

It's time to Spare the Air

The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Spare the Air season begins today and will run through September in an effort to reduce summertime smog and reach federally mandated deadlines for achieving clean air.

When a Spare the Air day is declared, Valley residents are asked to avoid or reduce their use of pollution-producing equipment for 24 hours.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is expected to declare 20 to 45 Spare the Air Days in different areas of the San Joaquin Valley when air quality is unhealthy.

Employers can register for e-mails and fax notices about Spare the Air days by logging onto www.valleyair.org or calling (559) 230-6000.

To participate in Spare the Air days, residents can:

- Car-pool or use public transportation
- Ride a bike or walk
- Postpone using gas-powered lawn equipment
- Use electric briquette lighters instead of lighter fluid
- Keep cars tuned up.

It's not summer, but it's time to Spare the Air

BEE STAFF REPORTS

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Ah, it's that time of year, when the thoughts of Northern San Joaquin Valley residents turn to pollen, dust, particulate matter and ozone - especially ozone.

That's right. Spare the Air season begins today.

While officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District may not be able to do much about pollen, they once again plan an aggressive battle against summertime air pollution.

Spare the Air season runs through September. During that time, the air district typically forecasts 20 to 45 Spare the Air days, when air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

The primary air pollution problem in the valley during summer is ozone, the main ingredient of smog.

"Spare the Air is a popular program that always generates a high degree of public participation," said Jaime Holt, public information administrator for the district. "Employers are a crucial link in conveying this important air quality information."

When the district forecasts a Spare the Air Day, e-mail or fax notices are sent to employers who have registered in the program. They notify their workers and encourage them to adopt air-friendly behaviors that will help reduce pollution levels, such as car-pooling, bicycling and riding public transportation.

Despite years of air quality improvements, Holt said the valley air basin remains one of the country's worst for summertime smog.

Spare the Air participation is free. The air district provides employer participants with brochures, notification posters and incentive items. The region's Spare the Air status is updated daily, by county, on the district's toll-free phone line at 800-766-4463 and online at www.valleyair.org.

Smoky grass fire closes highway with poor visibility

Doane Yawger

Merced Sun-Star Tues., June 5, 2007

A grass fire stretched for about a quarter-mile along both sides of Highway 99 near Auto Center Drive and 16th and V streets Monday night, bringing traffic to a stop due to thick smoke.

Merced Fire Chief Ken Mitten said five city trucks, three Merced County units and an Atwater engine were deployed to the 6:40 p.m. fire along both sides of the highway. It's unknown what started the fire but it could have been a discarded cigarette, Mitten said.

The fire, fanned by 12 to 14 mph winds, was declared under control about 7:45 p.m. The highway was blocked for about 40 minutes.

No accidents were reported but zero visibility was reported. Four California Highway Patrol officers responded, blocking traffic until the fire was quelled.

Orchards must trade matches for chippers

Valley ag fires fall victim to tighter air-pollution rules

By Alex Breitler Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

STOCKTON - San Joaquin Valley fruit and nut growers in the past would pile and torch their 20- to 25-year-old trees that had become less productive, making room for new trees or different crops.

But that longtime practice of burning old fruit and nut orchards is being phased out by a series of restrictions to help curb air pollution. The latest of those restrictions, a partial ban on such agricultural burning that includes walnuts and almonds, went into effect late last week.

Some San Joaquin-area growers now use chippers to eat up the leaves, branches, trunks, roots and sticks, which are hauled off to cogeneration plants to be burned to produce energy, said Tom Orvis, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Farm Bureau.

But chippers can cost more than \$260,000. Hiring a crew to do it can cost hundreds of dollars per hour, Orvis said.

"There's always been concern" about the cost, he said.

Orchards 20 acres or smaller are granted an extension until 2010. It does not make sense to use such expensive equipment for such small areas, says the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Reprieves also were granted to citrus, apples, pears, quince and fig growers, due to disease likely to spread unless their waste is burned.

Extensions aside, the new rules are expected to eliminate nearly 2,400 tons per year of pollutants that contribute to the region's particulate matter and ozone problems.

For example, volatile organic compounds are expected to drop by 811 tons per year. That is roughly the same amount of pollution emitted by nearly 146,000 typical cars driven across the country.

Valley air quality watchdogs question the district's decision to grant extensions just weeks after the district voted to give itself more time to meet federal ozone standards.

Agricultural burning is a "significant source" of pollution, said Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

"What we have to grapple with in the air basin is we must address all source categories," Newell said, adding that the delays are not in the spirit of a 2003 state law that began the current phase-out of agricultural burning.

Gabriele Ludwig, a spokeswoman for the Almond Board of California in Modesto, said most almond growers are already in compliance with the new rule. Growers can continue to burn orchard prunings until 2010 but only on days in which air quality is acceptable.

"The world is not going to come to an end for us," Ludwig said.

Kern County tries new way to keep dust pollution down

In the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, June 4, 2007

Bakersfield, Calif. (AP) -- Officials hope to use an enzyme-and-water solution to reduce Kern County's dust pollution and save taxpayers the cost of paving miles of road.

This summer, the county will try the mixture on the shoulder of roads, which are one of the largest sources of particulate matter pollution, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The county is required to pave the shoulders on half of its urban roads and 25 percent of its rural roads by 2010 under an air regulation. That would cost about \$60 million - money the county doesn't have, officials said.

It costs about \$125,000 to pave a mile of road versus \$10,000 per mile for the enzyme-and-water solution, said Andy Richter, a maintenance engineer with the roads department.

The mixture, which helps bind dirt and forms a hard surface, seems durable enough to withstand breaking and cracking when driven on, but more testing will be done this summer, he said.

Most communities in the San Joaquin Valley struggle with particulate matter, which is made up of tiny particles of dust, ash and soot less than the width of a human hair and can cause respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

Officials in Merced, Kings, Tulare and Fresno counties also said they don't have the funds to pave all their road shoulders, Richter said.

Allensworth Park buffer zone backed

Assembly approved bill draws criticism

By Jake Henshaw, Sacramento Bureau
Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

SACRAMENTO - After a debate that ranged from black history to private property rights, the Assembly approved a bill on Monday to create a buffer zone around Allensworth State Historic Park.

Lawmakers voted 44-23 to approve Assembly Bill 576, which would create a 2.5-mile protective zone around the park as part of a campaign to keep odors and other possible negative effects of proposed dairies away from the park. The park was created in the 1970s to preserve the town for African Americans founded in 1908 by Col. Allen Allensworth, a Civil War veteran.

"The town of Allensworth is an example of African Americans coming together to shatter the grip of racism and discrimination," said Assemblywoman Wilmer Amina Carter, D-Rialto, the bill's author.

Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, whose district includes the park, added that she supports agriculture but complained that residents of the nearby Allensworth community were left out of the early review of the two proposed dairies.

"This is about respect," said Parra, who supported the bill. "This is about preserving history."

Opponents argued that the bill undermines the role of local governments to determine land use and the right of property owners to use their land.

"I am highly sympathetic to the arguments" for the bill, said Assemblyman Chuck DeVore, R-Irvine, "but we need to keep our hands off of private property."

Assemblyman Bill Maze, R-Visalia, said in an interview after voting against the bill that the Assembly's action ignores negotiations underway to reach a possible solution to the issue.

"To go ahead and just put a piece of legislation through means that they had very clearly an agenda," Maze said.

Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley said the best-case scenario would be for a land trust to purchase the land from land-owner Sam Etchegaray.

The Trust for Public Land is working on buying a portion of Etchegaray's property or buying dairy development rights, which would create a buffer zone between Etchegaray's remaining property and the park.

"If the state wants the property, they should ante up," Worthley said. "They shouldn't take [Etchegaray's] property rights through legislation."

Approval of the bill was praised by supporters who watched the floor action.

"I tell you, I was excited to see it go," said Nettie Morrison, the unofficial mayor of Allensworth.

AB 576 next goes to the Senate.

Charles Allen, who identified himself as former vice mayor of Allensworth, said he expects to succeed in the Senate as well.

"We have to," Allen said. "There is no other answer."

Josephine Blodgett Smith of Los Angeles, the 92-year old granddaughter of Col. Allensworth, said the bill will help protect other parks in the state as well.

"There's more at stake here than Allensworth," Blodgett Smith said.

Christophe Maynard Pasadena, the great-great grandson of Col. Allensworth, added that "we're glad it started with Allensworth [park]."

In addition to the legislation and negotiations, Tulare County's approval of the dairies also is the target of lawsuits, including one by the attorney general for improperly assessing the environmental impact of the dairies.

"The concern with environmental issues is not real," Assemblyman Doug LaMalfa, R-Biggs, said.

He and others argued the need for dairies, noting that the land is zoned for agriculture.

"Are we going to put a fence around this [park] to keep skunks out?" asked Joel Anderson, R-La Mesa, "because skunks are pretty stinky too."

The bill's supporters countered that the environmental issues are real and that dairies too near the park promise odors, flies and water pollution.

They also said there are plenty of other farm activities that could occur in the area around the park, but that dairies are inappropriate.

"No one is proposing the property here can't be used for agricultural purposes," said Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael.

Allensworth legislation OK'd Assembly votes to bar dairies near state park.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau

Fresno Bee, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- Opponents of two proposed dairies near Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park scored a victory Monday when the Assembly voted to establish a 2.5-mile dairy-free zone around the southern Tulare County park.

Black leaders and environmentalists say Assembly Bill 576 will keep dairy flies and odors away from the park, a monument to Col. Allen Allensworth. The Civil War veteran founded the Allensworth colony in 1908 as a haven for blacks.

But Republicans have sided with Tulare County officials who say the bill is an assault on local control of land-use decisions.

AB 576, by Assembly Member Wilmer Amina Carter, D-Rialto, passed the Assembly on a 41-23 vote. The bill is backed by the Legislative Black Caucus and enjoys support from key Democratic leaders, so it has a good chance of passing the Senate and making it to Gov. Schwarzenegger's desk. The governor has not taken a position.

Monday's vote went as expected, though one Valley lawmaker changed his mind.

Assembly Member Juan Arambula, D-Fresno, had been leaning against the bill, saying last week that it might erode local control. But he voted yes because he said the bill would put pressure on both sides to come up with a compromise.

Valley Republicans Bill Maze of Visalia and Tom Berryhill of Modesto voted no. Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, whose district includes the park, voted yes.

"This is about respecting a historically significant park," Parra said during floor debate.

But Republicans said the state was needlessly getting involved in a local decision.

"We need to keep our hands off private property," said Assembly Member Chuck DeVore, R-Irvine.

Tulare County supervisors approved the dairies in March on a 4-0 vote. But that decision is being tested in a lawsuit filed in April by state Attorney General Jerry Brown, who says the supervisors ignored state environmental laws aimed at protecting historical landmarks.

The dairies, proposed by Sam Etchegaray of Visalia, are targeted for land about a mile and a half from the park. Etchegaray must still get air and water permits. He also is considering selling the land to The

Trust for Public Land, a private nonprofit whose mission is to conserve natural and historic lands. The land is being appraised, a process that Arambula said might be finished in two weeks.

Black leaders from across the state have rallied for the bill.

Nettie Morrison, who lives near the park in the unincorporated town of Allensworth, said passage of the bill would clear the way for a great celebration next year, when hundreds of supporters are expected to gather to recognize the 100-year anniversary of the Allensworth's founding.

"We want to greet people," she said. "Not cattle."

**High-speed rail funding pushed
Costa lines up federal support in letter to governor.**

By Russell Clemings / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Two-thirds of California's congressional delegation has signed a letter to Gov. Schwarzenegger supporting much more funding for the state's proposed high-speed rail system than the governor's budget proposed.

Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said the 36 signatures include four other San Joaquin Valley representatives -- Reps. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced; Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield; Devin Nunes, R-Visalia; and George Radanovich, R-Mariposa.

He called the letter "a strong signal from Washington that California is serious about high-speed rail" and said the goal is to get \$50 million in funding, about 10 times what the governor proposed.

He also pledged "we will do everything we can to provide the federal funding" needed to supplement state funds, including a potential \$9 billion in bonds from a state ballot measure now scheduled for a vote in November 2008.

Nine other local leaders joined Costa in announcing the letter at a news conference Monday outside the restored Fresno Amtrak station.

Among them was Shafter Mayor Fran Florez, a member of the state High Speed Rail Authority board and mother of state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter. She called high-speed rail "the most important project in California today."

The 700-mile system would be built in phases and is expected to cost some \$40 billion at full build-out. It would link the state's major cities, from Sacramento and San Francisco to San Diego, with 200 mph "bullet trains." Plans include stops in Fresno, Merced, Modesto and Bakersfield.

Those who shared the platform with Costa on Monday talked about how the trains would slash travel times to the state's major metropolitan areas, while reducing air pollution by substituting electric trains for gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles.

"I look forward to the day when travel from Fresno to San Francisco is just over an hour," Fresno County Supervisor Bob Waterston said.

Costa said increased funding for the next fiscal year -- \$50 million is the amount approved by an Assembly committee, compared to \$5.19 million in Schwarzenegger's request -- is necessary to sustain the authority's planning efforts in advance of the bond vote late next year.

The high-speed rail system itself, he said, is needed to cope with California's continued growth in the face of limits on future airport and highway construction.

"We cannot build enough airports because of problems with density and growth, and we cannot build enough highways to solve this problem," he said.

Despite Wal-Mart cuts, the Supercenter in Lodi appears to be moving forward

By Chris Nichols - News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi News Sentinel, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Plans to bring a Wal-Mart Supercenter to Lodi are moving forward, despite an announcement last week that the retail giant will delay construction of more than 25 percent of its Supercenters across the country.

Lodi Senior Planner David Morimoto said the city is still reviewing new environmental reports for the 226,000 square-foot project, proposed near Kettleman Lane and Lower Sacramento Road.

"As far as we know, we haven't received any kind of notification that they want to terminate the Lodi project," he said Monday. "So, we are still processing the project as before and we will until we hear otherwise."

Calls to two regional Wal-Mart spokesmen to confirm the status of the project were not returned.

If plans continue forward, the Lodi City Council could vote on the Supercenter as early as August.

The Council OK'd an earlier version of the Supercenter project in 2005. But a judge overturned that approval the same year, ruling that Wal-Mart's environmental report was inadequate.

A majority of Lodi voters in 2004 defeated a ballot measure to limit the size of retail stores in the city, paving the way for the Supercenter.

Wal-Mart in California by the numbers:

70,932: Number of Wal-Mart associates (employees) in the state.

144: discount stores

24: Supercenters.

\$10.77: Average hourly wage for full-time Wal-Mart employees. All are eligible for performance-based bonuses.

9: Supercenters approved but not yet under construction.

7: Supercenters under construction.

Source: Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart's move to curb its nationwide building plans comes as the company's stock has dropped significantly in the past three years.

It also comes as leaders from numerous Central Valley and Bay Area cities have opposed or pushed for limits on the size and number of Wal-Mart stores.

"I think they realize that areas are sick of them," said Jean May, a retired Lodi resident, and former member of the Small City Preservation Committee, a local group that has opposed many "big box" stores.

"I just think Lodi can do without (the Supercenter)," she added.

Lodi city leaders have vowed to scrutinize the new environmental reports before voting on the Supercenter. Those supplemental documents will look more closely at the project's effect on the local economy, traffic, [air quality](#) and agriculture.

At least one Lodi business leader said he sees Wal-Mart as a positive influence, one that shouldn't be blocked.

"Free enterprise is kind of near and dear to the chamber's heart," said Lodi Chamber of Commerce President Pat Patrick, noting the chamber hasn't taken an official stance on the Supercenter. "We don't see any tremendous negative effect. We see that it would positively contribute to the tax base."

Californians curb carbon emissions more efficiently than others in U.S.

Monday, June 04, 2007

By The Associated Press

Published in the Madera Tribune

SAN FRANCISCO - When it comes to their role in causing global warming, Californians can feel slightly less guilty than most Americans.

The average Californian generates fewer carbon dioxide emissions - the main heat-trapping gas blamed for warming the planet - than residents in all other states but Idaho, Vermont and Rhode Island, according to an Associated Press analysis of data from 2003, the latest U.S. Energy Department numbers available.

California ranks second in total carbon emissions, trailing only Texas. But the country's most populous state is one of the lowest carbon emitters on a per-person basis.

Each person in California is responsible for about 24,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year, emissions data shows. Wyoming, by contrast, emits 276,000 pounds per capita annually.

California has less heavy industry than many other states, and its mild climate means it doesn't use as much energy - or spew as many greenhouse gases - to warm or cool homes. But those factors alone do not account for its low per person carbon emissions, officials say.

Although Californians drive as much, live in similarly sized homes and use as many electronics and appliances as other Americans, policies enacted over the past three decades have helped the state squeeze more out of its electricity than nearly any other.

"California's energy-efficiency measures have allowed our energy use to remain constant while the rest of the country's energy use has increased dramatically," said California Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Linda Adams.

The state's campaign to conserve electricity began during the 1970s oil embargo that sent energy prices soaring and persuaded policy makers to take action.

Since then, state energy regulators have barred utilities from buying power from highly polluting sources, including most coal plants, while requiring them to secure more electricity from renewable sources such as hydro, wind and solar.

California also was one of the first states to create energy-efficiency standards for new homes and buildings, as well as for power-sucking appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines.

State lawmakers are now considering legislation that would phase out incandescent light bulbs in favor of compact fluorescent bulbs that are several times more efficient.

Residents have done their part, too, said Claudia Chandler, assistant director of the California Energy Commission. The state's energy crisis in 2000-2001, when skyrocketing electricity prices led to rolling blackouts across the state, was a "wake-up call" that spurred many people to curb their household energy use, she said.

Altogether, the various conservation measures have eliminated the need for 20 large power plants, according to Chandler.

Last year, California became the first state to impose a statewide cap on greenhouse gas emissions. The landmark bill signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger requires the state to reduce emissions by an estimated 25 percent - about 174 million metric tons - by 2020.

California could further reduce its environmental impact if it could impose fuel efficiency standards on automobiles, which produce about 40 percent of the state's carbon emissions, officials say. But legislative efforts to impose state-specific vehicle emissions standards have been tied up in the courts.

"California has a lot of policies that are the best in the country," said Bill Magavern, senior

legislative representative for Sierra Club California. "If the rest of the country would follow California, we could reduce our national greenhouse gas emissions by a significant amount."

GM to speed up battery program

By TOM KRISHER | The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

General Motors Corp. has awarded two contracts to companies that will help speed up development of its plug-in electric car called the Chevrolet Volt, GM Chairman Rick Wagoner said Tuesday.

Wagoner, speaking Tuesday at the company's annual shareholders meeting, also said GM would introduce four new hybrid models this year.

A company spokesman said the four new hybrids, all previously announced, are the two-mode gas-electric systems in the Chevrolet Tahoe and GMC Yukon large sport utility vehicles, and hybrid systems for the Saturn Aura and new Chevrolet Malibu sedans.

The contracts to design and test lithium-ion batteries went to Michigan-based Compact Power Inc. and to Continental Automotive systems, Wagoner said.

"Given the huge potential that the Volt and its E-flex system offers to lower oil consumption, lower oil imports and reduce carbon gas emissions, this is for sure a top priority program for GM," said Wagoner, who added that the company is trying to produce the Volt as soon as it can. No production timetable has been announced.

The Volt, unveiled in January at the Detroit auto show, has a battery-powered electric motor that can run the car for up to 40 city miles on a single charge. Beyond that, a gasoline-powered, one-liter, three-cylinder engine can generate electricity to replenish the battery, giving the car a range of up to 640 miles, GM said.

The battery system can be plugged into a home outlet for recharging, and the gasoline engine can recharge the batteries while it is moving.

GM's announcement came as Honda Motor Co., Japan's second biggest automaker, said it will discontinue the hybrid version of its Accord sedans, conceding Toyota Motor Corp.'s dominance with the hit Prius hybrid.

Honda said Tuesday it will continue to make gas-and-electric models of its Civic sedan, but stop offering the hybrid Accord with the new model expected to go on sale later this year, company spokesman Yoshiyuki Kuroda said in Tokyo.

The Accord hybrid, which is sold only in North America, sold just 25,000 since going on sale in 2004, and just 6,100 last year.

Toyota's Prius hybrid is the market leader, with 729,800 units sold since December 1997.

Wagoner also said during his opening remarks that the company's turnaround plan is working, but some shareholders were not convinced.

John Lauve of Holly, Mich., said time is running out for the company to turn things around.

"The board has not demanded the necessary changes now," he said, pointing out that GM has lost 10 percentage points of market share in the past 10 years.

"This is a crisis. What would Toyota do?" Lauve asked. "It's very simple. They would not have allowed this to happen."

GM has cut more than \$7 billion in annual costs, shed more than 34,000 hourly workers and rolled out more than 20 new models since November 2005 in an effort to regain sales lost to Asian competitors.

Although it made a \$62 million net profit in the first quarter, the company still lost an adjusted \$85 million on its North American operations. Last year it lost \$2 billion, a vast improvement over a restated loss of \$10.4 billion in 2005.

GM shareholders voted down a bylaws change proposed by the Community of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Caldwell, N.J., that the company set goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve fuel efficiency.

Proponents argued that GM needs to set the goals to show investors that it is serious about global warming, and that it needs to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles to survive as a company and stem its market share loss.

Just less than 26 percent of the voters were in favor of the proposal, which GM said was unnecessary because it has been working diligently to reduce emissions and improve fuel economy.

During questioning by shareholders, Wagoner confirmed that the company is entertaining the possibility of restructuring and selling its medium-duty truck business. Its Allison Transmission division also is up for sale, he said. The company has said it is selling Allison to strengthen its liquidity.

GM shares rose 15 cents to \$30.52 in morning trading.

Honda's hybrid Accords are out

By YURI KAGEYAMA | The Associated Press
In the Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Honda will discontinue the hybrid version of its Accord sedans, the company said Tuesday, ceding Toyota's dominance of the market with its Prius hybrid.

Honda Motor Co., Japan's No. 2 automaker, will continue to make gas-and-electric models of its Civic sedan, but stop offering the hybrid Accord with the new model expected to go on sale later this year, company spokesman Yoshiyuki Kuroda said in Tokyo.

The Accord hybrid, which is sold only in North America, was a dud, selling just 25,000 since going on sale in 2004, and just 6,100 last year.

Kuroda said the decision underlines how hybrids tend to be more popular with smaller models because mileage improvements tend to be more pronounced.

A hybrid switches between a gas engine and electric motor to deliver better mileage and reduce greenhouse emissions.

Toyota Motor Corp.'s Prius hybrid is the market leader, with 729,800 units sold since December 1997. Toyota offers several other hybrid models, including the hybrid Camry and hybrid Lexus models.

"Americans didn't accept the Accord hybrid," Kuroda said.

The Accord hybrid's U.S. sales totaled just 439 last month, while Toyota sold 24,000 Prius cars during the same period.

Last year, Honda said it will stop making the slow-selling Honda Insight hybrid, but Honda is promising a new U.S. hybrid competitor in 2009.

Tokyo-based Honda continues to sell the hybrid Civic, which has sold more than 153,000 since going on sale in 2001 in Japan, Europe and North America. It said it remained committed to developing more hybrids.

Hybrid sales in North America have risen with soaring gas prices. The Prius made up more than 40 percent of hybrid sales in the U.S. last year.

Hybrids like the Prius and Civic deliver as much as 50 miles per gallon or more, depending on driving conditions, but the hybrid Accord delivered fewer miles to the gallon.

Bill Would Block States on Auto Rules

By H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer
In the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, June 4, 2007

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A dozen states would be blocked from imposing new requirements on automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under a draft energy bill being prepared for a vote later this month.

The "discussion draft" would prohibit the head of the Environmental Protection Agency from issuing a waiver needed for a state to impose auto pollution standards if the new requirements are "designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

California has been battling the federal EPA for two years over a state law that would require automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mainly carbon dioxide, by 25 percent from cars and 18 percent from SUVs by the 2009 model year.

The state still needs the EPA waiver before the law can be implemented. Eleven other states, including most of the Northeast as well as Washington and Oregon, have said they would follow California's lead if the federal waiver is granted.

A provision that would bar such a waiver for any action aimed at climate-changing greenhouse gases is tucked deep in the draft bill that was circulated Monday among members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

It was drafted by Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., whose Energy and Commerce energy subcommittee has scheduled a hearing on the legislation for Thursday.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a committee member, said the bill would "pre-empt the rights of states to set strong standards to save energy and reduce global warming pollution."

The bill, which is expected to be voted on by the committee later this month and then combined with other energy legislation, addresses a broad range of energy issues.

It calls for expansion of the production of ethanol and other alternative motor fuels - including liquefied coal - to 35 billion gallons a year by 2025.

It also requires automobiles to increase fleet-wide fuel economy to 35 miles per gallon, from the current 27.5 mpg, by 2021 and requires them to make 85 percent of their new cars capable of running on 85-percent ethanol blends by 2020.

But the language on the greenhouse gas waiver is likely to meet strong opposition from lawmakers from California and other states that want to reduce carbon dioxide - the leading greenhouse gas - from automobiles.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has criticized the EPA for not moving more quickly on California's waiver request.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., also a member of the energy panel, said the legislation would "strip states of their existing authorities" when it comes to dealing with global warming emissions.

"The intent is to tie EPA's hands when it comes to establishing greenhouse gas standards," said Frank O'Donnell of Clean Air Watch, an environmental advocacy group.

States that have said they will impose emission reductions for greenhouse gases from automobiles if California gets its waiver are Oregon, Washington, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. Other states are considering similar moves.

Blame coal: Texas leads carbon emissions

By SETH BORENSTEIN - AP Science Writer
Sacramento Bee, Saturday, June 2, 2007

WASHINGTON -- America may spew more greenhouse gases than any other country, but some states are astonishingly more prolific polluters than others - and it's not always the ones you might expect.

The Associated Press analyzed state-by-state emissions of carbon dioxide from 2003, the latest U.S. Energy Department numbers available. The review shows startling differences in states' contribution to climate change.

The biggest reason? The burning of high-carbon coal to produce cheap electricity.

-Wyoming's coal-fired power plants produce more carbon dioxide in just eight hours than the power generators of more populous Vermont do in a year.

-Texas, the leader in emitting this greenhouse gas, cranks out more than the next two biggest producers combined, California and Pennsylvania, which together have twice Texas' population.

-In sparsely populated Alaska, the carbon dioxide produced per person by all the flying and driving is six times the per capita amount generated by travelers in New York state.

"There's no question that some states have made choices to be greener than others," said former top Energy Department official Joseph Romm, author of the new book "Hell and High Water" and executive director of a nonprofit energy conservation group.

The disparity in carbon dioxide emissions is one of the reasons there is no strong national effort to reduce global warming gases, some experts say. National emissions dipped ever so slightly last year, but that was mostly because of mild weather, according to the Energy Department.

"Some states are benefiting from both cheap electricity while polluting the planet and make all the rest of us suffer the consequences of global warming," said Frank O'Donnell, director of the Washington environmental group Clean Air Watch. "I don't think that's fair at all."

He noted that the states putting out the most carbon dioxide are doing the least to control it, except for California.

Several federal and state officials say it's unfair and nonsensical to examine individual states' contribution to what is a global problem.

"If the atmosphere could talk it wouldn't say, 'Kudos to California, not so good to Wyoming'," said assistant energy secretary Alexander "Andy" Karsner. "It would say, 'Stop sending me emissions.'"

Some coal-burning states note that they are providing electricity to customers beyond their borders, including Californians. Wyoming is the largest exporter of energy to other states, Gov. Dave Freudenthal told The Associated Press.

He said two-thirds of the state's carbon footprint "is a consequence of energy that is developed to feed the rest of the national economy. That doesn't mean that somehow then it's good carbon, I'm just saying that's why those numbers come out the way are," Freudenthal said.

And the massive carbon dioxide-spewing and power-gobbling refineries of Texas and Louisiana fuel an oil-hungry nation, whose residents whine when gasoline prices rise.

However, some of the disparities are stunning.

On a per-person basis, Wyoming spews more carbon dioxide than any other state or any other country: 276,000 pounds of it per capita a year, thanks to burning coal, which provides nearly all of the state's electrical power.

Yet, just next door to the west, Idaho emits the least carbon dioxide per person, less than 23,000 pounds a year. Idaho forbids coal power plants. It relies mostly on non-polluting hydroelectric power from its rivers.

Texas, where coal barely edges out cleaner natural gas as the top power source, belches almost 1 1/2 trillion pounds of carbon dioxide yearly. That's more than every nation in the world except six: the United States, China, Russia, Japan, India and Germany.

Of course, Texas is a very populous state. North Dakota isn't, but its power plants crank out 68 percent more carbon dioxide than New Jersey, which has 13 times North Dakota's residents.

And while Californians have cut their per-person carbon dioxide emissions by 11 percent from 1990 to 2003, Nebraskans have increased their per capita emissions by 16 percent over the same time frame.

China unrolls strategy on climate change

Coal-powered nation rejects mandatory caps on emissions unless developed industrial countries act first

Jim Yardley, Andrew C. Revkin, New York Times

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Beijing -- With global warming high on the agenda for the world's industrial powers gathering later this week in Germany, China staked out its position on Monday by releasing its first national strategy on climate change, a plan that promises to improve energy efficiency but rejects any mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emissions.

The 62-page plan, two years in the making, served at least partly as a rebuff to efforts by President Bush and European nations to draw China and other developing countries into a commitment to reduce emissions, which was expected to be a focal point at the expanded summit meeting of the Group of Eight industrialized nations.

China has resisted mandatory reductions in emissions, arguing that it is still a developing country and needs to balance environmental improvements with maintaining economic growth.

President Bush, trying to blunt criticism of his own record on global warming, proposed Thursday a new negotiating framework in which the 15 countries that produce the most greenhouse gas emissions would meet this fall in Washington. Each country would establish its own targets and plan to slow emissions in the next 10 or 20 years, while the group would work to set a long-term global goal for substantially cutting emissions.

But some experts say the Bush administration's approach is undercut because, like China, it, too, opposes a mandatory cap on its emissions.

"China is not going to act in any sort of mandatory-control way until the United States does first," said Joseph Kruger, policy director for the National Commission on Energy Policy, a bipartisan group in Washington.

Along with India and other large developing countries, Chinese officials have long maintained that the established industrial powers need to act first because they built their wealth largely by burning fossil fuels and adding to the atmosphere's blanket of greenhouse gases.

"Our general stance is that China will not commit to any quantified emissions reduction targets, but that does not mean we will not assume responsibilities in responding to climate change," said Ma Kai, head of China's powerful economic planning agency, the National Development and Reform Commission.

The report introduced by Ma is dense with figures and programs on subjects like reforestation, public education and improving regulatory enforcement. It emphasizes that China will try to control greenhouse gas emissions through a nationwide program to improve energy efficiency by 20 percent by 2010. But, in broad terms, the plan merely restates Beijing's position that mandatory emissions caps are unfair to China and other developing countries still trying to modernize and improve living standards.

China, with the world's fastest-growing major economy, had been projected to surpass the United States by 2009 or 2010 as the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, which scientists say cause global warming. But China's coal-based, high-polluting economy is growing so rapidly that the chief economist for the International Energy Agency is predicting the country could become the global emissions leader as soon as this year.

Fatih Birol, the agency's chief economist, warned that if China does not begin curbing its current rate of emissions growth, its total carbon dioxide emissions within 25 years could double the combined emissions of the world's richest nations -- including the United States, the European Union and Japan.

At his Monday news conference, Ma applauded Bush's proposal but emphasized that any effort in Washington should complement, not replace, the existing framework, including the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, sponsored by the United Nations. Under the Kyoto Protocol, participating industrialized nations are subjected to caps on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, while developing countries, including China and India, are exempt. The Bush administration rejected the agreement because of the exemptions for China and India, and said the cuts would harm the U.S. economy.

Ma stressed that as a latecomer to industrialization, China had produced only a small fraction of the world's greenhouse gases, and that its current per capita emissions equaled roughly one-fifth the rate in the United States.

"The ramifications of limiting the development of developing countries would be even more serious than those from climate change," Ma said.

Birol, the IEA economist, agreed that the developed world was responsible for the bulk of emissions in the atmosphere and should play a leading role in finding a solution. But he said no plan could succeed without a major role for China and said making distinctions between "total emissions" and "per capita emissions" obscured the larger point.

"The atmosphere does not make a distinction if it is cumulative or a per capita emission," Birol said in a telephone interview. "Either way, it is a problem for all of us."

China is heavily dependent on coal, which currently accounts for about 68 percent of its energy. Under the climate change program, China is planning a major expansion of nuclear power, as well as renewable energy sources. The plan calls for renewable energy to account for 10 percent of the country's power supply by 2010. China is also in the midst of a nationwide reforestation program to help absorb greenhouse gases.

The report also painted a brief, if alarming, picture of how global warming could change China, with rising sea levels, shrinking glaciers in Tibet, rising temperatures and the likelihood of expanding desertification.

In addition, projections show that Chinese agricultural output could be reduced by 10 percent by 2030.

James Connaughton, the lead White House official on the environment, said last week that a central goal of the Bush administration's new plan is to reach out to China, India, Korea and other fast-growing Asian countries to help eliminate barriers to emissions cuts, including the high tariffs China now charges on imported pollution-controlling technology.

In return, he said, wealthy countries could offer developing countries new energy technologies created with government research money at a discount. Connaughton said that one vital tool, particularly given China's exploding use of coal, would be the development of systems for capturing carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas from fuel burning, and pumping it underground.

"China will use four times more coal than the United States by the end of 2020," he said. "We have to accelerate producing power from coal without emissions."

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Tuesday, June 5, 2007:](#)

See through smoke

Not so fast! Don't strike that match. Farmers shouldn't get a pass on a Legislature-imposed ban on agricultural burning.

A bruising verbal battle erupted last month between state Sen. Dean Florez and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's board over plans to exempt some farmers from a ban on burning field waste.

The ban, which was to go into effect on June 1, was included in a package of bills sponsored by Florez in 2003 to impose air cleanup rules on agriculture.

But as the deadline neared, the district's board approved an exemption for some farmers until 2010, allowing burning to continue. Florez claimed the exemption gave most farmers a pass. District staff said only a few would benefit.

But the district gave itself a pass by not clearing the move with the California Air Resources Board, as required by law. After a hammering by Florez, the district has agreed to hold off on the exemption until a state review is done.

If valley residents can't burn their fireplaces on foggy nights because of pollution fears, certainly farmers shouldn't be allowed to burn entire fields.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, June 5, 2007:](#)

Getting rid of that gas guzzler is a real win-win

Hey, fellow miserable motorists, want to find a way to instantly cut the cost of gasoline in half? It's not magic.

When you buy your next car, trade in that 12-mpg SUV or 8-cylinder overpowered muscle car for something reasonable that gets 30 miles per gallon.

There's lots of choices out there, and the good news is that most of them have a sticker price less than your current gas guzzler.

If all (or most) of us do this it will reduce our demand for oil, reduce the price of gas and probably help our air quality to boot.

What a win-win, and what could be simpler?

KARL SCHOETTLER, Visalia

[Letters to the L.A. Times, Tuesday, June 5, 2007:](#)

Burning issues

Re "Plan to clean air may kill ambience," June 1

Our family drives relatively fuel-efficient cars, limits unnecessary trips and carpools when possible. During the winter months, however, we often watch a movie in the evening while enjoying a wood-burning fireplace. This fireplace heats the family room, which seems more sensible than cranking up the gas furnace to waste energy heating the whole house when we are only using a small part of it. In addition, natural gas is not a renewable resource (wood is). Now the South Coast Air Quality Management District is recommending banning the use of wood-burning fireplaces to limit pollution. Rather than starting with this ridiculously small area of concern, why doesn't it focus on the big polluters? Ships, locomotives, big-rigs, lawnmowers and leaf blowers - the list goes on. By starting with the smallest offenders and working up, it will take several generations to make a noticeable difference in air quality. It is too bad that these officials can't use common sense.

Terrie and Roger McKinley, Aliso Viejo

Not everyone uses their fireplace for ambience. We live in a historic 1903 Craftsman and use our fireplace not only in the winter but rely on it for our home's heating needs. Without it, the house goes cold. I'll be the first one in my neighborhood to fight tickets and fines for using our only source for heat. What's next? Banning barbecues in the summer?

Jeff Camp, Los Angeles

I wholeheartedly agree with doing away with wood-burning fireplaces. On my lunch hour last week, I strolled to the Ralphs grocery store across the street and there, at the front door, was a colossal stack of firewood (next to a pyramid of charcoal briquettes) to be purchased for burning. With L.A. assuming its place, once again, as the American city with the worst air quality, banning wood-burning and charcoal-burning grills and fireplaces is appropriate. They are dirty and sooty and nothing more than habit or what we have become accustomed to. In all honesty, who needs them?

Ellen Hageman, Los Angeles