward residents worry about air pollution

By Matt O'Brien, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, March 5, 2007

HAYWARD — Controversial plans to build a gas-burning power plant are headed for a showdown Tuesday as the Hayward City Council must choose whether to approve or deny the project.

Council members could also delay their vote, something Texas-based developer Tierra Energy is urging them to do following a groundswell of neighborhood concerns about air pollution.

"We want to spend more time working with the local community to address some of their concerns and needs," said Tierra president David Marks in an interview Friday, on the same day City Hall administrators attempted to sort through more than 100 letters voicing opposition to the project.

Marks believes an upcoming report by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District will provide the city with a more "favorable" impression of his proposed 115-megawatt, gas-fired plant, which would be used by Pacific Gas & Electric to provide the Bay Area with electricity during periods of peak demand.

But several city leaders remain skeptical about the project, known as the Eastshore Energy Center, and a growing number of residents from the nearby Eden Gardens neighborhood are hostile to the idea.

Michael Toth, a software engineer who lives less than a mile downwind from the proposed Clawiter Road plant, said he has a host of unaddressed concerns after reading the California Energy Commission's voluminous reports studying Tierra's plans. Among his concerns is the amount of ammonia that would be used as a catalyst to reduce the amount of nitrogen oxide produced by the combustion process.

"A tremendous amount of ammonia to the tune of 300 pounds a day is going to shoot up into the air and come down over a 4-kilometer radius," Toth said. "That's an ammonia fountain. That, to me, should not be an approved land use."

Frustration over the lack of clear information about the proposed plant's true impacts on the area have been a problem for both supporters and opponents of the plant. Toth accuses Tierra of downplaying the environmental problems the plant might bring to the area, but plant supporters say it should be state scientists, not city officials, who make that determination.

City administrators have opposed the project based mostly on land-use concerns, calling the plant a potential aesthetic "deterrent" to the effort to attract high-tech business to west Hayward. And it was zoning concerns that divided the Hayward Planning Commission and caused it to reach a stalemate last month — three voted in the plant's favor, three voted against it and one abstained, citing a lack of information to make a fair decision.

Tierra's proposed peaker plant is one of two power plants now being proposed for west Hayward. The other proposed facility, which was already welcomed by city officials, is a much larger, 600-megawatt combined-cycle plant. But it is located closer to the shoreline, a greater distance from homes and schools.

"Hayward is the first city after you cross the bridge. It should be the most beautiful," wrote Ana Rosales, a resident of Bradford Avenue, in one of the many letters city officials received last week. "We, the working class, always have to pay the price for everything."

Some asked why no one is trying to build plants in more affluent Pleasanton, San Ramon or Dublin, other residents promised to vote out any elected official who votes in favor of the project, and still others raised larger issues about the effect of fossil-burning plants on the environment.

"Please do not put your heads into the sand while the polar caps melt," wrote Esther Ho, a resident of Thayer Avenue.

Marks, the Tierra president, said his company is looking at providing some kind of "renewable energy" program in Hayward as mitigation for the plant. He said Tierra also builds wind power projects, but that gas-fired peaker plants are still necessary to keep the local electricity grid reliable.

No matter what decision the Hayward City Council makes on Tuesday, it is ultimately the California Energy Commission that has authority to make or break the plant.

Although the commission rarely overrides local authorities, it has happened before, said spokeswoman Susanne Garfield. Most recently, the state pushed forward two South Bay power plants that the San Jose City Council originally opposed.

PSEG CFO: Coal plant cleanups could exceed \$1.1 billion

Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 2, 2007

NEWARK, N.J. - The parent of Public Service Electric & Gas may have to spend more than \$1.1 billion to reduce emissions at two coal-fired power plants environmentalists say are among the dirtiest in New Jersey.

Thomas O'Flynn, chief financial officer of Public Service Enterprise Group, said new cost projections put the price tag at \$703 million for pollution controls at its Jersey City plant, plus \$450 million to overhaul its coal-fired plant in Hamilton Township, Mercer County.

O'Flynn made the comments Thursday at a New York investors conference, and The Star-Ledger of Newark reported them in Friday's editions.

The PSEG subsidiary that operates the plants, PSEG Power, has agreed to upgrade pollution controls to reduce smog and other emissions from the plants under a deal with state and federal regulators reached on Nov. 30, 2006. That agreement, which EPA regional administrator Alan J. Steinberg has said would improve air quality for New Jersey and neighboring states, included a \$6 million civil penalty against the company.

The penalty was levied because PSEG failed to comply with a 2002 agreement to install pollution controls at both coal-fired plants, doing so only at Hamilton.

The newest agreement prevented a shutdown of the Jersey City plant on Dec. 31. However, if the controls aren't installed there, the plant will be required to close either at the end of 2008 or, if regulators decide it's needed because of rising energy demand, by 2010. O'Flynn told the investors a decision on whether to do the upgrade will be made over the summer.

Together, the two plants produce more than 1,200 megawatts of relatively low-cost power at a time when electricity demand is increasing but few new plants are starting up.

Environmentalists gets another chance at TVA lawsuit

Duncan Mansfield, Associated Press
Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 2, 2007

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. - A divided federal appeals court on Friday revived an environmental lawsuit against the nation's largest public utility for failing to add pollution controls when it overhauled a coal-fired power plant in Tennessee nearly two decades ago.

By a 2-1 vote, a panel of judges on the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati said the statute of limitations hadn't run out on the continuing emissions from the Tennessee Valley Authority's Bull Run fossil plant in Clinton, Tenn.

Judge Alice Batchelder said in a dissenting opinion that if there was a Clean Air Act violation it happened only once - in 1988 when TVA made the upgrades to the plant - and the statute of limitations would have ended five years later.

But writing for the majority, Judge Karen Nelson Moore said the alleged violation "manifests itself each day the plant operates."

Under the court's interpretation, TVA could be liable for damages dating to 1996, reflecting the five-year window on a 2001 lawsuit filed by the National Parks Conservation Association, the Sierra Club and Our Children's Earth Foundation.

The appeals judge ordered the case sent back to U.S. District Judge Tom Varlan in Knoxville to consider the case's merits. Varlan will have to decide if TVA's replacement of 58,000 feet of tubing in Bull Run's boiler - about a quarter of the total - was significant enough to trigger Clean Air Act requirements for pollution controls.

"Nobody is wanting to shut off any lights and close plants," said Don Barger, regional director of the National Parks Conservation Association. "What we have got to do is prevent the endless delay (in meeting environmental standards) that has happened in the past."

Utilities operating old coal-fired power plants "aren't going to be able to slide under the radar anymore," vowed Ginny Cramer, a Washington spokesman for the Sierra Club. "They are not going to be able to legally extend the life of their old plants. They can't just patch them up forever."

TVA spokeswoman Barbara Martocci said that "regardless of the outcome of this case" the federal utility will complete a \$300 million state-of-the-art scrubber to reduce haze and acid rain-causing emissions at Bull Run by 2009. Equipment to reduce smog-forming emissions was installed there in 2004.

The 870-megawatt Bull Run plant, one of TVA's closest fossil plants to the pollution-prone Great Smoky Mountains National Park, generates enough electricity to light about 500,000 homes.

The Environmental Protection Agency previously cited TVA, and other utilities, for making such "major modifications" in their coal-fired power plants that they would be required under the Clean Air Act to install "best available control technology" to reduce emissions.

The U.S. Supreme Court let the issue die in 2004 when it refused to consider whether government-owned TVA could disregard a demand by EPA, another government entity, to clean up its power plants.

The high court, however, has another case pending, Environmental Defense vs. Duke Energy Corp. of North Carolina, that considers a similar issue based on a citizen petition.

"That could drive a lot of different kinds of discussion around the country toward settlements and cleanup strategies," Barger said.

Follow state on warming, Congress told

California legislators want tough new federal limits that don't dilute local rules

Zachary Coile, Chronicle Washington bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, March 2, 2007

Washington -- California's top legislators urged federal lawmakers Thursday to follow the state's leading role in the fight against global warming by passing stringent national limits on greenhouse gases.

But state Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, and Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, also cautioned Congress during their testimony on Capitol Hill not to enact any legislation that would block even stronger measures taken by state and local governments to combat climate change.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, called state and local officials from California, New Jersey, Washington and Iowa to testify about their actions in the absence of federal legislation addressing global warming.

"They are sending us a signal that we should heed," Boxer said at the hearing.

New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine, a former U.S. senator, began the hearing by describing the executive order he signed last month setting targets to cut his state's greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020 and 80 percent below 2006 levels by 2050.

"I may not be the 'Terminator' of greenhouse gases," Corzine said, in a reference to California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's support for global warming initiatives, "but we are working very hard to be part of a broader movement."

Corzine and Perata echoed the concerns of many state and local officials that Congress would pass federal greenhouse gas limits weaker than those already approved by many states, cities and counties.

"I ask only one thing," Perata told the senators on Boxer's committee. "Whatever you do, please don't do anything to pre-empt the strides that are being made in New Jersey, Washington, California and elsewhere."

After the hearing, Boxer insisted she wants legislation to set national standards but would not prohibit state and local officials from going further.

"I'll never support pre-emption. I never do, because I think that's ridiculous," she told reporters. "We want to have the best environmental laws. We don't want to cramp this laboratory in the cities and in the counties. ... I want to be a partner to the states, not an impediment."

In recent years, Boxer and other California lawmakers have battled efforts by the previous GOP-controlled Congress to pre-empt state laws on food-safety labeling and consumer financial privacy as well as state and local rules that give tip-based workers a higher minimum wage.

The hearing highlighted how much of the country already is moving toward addressing climate change. Twenty-nine states have climate action plans, including 14 states that have set targets for reducing greenhouse gases.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels told the panel how his city has cut greenhouse gases by local government by 60 percent, bought hybrid and biofuel vehicles for the city's fleet and started building a new light rail system. Seattle was among the first cities to address climate change, but now 409 cities -- including 36 of the country's 50 largest cities such as New York, Los Angeles,

Chicago and San Francisco representing more than 60 million people -- have signed a U.S. Conference of Mayors agreement to reduce their emissions.

But the committee's ranking Republican, Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, a skeptic of global warming, warned that cities and states that cut their greenhouse gases risk ruining their economies and raising energy costs for consumers.

"These programs haven't accomplished anything," he said. "They are simply empty promises that won't be kept."

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., a presidential contender in the 2008 race, responded that California has managed to grow its economy for the last 30 years while at the same time pushing conservation programs that have kept electricity usage flat.

"So when people say, 'We can't do this,' I say, 'Well, I don't think that's true. In fact, California is doing it,' " she said.

Schwarzenegger said a decision announced Thursday by USG Corp. to build a new drywall plant in Stockton shows that climate change laws are not discouraging businesses from moving to California.

"There are always going to be people who disagree with you or question the science," the governor said during an appearance in San Francisco. "These are probably the same people who are still questioning whether the Earth is really round."

Boxer has scheduled several more climate change hearings -- including a March 21 hearing with former Vice President Al Gore -- before she begins to craft legislation.

The senator said she sees signs of a shift among some Republicans on the panel toward action. At Thursday's hearing, Sen. George Voinovich, R-Ohio, said Congress needs to invest heavily in new low-carbon technologies and perhaps take even stronger actions to force industry to cut emissions.

"If we wait for the markets, it's not going to happen ... we don't have the time," Voinovich said. "We've got a role as the federal government to get on this thing now."

Chronicle political writer John Wildermuth contributed to this report from San Francisco.

When Being Green Puts You in the Black

By Daniel C. Esty

The Washington Post, March 4, 2007

Are America's capitalist titans really going green?

This week's announcement that two of the country's largest private equity firms, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and Texas Pacific Group, will purchase the Dallas-based utility TXU made headlines, and not just because the \$45 billion deal represents the largest private equity transaction in history. The even bigger news was the environmental dimension of the takeover proposal. It calls for scaling back construction of new coal-fired power plants, ramping up commitments to wind and solar power, supporting mandatory controls on greenhouse gas emissions and promoting energy efficiency.

One can overdo the hyperbole here, of course. Henry Kravis -- allegedly the model for the 1980s bestseller "Barbarians at the Gate" -- isn't just a Green Knight riding into the Lone Star State to save it from a polluted future. He's a smart businessman who wants to make money. And that is just the point.

This deal shows that we are in the midst of a revolution. Environmental progress no longer depends on hundreds of bureaucrats at the Environmental Protection Agency mandating what piece of pollution-control equipment will be on each smokestack. Government must continue to set standards. But the burden of innovation and technology development will shift to the private sector.

Moving from "command and control" regulations to a market approach to environmental protection means that there will be real costs for pollution -- including a price to be paid for greenhouse-gas emissions -- for every business. But these costs sharpen the economic incentives for pollution control research and development, and create big opportunities for companies that come up with solutions for society's environmental problems.

At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, CEOs fell over one another stepping up to the issue of climate change. Companies large and small are redoubling their environmental efforts in the face of Wal-Mart's demands that its suppliers reduce waste and improve energy efficiency. Billions of dollars of venture capital are flowing into alternative energy and pollution control technology. Leading companies -- call them "WaveRiders" -- have begun to fold environmental thinking into their corporate strategies.

They recognize that we face a carbon-constrained future. While the Bush administration remains opposed to the emissions limits of the Kyoto Protocol, the European Union has imposed greenhouse-gas-reduction obligations on its industries and set up a carbon market to facilitate cost-effective implementation of these requirements. Dozens of American states have likewise taken action in response to the threat of climate change. In fact, five Western states, following the lead of California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, announced plans last week to set up their own system for trading carbon emissions. And more than 400 U.S. mayors have committed their cities to emissions-reduction targets.

The next U.S. president is almost certain to bring the nation back into climate-change negotiations and commit to a "beyond Kyoto" set of greenhouse gas reductions.

With the prospect that carbon emissions will soon bear a price -- and perhaps an escalating one -- the decision by the new owners of TXU to steer away from a focus on carbon-intensive coal-based power makes good business sense. In fact, leading-edge companies nationwide are factoring in carbon charges and thus higher prices for burning fossil fuels into their business planning models. This new approach has several important implications. By making companies pay for every increment of pollution, society puts an economic premium on vigorous environmental effort, and forces executives to make pollution control and management of natural resources a core part of their strategy.

Companies that fail to grasp this point put themselves at competitive risk. Ford Motor Co. teeters on the edge of bankruptcy because it did not spot the public's emerging desire for more fuel-efficient and less-polluting vehicles. At the same time, Toyota reported record profits last year because it put these issues at the center of its design strategy, which includes hybrid engines, "lightweighting" of its vehicles through the use of carbon fiber and other advanced materials, and "smart systems" that use computer power to improve efficiency and performance.

The environmental imperative on business arises not just from tighter regulation, but also from the reality of higher energy costs, shortages of natural resources and pressure from environmentally oriented stakeholders, such as those who shaped the TXU deal. With energy costs rising, an expanded focus on conservation and efficiency will pay off in many areas. From high-efficiency LED lighting to smart appliances and green buildings, opportunities to link information-age technology to environmental challenges abound.

A growing number of companies are finding their business plans pinched by limits imposed by nature. For example, Coca-Cola's ability to sell soft drinks depends on access to water, something that cannot be taken for granted in markets such as India. Today, many companies are operating in communities that care deeply about the environment. And employees increasingly want to work for companies that have good environmental records in line with their values. Top corporate leaders recognize that environmental issues represent more than a set of

regulations to follow or costs to bear. There are enormous profit opportunities for companies that respond to climate change, water shortages, air pollution and other problems. Jeffrey Immelt, chairman and chief executive of General Electric Co., for example, is selling off his plastics business to focus on high-growth, high-margin environmental goods and services, such as more efficient jet engines, wind power, solar energy and water purification.

This new approach to environmental progress has several important implications. By making companies pay for every increment of pollution, society puts a premium on vigorous environmental effort and forces executives to make pollution control and natural resource management a core part of their strategy. So KKR and TPG have most certainly have not gone soft. The masters of the universe have not given in to greenmail in a fit of political correctness. To the contrary, they are super-sophisticated business people who have learned that success in the marketplace now depends on getting corporate environmental strategy right.

Only 33% in poll favor strict emission controls But 78 percent see global warming as serious threat

Chuck Squatriglia, staff writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, March 2, 2007

Nearly 4 out of 5 Bay Area residents believe global warming poses a significant threat to the region, but only about one-third support a strict mandate to force California businesses to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent, according to a poll released today.

The survey by the Bay Area Council, a business-supported policy advocacy group, found 78 percent of residents think global warming is a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" threat to the region's quality of life and economy.

The Bay Area Council commissioned the poll with an eye toward influencing lawmakers as they move to implement the California Global Warming Solutions Act, said John Grubb, the organization's vice president of communications.

The landmark legislation Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed in September requires cutting statewide greenhouse gas emissions 25 percent by 2020. The law enjoyed bipartisan support and was endorsed by scientists and the business community. But it does not outline how to roll back emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other gases that cause the planet to warm.

The poll found 49 percent of respondents favor allowing businesses that meet or exceed the 25 percent goal to earn "credits" that they could then sell to companies that do not meet it. One-third of respondents favored an across-the-board mandate that all businesses ease their emissions by 25 percent. The remainder didn't like either option or had no opinion.

Such a trading system is widely used in Europe and Japan. The council favors it because such an approach encourages those companies that can meet or exceed the benchmark to do so without adversely affecting those that cannot.

"On this issue, Bay Area residents and the Bay Area business community are in perfect agreement," said Jim Wunderman, council president and chief executive officer. "A market system ... puts a steep price on emitting greenhouse gases, harnessing economics to drive California's famous spirit of innovation to reduce carbon emissions across all companies."

The poll by the nonpartisan Field Research Corp. surveyed 600 Bay Area residents in both English and Spanish. The results have a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

Eleven percent of respondents believed global warming is "not too serious," and 7 percent said it is not at all serious. Two dozen people -- 4 percent of those polled -- said they did not know.

The Bay Area Council comprises chief executives from more than 275 of the region's largest employers.

Field Poll Global warming

A new poll out today shows many Bay Area residents are concerned about global warming.

Q: "How big of a threat do you think global warming is to the Bay Area's future economy and quality of life?"

Very serious: 49%

Somewhat serious: 30%

Not too serious: 11%

Not at all serious: 7%

Don't know: 4%

Q: "How should California achieve its 25% reduction in greenhouse gasses?"

Credit trading system: 49%

Uniform cut: 33%

Neither: 9%

Don't know: 8%

Source: Field Research Corp.

A WARMING WORLD

China about to pass U.S. as world's top generator of greenhouse gases

By Robert Collier, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Monday, March 5, 2007

Far more than previously acknowledged, the battle against global warming will be won or lost in China, even more so than in the West, new data show.

A report released last week by Beijing authorities indicated that as its economy continues to expand at a red-hot pace, China is highly likely to overtake the United States this year or in 2008 as the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

This information, along with data from the International Energy Agency, the Paris-based alliance of oil importing nations, also revealed that China's greenhouse gas emissions have recently been growing by a total amount much greater than that of all industrialized nations put together.

"The magnitude of what's happening in China threatens to wipe out what's happening internationally," said David Fridley, leader of the China Energy Group at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

"Today's global warming problem has been caused mainly by us in the West, with the cumulative (carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases) in the atmosphere, but China is contributing to the global warming problem of tomorrow."

New statistics released in Beijing on Wednesday by China's National Bureau of Statistics show that China's consumption of fossil fuels rose in 2006 by 9.3 percent, about the same rate as in previous years -- and about eight times higher than the U.S. increase of 1.2 percent.

While China's total greenhouse gas emissions were only 42 percent of the U.S. level in 2001, they had soared to an estimated 97 percent of the American level by 2006.

"The new data are not encouraging," said Yang Fuqiang, China director for the Energy Foundation, a San Francisco organization that works extensively with Lawrence Berkeley scientists and the Chinese government on energy-saving programs. "China will overtake the United States much faster than expected as the No. 1 emitter."

China's top environmental official admitted Wednesday that the results show the government's environment agenda of the past few years has been ineffective.

"Economic growth is still excessive ... and there is slow progress in restructuring obsolete and backward production capacity," said Zhou Shengxian, director of the State Environmental Protection Agency.

"The new data show that many local officials are more concerned about economic development, about increasing gross domestic product, and see energy efficiency and environmental protection as a lower priority," said Yang, of the Energy Foundation.

In an attempt to force local governments to obey energy-efficiency edicts from Beijing, the government recently announced that local officials' pay and promotion will be judged in part based on their environmental record, not just their economic success. The first evaluation period will be in July.

China's emergence as a global warming polluter has been intensely controversial in international negotiations over climate change.

The Bush administration refused to join the Kyoto Protocol in part because the pact committed only industrialized nations, but not fast-growing poorer nations like China, to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases.

Chinese officials, however, note that the country's per capita emissions are far below those in the West, and they say any move to adopt mandatory cuts now would restrain its economic growth and in effect penalize its 1.3 billion people for being poor. The officials say China must be given the chance to attain the West's standard of prosperity before it will cut emissions.

"It must be pointed out that climate change has been caused by the long-term historic emissions of developed countries and their high per-capita emissions," China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Jiang Yu, said last month.

"Developed countries bear an unshirkable responsibility," she said, adding that they should "lead the way in assuming responsibility for emissions cuts."

International negotiations have begun over a successor pact to the Kyoto Protocol, and industrial nations -- and most environmentalists -- are insisting that big developing nations such as China, India and Brazil commit to reductions.

China's hard line may finally be softening, however.

The Chinese government recently admitted that global warming will dramatically impact China's ability to feed its people. A government report released in January said that climate change will cause China's production of wheat, corn and rice to drop by as much as 37 percent over the next 50 years.

Precipitation over the country's northern grainbelt is expected to drop markedly, causing worsened droughts and dust storms, while increased flooding and typhoons are expected in the subtropical south, the report said.

What China needs, many experts say, is help from the United States and other Western nations to help adopt energy-saving technologies. China's energy consumption per unit of production is 40 percent higher than the world's average, and about 70 percent of its energy comes from coal, usually burned in highly inefficient power plants.

The U.S. Energy Department carries out some technical cooperation with China on issues such as coal, but most forms of U.S. assistance to China have been barred under sanctions imposed by Congress after the 1989 Tiananmen killings in Beijing.

Although Chinese officials say their country should receive foreign grants and subsidies, the Central Bank has the world's highest foreign-exchange reserves, at \$1.1 trillion, so most experts say China needs training and technology rather than cash.

China has much to learn from California, said Barbara Finamore, director of the China program of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The state's Energy Commission and Public Utilities Commission have exchanged information with their counterparts in China in recent years, but Finamore said much more is needed to help spread California's energy-efficient ways.

"This is what China is missing," Finamore said, referring to the state's complex mix of efficiency standards for buildings, appliances and industry. "We have no national energy-efficiency program, but 20 U.S. states use them, and China is on the brink of using them."

Chinese Premier Focuses on Pollution and the Poor

By JIM YARDLEY

N. Y. Times, Monday, March 5, 2007

BEIJING, Monday, March 5 — Prime Minister Wen Jiabao conceded Monday that China was failing on important energy and pollution goals and declared that the country must become more energy-efficient and quickly improve environmental protection to safeguard the long-term health of its booming economy.

Mr. Wen, making China's equivalent of the State of the Union address, also pledged more government spending on education and health care, particularly for poorer residents in rural areas.

His nationally televised speech, which opened the annual gathering of the National People's Congress in Beijing, was generally short on specifics but emphasized past themes like social equality and the need to reduce the income gap between rural and urban residents.

Mr. Wen has spoken before about the importance of environmental protection, but he gave the issue greater emphasis in his speech, describing plans to shut down "backward" steel and iron foundries and inefficient, polluting power plants. He said development projects would have to meet national environmental standards and vowed that China must "bring pollution under control."

"We must make conserving energy, decreasing energy consumption, protecting the environment and using land intensively the breakthrough point and main fulcrum for changing the pattern of economic growth," Mr. Wen told the opening session of the Communist Party-controlled national legislature.

Yet the difficulty of recalibrating China's soaring economy was also evident in Mr. Wen's remarks. Economic growth reached 10.7 percent last year, and while Mr. Wen predicted a more modest 8 percent growth rate for 2007, he acknowledged that such projections are merely goals for

budgeting purposes. China has repeatedly exceeded growth projections in recent years, and the government has struggled to keep a lid on the economy.

Mr. Wen described serious structural problems in the economy, but he emphasized that nothing was more important than maintaining the nation's boom, which many experts consider essential to the Communist Party's continued rule.

Environmental protection and energy conservation have earned an higher profile from government leaders in recent years as it has become evident that China's economy is devouring its resources and polluting its land and air. The most recent five-year plan calls for a 20 percent reduction in energy consumption per unit of gross domestic product.

But Mr. Wen acknowledged that China had already failed to meet the reduction goals in the first year of that program. It also failed to meet a goal of reducing the overall discharge of pollutants by 2 percent last year, he said.

He blamed the setbacks on the slow pace of industrial restructuring, the growth of heavy industry and the failure of some local governments to abide by environmental laws.

Mr. Wen spent little time discussing the usually volatile issue of Taiwan and placed only passing emphasis on the country's military modernization efforts. He did not mention this year's large 17.8 percent increase in military spending, but said the People's Liberation Army was in the midst of changes to transform it into a force capable of fighting the high-tech wars of the 21st century.

He called for continued overhauls of banking, currency valuation and the financial sectors and also addressed the trade issues that have become so contentious in the United States. "We must optimize the mix of imports and exports, change the pattern of China's foreign trade growth and strive to reduce our excessively large trade surplus," he said.

Mr. Wen spent more time expanding upon last year's theme of building "a new socialist countryside," the slogan for the government's efforts to enliven the lagging rural economy. He said the economy had lifted incomes for both city and rural residents but acknowledged that an array of problems pressed down on common citizens, particularly the rural poor.

He warned that illegal land confiscation had to be stopped. He praised the real estate industry as an essential part of the national economy, but he called on developers, who have built expensive projects all over China, to also focus on building affordable housing and not to threaten "primary farmland."

In the past, Mr. Wen has used his speeches before the National People's Congress to announce plans to repeal the agricultural tax on farmers and to extend free schooling to students in the poorest regions.

This year, he said the government would stop collecting tuition and fees from all rural students. He said the government would also expand pilot projects to build a rural cooperative health care system and would begin establishing the equivalent of a welfare program for the poorest people.

Corruption, meanwhile, has become a dominant concern in recent months, as President Hu Jintao has ordered a nationwide crackdown that many political analysts consider as much about purging political enemies as cleaning up the government.

Mr. Wen repeated demands that government officials act within the law and mentioned the need to end official extravagance. The two-week legislative session that opened Monday is usually a rubber-stamp gathering to approve initiatives already vetted by top leaders in Beijing. Delegates are expected to approve a major law protecting private property rights, as well as a new law equalizing corporate tax rates on foreign and domestic companies.

The property law, debated for years, was tabled at last year's congress after it sparked an unusually public ideological debate about the merits of capitalism and socialism. Detractors have warned that the law would provide legal protection for officials who have misappropriated state assets and would also deepen the country's income divide. Advocates say China's embrace of market economics makes legal protections for private property a necessity.

Activists seek to clear air for commuters

By Jeff Nesmith, Cox News Service
Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 2, 2007

WASHINGTON - Urban commuters breathe air that contains levels of dangerous dust and soot that is often eight times higher than downtown air, environmental activists said Wednesday.

Reporting on surveys in four cities -- New York, Boston, Columbus, Ohio and Austin, Texas -- the Clean Air Task Force said that the average commuter inhales two-thirds of his or her daily dose of these pollutants while in a car or a diesel-powered public transit system.

The results emerged from multiple trips along urban commuter routes, either by cars equipped with pollution monitoring devices or public transit system riders carrying the devices in backpacks, said Conrad Schneider, an official with the Boston-based advocacy group.

He called for retrofitting diesel trucks and buses with exhaust filters, which have been shown to reduce particulate matter by up to 90 percent. He said the filtered exhaust stacks cost from \$5,000 to \$7,000 each.

Without widespread retrofitting, he said, expressway commuters should keep their windows up and car ventilation systems set to recirculate air inside the vehicle, rather than drawing in outside air.

A spokesman for the Diesel Technology Forum, an industry group, agreed that putting the filters on existing vehicles would greatly reduce the particulate "burden" of urban air and noted that Congress has authorized spending up to \$200 million a year in aid to the trucking industry for this purpose.

Allen Schaeffer, executive director of the group, also noted that state emission inspection programs are set up remove the dirtiest trucks from highways -- but only 16 states have them.

Tests in the four cities measured four different kinds of dust pollution associated with diesel exhaust: fine particles, which are less than 2.5 millionths of a meter in diameter, "ultra-fine particles," which are less than one ten-millionths of a meter in diameter, "black carbon" and a family of carcinogenic chemicals known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

Levels of fine particles inside commuter vehicles averaged about one-and-a-half times the averages in downtown air but often "spiked" to levels eight or more times higher, according to the Clean Air Task Force surveys.

In Boston, peak readings inside cars were 14 times downtown averages.

Similar results were recorded for the other pollutants.

Fine and ultra-fine particles, which penetrate deep into lungs and spread through the blood, have been linked to heart disease. Spikes in urban hospitalizations have been shown to correspond to sudden increases in particulate pollution.

Under Environmental Protection Agency regulations finalized in 2001, all new highway diesel engines must be built to reduce particulate pollution by at least 90 percent, beginning this year. However, it will be 2030 before the existing fleet of trucks is expected to be replaced by vehicles built to the new standards.

EPA estimates that when the new diesel regulations are fully in effect, they will save 8,500 American lives a year.

Regulation of fine-particle dust and soot has been one of the Bush administration's most controversial environmental issues.

Under court order to review standards, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson announced that the agency would not restrict allowable annual averages of this form of pollution below the current limit of 15 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

The decision contradicted recommendations by EPA staff scientists as well as a committee of outside advisers, which issued a formal statement protesting the decision and calling for more stringent standards.

Group dreams up 'green' van

Automakers can cut emissions by 40% with existing technology, says a scientists' group, as it unveils a blueprint for a climate-friendly model.

By John O'Dell, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Friday, March 2, 2007

As concern over the dangers of global warming grows, the auto industry has an opportunity to take a leading role in fighting it, a prominent environmental group said Thursday.

Instead of suing to block state-mandated reductions in carbon dioxide, a primary cause of climate warming, automakers could pull enough existing technology from their parts shelves to cut emissions of the so-called greenhouse gas by 40%, the Union of Concerned Scientists said.

To prove the point, the Washington-based group unveiled a blueprint for a climate-friendly minivan it calls the Vanguard.

It would run on a blend on 85% gasoline and 15% ethanol and could achieve 22 miles per gallon in combined city and highway driving. That's the equivalent of 28 mpg on conventional gasoline.

Technologies would include a turbocharged six-cylinder engine that would shut down two cylinders when cruising, a fuel-efficient six-speed automatic transmission and electric power steering.

Although those technologies are in use today, "they've never been all put together in one vehicle," said the group's Spencer Quong, an engineer in Berkeley who designed the Vanguard.

He estimated that in California alone, use of the Vanguard technologies would eliminate 73 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2030 — an amount equal to taking 19.1 million of today's passenger vehicles off the road.

Chris Martin, a spokesman for Honda Motor Co.'s U.S. arm in Torrance, said that the vehicle the environmental group designed existed only as a computer model and questioned whether it could be easily and economically built.

"But we support all efforts to improve the environment, and we already have many of these technologies in use on our vehicles," Martin said.

Honda boasts the auto industry's best overall fuel economy and would be least affected by laws limiting greenhouse gases. The rules affect fuel economy because carbon dioxide is produced in proportion to the amount of fuel a vehicle burns.

Turning out vehicles based on the Vanguard model would take a concerted effort and would have

to be phased in as various car and truck models were redesigned, said David Friedman, research director for the Union of Concerned Scientists' clean-vehicle program. But the additional features would add only about \$300 to the average price, he said.

Fuel savings alone over five years of ownership could put \$1,300 into an owner's pockets, Friedman said. When all factors are considered, he said, "the \$300 additional cost could be repaid in 19 months."

California and 10 other states have adopted rules requiring automakers to slash greenhouse gas emissions from their vehicles by as much as 34% by 2016.

The legislation has been challenged in federal lawsuits filed in California, Vermont and Rhode Island by the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, a lobbying group that represents most major automakers.

The initial measure to reduce automotive carbon dioxide emissions was approved in 2002 by California.

Because of its severe air pollution, California is the only state allowed to institute its own auto emissions regulations. Other states must either use the U.S. standards or adopt the stricter California rules. Those that have emulated California are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Oregon and Washington.

Gloria Bergquist, a spokeswoman for the automaker alliance, said the industry lawsuits challenged not the technology but the idea that individual states could adopt what amounts to their own fuel economy standards.

Automakers in the U.S. "have 200 models on sale today that achieve 30 miles per gallon on the highway," she said. "Many of the technologies the Union of Concerned Scientists talks about were developed with substantial effort and expense by auto companies. But we can't let California set its own fuel efficiency standards. Those have to be national," she said.

By fighting the rules, the environmental group's Friedman said, automakers are sticking to a "can't do" philosophy.

"To get the job done, they should bench their lawyers and call in the engineers."

Scientists craft super-green van

COMPUTER MODEL USED TO SHOW CURRENT TECHNOLOGY UP TO THE TASK

By Matt Nauman, Mercury News

In the Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 2, 2007

The Union of Concerned Scientists on Thursday unveiled a theoretical minivan that could exceed California's 2016 standards for fewer greenhouse-gas emissions.

The group, seeking to capitalize on the growing public awareness of the issue, said the vehicle, which exists only as a computer simulation, would use currently available technologies. It would cost \$300 more than one of today's minivans, but it would save an owner \$1,300 over the lifetime of the vehicle, the group said.

The unveiling of the Vanguard minivan comes as automakers battle California's attempt to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions in federal court. The state requirements, adopted in 2002, begin with 2009 model-year vehicles and mandate a 30 percent reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions by 2016.

The Vanguard could exceed state standards, cutting greenhouse-gas emissions by as much as 40 percent, said David Friedman, the group's clean vehicles research director. As envisioned, it would include an engine with turbo-charging, variable-valve timing and cylinder-deactivation; a more efficient transmission; better air-conditioning hoses and connections to prevent leaks; and greener refrigerant. The vehicle could run on a gasoline-ethanol blend, which also would help reduce greenhouse gases.

"The Vanguard design uses today's technology and fuels to decrease global warming pollution," said Spencer Quong, the group's senior vehicles analyst and lead designer. "We're not talking about pie in the sky here, and we're not even talking about hybrid vehicles."

The group acknowledged that many automakers already are using some of these technologies in various vehicles, but none combine all of them on one vehicle.

Automakers sued the state, arguing that the only way to lower greenhouse-gas emissions is by improving fuel economy, and that only the federal government can set mileage standards. A trial in federal court in Fresno is on hold until the U.S. Supreme Court makes a ruling on a related issue. Similar suits are proceeding in Vermont and Rhode Island.

Eleven states have adopted California's greenhouse-gas standards or something similar, and another half dozen are considering such legislation.

The Vanguard is part of the scientist group's effort to keep global warming front and center, Friedman said. Awareness of the problem "has grown dramatically in the last few years," he said. "Americans now see the direct impact of climate change."

Friedman said he expects sweeping federal legislation on the issue within the next five years, and predicted it'll be a major issue in the 2008 presidential election.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, March 5, 2007:](#)

The governor's blind spot

Neglect of passenger rail's needs will cost California dearly.

A European observer once remarked that California is "the place where they reinvent the world every day." That was a long time ago.

One of the attractive things about Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is his commitment to return the Golden State to its golden past, when it was a world center for innovation and vision. But his vision has a curious -- and frustrating -- blind spot when it comes to rail transport.

He has failed to support the proposed high-speed rail lines for California, and his neglect threatens the very existence of that badly needed system.

The high-speed project is especially important for the Valley, an area to which the governor has promised much. High-speed rail offers economic development opportunities, air quality improvements and congestion relief for Valley highways, but it's not part of the governor's otherwise visionary plans.

Now the governor's blind spot for rail has grown to include existing passenger rail lines in the state. His proposed budget contains no bond money for intercity passenger rail. That's a big mistake.

Rail investment begun 17 years ago has produced phenomenal results. The Pacific Surfliner between San Diego and San Luis Obispo is the nation's second busiest passenger rail corridor; the Capitol Corridor, connecting Sacramento and the Bay Area, is the third busiest; the San Joaquins, running between Sacramento and Bakersfield, are fifth busiest.

They account for the equivalent of a half-billion vehicle miles a year. Those are trips not taken on overtaxed freeways such as Highway 99. But additional investment in new equipment is needed immediately to maintain the progress. The rail passenger volume will grow only if there is more rolling stock. It's up to the Legislature and the governor to make it happen.

The transportation bond that voters approved in November designates \$400 million for intercity rail, but the Legislature and the governor must appropriate it.

But that collides with the governor's blind spot. What is it about rail that he doesn't get? Is it because he can't drive his precious Hummers onto the tracks? Whatever it is, it's impeding his effort to get California back to a golden future.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Monday, March 5, 2007](#)

Editorial: Caltrans vs. downtown Does battle loom over busy Interstate 5?

Interstate 5 is the primary artery of the West as it connects San Diego with Seattle. Its crushing truck traffic is partially the result of free trade with China, which sends its goods in cargo containers to California ports.

Everyone on the interstate has a different reason for being there. Some are on long hauls from San Diego to Seattle, some on daily commutes to cities along the route or even to the Bay area via connector highways.

So it's a little peculiar that the state transportation agency, Caltrans, seems to have gotten disproportionately interested in the redevelopment under way in downtown Sacramento, worried about its impact on the interstate. Hmm. Should we stop redevelopment down in Los Angeles as well?

The local project is known as 500 Capitol Mall. The careful reader may remember this office project as the one that proposed to put a miniature Greek Parthenon structure at the top of the tower. The Parthenon got nixed in the approval process. What the Sacramento City Council approved the other day was a more standard 24-story office building.

The approval process was slowed, however, by late concerns by Caltrans. "Interstate 5 is already at capacity," official Jody Jones explained. The agency wants to coordinate with the city on plans to add more high-rises downtown and to redevelop the dormant railyards.

Coordination is fine. And frankly, so is Caltrans' commenting on large new development projects that have real impacts on the regional roadway system that the local government is trying its darndest to overlook. But this office project is within walking distance of light rail, the train depot, numerous bus lines and a growing stock of downtown housing. Nonetheless, the developer of 500 Capitol Mall, Tsakopoulos Investments, agreed to pay \$75,000 to Caltrans to help install metering lights on the interstate from I Street.

But if Caltrans somehow thinks it is doing the region's transportation system a favor by worrying about rejuvenation downtown, it should think again. Nothing could be worse for traffic and air quality than delaying downtown redevelopment.

The more this region builds homes closer to jobs, the less commuters will rely on freeways. Adding thousands of residences and new office space in the downtown will do more to help I-5 than to hurt it.

If the alternative is to build the housing in Yuba and Placer counties, and have all those folks drive to downtown, will Caltrans be worried about that, too? Where is Caltrans in that debate up in

Yolo County about building a brand new commuter city in Dunnigan (on I-5 as well)? Or the debate about Elk Grove's look at expanding southward? And don't forget about Stockton.

Given the challenges of the real estate marketplace, limited redevelopment funds and a quirky set of landowners, rejuvenating downtown Sacramento will be tricky as it is. If downtown doesn't live up to its full potential, I-5 will be far more of a long-distance commuting nightmare than if downtown succeeds. Caltrans should be challenging large office and housing projects that are too dependent on the automobile and instead championing growth within urban, high-transit areas.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Sunday, March 4, 2007](#)

Editorial: Do the easy stuff

Fighting global warming and reducing America's dependence on fossil fuels will require some tough transitions. But it also will involve some simple ones.

One of the easiest is to establish strong efficiency standards for refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners, washers, dryers and other household appliances.

Over the years, the federal government has helped promote efficiency through use of "Energy Star" labels, which guide consumers toward products that can drive down their energy bills and conserve megawatts.

Congress has also done its part by requiring the U.S. Department of Energy to set efficiency standards for more than 20 appliances.

So what has the Energy Department done? Pretty much zilch, says a report released this week by the Government Accountability Office.

According to the GAO, the Energy Department has missed all 34 deadlines set by Congress for setting efficiency standards on 20 types of appliances. Eleven of those standards were issued late, and 23 haven't been set. Some are 15 years late.

Both consumers and the environment are paying the price for the Energy Department's dithering. The GAO estimates delays in setting efficiency standards will cost U.S. consumers a collective \$28 billion in electricity bills by 2030. Every year, an extra 53 million tons of carbon dioxide is wafting into the atmosphere, about one percent of the nation's yearly emissions.

The GAO's findings come as little surprise to officials at the California Energy Commission. In recent years, California has had to sue the federal energy department three times to enact efficiency standards on air conditioners and other appliances.

In the arid Southwest, more efficient air conditioning could reduce demand on the grid and cut air pollution from "peaker plants" that must run on hot summer days. Yet in several cases, the Bush administration has sided with manufacturers, who want to sell appliances as cheaply as possible, over states that are seeking cost-effective ways to save energy.

Andy Karsner, an assistant Energy secretary, acknowledged this week that the agency's track record in setting standards has been "simply abysmal." He and others in the administration blame the problem on inadequate resources and management, as opposed to a systematic attempt to stall improvements that some industries oppose.

Congress shares responsibility for these missed deadlines. Over the last decade, lawmakers have put more energy into promoting gas extraction and oil drilling than into basic conservation. By providing different priorities and stronger oversight, the new Congress can move the country toward a saner energy policy.

[Fresno Bee column, Sunday, March 4, 2007:](#)

Dooley advocates for buyers of corn

By Lewis Griswold / The Fresno Bee

Calvin Dooley, president of the Grocery Manufacturers Association, got some national exposure last week when he was interviewed on the "Nightly Business Report" on PBS. The topic: the rising price of corn.

Dooley, once a House member from the Valley, now represents food giants such as Frito-Lay and Kellogg, which buy corn by the ton to make corn chips and corn flakes. Prices have doubled in six months, Dooley said, because ethanol fuel producers are crowding into the marketplace.

Dooley said he is making it his mission to get a conversation started about the problem.

On the "Nightly Business Report," Dooley argued that a federal tax credit of 51 cents a gallon to "blenders" -- companies that mix ethanol into gasoline to help it burn more cleanly -- hurts food processors and the public.

"We are very concerned that this policy that we have in place now -- which is really taking a bushel of corn that goes into ethanol and providing significant subsidies for it -- but that same bushel of corn that goes into the production of pork or beef or poultry or even a box of corn flakes receives no subsidy whatsoever," Dooley said.

The tax credit is "creating a distortion in the marketplace," Dooley said later from his office in Washington, D.C. Congress should let the ethanol tax credit expire in 2010, he said.

"That's not going to happen," said Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia. Congress strongly favors tax incentives for domestically produced fuel.

"Cal's overall point that corn is going into ethanol, and is more than what is healthy for this country, that's true," Nunes said. But the long-term answer is development of "cellulosic ethanol," he said, which would use switchgrass and other plants, not corn.

But that technology is years away, Dooley said.

In Fresno, Bill Jones, chairman of Pacific Ethanol, said corn prices should go down because "the American farmer will raise drastically more corn next year."

Wheat farmers already are switching to corn, Dooley said, pushing up wheat prices.

"Let's not lose sight of the ball here," Jones said. "Renewable fuel is one way we're able to wean ourselves off the dependency on foreign oil."

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sunday, March 4, 2007:](#)

Cars that make hybrids look like gas guzzlers Plug-in versions can go 100 miles on a gallon of gasoline

Toyota Prius owners tend to be a proud lot since they drive the fuel-efficient hybrid gas-electric car that's the darling of mainstream environmentalists and one of the hottest-selling vehicles in America. A few, however, felt that good was not good enough. They've made "improvements" even though the modifications voided parts of their warranties.

Ron Gremban of Corte Madera did it. So did Felix Kramer of Redwood City, and Sven Thesen of Palo Alto. Why? Five words: one hundred miles per gallon.

"We took the hybrid car to its logical conclusion," Kramer says, by adding more batteries and the ability to recharge by plugging into a regular electrical socket at night, making the car a plug-in hybrid.

Compared with the Prius' fuel efficiency of 50 mpg, plug-in hybrids use half as much gasoline by running more on cleaner, cheaper, domestic electricity. If owners forget to plug in overnight, it's no big deal -- the car runs like a regular hybrid.

These trendsetters monkeyed with the car for more than their own benefit. They did it to make a point: If they could make a plug-in hybrid, the major car companies could, too. And should. Kramer, Gremban and a cadre of volunteers formed the California Cars Initiative (online at calcars.org), and in 2004 converted Gremban's Prius to a plug-in hybrid in his garage. They added inexpensive lead-acid batteries and some innovative software to fool the car's computerized controls into using more of the energy stored in the batteries, giving the car over 100 mpg in local driving and 50 to 80 mpg on the highway.

The cost of conversion is about \$5,000 for a do-it-yourselfer.

CalCars' efforts to publicize plug-in hybrids were so successful that in January 2006 the Bush administration lifted a photo of the car peeking out from Gremban's garage and featured it on the White House Web site as a harbinger of good cars to come. Do-it-yourselfers in Illinois and elsewhere converted their hybrids to plug-ins. Several small companies like EnergyCS in Southern California started doing small numbers of conversions for fleets and government agencies using longer-lasting, more energy-dense lithium-ion batteries.

Kramer hired EnergyCS to convert his Prius and reported on a typical day of driving. He traveled 51 miles, mostly on the highway, at fuel efficiencies of 124 mpg of gas and about a penny's worth of electricity per mile. Compared with driving his Prius before the conversion, he used 61 percent less gas and spewed out two-thirds less greenhouse gases at a total cost of \$1.76 for electricity and gasoline, instead of the \$3.17 it would have required on gasoline alone.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. acquired an EnergyCS plug-in Prius conversion, too. It so impressed Thesen, a PG&E supervisor in the clean air transportation group, that he offered his privately owned Prius to CalCars as a guinea pig. Back in Gremban's garage, CalCars and the Electric Auto Association converted it in November to a plug-in with lead-acid batteries as part of a video and educational package to guide do-it-yourselfers (www.eaaphev.org).

Support for plug-in hybrids from a utility like PG&E, which still produces 45 percent of its electricity from polluting fossil fuels, makes some environmentalists nervous. The data on plug-in hybrids, however, have calmed their fears. On the U.S. electrical grid, which gets more than half of its power from dirty, nasty coal, plug-in cars produce fewer overall emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants than do other cars.

California's grid uses less coal, which makes plug-in cars even cleaner. As more wind and solar power get added to the energy mix, driving on electricity gets cleaner still. Driving on gasoline will only get dirtier as conventional sources dry up and we desperately turn to hard-to-extract oil that requires lots of energy to get at, producing lots more pollution.

Enthusiasm over plug-in hybrids has created strange bedfellows. Perched somewhat uneasily alongside PG&E and the former oil man in the White House, Sierra Club leaders representing 13 chapters in California and Nevada adopted a resounding endorsement of plug-in hybrids in the past year.

Former Sierra Club President Larry Fahn has been looking for a mechanic to convert his Prius for more than a year. Therein lies the problem. People want plug-in hybrids but can't get them. Dealers don't sell them yet, and the few conversion services cater to fleets.

There are only a few dozen plug-in hybrids in the world, while demand for them is growing rapidly. The city of Austin, Texas, which uses more renewable power than any other U.S. city, started a Plug-in Partners Campaign and gathered more than 8,000 advance orders for plug-in hybrids. In the Bay Area, San Francisco, Alameda, Berkeley and Marin County signed on as Plug-in Partners.

Are the automakers listening? Maybe.

Several showed plug-in hybrid prototypes in the 1990s but cast them aside during their battle to weaken California's Zero-Emission Vehicle Mandate. Stung by bad publicity from the 2006 documentary "Who Killed the Electric Car?", General Motors reversed course and showed the prototype plug-in hybrid Chevrolet Volt at a January auto show. In the past year, at least six major car companies have said they're developing plug-in vehicles, including Toyota officials, who seem none too happy about amateurs messing with the Prius.

Plug-in hybrids won't hit the market, though, until better batteries are developed, the automakers say. That doesn't sit well with drivers like Marc Geller of San Francisco, who co-founded the nonprofit group Plug In America (www.pluginamerica.org). The nickel-metal hydride batteries in Gellers' all-electric 2002 Toyota RAV4-EV give the compact SUV plenty of power, take him all over the Bay Area, and are expected to last the life of the car, based on utility company fleet tests.

Consumers appear to have three options to hasten the arrival of plug-in hybrids: Demand them ("Tell the automakers that you won't buy a new car unless it has a plug on it," Geller says), or push for government incentives or interventions. (The California Air Resources Board is planning to revise the zero-emissions mandate this year.)

Or, build your own plug-in hybrid.

Sherry Boschert is the author of "Plug-in Hybrids: The Cars That Will Recharge America" and a member of Plug In America.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Sunday, March 4, 2007](#)

Daniel Weintraub: Deadline met; billions parsed out for freeways

Before California voters passed the largest public works bond in American history last November, they heard that a big chunk of the money for new transportation projects would be heading out the door with extraordinary speed. The state was supposed to approve the first \$4.5 billion from the \$20 billion bond by March 1, less than four months after the election.

Well, it wasn't pretty, but the California Transportation Commission met its deadline. Acting on Feb. 28, the panel adopted a plan for spending a pot of money dedicated by the voters to removing bottlenecks on state highways and improving connections between cities and towns.

Billions more from the bond - known as Proposition 1B - will go for public transit, intercity rail, local streets and highways, air quality improvements and speeding the movement of truck traffic from the state's booming ports.

But the first piece was the highest profile, because it promised an immediate infusion of cash to widen freeways and build interchanges, improving mobility in a system that in recent years has been starved for new money to add capacity.

The process set off a feeding frenzy among local transportation agencies eager for money to complete projects on the drawing boards for years, in some cases decades. When the commission's staff initially recommended spending only a portion of the available money this

year, state and local politicians mounted a short, furious lobbying push to make sure that every dime was distributed. In the end, it was.

The final list didn't satisfy everyone. In a couple of cases, small towns with big needs got shoved aside by urban areas with more congestion - and more clout. But the result is likely to produce a noticeable reduction in urban traffic delays, or at least prevent backups from worsening as the population grows.

"This is really a down payment," Marian Bergeson, the chairwoman of the Transportation Commission, told me last week. "As much money as it is, it's not going to solve all the problems in transportation in California."

By law, the money had to be split geographically, with 60 percent going to more populated Southern California and 40 percent going to the north state. Beyond that, however, the commission had wide discretion to choose among urban and rural areas and to decide how much of a project's budget the bond would finance.

That flexibility led to a more wide-open process. And, ironically, a decision by the commission's staff to not engage in private negotiations with local transportation planners led to a very public airing of political priorities as the list of projects was vetted, expanded and tweaked. That sort of transparency is probably a good thing. It's certainly better than having all of the decisions made behind closed doors. But it is a turn-off to purists who think that politics can somehow be removed from decision-making in a democracy.

It also heightened the disappointment of a handful of communities that first learned they had been recommended by the professional staff for funding, then removed from the list by the political appointees on the Transportation Commission.

The big losers were the people of Mendocino County, who thought that a long-awaited bypass for Highway 101 around the town of Willits would finally be funded. That project was dropped from the final package, and the area will have few other options for finding the \$177 million it needs for the job.

A similar fate befell another project on the 101 in San Luis Obispo County. That one would have added one lane in each direction to the Santa Maria River Bridges. Now, it might never be built.

Several other projects that ended up on the cutting room floor could find a spot in future allocations from the bond.

A proposal for a four-lane divided expressway in rural Imperial County near Brawley fell off the list but might get funded from a pot of money reserved for easing truck traffic caused by international trade. That stretch of road, planners say, is clogged with big rigs coming into California after crossing the Mexican border. A project to widen bridges and replace interchanges on Interstate 10 in San Bernardino County might win the same treatment.

All of those projects and more were sacrificed mainly to make room for one very expensive addition, a \$730 million proposal to build a northbound car pool lane along 10 miles of Interstate 405 in Los Angeles. That project was the highest priority of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, and they enlisted another Los Angeleno, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, to back the effort.

The pressure campaign was very public and very blunt, with Núñez threatening to hold up the entire package in the Legislature if the project was not added to the list. But the project was not exactly a bridge-to-nowhere, the kind of wasteful pork that larded up the most recent federal transportation bill. The 405 in Los Angeles is the most congested freeway in the nation, and CalTrans engineers recommended that the project be funded from the bond. It will be.

Construction is scheduled to begin in 2009.

[Letter to the Editor, Contra Costa Times, Monday, March 5, 2007](#)

Decrease population

If people are the biggest cause of global warming, then people are also the solution -- fewer people.

I notice that despite huge increases in world population, the third-rail of population control cannot be touched. It has been demonstrated by scientists on numerous occasions that employing the Kyoto protocol will have such a small impact on the environment, while destroying many economies.

Other suggestions target first world consumers, apparently ignoring the impact of burning whatever is around, which has caused horrible pollution and toxic air in China and India.

Fewer people, fewer resources consumed and less impact on the environment. We would not need to continue to encroach on wetlands, rain forests or other natural areas.

Endangered animals would retain needed habitats. At least for now, the goal should be less than replacement -- meaning most people should have no more than one child, at maximum two. This voluntary effort is something everyone can participate in, worldwide.

Denise P. Kalm, Walnut Creek

[Letter to the Editor, Contra Costa Times, Saturday, March 3, 2007](#)

Airlines pollute

Opening the air passenger "bill of rights" subject is a favor to me, but nowhere else on this page will you find a diversion to an analysis of the public right to unlimited air travel.

We've all seen 55-gallon drums around our gas station facilities, each able to hold approximately 330 pounds of jet fuel, an amount necessary to fly one average 170-pound person across the United States.

Picture a jumbo jet, 380 passengers, with tanks full of 380 of these fuel barrel equivalents, all consumed in one SFO-LaGuardia flight.

Are these trips really necessary? This represents 63 tons of air pollution fuel burned into the sky, combined with many more tons of oxygen! I don't believe in government regulation of intra-America travel, but the public should recognize just how much pollution garbage these airline flights cause.

Martin A. Easton, Clayton

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, March 4, 2007:](#)

Global warming: Truth or lie?

Global warming argument bogus

The global warming debate is not about temperature. Climate always changes. Every 10 years, new statistics are generated for all U.S. cities based on the most recent 30 years of date. Bakersfield used to average 5.72 inches of rain per year. A lot of people had that number memorized. Since 2001, the average is 6.49 inches. This .77-inch increase over 10 years does not mean, however, that there is global moistening and that at this rate our average will be 14.39 inches by the year 2100. Neither does it imply blame for the extra raindrops that now fall on Kern County.

The global warming debate is not about sober scientific understanding.

In the really big picture (eons of time), we only have a few moments of reliable standardized temperature statistics from which to draw relationships and mark trends. Paleoclimatological temperature data is indirectly inferred; modern comparisons do not conclusively prove anything.

The global warming debate is not about finding solutions to problems.

Anthropogenic warming proponents have already decided what the solutions are and are working backward to identify the problems.

No, in fact the great debate isn't a debate at all. It is a pronouncement; a declaration, a one-sided assumption that the world will agree with their fact-finding. Those who disagree with the fundamental theory of a looming manmade global warming catastrophe are subject to shame. They are called names, minimized and treated with disgust. Dr. Heidi Cullen of the Weather Channel would strip me of my CBM (certified broadcast meteorologist) status because of my opinion.

How did we get to this point where civility in a scientific discourse was so rashly abandoned? It is like the bitter partisanship in government today. Where did this rabid activism come from? It came from the unshakable conviction that we must act now to avoid certain disaster. Extreme zeal in a cause can be good, but it also may blind a person to reason.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently issued their well publicized report accusing mankind of culpability in the warming of the world. I have taken issue with the report, as have many of my meteorological colleagues.

A friend asked, "So, 2,500 scientists are wrong?" I replied, "Yes."

This would not be the first instance of a large body of people being wrong in their belief. There was a time tornado safety included opening windows, mercury was used in topical ointments, smoking was ubiquitous and global cooling was going to kill us all. Not to mention other hysterias, such as Y2K, McCarthyism, Jim Crow and the Spanish Inquisition.

But my biggest concern is the widespread notion that there is a monolithic consensus on the subject. A constant drumbeat of "the science is settled" from every corner of media, government and academia has saturated public opinion. The science is not settled.

There are serious questions regarding carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations, which are directly related to temperature fluctuations. I contend they have gone up more than 20 percent in the past 50 years as a result of natural warming, rather than the other way around. Warmer oceans absorb less CO₂, thus affecting the carbon cycle balance. Indeed, the greatest influence from a greenhouse gas comes from water vapor (comprising up to 4 percent of the atmosphere in the tropics.) A warmer (or colder) climate is caused by macrostimuli, not by insignificant human input.

Urban development represents less than one half of one percent (0.0044 percent) of the world's surface, which is 70.8 percent ocean. Although our influence may be formidable on a local scale, it comes nowhere close to a commanding interest of the earth.

I believe volcanic eruptions pose a much larger threat than does anything else, bringing about immediate climate cooling. There are many well-documented episodes during the past 2,000 years in which crops have failed and people have starved due to volcanic-induced periods of worldwide extreme cold.

When the climate does change, mankind must adapt. During a storm chase, the rule of thumb is to get out of the way of a tornado not to expect I can alter its path or strength.

What about the indisputable computer model predictions of doom? We have enough trouble forecasting tomorrow's weather. This idea that sophisticated models are going to predict with accuracy conditions 100 years from now is really half-baked. In the final analysis, I have found that people will believe what they want to believe. Those who subscribe to human-induced global warming want to believe the hysteria. However, when anyone compels you to agree with them about anything, without dissent or review, it is duress. A red flag should go up.

The IPCC solution is too simple: Stop the CO₂ and everything will return to normal.

But why would anyone think mankind has the power to change the world's climate one way or the other? It seems narcissistic and self-congratulatory. Can we also change winter to spring or move the earth into a new orbit? Can a living human be beamed from one place to another, like in Star Trek? Where does science end and science fiction begin in the global warming debate?

Asking the question does not mean I am unenlightened. Rather it demands extraordinary proof to answer this extraordinary assertion.

– *Miles Muzio is a meteorologist for KBAK, Channel 29.*

Skeptics' arguments don't pass the test

Essentially every scientist who actively studies global climate change concludes that human activity is the principal cause of global warming over the past several decades.

Recently this conclusion was summarized by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Despite this consensus, a relatively small group of skeptics still exists. Because this group of skeptics is very vocal, they have skewed public opinion and media coverage toward a "the jury is still out" impression, a viewpoint that is simply not justified given the overwhelming evidence supporting human-caused global warming and the failure of the alternative ideas proposed by the skeptics.

Skeptics state that scientists' ignore evidence of natural climate change from the geologic record. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, careful consideration of this evidence has brought to light several possible contenders for driving climate change.

This dataset, in conjunction with more accurate, higher resolution, modern measurements, show that only one of these causes for climate change has dominated over the past several decades. That is an increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, particularly carbon dioxide.

For example, the skeptics most often attribute the warming to variations in the sun's output. Fair enough. This alternative idea is testable. It predicts that the sun's output should have increased over the past decades as the Earth's temperature has risen, a prediction that can be compared to new observations according to the rigorous standards of the scientific method. Unfortunately for the skeptics, the modern data show no such thing.

The sun's output has been measured directly by satellites since the late 1970s. These measurements represent a big improvement over the previous attempts to indirectly estimate the sun's output using observations like the number of sunspots. The data are readily accessible on the Web from the U.S. National Geophysical Data Center. The new and clearly better data show that the sun has been remarkably steady over the period corresponding to the vast majority of warming. Clearly, the skeptics' principal explanation for global warming fails a very straightforward test.

Other ideas from the skeptics include variations in the Earth's orbital geometry and in the incidence of cosmic rays that may seed low altitude clouds. These ideas similarly fail scientific tests based on observations relevant to the warming observed during past several decades. Variations in the orbital geometry operate on time scales too slow to affect the warming we see over this time period; direct observation of cosmic rays since the 1950s show no variation that can be correlated to the observed warming.

On the other hand, the IPCC's idea of human-induced climate change passes test after test after test. For example, is a steady increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide observed that correlates with the temperature increase? Yes.

If you calculate the rate of fossil fuel burning, is there enough to produce the half-percent increase in atmospheric concentration that we see every year? Yes.

Are the carbon isotope ratios in the atmosphere changing in accordance to the expected dilution effect when fossil fuels are burned? Yes.

Is carbon dioxide the only greenhouse gas that spends a long enough time in the atmosphere to drive the temperature change rather than being a passive player in the system (like water vapor)? Yes.

The experiment goes on. Given the consensus of the vast majority of climate scientists, and the success of their ideas to date, you can bet on their predictions. Given the failure of the skeptics' natural global warming idea, don't bet on it!

-- Rob Negrini is a professor of physics and geology at Cal State Bakersfield.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, March 3, 2007](#)

We're fighting the wrong enemy

Concerning the problem of global warming and shifting weather patterns: The results mean less fresh water and food for our entire world.

There is a possibility of halting or at least slowing the effects. If all industrial countries could cut down on air pollution and soil contamination, this would help greatly. If people plant more trees on farms, forests and urban areas, carbon dioxide would be reduced. Trees are the lungs of the earth.

Presently, people are more concerned with killing the "enemy" instead of fighting for survival. When people realize we are fighting the wrong enemy, it may be too late.

GERALDINE PARKER, Modesto

[Contra Costa Times Editorial, Friday, March 2, 2007:](#)

California shows U.S. how to conserve energy

THE THREAT OF GLOBAL warming has risen to the level where more Americans are now understanding that we need to use fossil fuels more efficiently while we develop alternative sources of energy.

But even without potential global-warming disasters, there are several good reasons to use fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas more wisely.

The major source of these fuels is in the most unstable part of the world, where supplies could be severely reduced in a short time.

The cost of fossil fuels is skyrocketing as supplies fail to increase as fast as the rise in demand. Also, fossil fuels pollute the air and can cause health problems under certain atmospheric conditions.

So why haven't Americans done a better job of conserving a valuable resource? The answer seems to be that too many people believe that our quality of life cannot improve without an increase in energy use.

That mindset explains in large part why in the past three decades the average American has increased energy use by 50 percent. That is a costly and unnecessary waste.

Fortunately, the huge increase in per-capita energy use has not occurred everywhere. In California, where living the good life is high on most people's agenda, per-capita energy use has not increased at all since 1974.

Moreover, carbon dioxide emissions per capita in California have fallen 30 percent since 1975. Nationwide, per capita carbon dioxide emissions have stayed the same.

Thanks to state regulations, high energy prices and greater awareness of the need for conservation, California uses less energy per capita than any other state in the country. We are more like Denmark than the rest of the United States.

A warmer climate helps Californians keep energy use for heating lower than average. But this state also experiences very hot weather in many areas, increasing the need for air conditioning, and has long commutes for many urban residents, boosting gasoline use.

If the state had not altered its pre-1974 trend toward increasing electricity consumption, today California would have needed the equivalent of a nuclear power plant every eight miles between San Diego and San Francisco, according to physicist Arthur Rosenfeld.

Saving huge amounts of energy is not as difficult a task as one might think. Back in 1976, California was considering building a 1 billion watt nuclear power plant in Southern California. Gov. Jerry Brown wanted to find a way to stop construction of the plant.

Rosenfeld came up with the answer: refrigerators. He calculated that the state's refrigerators were using the equivalent of five such nuclear plants. The state adopted appliance efficiency standards and saved as much electricity as is produced by all the hydroelectric power plants in the nation.

California also wisely adopted an innovative utility regulation that decoupled utilities' profits from increasing sales. Utilities here are able to maintain constant profit margins even as Californians used electric power more efficiently. We are still the only state to have removed the link between utility profits and higher energy use.

This state also has taken a lead in promoting solar and wind power and has the largest wind power operations in the nation.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also deserves credit for making California one of the few states to establish energy caps that call for increased efforts to use energy more efficiently.

The development of consumer-friendly hybrid cars, more efficient appliances, stringent rules on home insulation, solar power rebates and using natural gas instead of electricity promise to keep California in the lead in curbing energy consumption.

But it is not enough for California to go it alone. This state is proof that the rest of the nation can cut energy consumption significantly without suffering a loss in one's quality of life.

If the entire country had done what California has accomplished in the past three decades, we would not be as dependent on foreign oil or creating nearly as much carbon dioxide as we do now. It is past time for the rest of the nation to catch up.