

Calif. offers plan for clean air

Lessons for metro Phoenix: Sacrifice, cooperation are key

By Corinne Purtill

The Arizona Republic, Sunday, Apr. 22, 2007

CARUTHERS, Calif. - Take a deep breath in the walnut orchard in this central California farm town, and the air feels crisp and clean.

Ten years ago, air in this region was dangerously dirty. Getting back to blue skies took a long and difficult battle.

Powerful industries and regulators came together. State laws were changed. And the air in San Joaquin Valley is cleaner - and healthier. Maricopa County is now where San Joaquin Valley once was: forced to reduce air pollution or face federal sanctions.

County leaders have this year to devise a plan. The story of San Joaquin Valley's long road back offers lessons in how it can be done.

Maricopa County is the second place in the country ordered to reduce coarse particulates - tiny suspended particles caused by combustion, fires and dust - or lose \$1 billion in highway funds.

San Joaquin Valley was the first.

On a recent morning in Caruthers, workers with pruning shears snipped walnut trees under clear winter skies at Campos Brothers Farms.

A decade ago, the scene might have been framed by a veil of pollution. Trucks would have churned up dust. Branches would have been burned, sending particles skyward.

Today, a salt-based dust suppressant coats the roads. Prunings await a shredder to turn them to organic mulch.

To get to this point, San Joaquin Valley had to craft a far-reaching cleanup strategy that demanded sacrifice and cooperation from industry, government, media, environmentalists, health care professionals and residents.

Last October, the region reached a milestone. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized that it had made significant progress toward reducing particulates.

Maricopa County must start showing improvement by 2009.

Advocates take notice

The San Joaquin Valley has long struggled with some of the worst air in California.

With eight counties spread over 25,000 square miles, the region has a growing population of more than 3 million - just like Maricopa County.

It is crisscrossed by freeways and encircled by mountains that corral pollution. Summers are hot. Winters are mild and stagnant with frequent temperature inversions, where warm air above traps cooler air and pollution close to the ground.

Kevin Hamilton is a respiratory therapist in Fresno, the San Joaquin Valley's largest city.

In the early 1990s, he noticed an increase in asthma cases at the county-run clinic where he worked. He realized that child patients with upper respiratory problems all seemed to live near the expressway then under construction through town. When the freeway was finished, the number of asthma cases declined by almost 40 percent. But they stayed higher than they were before the road was put in.

The popular belief at the time was that respiratory problems were a result of bad air in people's homes. One-fifth of the San Joaquin Valley's population lived below the poverty line. Much of the housing was substandard.

But for Hamilton, the spike in asthma cases in sooty, dusty conditions cemented the connection between dirty air and bad health.

In 2001, Hamilton and other doctors and researchers formed a group called Medical Advocates for Healthy Air. They planned to testify at state congressional hearings and educate lawmakers on the health risks of air pollution.

Hopes were high at the time, Hamilton said last month as he sat in his office at a Fresno community clinic. "We thought we would provide policymakers with information, they'd read it, be very impressed and start making the right decisions," he said.

"Boy, were we wrong."

Groups file lawsuits

In 2001, as Hamilton and his associates began their campaign to educate lawmakers, San Joaquin Valley residents were waking up to particulate pollution above the federal health standard about 10 days each year.

It was the last year the region had to improve its air or face stiff federal sanctions, the same position Maricopa County was in through 2006.

At that time, Bob Kard was director of compliance at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Even with federal sanctions looming, Kard said, air quality didn't generate a lot of public interest.

About half of San Joaquin Valley's emissions of particulates measuring 10 microns or less were linked to agriculture. The rest was from construction, roads and other sources. (In Maricopa County, about 40 percent of particulates come from construction.)

Although emissions from most other industries could be regulated by the air district, a decades-old loophole in California law exempted agriculture.

Unless farms were controlled, clean-air advocates knew San Joaquin Valley had no hope of reducing particulates.

In November 2001, Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, the Sierra Club and the advocacy group Latino Issues Forum filed the first of a series of lawsuits against the Air Pollution Control District, the EPA and the California Air Resources Board. The lawsuits demanded stricter enforcement from those agencies and a repeal of agriculture's exemption.

Mark Borba grows cotton and produce in Riverdale, about 20 miles south of Fresno. Seated at a polished wooden table in his office, Borba said his fellow farmers acted in one of two ways at the

time.

Some, like him, sensed that regulation was imminent and wanted to work with regulators to create the most farm-friendly rules they could. Others, who he described as the old guard, crossed their arms and said "no, no and hell no."

EPA forces action

San Joaquin Valley's Dec. 31, 2001, cleanup deadline came and went with little improvement in pollution levels.

On Jan. 1, 2002, the EPA put the region on a Five Percent Plan. That meant it had to eliminate the equivalent of 5 percent of its particulate emissions each year until it reached the standard. It was the first place in the country held to such a program.

Maricopa County was put on the plan this year.

Reducing emissions required sacrifices from every sector.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District tightened restrictions on dust from construction, unpaved roads, vehicle traffic and other activities. The agency also instituted a controversial rule that encouraged developers to design projects that were more environmentally friendly and required hefty fees if they missed emission-reduction targets. The use of fireplaces and woodstoves was banned on days when pollution was expected to exceed the federal health standard.

And clean-air advocates chipping away at agriculture's protection found support.

State law changed

In May 2002, in response to one of the suits from Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, the Sierra Club and other groups, the EPA threatened to take over California's agriculture permitting program unless the state repealed the agriculture exemption.

Fresno's state Sen. Dean Florez took the lead, crafting a series of bills that repealed the exemption and regulated farm pollution. Farm lobbyists and sympathetic representatives railed against the legislation.

Florez wrote in some compromises, but the bills passed in 2003 with the meatiest regulations intact.

California's Legislature is among the most progressive in the nation on environmental issues. However, it still needed the threat of harsh EPA sanctions to crack down on the powerful agriculture industry.

The Arizona Legislature has historically resisted most environmental initiatives. In the case of the Groundwater Protection Act, lawmakers held off on crafting a plan to protect the state's groundwater until the feds threatened to withhold a multibillion-dollar surface water delivery project. Even today, lawmakers are being heavily lobbied by the industries that would be most affected by air regulation.

Once the California Legislature acted, farmers and local regulators worked to craft rules that would work for both sides.

For ideas on how to reduce agricultural pollution, farmers and regulators actually looked to a successful program already in place in Maricopa County, where farmers choose from a menu of

measures.

Industry and regulators worked together to educate farmers, and San Joaquin Valley's farm pollution control program took effect in 2004.

In October 2006, the EPA issued what is known as a "finding of attainment" for the San Joaquin Valley. Still, the region has work to do to meet all of the EPA standards.

At least one of the architects of the region's cleanup strategy was gone by the time that milestone was reached.

Maricopa County hired Bob Kard in 2005 from the San Joaquin Valley to take over its ailing air program. Kard already has imported San Joaquin Valley's strict enforcement policies. Fines and inspections have increased on his watch.

Clock is ticking

As Maricopa County has grown, so have pollution-generating activities such as construction and traffic. On Dec. 31, the county officially missed a three-year deadline to clean up particulate pollution. It's now the second region in the country to face the type of federal sanctions San Joaquin Valley faced. County regulators, state lawmakers and industry representatives have been in talks over what Maricopa County's final cleanup plan will look like. It is due Dec. 31 to the EPA.

Last month, the Maricopa Association of Governments approved 41 dust-control measures that it says industry, cities, the county and the state should adopt to meet the Five Percent Plan. At the vote, Maricopa County Supervisor Don Stapley asked MAG's air-quality committee to go back and review San Joaquin's cleanup plan for more ideas on fighting dust pollution.

Most of the proposed measures, such as upping air-quality inspections, educating subcontractors on dust control and requiring dust managers on large construction sites, are in the county air department's jurisdiction.

Yet some measures, such as providing incentives for clean fuel and shifting work hours on high-pollution advisory days, will require legislative changes.

Here, as in the San Joaquin Valley, public awareness could be instrumental in influencing policymakers' opinions. Although some rules in California drew harsh criticism at first, they got people interested in the quality of the air they breathed. By the time legislation was debated, people were writing to the local newspaper in support of clean air.

In opinion polls today, San Joaquin Valley residents rank air pollution as the region's No. 1 problem, ahead of crime, the economy and immigration.

"Now everybody's talking about it," said Laura Whitehouse, a Fresno resident whose three children have asthma. "You're no longer considered kind of odd if you're talking about air pollution."

With the clock running, Maricopa County regulators are reaching wide to cut pollution. The "Bring Back Blue" campaign urges residents to commit to at least a few personal sacrifices to control dust emissions. Construction workers, farmers, all-terrain-vehicle enthusiasts and anyone who enjoys sitting around a fire on a chilly winter night could all have a part in controlling pollution.

"We're going to need to get buy-in from all sides," Kard said. "We're looking here to improve things. We have to."

Save the planet

38 ways to be kind to Mother Earth

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, April 22, 2007

Even if you don't believe in global warming, or that humans are the cause, what's the downside in being kinder to the environment where you can? If we each make small changes, we can have a big impact.

One way to tackle global warming is to cut the amount of greenhouse gases -- carbon dioxide, methane and a host of others -- that we produce.

But doing things to reduce air pollution and conserve water also help. Research shows that smog and small particles of dust and soot in our air are not just bad for our health but also contribute to warming. And pumping, purifying and heating water takes a lot of energy, which in turn creates greenhouse gases and air pollution.

On the 38th anniversary of Earth Day, we've come up with 38 ways we can all be a bit gentler to the planet.

In your yard

Go electric. Trade in your gas-powered lawn mower for an electric one. From now through May 31, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will issue vouchers for an electric mower when you recycle your gas-powered model. The voucher explains how to turn in your old model to be recycled. Once that's done, you can then purchase an electric mower for about \$150. They usually retail for about \$420.

Electric mowers work just as well and pollute less. Even a small gas-powered mower can produce 40 times the pollution of a newer car, according to the air district. For more information on the trade-in program, call 326-6900 or visit www.valleyair.org.

2. While you're at it, ditch the leaf blower and grab a rake.

Leaf blowers are perhaps the most obnoxious lawn care tools. Not only do they spew 80 times the pollution of a newer car, but they also kick up dust and other particles that foul our air and can aggravate respiratory problems. There are electric blowers, but the air district doesn't have a program to exchange those because even electric blowers create air problems by kicking up dust. Plus, they're noisy.

3. Make your yard low-maintenance. This means working with nature.

- Consider a xeriscape yard. Xeriscape, from the Greek word xeros, or "dry," is a landscape concept that emphasizes plants that are native or adaptive to the natural surroundings and require minimal water. This doesn't mean you have to fill the yard with rocks and cactus.
- There are a variety of lush plants and ground covers that can survive in our desert conditions on very little water. You don't have to tear out every blade of grass, either. By minimizing grass areas and filling in the rest with plants suited to the water and soil conditions, your yard will require less fertilizer chemicals and water. For more information: www.xeriscape.org.
- If xeriscaping is not an option, you can still improve the health and appearance of your lawn while conserving natural resources. Leave grass clippings on the lawn to enrich the soil. And when buying new plants, ask for varieties that are pest- and disease-resistant to avoid pesticides. Review the practices in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's GreenScapes programs at www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/green/index.htm

4. Skip the charcoal and go for a propane or gas grill.

Charcoal might make your burger taste great, but it burns dirty, producing tiny soot particles that pollute the air and aggravate respiratory problems.

5. Use outdoor solar lights to light your backyard or walkway. It's free electricity.

Plant a tree.

It's true, they do emit some of the same pollutants as dairies and power plants. And a recent study by researchers at Stanford University and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory shows trees in some parts of the world absorb heat and may contribute to global warming.

But planting trees in Bakersfield is still a good thing, according to air district officials. Trees absorb all types of pollutants, including those that cause smog, which is one of the valley's worst air problems. By providing shade, trees also help cut heat from surfaces such as parking lots.

At home

7. Recycle. It's not as easy to do in Bakersfield as in other cities, but it can be done.

And it's worth it. Chances are, what you don't recycle ends up in the landfill. When you recycle, you conserve energy and reduce pollution and greenhouse gases, according to the EPA.

Metro Bakersfield residents have to pay to participate in the curbside recycling program. However, the city recently voted to reduce the rate from \$80 a year to \$48 effective July 1. Bakersfield residents who live in unincorporated parts of Kern County can also get the service through the county, though their rate remains \$80 a year.

To sign up for curbside recycling in metro Bakersfield, call:

- Kern County Waste Management, 322-6863
- City of Bakersfield Solid Waste Division, 326-3114

If you don't want to pay, you can take your recycling to one of several drop-off locations throughout Bakersfield and Kern County, where churches and other nonprofits redeem the materials for money. To find drop-off locations, call 862-8979 or visit:

www.co.kern.ca.us/wmd/Services/Drop/drop.html#top.

8. On your next trip to the store, recycle the plastic grocery bags from your previous trip.

Albertsons, WinCo, Green Frog and Vons have recycling collection at their stores for plastic grocery bags. In addition, Vons said it will accept any type of plastic film, including dry cleaning bags and the plastic sleeve your newspaper comes in.

9. Cash in your bottles.

Instead of tossing beverage containers in the trash, start a collection in the garage and take them to a buy-back center. Until July, you can get more cash back for your bottles than the deposit you pay at the store. The redemption value now is 5 cents for small bottles compared to 4 cents you paid at the store; and 10 cents for containers 24 ounces or larger over 8 cents paid at purchase. It's money in your pocket and less waste in the landfill. To find a recycling center, visit

www.bottlesandcans.com.

10. Opt for homegrown fruits and vegetables.

Buying locally grown produce is regarded by many as better for the environment because it cuts down on transportation and the subsequent air pollution it causes. In Kern County, local produce isn't hard to find. But some fruits and vegetables take a more roundabout journey to get to the produce bin.

Here's how it works:

Produce sold at chain grocery stores like Vons and Albertsons is first shipped to a refrigerated distribution center where the fruit is inspected for size, taste and color. Once approved, it's shipped to the grocery store.

Produce is usually delivered directly to smaller markets like Green Frog Market and Young's Marketplace. They tend to have a wider selection of locally grown foods, too.

Local fruit stands and farmers markets are also great places to find locally grown produce.

Use energy-efficient light bulbs.

12. Get free work done on your air conditioning and duct system to improve efficiency.

It may sound too good to be true. Read on. Through a little-known state program, customers of investor-owned public utilities such as Pacific Gas and Electric and South California Edison pay a small surcharge on their monthly bill that goes to sponsor energy programs in the state.

One of those programs provides grants to heating and cooling companies to perform efficiency upgrades on residential and commercial air conditioning and duct systems once every six years. Some companies will charge for the service but some do it for free.

For a list of local contractors who will perform the work, call 877-422-2432. Once you get the list, call around to see which companies will provide the service at no cost.

Also, PG&E customers qualify for the installation of a device that will boost the efficiency of cooling systems. The device works by keeping the fan on a few minutes after the cooling unit turns off in order to blow out the extra cold air still left in the air conditioner coil.

Power down your computer and unplug other electronics when they're not in use.

The U.S. Department of Energy says 75 percent of the electricity used to power electronics in your home is consumed when the products are turned off.

To save energy:

- Unplug your laptop's AC adapters when it's not in use. If left plugged in, the transformer in the adapter draws power continuously, even when the laptop is not connected to the adapter.
- If you use a desktop computer, turn off the monitor if you're not going to use it for the next 20 minutes or more. Turn off the CPU and the monitor if you won't use the computer for two hours or more.
- Plug your television and DVD player into power strips and turn the power strip off when the equipment is not in use.

14. Pay your bills online.

According to a study by Javelin Strategy and Research, if all U.S. homes paid bills online it would save 18.5 million trees, eliminate 1.6 billion tons of waste a year and cut 2.1 million tons of greenhouse-gas emissions by reducing the transportation of paper checks.

15. Eat less meat and dairy products.

Livestock operations pollute the air and they warm it, too.

A series of studies by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District have shown that a cow emits more smog-forming pollutants than a car.

And last year, a United Nations study found that livestock industries emit more greenhouse gases than all the trucks and cars in the world. The study estimates that livestock accounts for 18 percent of the world's greenhouse gases.

16. Start a compost pile.

Composting your food reduces the amount of garbage you send to the landfill. That, in turn, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, according to the EPA. And you might be surprised by what can be thrown in the pile. Along with most food scraps, you can toss cardboard rolls, coffee filters, lint from the dryer, tea bags and shredded newspaper.

Use the enriched dirt as mulch for your flower beds and gardens.

For more information, visit: www.epa.gov/compost

17. Wash clothes in cold water.

Up to 90 percent of the energy consumed by a washing machine goes to heat the water. Washing with cold water will mean big savings in your energy bill and cutting carbon dioxide emissions by about 500 pounds a year, according to PG&E.

18. When cooking small meals, use the microwave instead of the stove or oven.

It uses less energy, according to the EPA. And because less heat is generated in the kitchen, you also save on air conditioning costs.

19. Clean or replace filters on your furnace and air conditioner.

Doing this is the best way to ensure the efficiency of your air conditioner. Clogged, dirty filters block air flow and significantly reduce a system's efficiency significantly.

20. Wrap your water heater in an insulation blanket and save 5 percent to 10 percent of the energy you've been using.

The colder the area where your heater is located, the greater the heat loss, according to PG&E. This is especially effective in winter if your water heater is in the garage.

21. Get rebates for new appliances.

Check with your utility company before you buy a new dishwasher, refrigerator, washing machine or pool pump. PG&E and Southern California Edison offer rebates ranging from \$30 to \$75 for energy-efficient models. Rebates ranging from \$300 to \$600 are also available for new furnaces and duct sealing.

22. Recycle your old refrigerator.

Get \$35 to recycle your pre-1995 refrigerator. Many people keep old refrigerators in their garage or basement for extra cold storage. However, these tend to be older, energy-hogging models from before 1995. If not disposed properly, the refrigerators can leak dangerous chemicals into the environment. Through a PG&E program, you can make \$35 by getting rid of these older units. PG&E contractors will pick up the refrigerator free of charge and safely dispose of it.

For more information, PG&E customers should call 1-800-299-7573 for more information. If you are not a PG&E customer, contact your local utility company to see if it offers a similar service.

Power your home with solar energy.

Under the California Solar Initiative passed last year, homeowners who use solar power are entitled to rebates and incentives. You can go solar in two ways: retrofit your current home or buy a new house equipped with solar panels.

It would cost about \$20,000 to retrofit the average home. The homeowner is then eligible for up to a \$7,000 rebate from the state and a federal tax write-off of up to \$2,000. If the house creates more energy than it can use, the excess power is rerouted back to the grid. The utility will grant a credit for this surplus. Those credits can then be used to offset the cost of electricity the house uses at night or during winter, according to the California Energy Commission.

Newer homes built with solar panels stand to reap the most savings, since they usually have the most up-to-date, energy efficient appliances. Some solar homeowners have reported receiving monthly utility bills as low as \$6.

For more information, visit www.gosolarcalifornia.ca.gov

At school, work or church

24. Teleconference instead of driving or flying to a meeting.

25. Ask your employer to start an incentive program for those who walk, bike or take the bus to work.

Some ideas from the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition include:

- Discounts or subsidies for transit passes, walking shoes and biking equipment

- Cash back to cyclists who agree not to use employee parking spaces
- Travel reimbursement of 10 cents a mile
- Accrual of 15 minutes of vacation time for each day an employee bikes, walks or takes the bus to work

26. Start a recycling program.

For help initiating a recycling program at a school, contact Keep Bakersfield Beautiful at 326-3539. Revive Recycling, at 322-7374, is a local company that provides recycling services for local businesses.

27. Organize a group and volunteer with Keep Bakersfield Beautiful.

The not-for-profit is a local environmental organization with an emphasis on litter removal and beautification in the local community. Volunteers plant flowers and trees and pick up trash. For more information, call 326-3539.

28. Give two-wheeled transportation a try.

Take part in national Bike to Work Day on May 18. Not sure of the best route? Bike Bakersfield, a local group that promotes biking as transportation, can help you out. Send your start and finish addresses to info@bikebakersfield.org and they'll map a safe route for your commute. This service is available year-round.

29. Start a no-idle rule in your school or church driveway.

In the car

30. Report polluters.

When you see a smoking vehicle on the road, call 1-800-559-9AIR. Visible exhaust coming from a vehicle is made up of tiny particles that can lodge deep in the lungs and aggravate respiratory and heart conditions. If you can't make the call when you see the vehicle, write down the license plate number and call later.

31. Buy a fuel-efficient vehicle.

Driving a car is one of the most polluting things we do, according to the EPA. To find the best ones available, check out:

- The EPA's Green vehicle Guide at www.epa.gov/emisweb
- The Department of Energy's Fuel Economy Guide at www.fueleconomy.gov

32. Skip the drive-through window.

Studies show that if you expect to idle for more than two minutes, you're better off parking the car and going into the restaurant or bank.

33. Lighten your load.

An extra 100 pounds in the trunk reduces a car's fuel efficiency by 2 percent, according to the Federal Trade Commission.

Make sure your vehicle's tires are properly inflated.

Tires can lose about one pound of pressure a month. For every three pounds below recommended pressure, a vehicle's fuel economy goes down by about 1 percent, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

35. Is your vehicle fuel-efficient? Calculate your miles per gallon.

Here's how:

- Next time you fill up, write down your mileage before pulling away from the pump.

- When it's time to refuel, keep track of the number of gallons it takes to fill the tank. Also record the odometer reading.
- Subtract the initial mileage reading from the new one.
- Divide this number by the number of gallons it took to fill the tank to find miles per gallon. (U.S. Department of Energy)

Other

36. Calculate your carbon emissions.

The average two-person U.S. household emits about 20 tons a year, according to the EPA. How much do you emit? Find out using the EPA's carbon calculator, which will also offer tips for reducing your carbon emissions. Visit

www.epa.gov/climatechange/wycd/calculator/ind_calculator.html

37. Build more green buildings.

To be considered green, new commercial buildings must adhere to guidelines set forth by the U.S. Green Building Council. Green buildings minimize energy consumption through the use of natural light, advanced heaters, low-energy lighting, super-tight duct work and reflective roof materials. So far, Kern County has one -- the new Kern Schools Federal Credit Union complex on Ming Avenue.

38. Share these ideas with others!

How long it takes to degrade in a landfill:

Aluminum can: 80 to 100 years

Plastic bottle: 700 years

Glass bottle: 1 million years

Source: California Department of Conservation

Glass, plastic and aluminum containers that can be redeemed for cash:

- carbonated soft drinks
- beer and wine coolers
- carbonated, mineral and noncarbonated water
- sports drinks
- coffee and tea drinks
- fruit and vegetable juices
- Containers that can't be redeemed for cash:
- milk
- medical food
- nutritional supplements
- infant formula
- wine
- fruit juice in containers 46 ounces or larger
- vegetable juice in containers larger than 16 ounces

What's a ton of carbon?

A ton of carbon dioxide is released when you:

- Travel 5,000 miles in an airplane
- Drive 2,500 miles in a medium-sized car
- Cut down and burn a tree about one foot in diameter and 40 feet tall
- The average American emits 22 tons of carbon dioxide every year, compared to the worldwide average of just 5 tons per year.

Source: The Nature Conservancy

Dust up

John Upton

Tracy Press, Saturday, April 21, 2007

BLAST OFF:The 851 firing table at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Site 300 plays host to outdoor test explosions. A permit application filed with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, if approved, would allow the Lab to increase the amount of depleted uranium and other materials exploded in outdoor tests.

Analysis of an air pollution permit application filed two weeks ago shows that tons of radioactive depleted uranium and other toxic heavy metals could be blown up in outdoor military test blasts near Tracy.

Yearly, 20 explosions could each vaporize 220 pounds of depleted uranium at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Site 300 testing ground, off Corral Hollow Road in the San Joaquin Valley air basin.

Lawrence Livermore has applied to detonate more than 4 tons a year of depleted uranium on outdoor gravel-lined Site 300 blast tables. The lab already conducts 60 to 100 smaller test blasts annually in which an unstated amount of depleted uranium is used "routinely," according to a February letter sent to Tracy homes by Site 300's manager.

Lab officials this week said they have no immediate plans to detonate much of the material listed in the permit application, including 20 grams annually of radioactive tritium, 1,450 pounds of lead and 1.3 tons of corrosive lithium hydroxide, a common ingredient in batteries.

Quantities of materials listed in the permit application were based on "back-calculations" of doses allowed by the Environmental Protection Agency outside Site 300's border, according to Mike Dunning from the lab's nuclear weapons program.

The lab applied for the highest limits possible to save time and money on later permit amendments and additions, Dunning said.

The executive director of lab watchdog Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment, Marylia Kelley, described as "unrealistic" the lab's assumption that just 9 percent — or up to 720 pounds per year — of the uranium that could be blown up outdoors at Site 300 would be light enough for the wind to carry it away from the 7,000-acre weapons testing site.

Lab spokeswoman Lynda Seaver said the rest — as much as 7,300 pounds annually — would settle on the ground at the 50-year-old site, which is already listed by the EPA as one of the nation's most-polluted pieces of land.

Depleted uranium has advantages in military use, but its health effects are disputed. Some blame it for causing debilitating wartime illnesses, while others argue its radioactivity is so weak that it's harmless.

Depleted uranium is used in munitions because it's twice as heavy as lead and because it has characteristics that allow it to penetrate tank and other armor and then explode, according to Richard Muller, a Berkeley-based physicist. Muller, after a 34-year career, resigned last year from the 47-year-old JASON science and technology advisory group, which is sponsored by federal intelligence, energy and defense agencies.

"They make a hollow region in the explosive and they coat that with depleted uranium," Muller said. "When they set off the explosive, the depleted uranium is pushed into the empty space at high speed, where it ... goes forward with enormous velocity.

"They don't use it for the radioactivity — the radioactivity is just a little bit of a pain in the neck. Depleted uranium is not terribly radioactive."

Depleted uranium is used in American armor as well as grenades, bombs and armor-piercing bullets. U.S. forces have used it in both Iraq wars.

Army munitions director Col. Jim Naughton in a 2003 press briefing on depleted uranium said the powerful bomb material gives the U.S. military a big advantage on the battlefield.

"The Iraqis tell us, 'Terrible things happened to our people because you used it last time,'" Naughton said. "Why do they want it to go away They want it to go away because we kicked the crap out of them."

A 2002 report commissioned by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which summarized other studies, blamed the hundreds of tons of depleted uranium used in Iraq for the debilitating and widespread Gulf War syndrome, for a four- to six-fold increase in Iraqi birth defects after the first Gulf War and for a seven- to 10-fold increase in Iraqi cancer rates.

Specific individual deaths and serious illnesses were linked in the report to inhaled depleted uranium, which is toxic and emits low-level radioactivity for the average three to four years that it takes to leave the lungs, according to the report.

"The users of depleted uranium have tried to keep the effects of depleted uranium secret," wrote report author Y.K.J. Yeung Sik Yuen.

According to a December letter to the Tracy Press editor signed by Lawrence Livermore health physicist Gary Mansfield, the health effects of depleted uranium are negligible.

"A key issue is that the health effects, if any, of a substance depend not on whether any of the substance is inhaled or ingested, but on how much of the substance is taken into the body," Mansfield wrote. "Because it is so weakly radioactive, it is very difficult to take enough depleted uranium into your body to cause any harm."

The Bush administration last month invited the \$1.7 billion-a-year Department of Energy weapons lab, which will be partly managed by military contractors starting later this year, to design a new generation of atomic warheads. Lab officials have denied that their San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District permit application is linked to that mission.

Air regulators propose first steps to stem greenhouse gases

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, April 21, 2007

SACRAMENTO- California's first steps toward curbing greenhouse gases should include cleaner fuels, more efficient light bulbs and a ban on retail sales of refrigerants, according to state air regulators.

A report released Friday and set for a hearing Monday lists initial actions the state should take to meet targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions set by last year's landmark Global Warming Solutions Act.

The law requires the California Air Resources Board to adopt regulations to combat climate change by 2010. The steps are projected to reduce greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020, a 25 percent reduction from today.

Under the air board's recommendations, vehicle fuel producers would be required to use more ethanol and biodiesel to cut carbon dioxide emissions.

Landfill operators would be required to install and improve devices to capture methane gas emissions.

Refrigerants used to replenish automotive air conditioners would be available only from professional shops that have equipment to make sure the gases don't escape.

New regulations for light bulbs and replacement tires are also in the mix.

Additional steps include new air standards for dairy farms, commercial refrigeration, foam manufacturers, cement manufacturers, outboard boat engine fuel tanks, vehicles and timber harvesting.

Environmentalists said taking such actions could spur similar efforts in other states and countries, but industry officials said many of the steps could prove costly to California's economy.

Air board sets goals to reduce emissions

Mark Martin, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, April 21, 2007

Sacramento -- Californians would have to buy cleaner gasoline and more efficient lightbulbs and face a new ban on a chemical backyard mechanics use to replenish air conditioners in cars under the first proposals aimed at meeting the state's landmark law to reduce greenhouse gases.

State regulators on Friday released a list of changes that could be implemented by 2010 to begin California's march toward its 2020 global warming target. The list -- and the reaction it garnered -- previewed what will likely be years of wrangling among regulators and interest groups.

Environmentalists complained that the state wasn't moving fast enough, and a representative of the makers of air conditioners for vehicles vowed to fight the change that would affect the auto refrigerant industry.

AB32, the law signed last year by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, calls for a 25 percent reduction in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. But the law also requires earlier changes, and Schwarzenegger administration officials and regulators with the state Air Resources Board released a preliminary set of changes.

A hearing will be held in Sacramento on Monday to discuss the proposals, which Air Resources Board executive director Catherine Witherspoon described as changes that "will chip away at the overall goal."

Among the proposals, which indicate the dramatic breadth of changes the state faces as it works to reduce emissions, are:

- Requiring that the carbon content of gasoline be reduced by 10 percent, something Schwarzenegger called for this year in an executive order he signed;
- Updating energy-efficiency standards for new homes and businesses;
- Requiring that replacement tires for vehicles meet the same efficiency standards that tires on new cars must meet; and
- Forcing cement makers to change the composition of cement to a mix that releases fewer emissions when it is made.

It's unclear how consumers might be affected by the proposals.

The gasoline requirements could mean motorists will have more options at the pump, or at least be filling their cars with gas that has a higher percentage of biofuels like ethanol. The proposal calls for requiring new energy-efficiency standards for lightbulbs, although administration officials they said they were not calling for banning incandescent lightbulbs, as one piece of legislation pending this year could do. Officials do want to ban the retail sale of the vehicle refrigerant HFC-134a, which is used to replenish air conditioners in vehicles.

Reaction to the proposals was mixed.

Environmental groups were pleased that multiple state agencies -- from the main water agency to the Department of Food and Agriculture would be involved in implementing the changes. But they also complained that the administration wasn't doing enough.

"We'd like them to run even faster," said Devra Wang of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Environmentalists have pushed for further regulations on diesel emissions, for example, or for new requirements mandating curbside recycling for every household and apartment building in

the state, which would reduce the size of landfills. Landfills are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Those changes could and should be started sooner if the state is expected to meet the target of reducing 174 million metric tons of gases by 2020, said Jason Barbose of Environment California.

"Both in terms of meeting the early goals and of broadly solving the problem, the state needs to be putting the pedal to the metal," Barbose said. "This isn't quite doing that."

Business groups, however, questioned the proposals.

Dorothy Rothrock, an executive with the California Manufacturers and Technology Association, said her group was concerned about how changes to the state's fuel supply would impact the cost and availability of gasoline.

"We have a lot of infrastructure questions, technology questions and supply questions," Rothrock said, noting that AB32 requires that changes mandated by regulators be cost-effective and technologically feasible.

And in an illustration of how even seemingly small changes could provoke big fights, a lobbyist working for the Automotive Refrigeration Products Institute said his group would aggressively oppose the effort to ban the retail sale of car refrigerants.

State regulators argue that cans of the hydrofluorocarbon that has replaced Freon in vehicle air conditioners emit a large amount of greenhouse gases, particularly when they are thrown away by homeowners and end up in landfills. The proposed new rules would force motorists to go to professional mechanics to recharge their air conditioners, something they estimate could save 1 million to 2 million metric tons of greenhouse gases between 2010 and 2020.

The industry lobbyist, Norm Plotkin, argued the state was inflating the emissions from HFC-134a and that the industry was changing its product to be more environmentally friendly on its own. "There are power plants and oil refineries that bellow millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide, so why are we being targeted?" he said.

The plan

The agency proposes:

- Lowering the carbon content of fuels by 10 percent by 2010 through new standards.
- Restricting the sale of refrigerants for automotive air conditioners.
- Capturing methane produced at landfills with more effective systems.
- Requiring energy-efficient lightbulbs.
- Requiring replacement tires for vehicles sold in the state to meet the efficiency standards as tires on new vehicles.

Changing the composition of cement.

Legislators push environmental efforts

BY HARRISON SHEPPARD, Sacramento Bureau
LA Daily News, April 22, 2007

SACRAMENTO - Fueled by growing concerns over global warming, California lawmakers have launched new environmental efforts in hopes of harnessing reinvigorated public attention and overcoming intensive lobbying pressure from heavy-hitting opponents.

The measures range from a \$2,500 fee for buying gas-guzzling SUVs to a requirement that takeout-food containers be made from recyclable material.

"I think there's a greater emphasis on the environment this year than we've seen in past years, particularly because California has been a leader in the fight to combat global warming," said Assembly Speaker Fabian Nu ez, D-Los Angeles, a co-author of last year's landmark global warming bill. "It's generated so much interest and attention that I think people now feel a responsibility to continue carrying that torch."

Last year's global warming legislation created a program to regulate emission of greenhouse gases in California, with a goal of rolling back emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

The bill was written by Nunez and former Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Woodland Hills, and signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger after lengthy negotiations with Democrats.

But some Republicans and business groups worry the measures go too far with taxes and bind businesses with too much red tape.

Many Republicans are looking for market-based approaches in which businesses can trade environmental credits or receive other financial incentives for reducing emissions, rather than top-down mandates preferred by Democrats.

Assemblyman Chuck DeVore, R-Irvine, said market approaches can allow the state to help the environment without harming the business community.

"California is the most energy-efficient state," DeVore said. "You would think we would want to attract jobs and investment to come here, because if you have a job here, that means any good produced here is going to be produced with less harm to the environment than in any other state in the union."

DeVore recently introduced a bill to lift a ban on new nuclear power plants in California, arguing that nuclear power produces the lowest level of carbon emissions of any power source, including solar.

The bill was killed in committee, though DeVore said he plans to re-introduce it next year.

Sen. George Runner, R-Lancaster, a member of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee, noted that Democrats and environmentalists have opposed development of several energy sources that produce lower carbon emissions, including nuclear, hydroelectric and liquefied natural gas.

"It's really difficult for me to see all this emphasis on light bulbs and SUV taxes when we won't even have a debate on energy being developed through either nuclear or additional hydro or the issue of importing (liquefied natural gas)," Runner said.

"Those three items have far more significance than the little lifestyle `nanny government' decisions that we see coming out of the Legislature. But the problem is those are just not politically correct."

Opponents of new hydroelectric sources worry that dams built to support such facilities harm local ecosystems, while coastal protection advocates have fought new offshore LNG terminals because of concerns about marine life and pollution.

Nuclear critics worry about safety, as well as proper disposal of nuclear waste.

Environmentalists acknowledge the business community, led by the California Chamber of Commerce, has strong influence in the Capitol, but they feel the tide may be finally turning.

"We're outgunned and outnumbered," said Bernadette Del Chiaro, an advocate with Environment California. "But this time around we have a growing voter base on both sides of the aisle that realizes we need to take swift action. So hopefully we'll continue to prevail."

Recent polls have found the public is growingly increasingly concerned about global warming. At the national level, analysts said the renewed attention is being partly driven by the success of former Vice President Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth."

A recent Field Poll found 81 percent of Californians consider global warming a very serious or somewhat serious problem. And the poll found Californians feel state and federal governments aren't doing enough to combat the problem. Only 21 percent approved of the federal government's handling of the issue, while 43 percent approved of the state's.

"I think the public is ahead of legislators on this," said Barbara O'Connor, director of the Institute for the Study of Politics and the Media at California State University, Sacramento.

"And Al Gore has provided cover. The wildly received slideshow has caused elected officials at all levels to say, 'OK, people are really attracted to this.'"

Power plant site gets cold response

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, April 20, 2007 (2:55 p.m.)

PARLIER - A proposal to build a 500-megawatt generation plant here that would power much of Kings, Fresno and Tulare counties got a skeptical response Thursday night at a town meeting.

"It's just beyond me how you're going to plunk a power plant down where thousands of residential homes are going in," said Selma resident Julie Bailey afterwards.

Bailey was among 150 people - mostly from Parlier, Selma and Kingsburg - who raised concerns about air quality, visual impacts, property values and noise pollution from the plant. It's been proposed for construction next to Parlier's wastewater treatment plant on the southern end of town.

The Kings River Conservation District set up the meeting to pitch the plant, which could provide electrical power to over a dozen cities in Kings, Fresno and Tulare counties that have already signed onto the idea in principle.

The district's service area covers parts of all three counties, including Hanford, Lemoore and Corcoran.

District officials estimate a 5 percent electricity generation savings because of KRCD's status as a public, non-profit agency.

But a whole host of issues were raised by concerned, and sometimes emotional, residents at Thursday night's meeting.

Air pollution was one of the most frequently expressed worries.

Parlier is one of the worst places in the San Joaquin Valley for ozone pollution, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Ozone tends to concentrate there in swirling eddies created as pollution drifts southeast from Fresno.

KRCD General Manager David Orth assured residents that the district will actually improve air quality by buying enough air pollution credits from surrounding businesses to more than offset emissions from the plant.

But some were skeptical about district claims that pollution won't be exacerbated in the immediate area, which includes Indianola Elementary School a half mile away.

"I'm not convinced that it's not going to pollute the air," said Shelly Abajian, who lives near the site.

"My question is going to be, can you mitigate it?" said Judy Case, the Fresno County supervisor whose district includes Parlier, in an interview after the meeting.

Case also echoed the concerns of Indianola parents and staff who are concerned about the plant's proximity to schoolchildren.

"I'm not sure that we've taken into consideration those 500 kids. I'm obviously very opposed to it," said Susan Silveira, a fifth-grade teacher at the school.

Silveira also worried about more pollution coming from expanded wastewater usage at the site. KRCD plans to use recycled wastewater from the adjacent Parlier facility to cool the plant's turbines.

Orth touted the availability of wastewater as one of the site's most significant benefits.

The use of such water - 3.5 million gallons a day at maximum capacity - would save Parlier from having to expand its wastewater treatment plant for the next 20 years, he indicted.

And pollutants in the wastewater would be removed inside the plant and shipped to a Bay Area firm for disposal elsewhere, Orth said, calling the idea a "home run."

Orth and other KRCD officials stressed that they still have to go through a year-long permitting process at the California Energy Commission with plenty of time for public input.

If CEC approves the permit application, KRCD will still have to decide if it wants to go ahead with the project based on the requirements CEC imposes, Orth said.

Construction could begin in 2008, with startup in the fall of 2010, Orth said.

Orth defended the location, saying he would be willing to live near it with his infant son.

Global warming bills pending

Here are some of the dozens of environmental bills pending in the Legislature.

For more information, go to www.leginfo.ca.gov.

Light bulbs: AB 722 by Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys - Lamps that use incandescent light bulbs would be banned by 2012 in favor of more energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs.

Hybrid cars: AB 99 by Assemblyman Mike Feuer, D-West Hollywood - Half the vehicles sold in California would have to use alternative fuel by 2010, with 100 percent by 2020.

Smog fee: AB 255 by Assemblyman Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles - Smog Abatement Fee would increase from \$12 to \$16, generating about \$44 million a year for alternative-fuels research.

SUV tax: AB 493 by Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Redwood City - \$2,500 incentives for buyers of cleaner vehicles; \$2,500 penalties for purchases of higher-polluting vehicles.

Alternative fuel: AB 118 by Speaker Fabian Nu ez, D-Los Angeles - Create a fund for air-quality improvements and alternative-fuel research.

Plastic in oceans: AB 258 by Assemblyman Paul Krekorian, D-Burbank - New methods to reduce plastic litter in the ocean.

Private investment: SB 469 by Sen. George Runner, R-Lancaster - State study of obstacles to private capital investment in self-generating power facilities.

Source: Daily News research, www.leginfo.ca.gov

Planned ethanol site drawing critics

Group says plant must have full environmental review

By TIM MORAN

Modesto Bee, Saturday, April 21, 2007

A proposal to build a large ethanol plant in Keyes is running into opposition from an environmental group.

The proposal, from Cilion Inc. and A.L. Gilbert, would put a plant capable of producing 55 million gallons of ethanol per year next to A.L. Gilbert's grain mill at Jessup Road and Highway 99.

The ethanol plant would use corn imported by rail to the A.L. Gilbert facility. The corn would be milled, fermented and distilled into ethanol for use in gasoline. The remaining corn pulp, called wet distiller's grain, would be sold by A.L. Gilbert for cattle feed.

The Cilion plant would process 571,000 tons of corn a year, which would produce 55 million gallons of ethanol and 306,000 tons of wet distiller's grain.

The ethanol would be used as an additive to gasoline. Ethanol is used in California gasoline to reduce auto emissions and improve air quality.

A federal law requires the use of ethanol to double in the next seven years to reduce dependence on foreign oil.

Ethanol currently is shipped to California by rail from the Midwest, Canada and South America.

The Keyes plant has gained the approval of the Stanislaus County Planning Department staff and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

But environmental attorney Richard Harriman, representing a group calling itself Valley Advocates, is challenging those approvals because he says the group doesn't feel the project has gone through a proper environmental review.

The county hasn't done a traffic safety study on a project that will add 182 trucks per day at Jessup and Keyes roads, Harriman said, nor has it looked at odor problems that might occur just two miles from north Turlock residences.

The county did not do a formal environmental review because the property on Jessup Road is already zoned for industry, according to Planning Director Ron Freitas.

"All they need is a building permit from us," Freitas said. Traffic and other potential problems were considered when the property was zoned for industrial use, Freitas said.

Traffic studies also were done during the Keyes community plan update in 1998, according to planning staff.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District did an environmental review that found no significant impacts that could not be reduced to an acceptable level, and so did not do a full environmental impact report.

But the air district is using an air pollution emissions threshold of 10 tons of nitrogen oxides per year, Harriman said, when it should be zero, given the county's status of being in extreme noncompliance with air quality standards for ozone, a component of smog.

Air district legal counsel Philip Jay said all the impacts of the plant were covered in previous county environmental reviews and the air district's review.

"All the emissions are offset with the best available control technology. To us it's a run-of-the-mill plant, fully mitigated. There's not much more to talk about; it seems to be a pretty clean plant," Jay said.

Harriman has filed a lawsuit against the air district in Fresno County Superior Court raising the same issues. A court date has been set for Oct. 5.

The Planning Commission on Thursday turned down Harriman's appeal of the county staff's decision on the plant, and Harriman said he would appeal that to the Board of Supervisors as well.

Ironically, Harriman commented that the ethanol plant is a good project — it just needs to go through a proper environmental review, he said.

"This is a new industry, and this is setting a very bad precedent," he said. "We won't let that happen."

Officials of Cilion and A.L. Gilbert did not return telephone calls Friday.

Cilion was formed last year as a partnership between Western Milling, a large California grain milling company, and Khosla Ventures, a venture capital company.

It is based in Goshen, and has plans to build eight ethanol plants, including at least three in California.

A.L. Gilbert, based in Oakdale, makes feed for dairy cattle, poultry and other animals at its grain mills in Oakdale and in Keyes. It was founded 115 years ago, and is family-owned.

Bronco Wine announces plans to build Napa glass bottle plant Facility would cost \$200M and create about 350 jobs

By JOHN HOLLAND

Modesto Bee, Saturday, April 21, 2007

Bronco Wine Co., based near Ceres, is seeking to make its own glass near its bottling plant in Napa.

Company President Fred Franzia said the plant would eliminate the need to buy bottles, many of them imported from Mexico and China, and would cut pollution from trucks.

The move comes about 50 years after E.&J. Gallo Winery, another industry giant based in Stanislaus County, built a glass plant in Modesto. The stilloperating plant is credited with helping Gallo streamline its operations.

"We believe this will be the first new glass production facility built in California since the 1960s, over 40 years ago," Franzia said.

He announced the plan at Tuesday's celebration of the fifth anniversary of Bronco's Charles Shaw wines, sold for \$1.99 at Trader Joe's stores. The products, better known as Two Buck Chuck, have reshaped the lower end of the wine market.

Bronco's winemaking is done mostly at a site just south of Ceres, but most of the bottling takes place at the plant next to Napa Valley Airport, near the south end of the famed wine region.

The Ceres plant does bottle some products, such as sparkling wine, carafes and 4-liter jugs, said Bob Stashak, a winemaker for Bronco.

The Napa plant can bottle up to 55,000 cases a day, he said. This includes Bronco's many brands and bottling done on contract for other winemakers.

The glass plant would cost more than \$200 million to build and would create about 350 high-paying jobs, Franzia said.

Making glass near the bottling plant would eliminate the need for about 62,000 truckloads of purchased bottles a year, he said. This would reduce air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions, believed to contribute to global warming, he said.

Franzia also said the glass plant would have less emissions than an older one.

The project needs approval from the Napa County Board of Supervisors. Franzia said he does not have a timeline for construction.

"We expect this glass container plant will provide the California wine industry a more competitive advantage for the next 50 years," he said.

Fueling an empire

Pacific Ethanol, which recently moved its headquarters to Sacramento, seeks to grow

By Dale Kasler - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Monday, April 23, 2007

Investors have hopped on the bandwagon as well. Bill Gates invested \$84 million in Pacific Ethanol in late 2005. Vinod Khosla, a prominent Silicon Valley venture capitalist, has started his own renewable fuels business, Cilion Inc., which plans to build ethanol plants near Bakersfield and elsewhere. Among Cilion's investors: Richard Branson, the man behind Virgin Airways and Virgin Records.

Yet ethanol continues to receive criticism from some quarters. A study released this week by Stanford University scientist Mark Jacobson said widespread use of E85 -- a little-used fuel blend that is 85 percent ethanol -- could create more ozone than gasoline does. Ozone is a major ingredient in smog.

All this attention can make stock prices fluctuate. Pacific Ethanol shares briefly soared above \$40 last May before slumping to the low teens. The stock currently trades roughly between \$15 and \$20; it gained 5 cents Friday to close at \$15.19 on the Nasdaq market.

A former state worker, Koehler helped build the state's first plant in 1984, a small Rancho Cucamonga facility that made ethanol out of beer and soda manufacturing byproducts.

But the industry didn't take hold in California until the late 1990s, when the state told refiners to substitute ethanol for MTBE, a clean-air additive that was found to be polluting the groundwater. The first large-scale plant in California opened in late 2005 near Visalia; it's owned by a private firm from Los Angeles.

Pacific Ethanol, whose chairman is former California Secretary of State Bill Jones, began as a marketing firm and opened its first production plant, in Madera, last fall. It relocated its headquarters from Fresno to downtown Sacramento in January, partly to be close to the Capitol.

The company more than doubled its revenue last year to \$226.4 million and shrank its losses to just \$142,000, compared with \$9.9 million in 2005.

Many investment analysts believe it will turn its first profit this year, and the company keeps growing. It has purchased a minority stake in a Colorado plant and has facilities under construction in Oregon, Idaho, Stockton and the Imperial Valley.

Cleaning green

Nontoxic products are environmentally friendly but some warn that `natural' doesn't mean no adverse health effects from indoor fumes

By Melissa Heckscher, Staff writer

LA Daily News, April 21, 2007

WE KNOW WE'RE supposed to steer clear of cigarettes, trans fats and artificial everything.

But who would have thought a squeaky-clean home - that is, one squeaky-cleaned using many traditional household cleaning products - could be bad for you, too?

"Whatever you use on your floors goes into your skin and it goes into the pads of your pets' paws as well," said Lisa Hall, founder of Green Clean, a Los Angeles-based cleaning operation that calls itself "the conscious cleaning service."

"If you want to have a healthy home," she said, "cleaning products are the first and easiest step to take."

Hall's plethora of eco-conscious clients rely on Green Clean to keep their homes spiffy with products that claim to be

nontoxic, cruelty-free, pet-friendly, environmentally friendly and biodegradable.

Whereas most cleaning companies use petroleum-based products or harsh chemicals such as chlorine bleach, Green Clean uses an assortment of plant- and enzyme-based products blended with lavender, citrus oils, water and vinegar.

Hall said these ingredients are less irritating for people with environmentally induced asthma or allergies.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, many common household cleaners contain volatile organic compounds (also found in paint strippers and pesticides), which are emitted as gases and can have short- and long-term adverse health effects ranging from nose and throat irritation to liver and kidney damage.

Pets can be particularly susceptible to toxic chemicals, some of which may be ingested when they walk on freshly cleaned surfaces and then lick their paws. And the Poison Control Center of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has consistently named household cleaners among the top 10 hazards to pets. (It's important to note that ANY cleaning product, when ingested, may be harmful to pets.)

"I think it's a matter of not knowing. A lot of people are like, 'What does it mean to go green?' A lot of people are at different stages," said Hall, who ran a Los Angeles mobile spa before starting Green Clean about a year ago.

By the looks of it, it's easy going green. Whereas once nontoxic products were only found at health food stores, new eco-friendly brands including Second Nature and Seventh Generation are now sold at major chains such as Target and Wal-Mart.

But as more and more people jump on the go-green bandwagon, some scientists are saying "not so fast."

According to William W. Nazaroff, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, products labeled all-natural or nontoxic are no panacea to the potential adverse health effects of indoor cleaning fumes. He calls the "greening" trend an eco-centered marketing scheme not necessarily backed by science.

"It appeals to a mind-set - which I think is misguided - which says that if you take vegetation that is growing now or was growing recently and extract chemicals from it, that's better than if you take petroleum, which was vegetation from a really long time ago, and extract chemicals from that," Nazaroff said.

"I don't think that distinction really holds up. There are plenty of bad things that are produced by plants," he said, explaining that terpenes, a substance extracted from pine and citrus to create pleasant aromas in household cleaners, creates formaldehyde when mixed with ozone. Ozone seeps into homes from outside air.

In a study conducted by UC Berkeley and funded by the California Air Resources Board, Nazaroff measured pollutant concentrations during and after simulated household cleaning activities and found that the chemicals directly emitted from the cleaning products weren't a problem - but that toxic reactions created by the chemicals were.

"I don't want to sound like an alarmist about this stuff," he said. "I want to achieve a certain sense of balance and perspective, and that might require people to be more fearful than they are right now. But I hope in the end people have better understanding and insight to make better decisions."

Those decisions, he said, might not have as much to do with the choice of cleaning products as with the proper use of them (though he acknowledged that choosing biodegradable products was better for the environment).

Rinsing surfaces with water after cleaning, for instance, can remove any potentially toxic residue.

"It's important that any cleaning product be used according to directions," said Glenn Williams, a spokesman for Procter & Gamble. "Even products claiming to be natural might have hazards if they are used improperly."

Cal Poly students design car that gets more than 1,900 mpg

In the Bakersfield Californian, Monday, April 23, 2007

A team of student engineers has won more than \$20,000 for designing a vehicle that could get a driver from Central California to the southernmost tip of Texas on one gallon of gasoline.

The catch? The driver would have to be going 15 mph.

California State Polytechnic University's Super Mileage Team won the award at an annual competition in Fontana.

Shell Oil Co. sponsors the event for students from the U.S. and Canada to design a vehicle that can travel the farthest distance using the least amount of conventional or alternative fuel.

The car, dubbed "The Curbhopper," gets 1,902.7 mpg. The vehicle was shown at 15 mph, but students said its top speed was 45 mph.

Using mainly carbon fiber, the team was able to put together a single-driver, aerodynamic, lightweight vehicle with two tires in the front and one in the back. It's equipped with a 189-milliliter gas tank.

The team swept three categories, taking home a total of \$21,600 - \$20,000 for winning first place overall, and an additional \$1,600 for taking the top spot in the internal combustion engine class.

Reliance on Coal Sullies 'Green the Capitol' Effort

By Lyndsey Layton, Staff Writer
Washington Post, April 21, 2007

When House Speaker Nancy Pelosi held a pre-Earth Day news conference this week to promote her plans to "Green the Capitol," she promised a number of steps to make the congressional campus a model of environmentalism.

But, surrounded by boxes of energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs she wants to install in 12,000 desk lamps, she became conspicuously vague when asked about the pair of towering smokestacks four blocks away.

The Capitol Power Plant, operated by Congress, is the only coal-burning plant in the District and is a major source of sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and soot in a city that has repeatedly been found in violation of the Clean Air Act.

But any efforts to eliminate coal have been thwarted by two of the most powerful figures in the Senate, who just happen to represent coal-producing states: Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

When the office of the Architect of the Capitol took a step in 2000 to eliminate coal from the fuel mix, the two lawmakers let it be known that they wanted coal to continue as the main fuel burned at the plant. Byrd and McConnell had a lot of say about the Architect's budget, and the discussions quickly ended.

Neither senator has any apologies for wanting the plant to continue using coal. "He'd like it to continue as the fuel source," said spokesman Don Stewart of McConnell, though he said the senator would review any recommendations from the Architect's office.

"As we break the chains of foreign oil, our reliance on resources that we have here at home will only expand," said Jenny Thalheimer, a spokeswoman for Byrd. "Technologies are available today that can burn coal more cleanly and more efficiently."

A familiar landmark to drivers on Interstate 395, the power plant is bounded by four busy streets in Southeast, wedged between the highway and a manicured neighborhood of historic townhouses. The plant has been called the "armpit of the Capitol" by Rep. James P. Moran Jr. (D-Va.), who has repeatedly questioned why Congress continues to operate it. Lawmakers recently approved an \$85 million expansion so the plant can serve the Capitol Visitors Center, which is still under construction.

Despite its name, the Capitol Power Plant, which opened in 1910, has not produced a watt of electricity since 1952; the Capitol complex buys its power from Pepco.

Instead, the plant generates steam and chilled water to heat and cool the Capitol, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress and 19 other structures. Steam and chilled water are carried in pipes through a web of tunnels stretching from south of the Capitol to Union Station.

Those tunnels present a health risk in their own right to the workers who maintain them. Built at the turn of the last century, the tunnels are lined with asbestos, a carcinogen. The tunnel workers have charged that the Architect of the Capitol, which oversees the power plant, knowingly exposed them to hazards, and nine of the 10 workers say doctors have found evidence of exposure to asbestos in their lungs. Last week, under pressure from Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), the Architect pulled the workers from the tunnels.

In addition to coal, the Capitol Power Plant burns natural gas and fuel oil, which are less polluting. About 49 percent of the fuel burned at the plant is coal, 43 percent is natural gas, and the rest is oil, said Daniel Beard, chief administrative officer of the House.

Emissions from the power plant are regulated by the District government under an arrangement with the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The plant is required to report its emissions to the city, which says it is in compliance with its permit. Last year, the Capitol Power Plant burned 17,108 tons of coal.

In 2002, the most recent year for which figures were available from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Capitol Power Plant was the second-largest fixed source of sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide in the District. A Pepco plant on Benning Road in Northeast was the largest.

Sulfur dioxide is a primary component of acid rain and an ingredient in smog. Carbon monoxide, a factor in smog and global warming, can cause breathing problems and damage plants.

No one knows how much carbon dioxide -- the greenhouse gas most closely associated with coal -- is emitted from the plant. The Environmental Protection Agency has not required regulation of carbon dioxide emissions, said Joan Rohlf, chief air-quality planner for the council. A recent Supreme Court ruling has changed that, ordering the EPA to treat carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

According to the 2002 data, the Capitol Power Plant was the city's fourth-largest fixed source of nitrogen oxide, a precursor to smog that exacerbates respiratory diseases such as asthma. It was the third-biggest producer of fine particulates, which have been linked to lung cancer.

Asthma rates in the District exceed the national average. The percentage of adults with asthma living in the District in 2005 was 9.2 percent, compared with the national average of 8 percent, according to city officials. More than 11 percent of children had asthma, compared with 9 percent nationwide.

Timothy Ballo, a lawyer at Earthjustice, said any effort to "Green the Capitol" without addressing the power plant would be a failure.

"Coal combustion is one of the driving forces behind global warming," said Ballo, whose organization is challenging the environmental permit allowing the plant to operate, which is issued by the city and is up for renewal. "It's a problem, especially for D.C., given its low elevation. We would very much like them to stop burning coal. The government seems almost hypocritical to do this in its own back yard."

Eva Malecki, a spokeswoman for the Architect of the Capitol, repeatedly declined to answer questions about the plant and its emissions, citing security concerns. But she wrote in an e-mail that her agency has spent "and will be spending several millions of dollars" to reduce pollutants and improve efficiency. She pointed to improvements including the use in the 1990s of "baghouses," dust collectors that trap soot from coal combustion before the smoke is released into the air.

"They may be meeting their permit requirements, but given a choice between burning coal and natural gas, natural gas is always going to be cleaner," said Tim Aiken, legislative director for Moran.

Pelosi, who attracted attention when she banned smoking in the Speaker's Lobby of the Capitol earlier this year, has not decided whether to push to drop coal from the power plant or make other changes. The plan she released on Thursday was preliminary, and the main reference to the plant involved a promise to contribute "a per ton payment . . . of carbon dioxide equivalents emitted by the Capitol Power Plant boilers and placing these funds in the Green Revolving Fund to be used to directly mitigate the emissions."

Pelosi said she is awaiting detailed recommendations by June 30 from Beard, the chief administrative officer, but the fact that the Architect of the Capitol and its power plant are overseen by both the House and the Senate limits what Pelosi can change, Beard said.

"We can say what we want, and, unless the Senate agrees, we can't do anything," he said.

Earth Day: Here are some tips so you can do your part

By Erin Kelly, Gannett News Service

In the Visalia Times-Delta, Saturday, April 21, 2007

WASHINGTON - The polar ice caps are melting, coal-fired power plants spew mercury into the air and Americans still can't swim or fish safely in 40 percent of U.S. waterways. So what can you do about it as we approach Earth Day on Sunday?

Plenty, say government experts and environmentalists.

Global Warming

- Drive smarter. Live as close to your job as possible to reduce your commute and cut down on the amount of gasoline you burn. Keep your car's tires well inflated and your vehicle tuned up to run more efficiently.
- Switch light bulbs. Switch from traditional incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs to save energy. If every household in America switched just five bulbs, the energy savings would be equivalent to taking 8 million cars off the road, according to the Sierra Club.
- Save energy at home. Buy energy-efficient appliances and electronics that carry the Energy Star label. Make sure your doors and windows are well sealed. Buy a programmable thermostat that allows you to set your heating and air conditioning to use less energy when you're not home. Turn off your computer and monitor when they're not in use. Computer screen savers and slide shows use a great deal of energy. Unplug your TV whenever you leave town. TVs suck up energy even when turned off.
- Use cleaner energy. Many utility companies allow customers to buy "green power" generated by renewable energy such as wind and solar. To find out what's available in your area, go to <http://zoomer.sierraclub.org> and click on "efficiency/renewables."
- Recycle. Make sure to recycle aluminum cans, glass bottles and paper. Creating a new aluminum soda can from recycled materials consumes just 5 percent of the energy it takes to make one from scratch.

Clean Water

- Don't pour pollution down the drain. Take unwanted household chemicals such as cleaning solvents, paint and varnishes to hazardous waste collection centers. If you pour them down the drain, you will make it harder for sewage treatment plants to clean the water before it flows back into rivers, lakes and bays.
- Make your lawn "greener." Don't use chemical fertilizers or pesticides on your lawn and flower beds and don't hire lawn-care services that use them.
- Pick up pet droppings. Waste from dogs and cats runs off yards and streets into storm drains and contaminates waterways.

Clean Air

- Go farther on a gallon of gas. Choose cars that are energy efficient and pollute less.
- Get out of the car. Combine as many errands as possible into one car trip. Avoid waiting in long lines at fast-food restaurants and drive-through banks. Park the car and go inside instead.
- Rake your leaves. Gas-powered lawn mowers, leaf blowers, weed trimmers, chainsaws and snow blowers contribute to air pollution.

Super-sized malls raise concerns

A building boom is in full swing as developers reinvent the shopping experience. But some fear traffic gridlock, other woes.

By Cara Mia DiMassa, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Sunday, April 22, 2007

Southern California's shopping centers are in the midst of a major building boom that promises to change the mall experience but also raises new concerns about how the retail behemoths fit into their surrounding communities.

The latest addition is likely to be developer Rick Caruso's 830,000-square-foot Shops at Santa Anita, which won unanimous approval from the Arcadia City Council last week. Caruso, considered Southern California's mall innovator, built the faux village-style Grove mall in the Fairfax district — which gets more visitors a year than Disneyland — and is building a similar "lifestyle center" in downtown Glendale.

Equally important, Caruso has helped spur competing malls across Southern California to rethink what they do.

The region's largest mall owner — Westfield — is spending \$1 billion to expand and remake nearly a dozen retail centers, in some cases knocking down fortress-style buildings to replace them with more open shops, restaurants and theaters.

Westfield just finished a major expansion of its Topanga Canyon mall, has proposed a similar build-out of Fashion Square in Sherman Oaks, and plans to build hundreds of condos in its Century City mall. The company even plans to expand its shopping center next to Caruso's Arcadia development.

Others are following suit. Developers took the roof off the Huntington Beach Mall and turned it into a Grove-style village, naming it Bella Terra. Owners of Santa Monica Place recently proposed a similar transformation.

Malls have struggled in recent years as anchor department stores have closed, but owners are looking for ways to maximize their sprawling grounds by adding stores not traditionally found at malls, as well as housing.

The new versions of the mall usually are less monolithic, more stylized outdoor centers that resemble self-contained villages and often face inward. Stuccoed buildings open onto central courtyards or walkways that are designed to take advantage of the mild Southern California climate and allow patrons to linger a little longer and spend a little more.

Critics roll their eyes at what they consider glorified Hollywood sets. But land-use planners say the village look speaks to shifting consumer tastes — away from the sprawling, sterile suburban mall and into something with a more intimate, urban feel.

"The era of the cookie-cutter shopping center is ending," said Michael Beyard, a senior resident fellow for retail and entertainment at the Urban Land Institute. "What were suburbs are really now urban."

In many communities, however, the added development is raising alarms. Residents and local businesses spent years fighting Caruso's plans in Glendale and Arcadia, worrying that the new shopping centers would cause more traffic gridlock and drive out mom-and-pop businesses.

Other mall expansions have faced similar opposition.

In downtown Glendale, Caruso's Americana project — a mix of housing and retail built around a "town square" — is rising on Brand Boulevard amid smaller eateries and shops but also right next to the Glendale Galleria mall.

Glendale officials strongly backed Caruso's project, eagerly anticipating the sales taxes it would generate. But there remains debate in the city over how huge shopping centers located back-to-back will affect already bad traffic as well as the scores of small businesses in downtown Glendale.

Anne Maria Tafoya, who lives in a downtown Los Angeles loft but comes to Glendale to shop, likes the concept of an outdoor mall but wonders whether Brand Boulevard can handle another huge development.

"I don't know if the community can support much more shopping, especially if more traffic comes to the neighborhood," said Tafoya, 39.

Community opposition has already derailed mall developer Macerich's ambitious plans for the Santa Monica Place mall. Macerich wanted to tear down the aging indoor center and replace it with a sprawling complex of shops and eateries as well as high-rise condos, shops and offices.

But residents rose in protest, saying the development would be too dense and would ruin the low-rise ambience of the area.

Now the developer is back with a scaled-down plan that calls for stripping away the mall's roof, creating public walkways, large gathering places and a third-floor dining deck with ocean views as well as play areas for children and public art space.

In Arcadia, residents backed by businesses that feared the competition of another mall fought Caruso, saying the city was placing sales tax revenue ahead of what was best for residents.

"This is the last large parcel of developable land in the San Gabriel Valley," said Sung Tse, a spokesperson for Arcadia First, the group opposing the Shops at Santa Anita. "Why not look at an alternative? Why are there no other options than another mall?"

Tse said the shopping center would become a regional destination, used by more than just Arcadia residents. But she said her city, which already has one serviceable mall, would bear the brunt of the increased traffic and pollution.

Traffic also was a huge concern when Caruso's Grove opened five years ago. The project included \$5 million in traffic improvements paid for by Caruso. But last year, the city of Los Angeles tried to address the gridlock with \$2.86 million more in street improvements.

The changes in the look and feel of shopping centers are part of a national, if not international, trend that is driving consumers outdoors and enhancing the shopping experience. Locally, operators are adding large indoor playgrounds for children and shattering the mold that once pegged a mall as either high- or low-end — integrating, say, a Target and Neiman Marcus into the same center.

In South Africa, developers are adding sports complexes for local schools near food courts and drive-in movie theaters on parking lot roofs. In Japan and Israel, theaters are stitching the movie complex into the larger shopping culture, tracking consumers closely so giveaways and coupons offer a carefully crafted premium that will keep them in the mall longer.

But because Southern California culture is so intrinsically linked with mall culture, and has some of the nation's biggest shopping centers, the changes are especially profound.

Mall developers must make the revamped centers conjure up nostalgia for shoppers who might have had their first date at the mall, or spent their first hard-earned dollar there, while they stay on the cutting edge of American retail tastes, said Paco Underhill, a self-described "retail anthropologist" and the author of "Call of the Mall: The Geography of Shopping."

"There's a generation of Americans out there who have disposable income but don't need anything. Therefore, providing them with something that gives them nostalgia ... that's important," Underhill said.

Caruso is trying to harness that nostalgia. His Arcadia plan promises to "create an old-town center in the heart of Arcadia" through a combination of upscale shops, outdoor restaurants and open space.

In an interview, Caruso said his projects — which also include the Commons at Calabasas, the Promenade at Westlake and the Encino Marketplace — aren't malls.

"The industry phrase is 'lifestyle center,' but I wouldn't use that phrase either," he said. "They are more akin to streets than anything else. That's what we try to pattern them after."

More than anything, Caruso said, he is trying to "build something I would enjoy ... a place where you can sit out, have a glass of wine and watch people. If you create a very interesting, compelling place to go, people will go there to shop."

The developer said he carefully studies how cities are put together and uses that information to construct his projects. "We write stories," he said. "We have story lines of all of the projects."

The Grove, for example, is based on Charleston, S.C., in terms of the scale and relationship of buildings, he said, and is meant to evoke a 1940s town square sort of feel.

Americana in Glendale, scheduled to open next spring, conjures a different version of the city center, with apartments and condos alongside shopping, dining and entertainment.

The project, which was blocked repeatedly by a group of residents and the owners of the nearby Glendale Galleria, got the nod only after it was placed on the ballot for citywide approval.

"If we do our job well," Caruso said, Americana "will look and feel different" from the Grove. "My goal is to have a customer come to Americana on a Thursday, go to the Grove on a Friday, and

feel as if he is at very different places."

Caruso dismisses concerns about traffic and overdevelopment, noting that many of his opponents are funded by rival mall developers such as Westfield. In most cases, Caruso said, the rival shopping centers ended up pouring millions of dollars into their redevelopment.

The owners of the Beverly Center, near the Grove, spent \$20 million to \$30 million "upgrading it, and it's making it a better mall," he said. "The Glendale Galleria is doing a whole revamp. If we hadn't come there, they would have sat — very fat and sassy — controlling that trade area, because they didn't have to" improve it.

Times staff writer Amanda Covarrubias contributed to this report.

Next-generation shopping centers

More than a dozen Southern California shopping centers have undergone major renovations, are planning remodels or are being built from scratch around a new model that trades fortress-style buildings for a more open, urban feel. Here are some examples:

1. Westfield Topanga Canyon

A \$350-million, 600,000-square-foot expansion completed last October added a Target, a carousel and a children's play area. Neiman Marcus will join as a tenant in 2008, according to a company spokeswoman.

2. Westfield Fashion Square (Sherman Oaks)

A proposed \$200-million expansion would increase the mall size by one third, adding a five-story parking structure, more landscaping and four sit-down restaurants.

3. Americana at Brand

(Glendale) The \$320-million project is under construction, expected to be completed next spring. Developer Rick Caruso plans restaurants, shops and an 18-screen cinema as well as condos and apartments.

4. The Shops at Santa Anita

Another Caruso development, to be built on a parking lot of the Santa Anita racetrack, would create nearly 830,000 square feet of commercial, retail and office development with about nine acres of open space.

5. Santa Monica Place

Plans include taking the roof off the current structure to provide open-air walkways, public gathering spaces and possibly a rooftop dining deck. Construction could begin as early as next spring.

6. Westfield Century City

A \$170-million facelift completed in 2005 upgraded the mall's food court and movie theater. An

additional \$500-million renovation would raze two office buildings to create space for 250 high-end condos and additional shops.

7. Bella Terra

(formerly Huntington Beach Mall) A \$170-million redevelopment, completed last August, turned the mostly shuttered Huntington Beach mall into an open-air entertainment, dining and shopping plaza.

Airing concerns about jets

Protesters at Santa Monica Airport say larger craft are a health and safety hazard.

By Carla Hall, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Sunday, April 22, 2007

It was sunny and breezy at Santa Monica Airport on Saturday, a great day for flying — and for protesting flying.

A few hundred local residents and several politicians held a midday rally in front of the dark glass of the airport's administrative offices (closed on weekends) to decry the environmental and safety hazards of the increasingly busy airfield. Not far in the distance, the objects of their protest — gleaming private jets — roared into the sky.

"The fact that the jets came in so dramatically in the last 10 to 15 years and there's no buffer zone is a serious issue," said Los Angeles City Councilman Bill Rosendahl, whose district includes the parts of L.A. that border the airport and who, like some of the other speakers, stood before the crowd with a gas mask around his neck.

"We have to let everybody know we're not going to tolerate it anymore!"

The crowd erupted in applause — which was quickly drowned out by a jet.

A low drone of boos rose up from the group.

"That's one of our friendly neighbors," Martin Rubin, one of the event's organizers, deadpanned.

Rubin, founder and director of Concerned Residents Against Airport Pollution, said toxic fumes from idling jets harm residents' health and that the lack of buffers for out-of-control jets leaves residents — some of whom live less than 300 feet from the runway — vulnerable to possible crashes. According to activists, 90% of the fumes waft toward Los Angeles.

The rally, which was followed by a march on Bundy Avenue, is part of an intensive campaign waged for years by Santa Monica citizens. The airport was originally designed for slower, smaller aircraft. The community has no problem with the propeller planes that people see as they drive into the airport. At issue are the larger private jets whose traffic has skyrocketed with the advent of fractional jet usage — in which travelers buy a partial interest in a type of jet, entitling them to a number of hours of flying time.

"When people moved into these neighborhoods ... they didn't have the pollutants coming out of these jets," Rosendahl said.

The city of Santa Monica has been criticized for not fighting the jet traffic at the airport, which is regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Their reaction when they get pushed is they're sympathetic, but they don't take action," said Marcia Hanscom, vice chairman of conservation for the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Santa Monica City Councilman Kevin McKeown said he wants the council to toughen its stance. "I regret the jets coming in and out of this airport," he said. "We also are battling with the FAA."

Air quality was a big issue at the rally. "Jet Setters, You're Killing Us" read one demonstrator's sign. Some wore surgical masks over their mouths.

Rosendahl believes that bigger jets should not be allowed at Santa Monica Airport and should be funneled instead to Van Nuys or Los Angeles International airports.

Assemblyman Ted Lieu (D-Torrance) told the crowd he had introduced a bill, AB 700, that would require the state to complete a study of air pollution caused by jets and turboprops taking off and landing at Santa Monica Airport.

Payouts OK'd for school's dust bowl

Wind carrying residue into residents' homes

BY KAREN MAESHIRO, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, April 22, 2007

LANCASTER - For the second time since 2005, residents near the Eastside High School construction site will be paid to cover the costs of cleaning up dust that blew off the campus onto and into their homes.

The Antelope Valley Union High School District last week authorized paying \$2,900 to residents who live along 35th Street East whose houses were hit by dust churned up by high winds during the first two weeks of April.

"I'm inundated with dust," resident Linda Bishop said. "The dust blows right down the road and blows up right in front of my house. The street is dirty and blows into the front yard. My husband washed down the patio last week. Because of the blowing dust, my backyard is filthy again."

Residents of the upscale neighborhood with its large lots say the dust is almost as fine as baby powder and blows through windows and into their homes. Out on the street there's six inches of dirt along the curbs.

"We are at our wits' end. We get dust throughout inside and outside," resident Evelina Pickett said. "It blows through the windows. When we open up the windows it's a good quarter inch of dirt. Every week I'm vacuuming the windowsills."

The \$2,900 will go to people whose homes

the district has identified as being directly downwind of the school construction site.

Claim forms will be sent to those residents, offering \$300 for homes with pools and \$200 to those without, officials said.

"Realizing the excessive winds that we've experienced, it's impossible to control dust from the site. Our proposal to homeowners is to compensate them for the inconvenience they are having to suffer," said Mat Havens, director of facility acquisition and development.

In 2005, the Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District fined the general contractor doing grading at the school site \$3,750 for failing to control so-called fugitive dust and required the company to pay 16 homeowners \$200 each and an additional \$100 if they had a pool to cover costs related to dust cleanup.

"The site was much bigger than their dust control and initial set-up for water and controlling dust," said Bret Banks, management district operations manager. "Over time, we got them to add additional controls. Unfortunately, it's right upwind of a nice residential neighborhood."

In addition, the high school district added its own water trucks for dust control, Banks said.

But Banks noted that even with construction crews doing the best they can, windstorms like the ones that occurred on April 12 and the week before can still impact the neighborhood.

Strong winds gusting as high as 100 mph blew through the Antelope Valley on April 12, uprooting trees, damaging roofs, knocking out power and forcing highway closures.

Eastside High's permanent campus at 35th Street East and Avenue J-8 is now under construction. Since early 2006, students have been attending classes in portable buildings on the campus.

The lack of rain has contributed to the dust problem. Rainfall since July 1 has measured 0.65 inches in Palmdale and 1.4 inches in Lancaster, according to the National Weather Service. Normal for both cities for the same time period is more than 7 inches.

"It's been an abnormal year where there's not a lot of water and some days much higher winds than normal," Banks said.

Neither Pickett nor Bishop received money in 2005 from the general contractor.

They added that trash blowing from the school site also is a problem.

"I never wanted to stop the school. I wanted them to watch out for the homeowners. It seems the homeowners are the ones not being treated the right way," Bishop said. "We want the homeowners to be treated fairly and equitably."

Mayor Proposes a Fee for Driving Into Manhattan

By Maria Newman

N.Y. Times, Sunday, April 22, 2007

Saying that he would not spend his final term in office "pretending that all is fine," Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg made a series of Earth Day proposals this afternoon to improve the environment of New York City, including charging a new congestion fee to drivers who come into parts of Manhattan during peak hours during weekdays.

The \$8 congestion fee was one of 127 initiatives included in a sweeping plan by the mayor to help the city of currently 8.2 million people cope with an expected surge in population that he said is sure to put a strain on its transportation, housing and energy systems.

"Let's face up to the fact that our population growth is putting our city on a collision course with the environment, which itself is growing more unstable and uncertain," the mayor said.

A key objective is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030, by which time the population is projected to grow by at least a million people, he said.

The proposal that is sure to attract the most attention, and possibly objections, is one to impose the \$8 fee on car drivers, and \$21 for truck operators, to drive in Manhattan south of 86th Street.

The mayor said congestion on the city's streets is the source of many of the city's health, environmental and economic problems.

"We can't talk about reducing air pollution without talking about congestion," he said.

"As our city continues to grow, the cost of congestion to our health, to our economy and to our environment are only going to get worse," he said. "The question is not whether we want to pay, but how do we want to pay — with an increased asthma rate, with more greenhouse gases, with more wasted time, lost business and higher prices. Or do we charge a modest fee to encourage more people to take mass transit."

The fee the mayor is proposing would only be imposed during the week, between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.. And motorists driving the major highways along Manhattan's east and west sides would not be fined, so it would be possible to go from Brooklyn to Harlem along Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive without entering the zone.

The fee would be deducted from the tolls commuters already pay to come into Manhattan via the bridges or tunnels.

There would be no toll booths, just a network of cameras that would capture license plate numbers and either charge a driver's existing commuter account or generate a bill to be paid each time.

The mayor said that about half of the fees would be paid by New York City residents — and the other half by commuters from surrounding areas. But he pledged not to begin imposing the fee for at least a year, until city officials can upgrade mass transit service into parts of New York City that are currently not well served by the city's subway or train system.

Revenue from the fees, he said, would generate about \$400 million in its first year, money that would be used to make improvements in the transit system.

The proposed fee, known as congestion pricing, is applauded by environmentalists and alternative transportation groups. But there is little doubt that much of the package of proposals will face stiff opposition from local politicians and trucking companies, as well as from the state legislators who will decide whether to approve many aspects of it.

State Assemblyman Richard Brodsky said he opposed the mayor's proposal for a congestion fee because it is a regressive tax.

"The middle class and the poor will not be able to pay these fees and the rich will," said Mr. Brodsky, who is chairman of a committee that oversees the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. "There are a lot of courageous things in the mayor's package, but this one is not very well thought out."

Clayton Boyce, a spokesman for the American Trucking Association, a national industry group, told The Associated Press, "It will be a real problem for operations for trucking companies and shippers, including all the retailers in Manhattan, which is substantial."

"And all the people who get FedEx and UPS deliveries will have problems and will bear extra expense, so we definitely see problems with it," he said.

The mayor, who has become known for his proposals that affect residents' lifestyles, including a ban on smoking and a ban on the use of trans fats in the city's restaurants, at one point in the speech joked about how far his own proposals have gone in forcing people to change the way they live.

"Banning trans fats is not enough. We also have to ban all desserts and sweets," he said, before quickly letting on to his audience that he was only joking.

The mayor spoke, appropriately enough, at the American Museum of Natural History, in the Milstein Hall of Ocean Life, under an imposing model of a 94-foot blue whale suspended from the ceiling— the largest model of a blue whale in existence.

Mr. Bloomberg is a mayor who has in many ways practiced what he preached today, riding the subway to work almost every day. He also pointed out that the museum's president, Ellen V. Futter, walks to her job everyday.

The mayor's congestion tax is patterned after one imposed by London in 2003, where government officials say it has significantly reduced congestion. During Mr. Bloomberg's speech, he played a videotaped message from Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain, who congratulated the mayor on his leadership.

Mr. Bloomberg talked about how cities and individuals have to take action, even when those actions may not be initially popular with others.

Like with the smoking ban, he said, "we did it, and whole countries followed us."

"We're not interested in preaching to others," he said. "We're doing what's best for our city. And when we reap the benefits, perhaps others will continue to follow."

NYC Pledges 1 Million New Trees by 2017

By SARA KUGLER, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Sunday, April 22, 2007

New York (AP) -- One million new trees will join the urban landscape of New York City by the year 2017 to reduce air pollution, cool temperatures and help improve the city's long term sustainability, officials said Saturday.

The tree program is one of 127 environmental proposals that Mayor Michael Bloomberg was set to outline Sunday in a speech at the Museum of Natural History, timed with the observance of Earth Day.

His administration has been working for more than a year on the package of ideas, which is also expected to include a controversial plan to charge motorists extra for driving into certain parts of Manhattan, as a way to cut down on traffic congestion and pollution.

Bloomberg, whose second term expires at the end of 2009, has a goal of reducing New York City's carbon emissions by 30 percent over the next two decades. He has said that the population is likely to grow by another million in that time — up from 8.2 million today — and that the city needs a plan now to deal with the strain on infrastructure and the environment.

The effort was put together by the mayor's Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability.

On Saturday, city officials announced the tree program, which is to begin this July.

For the next 10 years, the city will plant 23,000 trees each year along city streets, to reach a goal of having a tree in "every single place where it is possible to plant a street tree," Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff said.

The remaining will be planted in parks and public lots, while the private sector will also be encouraged to plant trees on their properties as well.

A number of different species will be planted. For each case, foresters assess the sun and shadow levels and other factors to determine the best type for that spot.

Today, New York City has 5.2 million trees, or 24 percent canopy cover. By comparison, Chicago's canopy cover is 11 percent and the rate for Atlanta is 37 percent.

The city said the increase in trees will help cool temperatures, because trees over roads help decrease the near-surface air temperature by 3.5 degrees. They also remove air pollution and reduce ozone, officials said.

The Bloomberg administration will commit another \$37.5 million annually to forestry programs, up from \$11 million currently, officials said.

Bloomberg Draws a Blueprint for a Greener City

By Thomas J. Leuck

N.Y. Times, Monday, April 23, 2007

In a quarter-century plan to create what he called “the first environmentally sustainable 21st-century city,” Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg proposed a sweeping and politically contentious vision yesterday of 127 projects, regulations and innovations for New York and the region.

The plan is intended to foster steady population growth, with the city expected to gain about 1 million residents by 2030, and to put in place a host of environmentally sensitive measures that would reduce the greenhouse gases it generates.

Mr. Bloomberg also set the parameters for what could be a large piece of his legacy as mayor. In an address outlining the plan yesterday at the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, Mr. Bloomberg likened it to the first blueprints for Central Park more than 100 years ago and the construction of Rockefeller Center in the Great Depression.

Many elements of the plan will face political hurdles in Albany and will depend on huge financial commitments from the state and federal governments, not to mention future mayors. To start, Mr. Bloomberg intends to add hundreds of millions of dollars to his proposed \$57 billion budget for the next fiscal year, his aides said yesterday.

“Our economy is humming, our fiscal house is in order and our near-term horizon looks bright,” Mr. Bloomberg said. “If we don’t act now, when?”

The mayor chose Earth Day to give his speech and to release the details of his proposals. As widely predicted, the plan calls for an \$8-a-day charge for people who drive their cars into Manhattan below 86th Street. The proposal for “congestion pricing,” which City Hall believes would reduce traffic and auto emissions while raising money for transportation projects, has already been met by harsh criticism from drivers and some officials outside Manhattan.

Other proposals in the plan, dubbed PlaNYC by the mayor’s staff, range from building huge capital projects and creating government authorities to implementing relatively benign initiatives in housing, transportation and land use.

One proposal calls for investments of \$200 million a year from both the city and state to create a financing authority that would assure the completion of major projects like the Second Avenue subway. New authorities, with representatives from the city, state and private industry, would push for improved energy efficiency in new buildings and for the replacement of energy-guzzling power plants.

The city also would encourage the construction of platforms over railyards and highways to create land for housing. In addition, the plan would open 290 schoolyards as playgrounds, eliminate city sales taxes on energy-efficient hybrid vehicles, increase the number of bike paths and cultivate mussels to suck pollution out of the rivers.

Much of the plan, including its most costly proposals, would require state approval, Gov. Eliot Spitzer, did not attend Mr. Bloomberg’s address, although another governor – Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, who appeared via videotape on two large screens — introduced the mayor.

Governor Spitzer, in a brief statement released late yesterday, said: "The mayor has released a comprehensive plan with admirable goals, especially the commitment to reduce energy consumption, and we look forward to reviewing the plan."

Mr. Bloomberg's initiative could be vulnerable to changes at City Hall and to setbacks in the economy.

But several observers praised it as a much-needed master plan for growth and the environment in a city that has let too many decades pass without such a vision.

"How you follow through on this is a huge political question, but it is a good time to be pushing it," said Diana Fortuna, president of the Citizens Budget Committee. Ms. Fortuna was among several hundred people invited to the mayor's speech, many of them associated with the 150 advocacy groups that had provided recommendations to Mr. Bloomberg.

The mayor acknowledged that the proposal for congestion pricing was the most contentious, calling it "the elephant in the room."

Under the plan, the city would charge \$8 for cars and \$21 for commercial trucks that enter Manhattan below 86th Street from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays. The charge would be \$4 for drivers within Manhattan, and several exemptions would apply. No one would be charged on the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive or the West Side Highway. There would be no charge for moving cars to comply with alternate side parking, and there would be no charge for taxis.

A similar system is in place in congested parts of London and Singapore, where Mr. Bloomberg said it had been shown to reduce congestion and improve air quality. In Manhattan, cameras and other equipment at intersections would deduct money from a driver's E-ZPass account or photograph a car's license plate, with the driver given two days to pay the fee through the mail, online or at certain stores.

The city said yesterday that it intended to seek state approval for a three-year test of congestion pricing and would need to spend \$225 million to buy and install traffic-recording equipment. Officials said the city and state could jointly apply for grants from the United States Department of Transportation to cover those costs.

"The federal government really does want to be helpful," Mr. Bloomberg said, in a rare departure from his prepared text.

Later, Mary E. Peters, the United States secretary of transportation, issued a statement praising the plan as "the kind of bold thinking leaders across the country need to embrace if we hope to win the battle against traffic congestion."

The Nassau County executive, Thomas R. Suozzi, who has many constituents who commute by car to Manhattan, also was enthusiastic. "People's first reaction is they don't want to pay," he said. "But getting them to switch to mass transit benefits us all."

Mr. Bloomberg also called for improvements in express bus service and other public transportation in neighborhoods with little access to the subway, and where people are most inclined to drive into Manhattan for work or shopping. He said the city would complete those improvements before anyone is charged in the congestion pricing system.

Still, the reaction of many officials from outside Manhattan was cool. "I wonder if it is another hidden tax on working people," said Adolfo Carrion. Jr., the Bronx borough president. "I worry about people who need to use their cars to get to work."

Money raised through congestion pricing would be added to the \$400 million a year in combined city and state funds that the plan seeks for the creation of a new financing authority for

transportation projects. The Sustainable Mobility and Regional Transportation Authority would issue bonds to award matching grants for projects by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and other agencies.

Mayor Bloomberg said yesterday that the added financial muscle was needed to close a \$31 billion funding gap in 18 projects that are planned or underway, including the Second Avenue subway.

The new authority would be governed by a board with equal representation from the city and state. But it could provide a mechanism for Mr. Bloomberg and future mayors to reclaim some power over planning and capital expenditures by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. It is also a joint city and state agency, but one that has often been dominated by appointees of the governor.

In a prepared statement yesterday, officials from the authority said: "We applaud the mayor's commitment to the transit system and will carefully analyze the city's proposal to understand its impact on the M.T.A."

Two other authorities, a New York City Energy Planning Board and an Energy Efficiency Authority, would be created to marshal investments that would finance energy conservation efforts and the construction of efficient power plants.

The plan also calls for a surcharge on electrical power customers, averaging \$2.50 a month, with the money used to finance grants and other incentives for retrofitting buildings with energy-efficient materials.

The new energy planning board, governed by city and state officials and utility executives, would make long-term commitments to buy energy from companies or investors who build efficient power plants.

In another measure, the city would plant more than 1 million trees in the next 10 years. It would offer incentives — intended to capture storm water runoff — for larger and deeper sidewalk tree pits and green roofs.

The plan calls for zoning changes in many neighborhoods with access to public transportation that would allow for larger homes and a higher density of housing, although such changes are often resisted in those neighborhoods.

It pledges that every New Yorker would live within a 10-minute walk from a park, and it calls for small public plazas in each community board district that does not have a park.

It would replace or modernize diesel-powered school buses in the city fleet and offer incentives to get heavy diesel trucks off the road. And it would commit city funds to clean up 7,600 acres of so-called brownfields, where soil has been polluted by chemicals or industrial materials. Some of the land would become parks.

Besides the introduction by Governor Schwarzenegger, Mr. Bloomberg's address yesterday included videotaped praise by http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/tony_blair/index.html?inline=nyt-per Tony Blair, the British prime minister, who made it clear the initiative was capturing the imagination of urban planners — if not necessarily the support it will need in Albany, Washington and neighborhoods outside Manhattan.

"This would mark out New York as a global leader in halting climate change" Mr. Blair said.

Courts Reject Alexandria Power Plant Moves City Had Tried to Use Zoning Authority, Permit Challenge to Shut Mirant Facility

By Kirstin Downey, Staff Writer
Washington Post, April 21, 2007

The city of Alexandria got slapped down in two courts yesterday, suffering setbacks in its long-running campaign to shut down the pollution-producing Mirant power plant on the Potomac River.

In one case, Virginia Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth B. Lacy ruled that Alexandria had improperly used its zoning power to require the power plant to obtain a special-use permit. The city would then have been able to designate the plant as a "non-complying use," which could have forced the plant out of the city. Mirant had sued to block the zoning change.

On a separate legal front, a federal district court in Alexandria ruled against the city by approving a consent decree that had been negotiated by Mirant, the states of Maryland and Virginia and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Alexandria had challenged the consent decree, saying that the agreement would benefit the region, but at the expense of Alexandria residents because the plant will be permitted to increase its production at the plant in the city in exchange for reducing overall emissions.

These rulings "were not what we were looking for," said Alexandria City Attorney Ignacio Pessoa. "We're going to consider other options."

Mirant officials were jubilant at the double dose of favorable court rulings. "This is very positive news for the company, particularly in regards to the Potomac River plant because it allows us to continue to provide reliable energy to the nation's capital," said Debra Bolton, assistant general counsel and vice president of Mirant.

Bolton said that Mirant has sought to be a "good neighbor" to Alexandria, promptly installing pollution-control equipment, but that city officials have persisted in their efforts to use legal means to restrict the plant's operations.

"We'd rather have the city work with us, and not against us," Bolton said. "We'll continue to be there."

Under the consent decree, Mirant has agreed to reduce its emissions of nitrogen oxides by 29,000 tons annually at each of four plants, including the Alexandria facility, the Morgantown plant in Charles County, the Chalk Point plant in Prince George's County and the Dickerson plant in Montgomery County. Most of the reductions will occur at the three Maryland plants, according to the Maryland Department of the Environment, which called the court's approval of the plan "the last step in this long negotiation."

"The consent decree is arguably good for the region, but it's not good for Alexandria," Pessoa said. "There's no reason to sell Alexandria down the river for those regional benefits."

The coal-fired power plant supplies electricity throughout the region, including to the District's central business district and many federal operations. It was built in 1949, when many other kinds of industrial operations lined the Alexandria waterfront, but now sits surrounded by residential developments, adjacent to the popular Mount Vernon hiking and jogging trail.

In her ruling, Justice Lacy said Mirant has a "vested right" to operate its plant there.

In recent years the plant has become the focus of intense environmental concerns. It was shuttered during summer 2005 for environmental violations but reopened after company officials installed new pollution-control devices.

Nitrogen oxides contribute to formation of ground-level ozone

Flying lab to test Pacific skies for dust from Asia **Researchers seeking to discover its effect on weather, global warming**

David Perlman, science editor
S.F. Chronicle, Monday, April 23, 2007

Vast plumes of fine-grained desert sand and pollution sweep constantly from Asia across the Pacific and over North America, darkening skies along the way and affecting the weather and global warming, but scientists don't yet know to what extent.

This week, researchers plan to launch a flying laboratory they hope will give them an answer.

A team from UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography and the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., began successful test flights last week aboard the government's newest high-altitude research aircraft. Within a few days, the team's leaders say, the Gulfstream V plane, financed by the National Science Foundation, will head to Anchorage, Alaska, and from there will fly over the ocean to Yokota Air Base near Tokyo on the first leg of its six-week mission capturing plume samples.

The plumes of particles, still poorly understood, are so huge that they are among the largest weather-influencing events on Earth. They are caused by combination of factors.

Dust storms from fierce winds that whip the Central Asian deserts cast a pall over Korea, rise high into the atmosphere as they speed eastward, and often cause a yellow-brown haze over California, the scientists say. At the same time, millions of tons of dense soot and chemicals rise into the air from China's booming coal-burning industries each year, and they, too, add to the density of the plumes that reach North America.

"Dust from deserts like the Gobi and the Taklimakan have been crossing the Pacific at high altitudes for millennia, but in the last 10 or 15 years it has been mixed with a growing burden of soot and industrial chemicals," said Veerabhadran Ramanathan, an atmospheric scientist at Scripps. "Now we need to know just how those micron-sized particles can change global temperatures and storm clouds and rainfall patterns."

Ramanathan and Jeffrey Stith, a cloud physicist at National Center for Atmospheric Research, are chief scientists for the airborne mission called PACDEX, the Pacific Dust Experiment. On each flight, one of the two will join other researchers aboard the plane, while the other leads a ground-support team providing updated information from computer models and satellite data.

During six weeks of the mission, the plane will fly wherever the prevailing springtime winds are carrying the dust and soot. The flying laboratory's 6,000-mile range and ability to fly as high as 45,000 feet -- or even down to 1,000 feet -- will allow it to grab particle samples for analysis on board.

Ground-based scientists in China, Japan and South Korea are already making measurements with instruments beamed skyward. In addition, Kimberly Prather, an atmospheric chemist at Scripps and a member of the PACDEX team, has sent one of her graduate students, Andrew Ault, 23, to Gosan Island off the southern tip of Korea to analyze microscopic dust and pollution particles at ground level.

Ault is using a highly sensitive mass spectrometer, a high-speed instrument that can swiftly determine the chemistry of particles one at a time as winds sweep the stuff across the island. In the one month Ault spends on the island, the spectrometer will have determined the precise size and chemistry of 36 million particles at the rate of 50,000 particles an hour, Prather said in a telephone interview after quickly calculating the instrument's capability.

Scientists like Ramanathan, Stith and Prather believe those particle clouds play an as-yet unrealized role in global warming. Water vapor in high-altitude clouds cannot form raindrops or ice crystals without a single particle as a nucleus for each drop or crystal. When they do form, they trap heat just the way greenhouse gases do.

"Dust from the Asian deserts plays a major, major role in climate change," Prather said, "and that fact hasn't figured fully so far in all the international estimates of the rate of change. It's what we're trying to calculate right now, and it's taking our neat chemistry experiment to know how the atmosphere changes when dust is aloft."

The particle clouds aren't on a one-way street, however, Ramanathan noted. The winds over American industry are also sending pollutants -- particularly sulfates and nitric oxides that cause acid rain -- far across the Atlantic.

"We send our own brown clouds to Europe and Asia," he said, "so each one of us is polluting each other's backyard."

Alternative vehicles showcased in China

By JOE McDONALD -- AP Business Writer

Sunday, April 22, 2007

SHANGHAI, China (AP) One experimental clean-energy car runs on natural gas. Another uses ethanol distilled from corn. A third has a zero-emissions electric motor powered by a hydrogen fuel cell.

These alternative vehicles were created not by a global automaker but by China's small but ambitious car companies, which displayed them Sunday alongside gasoline-powered sedans and sport utility vehicles at the start of the Shanghai Auto Show.

At a time when they are still trying to establish themselves in international markets, Chinese automakers are already investing in such avant-garde research in a bid to win a foothold in the next generation of technology.

"This is the tide of the industry. If you don't go with the tide, the industry will pass you by," said Qin Lihong, a vice president of China's biggest domestic automaker, Chery Auto Co., in an interview ahead of the show's opening.

China's communist leaders are encouraging the development as part of efforts to cut pollution and rising dependence on imported oil and to make this country a creator of profitable technologies.

Chinese manufacturers are getting help from foreign automakers in joint ventures and from research alliances with Chinese universities and government laboratories.

Beijing has made cleaner cars a policy priority, targeting the field as one of 11 priority areas in a 15-year technology development plan issued in February 2006. It promised grants and tax breaks to support industry efforts.

The campaign embodies one of Beijing's strategies in technology development: Pick new areas with no entrenched competitors so China can make breakthroughs without huge costs.

While foreign automakers have a lead in conventional technology, "in new energy we're starting from almost the same line," said Chen Hong, the president of Shanghai Automotive Industries Corp.

"So we believe we can catch up with other auto companies and make great progress in developing new energy vehicles," Chen said.

China's leaders are pressing its auto, steel, manufacturing and other industries to improve energy efficiency and cut pollution.

They see China's rising reliance on imported oil as a strategic weakness, especially since much of it comes from the politically volatile Middle East and crosses seas beyond Beijing's control.

China already is the world's No. 2 oil consumer after the United States and saw imports soar by 14.5 percent in 2006, driven by economic growth that has topped 10 percent for the past four years.

A boom in car sales has added to smog shrouding China's major cities, which are among the world's dirtiest. Vehicle sales jumped 25.1 percent last year to 7.2 million units, including 3.8 million passenger cars.

At the Shanghai show, both SAIC and Chery displayed experimental fuel-cell sedans, while they and a third Chinese automaker, Chang'an Automobile Group Co., also showed gasoline-electric hybrids.

SAIC said it will start selling its hybrid next year, while Qin said Chery's would go on the market in two to three years.

"The hybrid will be our focus," SAIC chairman Hu Maoyan said at a news conference. "The fuel cell will be our direction."

SAIC has spent 100 million yuan (\$12 million) on fuel cell research, according to state media.

Chery had the widest array of alternative vehicles on display at the Shanghai show. They included models outfitted to run on bio-diesel made from vegetable oil or a "flexible fuel" choice of compressed natural gas or ethanol.

Foreign automakers also are playing a role in China's research.

General Motors Corp. has a joint-venture technology center with SAIC in Shanghai and operates three experimental fuel cell buses in the city. DaimlerChrysler AG has three of its own fuel cell buses running regular routes in Beijing in a research project with the technology ministry.

Foreign automakers including GM, Ford Motor Co., BMW AG and Honda Motor Co. displayed their own hybrids and experimental fuel cell cars at the Shanghai show.

Company officials said hydrogen fuel cells, which produce power with no exhaust, are the cleanest option. But they say it could be a decade or more before such technology is commercially feasible, due partly to the need to create a network of hydrogen filling stations.

Chinese authorities also are looking at other possible fuels such as natural gas and methane extracted from coal, said Mei-Wei Cheng, the president of Ford's China operations.

"This is not an easy decision, because every option has pros and cons," Cheng said. "The government is trying to find a solution as quickly as possible, but this is a difficult problem."

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, April 22, 2007:](#)

Refinery conflict is 'sin of the past'

Learning that an oil refinery near their northwest Bakersfield home planned to expand, Michael and Jillian Stump wrote to Kern County planners:

"Irrespective of who is at fault, the town has grown up around the refinery, a fact well-known to Flying J when it purchased the facility. ... We have grave concerns about the safety of refinery operation in this area, given the vicinity of so many people trying to live, work and attend church."

County planners have wisely delayed consideration of plans to significantly expand the refinery on Rosedale Highway, now known as Big West of California. Since being built in the 1930, metropolitan Bakersfield has changed.

Once surrounded by farm land, the refinery and other industrial plants now are surrounded by homes and businesses in a fast-growing urban center.

Central to concerns over the refinery's expansion is the proposed use of hydrofluoric acid, a highly toxic chemical that can endanger employees and people living and working nearby. The refinery's safety record also is a concern.

County planners are asking refinery officials for more information about expansion plans. Planning commissioners are not expected to consider the project until later this summer.

But concerns over the refinery's expansion vividly demonstrate the harm that has been caused by the failure of county and city leaders to work together to guide the growth of metropolitan Bakersfield.

The Stumps hit the nail on the head: No matter who is at fault, urban Bakersfield has been allowed to grow around industrial operations, such as the refinery, that should have been well-separated from homes, shopping centers, schools and churches.

Two decades ago, city and county officials jointly adopted a general plan for metropolitan Bakersfield. But they have independently and frequently amended the plan, allowing leapfrog development and straining basic public services, such as roads.

Until recent years, Rosedale and most of what is now northwest Bakersfield was within the county's jurisdiction. Kern County supervisors approved residential and commercial developments with little regard for city concerns. Likewise, City Council members approved development plans within the city's border, with little regard for county concerns.

County and city officials are now updating metropolitan Bakersfield's general plan. It is a process that likely will take a couple of years.

The new plan will not undo the sins of the past such as allowing homes and businesses to be built so close to industrial operations. Rather, the new plan must help solve problems, such as traffic congestion, air pollution and unrestricted consumption of prime agricultural land.

It also must protect and enhance the quality of life for all of us and protect job-producing industrial operations from the encroachment of urban development.

For the revised plan to be more than an interesting civic exercise, city and county leaders must be committed to heeding the plan and more closely coordinating development oversight.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, April 22, 2007:](#)

Look into plant

As a neighbor to the Community Recycling plant on Wheeler Ridge, I am responding to the farmer's petition to renew the facility's conditional-use permit.

- To the claim that the acrid smell comes from the dairy: I find it difficult to believe county officials cannot tell the difference between BS and cow manure.
- I suggest the air quality staff investigate at night and on weekends when the level of activity at Community Recycling increases and the air is filled with plastic bits and black dust.
- I question why residential developments in the area were required by the county to have paved ingress/egress, when Community Recycling is allowed to drag so much mud onto the road that the pavement becomes slick as black ice in a rain. I have observed vehicles skidding off the pavement on many occasions.
- I can drink the milk that the dairies produce, but I have been told by many operators and employees of large farming concerns that the product that Community Recycling produces is of no nutritive value and they don't buy it.

I am anxious to see how our county officials respond to the petition.

-- KAREN E. WASS, Bakersfield

[Fresno Bee columnist, Sunday, April 22, 2007:](#)

Dairy fairy tales won't keep park breathable

By Bill McEwen / The Fresno Bee

It's not nice to pile on.

But when the Janice and Diane Sisterhood is at the bottom of the pile, I can't stop.

Janice and Diane are mythical Happy Cows. They pitch cheese for California dairies, which in the commercials are perpetually pleasant patches of perfect pasture free of flies and manure. I should be so lucky to have a backyard as beautiful as the fields where Janice and Diane cavort.

And the sisterhood is the dairy industry and its political accomplices. Its goal is to keep milk prices high and production costs low and to build supersized dairies, with 3,000 cows or more.

Tulare County, the state's top producer of milk, is a card-carrying member of the sisterhood. So, it comes as no surprise that the Board of Supervisors has approved putting more than 12,000 cows near a state park.

Not a run-of-the-mill state park, either. As proposed, two dairies would be built about a mile from Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park. The park is named for a black Civil War hero and honors the sole town in California founded and run by blacks.

The idea of building megadairies there is ridiculous. But the lunacy is magnified by the fact that five dairies already operate within five miles of the park.

The proposal is getting what it deserves: a lawsuit from state Attorney General Jerry Brown, opposition from state parks, proposed legislation to create a buffer around the park and protests from Allensworth-area residents -- as well as anyone else with a lick of sense.

I hope opponents bury the project in legal papers stacked as high as the 20 tons of manure the dairies would produce every day.

The sisterhood, meanwhile, is doing its best to embarrass Tulare County. Supervisor Steve Worthley has said the dairies wouldn't stink because of prevailing winds. Another supervisor, Connie Conway, has said the dairies won't harm the park.

I'm sure some people believe them. They're the same folks who think cows are born with three udders: one for vanilla, one for chocolate and one for strawberry.

Bill Maze, who represents Tulare County in the Assembly, and Worthley also have said they don't want the state poking into a local issue.

There's an easy way for the sisterhood to preserve local control. If it quit pretending the world's flat, dairies smell like Chanel No. 5 and people go to parks to swat flies, the state wouldn't have to intervene.

An idea being floated would have the landowner, Sam Etchegaray, sell part of the property to a private nonprofit, which would create a buffer around the park. Under that plan, the dairies wouldn't be constructed.

It's an appealing possibility, but one dependent upon the dairyman and the nonprofit, The Trust for Public Land, agreeing on price. Good luck.

Regardless of the outcome, the Janice and Diane Sisterhood will continue to foist its fairy tale about milk production on people.

I'm happy for the Happy Cows. I'd be happier, still, if supervisors stopped insulting the public's intelligence by insisting -- with straight faces, no less -- that a historic state park will do just fine with two megadairies next door.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, April 23, 2007:](#)

Good blueprint for state

Speaker Fabián Núñez needs to give this bill his support.

When it comes to challenges that threaten the state's economy and environment, transportation is near the top of the list. Californians are not only increasing in number, they are driving longer distances, for work and errands, and spending more and more of their time behind the wheel. You can measure the consequences in poor air quality, congested highways and more families that complain they don't get enough time together.

These driving habits also pose a challenge to the state's law to reduce greenhouse gases. Even as Californians transition to cleaner vehicles, they are piling up more miles. Ever-increasing mileage means more fuel consumption, more carbon dioxide and less chance the state can reduce emissions 25% in 13 years, as the law requires.

Fortunately, there are strategies for slowing the growth of what engineers call "vehicle-miles-traveled." One of these is embodied in legislation now being considered in the Assembly.

Assembly Bill 842, by Assemblyman Dave Jones of Sacramento, seeks to create incentives so regional planning agencies will direct more housing closer to transit stations, schools, jobs and shopping. The goal is to encourage a return to traditional neighborhood design, in which people can take more of their daily trips by bus, rail, bicycle or walking.

Computer models demonstrate that, by constraining leapfrog development and focusing a mix of housing, jobs and retail within existing localities, a region can actually reduce an average household's vehicle mileage by 10% or more.

The Sacramento region has pioneered this approach through its Blueprint program. Jones now wants to imprint the blueprint on the state's other metropolitan areas.

AB 842 requires that regional transportation plans approved by the California Transportation Commission include plans -- blueprints -- to reduce the growth of vehicle miles traveled. It would dedicate bond funds from Proposition 84 to develop these blueprints. It also would direct dispersal of \$300 million in Proposition 1C housing bonds to local governments seeking to develop infill projects.

The Assembly Local Government Committee passed Jones' bill Wednesday. It goes next to the Assembly Housing Committee. It likely will face a tough hearing from lawmakers who don't want to tie up the allocation of infrastructure bonds.

But there are strong arguments in favor of ensuring that state investments don't worsen the challenge of reducing smog and greenhouse gases. That's why Speaker Fabián Núñez, (who co-authored the state's global warming bill) needs to give this bill his support. It's a false choice to say California can't protect the environment while quickly making needed investments in transportation and housing. AB 842 will help it achieve both.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, April 21, 2007:](#)

Protect Allensworth

State is right to intervene against nearby dairy development.

The state attorney general has intervened in the controversy over dairies planned near the Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park in Tulare County, and legislation is moving forward that would extend protections against such projects for the park. Both actions are welcome, for the short term.

Attorney General Jerry Brown filed a lawsuit Tuesday challenging the environmental review for the two proposed dairies. Tulare County supervisors unanimously approved the projects, over the objections of Allensworth residents and many others, including African Americans who hold a special affinity for the park.

It is named for Allen Allensworth, a black Civil War hero. It is the only town in California founded, financed and governed by African Americans. As such, it has a special cachet.

The case also raises larger issues surrounding the rapid and massive expansion of the dairy industry in the Valley. As land prices skyrocket in Southern California, dairies there are selling out and moving their operations here. Existing local dairies are also expanding at a swift pace. The state's dairy industry generates more than \$8 billion in gross receipts each year, with much of that coming from the Valley.

That makes the dairy industry extremely valuable to the state -- but that wealth comes at a price. Dairies also produce waste water and solid waste in enormous quantities, exacerbating existing water and air quality problems in many areas. They can also be less than attractive neighbors, owing to the odors they emit and the pests they attract.

Local government leaders express frustration with what they regard as state meddling in local land use and planning decision. They have a point: Such decisions should be made at the local level.

But the Allensworth park is a state property and resource, and the state is right to intervene when it is threatened -- as it surely is by this proposal.

The owner of the property and the man behind the dairy proposal, Sam Etchegaray of Visalia, has also talked of selling the land to the The Trust for Public Land, a private nonprofit that seeks to conserve natural and historic lands. That would end the proposed dairies and protect Allensworth. For the long term, that would be the best solution.

And Tulare County's supervisors need to get over their mad on this. They made a mistake, and they're being called on it. That's good news.

[Guest Commentary in the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, April 21, 2007:](#)

Scott Haggerty From Alameda County: Congestion relief coming for Interstate 580

ALAMEDA COUNTY'S drivers and residents can look forward to congestion relief along the Tri-Valley segment of the I-580 corridor, with shovels in the ground for new lanes starting early next year.

Federal, state and local governments have committed more than \$450 million to three landmark projects for I-580: new HOV lanes eastbound and westbound, and a new interchange at Highway 84.

All three projects received final funding thanks to the passage of voter-approved Proposition 1B last fall.

All qualified for the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account of the bond, which funds highway improvements that address traffic congestion.

All projects must be under construction by 2012.

Interstate 580 is the major inter-regional gateway connecting the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley to the rest of the state for goods movement.

The I-580 corridor also connects affordable housing to good-paying jobs.

Traffic, primarily during an ever-expanding a.m. and p.m. commute period, exceeds the capacity of I-580 as currently designed. With the exception of the I-80 Bay Bridge approach, this segment of I-580 consistently rates as the most congested corridor in the entire nine-county region.

There is no doubt in the minds of those of us who travel through this corridor regularly, or anyone who lives in the Tri-Valley, that the chronic highway congestion impacts traffic flow and safety on our city and county roads, as well as our air quality.

In its Transportation 2030 Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission projects that traffic coming over the Altamont Pass will increase 90 percent by 2030.

The Port of Oakland estimates that the number of containers it handles will increase three-fold during the same period.

The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency estimates that approximately 40 percent of the traffic on I-580 in the Livermore Valley has neither an origin nor a destination in Alameda County.

Regardless of where this traffic originates, and as troublesome as the congestion is today, it is only expected to worsen.

Later this month the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency will approve a comprehensive plan called the I-580 Tri-Valley Corridor Improvement Delivery Strategy.

The plan sets a phased timetable for corridor upgrades, including the three projects covered by the California Transportation Commission's recent allocation of Proposition 1B funds.

The plan also sets priorities for expanding the right-of-way for BART or other transit in the I-580 median and uses "smart transportation" technology to help cars and buses flow smoothly.

There are a number of elements included in the comprehensive plan that include construction of auxiliary lanes, truck climbing lanes and rebuilding existing interchange structures including major improvements needed to improve traffic flow and safety at the I-580/I-680 interchange.

Some of the later elements will be built as funding opportunities become available.

In terms of transit improvements, to prepare for any future opportunity for a BART extension to Livermore, the CMA has outlined in the strategy its plan to begin environmental clearance in the I-580 corridor to accommodate "transit" in the median.

About \$100 million has been earmarked for this important element. Hopefully, this will provide some incentive to BART leadership to re-focus its attention on this extension. In response to concerns raised about the use of the median for the new HOV lanes making it more difficult for future BART -- if BART approved the extension today and the necessary funding was secured -- the existing median width does not meet BART's specifications and new right-of-way on the outside lanes would be needed.

Although the new HOV lanes will infringe on a portion of existing median, it also provides utility of existing space for a much needed additional lane of traffic in the near-term.

Given all of the various factors to consider in addressing congestion in the I-580 corridor, the CMA has outlined a prudent course of action for the future.

We will continue to seek funding toward improving the crucial I-580/I-680 interchange as well as the other, unfunded elements outlined in the I-580 Strategy.

I am pleased that progress will be made to bring relief to I-580, and by extension, to the entire Tri-Valley.

Haggerty is chairman of the Alameda County Congestion Management Board, and also represents the county on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Haggerty represents District 1 on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.