

Smoke in valley gone for now, but could return by weekend

By KEN CARLSON

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, July 1, 2008

The forecast calls for blue skies in the Northern San Joaquin Valley through the Fourth of July, but the thick smoke that hung over the region last week could return by the weekend.

The wildfires in the Sierra and coastal mountains still are producing the smoke, but wind flows at 6,000 feet and above are taking it away from the valley. At the same time, the delta breezes are pumping fresh air into the region.

After reaching record levels Friday, the air pollution wasn't as bad as feared Saturday and Sunday. By the end of this week, a low-pressure area will fade and high pressure will move back over the area, said Cynthia Palmer, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service.

"More toward the weekend, we could see that smoke moving down into our area," she said.

A warm-up is also expected, with temperatures flirting with 100 degrees Saturday and Sunday.

Valley air quality officials are keeping an eye on a new fire in eastern Kern County and the 40,000-acre blaze near Big Sur. There is potential that some smoke from the Big Sur fire could drift into the Northern San Joaquin Valley this week, officials said.

The Modesto area had some of the highest air pollution readings on record last week, according to the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

A monitor in Turlock recorded data translating into an air quality index of 182 for fine soot particles. The real-time data is still being analyzed, but if it stands, it tops the previous high of 176 in Modesto on Dec. 20, 1999.

The district has monitored for the so-called PM 2.5 particle pollution since 1999. In the past, high particle readings were caused by residential fireplaces in the winter months before the district placed restrictions on wood burning, said Shawn Ferreria, a senior air quality specialist for the district.

On Friday, Turlock had a 205 air quality index for ozone, pushing the county into the "very unhealthy" range. That reading tied for the third-highest on record. The district has access to ozone numbers dating to 1976 and the highest was a 209 AQI in 1984.

Ferreria said the bad air last week was a cumulative effect of the wildfires, light winds and natural conditions that trapped the smoke in the valley. For the time being, the smoke is going elsewhere.

"As long as the upper wind flow stays out of the south, we should be safe," he said Monday.

Weather and air quality

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, July 1, 2008

The National Weather Service predicts today will be sunny, with a high temperature near 95 and south southwest wind at 10 mph becoming northwest.

The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) predicts Tulare County's air quality index (AQI) will be 119 today, unhealthy for sensitive groups. Yesterday was 111, Sunday was 137.

A breath of fresh air is all we ask

By JEFF JARDINE

Modesto Bee, Sunday, June 29, 2008

Don't breathe the air. Don't exercise outdoors. Don't eat tomatoes, unless they're declared safe by the same folks who can't figure out where the contaminated ones came from.

Get ready -- gasoline could soon hit a wallet-draining \$4 a gallon. Did I say \$4 a gallon? Oops, I meant to say \$5. Or \$6.

Oh, and by the way, a panel of experts suggested last week that we are completely unprepared to handle a nuclear attack. You think? Just how do you prepare for a 10-kiloton nuke that explodes a block away?

Each day, it seems, there's yet a new peril and an obligatory warning. Some, we can work around. Not when it's the air, though. The bad air is worse than the cost of gas, which you can absorb simply by not buying salmonella-laden tomatoes, or vice versa. But you've got to breathe. Really, there's no alternative.

Even before electrical storms June 21 started hundreds of wildfires in Northern California, the valley's air quality was pretty bad. Now, it's horrible, with a thick blanket of eye-irritating, lung-clogging smoke stretching from this side of the Coast Range to the Sierra, and we're caught in the middle.

We haven't had a totally "green" day, meaning healthy air, in the valley since June 16. It's the longest stretch of bad air ratings on record since they began charting the particulate levels in 1999.

The smoke has left Northern California resembling, well, Southern California.

It's so bad that the air quality experts are telling us not to be outdoors any more than necessary. It's so bad that folks are being cautioned against riding their bikes to work, which they'd normally do for health reasons and to do their part to -- you guessed it -- reduce air pollution.

"I rode my bike to work Wednesday and I felt it in my lungs," said Shawn Ferreria, senior air quality specialist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno. "Thursday, I decided to try it one more time, using protective equipment, and if I felt bad, I'd stop."

A painter's mask enabled him to ride, but he said he still felt the effects of the nasty air.

The air is bad for those who have respiratory conditions and it also can cause heart problems.

A backdrop painted brown

It's so bad that while driving home one day this week, I saw a farmer tilling his field and churning up what appeared to be a huge plume of brown dust. Upon closer inspection, I decided maybe the plume wasn't so huge after all. Against an equally brown backdrop, it was difficult to tell where the cloud ended and the sky began.

A few miles closer to home, I noticed a car bearing the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) logo parked along Albers Road.

When I called the district to find out if the inspector used high-tech portable air-sniffing gadgets, I was told "no." Inspectors just look to determine -- and here's a new word -- the opacity.

"That's the thickness of smoke and dust in the air," said Anthony Presto, public information representative for the district's Modesto office. "It's measured by how much light can be seen through the smoke or dust."

The air inspectors must be retested every six months to determine their ability to determine opacity, Presto said.

Our bad-air days won't cease anytime soon, Ferreria said. The winds over the past week have come out of the north and northwest, carrying smoke our way from the fires in Mendocino and

other Northern California counties. Now, he said, the winds are expected to change. They'll be coming out of the south.

So what does this mean? We caught the smoke going south. Now we'll catch it heading back north. We get to itch and gag on the same stuff all over again.

"Recirculation," Ferreria calls it.

"What people want to know is, 'When will this end?' " he said. "Continue keeping an eye on the air quality (listings with the daily weather reports). We'll let you know when it's changed."

For now, though, don't hold your breath. Or better yet, do.

Because if the trend holds, a new peril and warning should surface soon to distract us from these most unfriendly skies.

San Joaquin Valley air advisory: Stay indoors, people Some groups cancel outdoor events, in line with pollution advisory

By KEN CARLSON

Modesto Bee, Saturday, June 28, 2008

After five straight days of smoky conditions, the air quality got downright scary Friday, prompting a [valley air district official](#) to advise people to cancel outdoor activities.

In Stanislaus and Merced counties, the smoke from hundreds of Northern California wildfires pushed the air quality to the "very unhealthy" range.

It's believed to be the first time the air quality entered the so-called purple zone in the north part of the San Joaquin Valley.

"Any outdoor events at this level of unhealthy air should be canceled," said Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "At this stage, very unhealthy means simply that. It is very unhealthy to breathe the air outside right now. The best thing is for people to remain indoors where you can use a filtered air conditioner."

The very unhealthy conditions are forecast for today as well and valley residents can expect the smoke to linger for several days.

According to district guidelines, young children and seniors, as well as people with chronic health conditions, should avoid all physical activity outdoors today. Everyone else, especially children, should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors.

The bad air can damage the lungs of children, trigger asthma attacks, or result in heart attacks and arrhythmia in people with heart problems, health experts say.

Organizations appeared to be getting the message.

The YMCA of Stanislaus County canceled final baseball games for children today, moving award ceremonies to its McHenry Avenue building in Modesto.

Chief Executive Officer Phil McGovern said the YMCA will have to decide about day camps next week.

The Youth Action Commission of Stanislaus County had planned a "Let's Get Moving" walk-a-thon today to promote healthy living. But organizers put that on hold until late July or August.

The group still plans to hold its graduation ceremonies at 5 p.m. today at the Modesto Police Department.

Worsened by weather system

Officials said the air quality deteriorated further because of a ridge of high pressure moving over California from the Southwest. It strengthened the natural inversion layer that traps pollutants over the San Joaquin Valley, pushing the sooty particles and other pollutants closer to the ground.

Of concern are the tiny particles that can get deep into the lungs. The concentration of those particles got close to the very unhealthy range Friday in Modesto.

Ozone is the main pollutant driving the "very unhealthy" reading in Stanislaus County, especially high ozone readings in Turlock, said Shawn Ferreria, a senior air quality specialist for the valley air district.

The air in San Joaquin County was rated unhealthy Friday and will be unhealthy today, the district said.

It uses an air quality index calculated from five common pollutants to rate the air quality on a six-point scale: good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive groups, unhealthy, very unhealthy and hazardous.

It's rare for the pollution to reach the very unhealthy level, but it has happened this week in Kern, Tulare, Fresno and now Stanislaus and Merced counties.

Ferreria said the conditions in the San Joaquin Valley are not as dire as in the foothills, which have approached the hazardous rating.

Stanislaus County health officials said they have not seen any advisories on the bad air from the state Department of Public Health. At some point, county emergency services agencies could discuss further measures for protecting the public.

Cleaner air on the way

BY VALERIE GIBBONS

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, June 30, 2008

First the good news: The air quality will be improving and the threat of dry lightning in the mountains appears to be dissipating.

And temperatures aren't expected to get higher than 100 degrees through the Fourth of July holiday, forecasters say.

Now the bad news: A strong wind that will help to blow the remaining smoke out of the Valley is nowhere to be found.

The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) canceled its air-quality warning on Sunday afternoon.

In the days to come, the air quality will slowly improve.

"We still need a good strong wind to scour the smoke out of the Valley," said Gary Sanger, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Hanford. "But there's not anything in the forecast for the next few days."

The air quality will be classified as "unhealthful for sensitive groups" for the next few days.

Late last week Tulare County's air quality earned a "very unhealthful" rating because of smoke and stagnant air.

Sanger warned there is still a remote possibility of dry lightning in the Sierra but the thunderstorms seem to be staying to the northeast of Tulare County.

Dry lightning ignited hundreds of blazes in Northern California last week.

The near-triple-digit temperatures will stick around for the rest of the week with highs hovering around 97 degrees expected up until next weekend. The highs on the Fourth of July should be around 96 degrees.

Lows are expected to be in the lower 60s.

Rethink those fireworks plans

Home displays harm people, property, air.

By Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, July 1, 2008

There are good reasons not to shoot off fireworks at home this Fourth of July -- and bad air and fire danger are only two of them.

Fireworks hurt people every year.

While backyard Fourth of July fireworks can be a fun way to celebrate the nation's birthday, Fresno burn center nurses and firefighters say even "safe and sane" fireworks can cause injuries if not used properly and with care.

Last year, four patients were treated for fireworks injuries at the Leon S. Peters Burn Center at Community Regional Medical Center in Fresno, said Sandra Yovino, burn center director.

Children 10 to 14 years of age are the most likely to be hurt. "It's usually young adults, adolescents that we're seeing," Yovino said.

Each year injuries from fireworks send thousands of people nationwide to hospitals.

In 2006, 11 people died and an estimated 9,200 were treated in emergency departments for fireworks-related injuries in the United States, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most of the injuries were burns to hands, eyes, the head, face and ears.

And even the innocent-looking sparkler, a perennial children's favorite, isn't without risk because it can burn at up to 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The Council on Fireworks Safety advises sparklers only for children 12 and older.

The deepest burns, however, often are those from illegal or altered fireworks, Yovino said.

Don MacAlpine, deputy fire marshal and chief of investigations for the Fresno City Fire Department, said people should consider the consequences of setting off illegal fireworks. Last year, one child had head and arm injuries from an illegal bottle rocket that landed too close to the child, he said. And illegal fireworks were blamed for a grass field fire and a vehicle fire, he said.

Firefighters and police officers will issue a citation for a \$1,000 fine to anyone found with illegal pyrotechnics, MacAlpine said.

"We will be out in force to implement that," he said.

Officers will consider anything that leaves the ground or explodes as illegal, he said.

Last year, a 12-team task force of police officers and firefighters issued 66 citations for illegal fireworks, MacAlpine said. Three people were arrested.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District advises residents to skip the home fireworks displays to spare the air. Because of all the fires in California over the last 10 days, officials say they hope people don't add to the air quality problem.

In 2007, air in the region was particularly bad following Fourth of July celebrations. Air officials then said the fireworks put 10 times the normal amount of particulate matter into the air.

"You wind up hurting your own air quality around your neighborhood," district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said Monday. "We're encouraging people to attend the big fireworks shows in their areas instead of having their own fireworks at home."

Instead of buying fireworks, Holt suggests, residents donate cash to the groups that are selling fireworks.

If families do set off fireworks at home, MacAlpine said, use common sense. Have a hose nearby to douse any flames and keep a bucket of water handy for used fireworks.

Trash fires are a common problem, he said. People dump used fireworks they think are extinguished in trash cans. By the next morning, the smoldering cans are on fire, he said.

Yovino said she prefers people attend public fireworks shows: "They're bigger, better and safer."

Sequoia Fire Affecting Pacific Crest Trail

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, June 30, 2008

A forest fire that has been burning in the South Sierra Wilderness in Sequoia National Forest has forced closure to parts of the Pacific Crest Trail that dissects SNF.

The fire began May 31 and because it is in a wilderness area and not threatening structures, it has been moderately suppressed. However, as of Tuesday there were 450 personnel on the fire using five helicopters and 19 engines. Those numbers have increased as the fire moved into Inyo County.

While that fire is not impacting air quality in the Valley, numerous fires in Mariposa County and the Indians Wildland Fire 14 miles west of King City, are sending smoke into the Valley, prompting a health advisory from the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

Sooty air to remain in Valley

Weather service issues 'stagnant air advisory' through Monday

BY DAVID CASTELLON

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, June 28, 2008

Smoke from hundreds of California wildfires is making life miserable for Central Valley residents with asthma and other breathing problems.

And things aren't likely to change any time soon. The National Weather Service has issued a "stagnant air advisory" that will remain in effect at least through late Monday morning.

That means there's not much wind to blow this smoky, sooty air out of the region.

"You have to work harder to get more air down, because there is not as much oxygen as usual available to us," said Dr. A.M. Aminian, director of the Allergy Institute in Visalia and Fresno.

To make matters worse, particles from the fires can adversely affect the lungs, Aminian said.

"When we are breathing, they get deep into the lungs and cause a lot of inflammation ... and people feel heavy in the chest - tight, short of breath," Aminian said. "This could happen to anyone at any age, but particularly to young children, elderly and [people with] respiratory problems."

In some cases bad air can trigger asthma symptoms, even among those never before diagnosed with it, said Dr. Praveen Buddiga, an allergist and immunologist with the Baz Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center, which has an office in Visalia.

Potential irritation isn't limited to lungs.

Many who have gone outside over the last few days experience irritated eyes from the soot and smoke in the air.

So what should you do to avoid feeling the effects? Here are some suggestions:

Avoid the outdoors

Buddiga suggested staying indoors, closing the windows and turning on the air conditioner, which can catch at least some of the offending particles in its filter systems.

Any filter will help, but some home air filters have higher grades than others. The higher the grade, the better they clean the air, Aminian said.

Home air cleaners - particularly electrostatic ones - can help remove pollutants that get into your home, too.

But air quality isn't the only reason to stay inside.

"The heat also can dry up the airway and mucous membranes and further irritates the lungs and airways," Buddiga said.

If you have to drive somewhere, Buddiga suggests, roll up the windows and use the car's air conditioner.

Try surgical masks

In some cases - particularly for those with severe reactions to the unhealthy air - wearing surgical masks can stave off at least some of the smoke particles, both doctors said.

Avoid strenuous outdoor activity

Playing, swimming and running around are great outdoor activities for children in the summer. But in light of the current air conditions, they should be avoided.

Young children are susceptible to poor air conditions because their lungs still are developing, Buddiga said.

"The elderly are in the same boat as young kids," he said, "because they have sensitive lungs."

Common signs that people are having problems with the air are wheezing, coughing and shortness of breath. Parents or caregivers of elderly or ill adults need to watch for those signs, Buddiga said.

If they do appear, he said, sufferers should go or be taken to doctors to determine whether they have asthma or respiratory infections. There's no truth to the myth that exercise in bad air conditions will somehow make lungs tougher or stronger, Aminian said.

"This is a bad idea," he said, "because it damages their lungs."

Take proper medication

Anyone being treated for asthma or other respiratory problems should take their prescribed medications. But for others, over-the-counter medications may not help.

Antihistamines, which dry up mucus, may be an exception. But for the most part, allergy medications generally have little effect on the problems caused by smoke particles, Aminian said.

Still, drinking lots of water to keep mucus from becoming dry and thick can help, as can washing your sinuses in a solution of luke-warm water to flush out the particles settled in the sinus cavities, he said.

Devices to flush sinuses are available at some pharmacies. A bulb syringe used for infants also can do the job, Aminian said.

As for eye irritation, the medication in eye drops may not have much of an effect on smoke particles. But using non-medicated eye drops intended to moisten dry eyes can help flush out some of the irritating particles, Aminian said.

Stay clean

If you have to go outside for an extended period, clean up afterward.

"When you get home, change your clothing and wash your hair," Aminian said.

Soot and other particles stick to hair and clothing. Exposure will continue unless you change and bathe, he explained.

'Worst air quality in some time' spurs call to stay indoors

BY JORGE BARRIENTOS, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, June 28, 2008

Air quality officials are advising Kern County and San Joaquin Valley residents to stay indoors as much as possible this weekend because of poor air quality caused in part by wildfire smoke.

"It's the worst air quality we've seen in some time," said Brenda Turner, spokeswoman for the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

The district this week issued a cautionary warning due to elevated levels of particulate matter in the air from smoke. The smoke is wafting into the valley from fires throughout the state sparked by hot, dry conditions and weekend lightning strikes.

More than 1,200 fires are burning across Northern California, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. About 11,300 firefighters are assisting.

Particulates can aggravate lung and heart disease, trigger asthma attacks and acute bronchitis. Officials advise the elderly and children to avoid being outdoors for long periods of time or exerting themselves. The general public should also take precaution to reduce strenuous activity and prolonged periods of time spent outdoors.

On Wednesday, officials issued an advisory for Arvin, which has the worst air quality of all Kern County, Turner said. The air quality advisory this weekend is in effect until late Monday morning, weather service officials said.

A southeast wind flow this weekend will help push bad air away slightly, Turner said. Air quality is forecast to improve over the next few days, but air will still be unhealthy.

"We'll still be at high levels," Turner said. "We're still bad."

Temperatures this weekend are expected to be in the 100s: 101 degrees on Saturday and 103 on Sunday, according to the National Weather Service.

Valley experiencing worst pollution ever recorded

BY SABRA STAFFORD <<mailto:ssafford@turlockjournal.com>> - Staff Reporter
Turlock Journal, Saturday, June 28, 2008

The thick smoke that continues to blanket the Central Valley has caused very unhealthy air conditions and forced a recommendation from the air district to avoid all outdoor activities.

"We are continuing our health caution and urging people to take their local air-quality conditions seriously when determining their outdoor activities," said Jamie Holt, the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's](#) chief communications officer.

Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the district's southern region, which includes Turlock, said all outdoor events should be canceled this weekend and people should remain inside as much as

possible.

Air district officials, who foresee no change in the poor air quality for at least several days, are cautioning residents that the air could worsen, depending on smoke migration and wind direction.

The air district uses an Air Quality Index to measure pollution. Air quality is scaled from 0 to 500, with higher numbers reflecting poorer air qualities. Stanislaus County had an average AQI on Friday of 203 for ozone. The AQI for the San Joaquin district is ranging from unhealthy to very unhealthy according to the air district's Web site. Turlock was experiencing particularly high ozone readings, which is the typical pollution problem in the Valley during the summer months.

The fires are creating a twofold cause of pollution. They are pumping dangerous particulate matter into the air, while also pushing ozone levels higher. Exposure to particulate matter can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks or acute bronchitis and increase the risk of respiratory infections. Ozone can also exacerbate asthma and damage lung tissue.

The air district has said this is some of the worst pollution the Valley has ever experienced and it is unknown when it will dissipate because more than 1,000 fires are still burning across the state. The National Weather Service has issued thunderstorm warnings for across the higher elevations of the Northern Sierra Nevada, which has the potential of creating even more fires and subsequently, more smoke over the Valley. The district also cautioned that smoke from Fourth of July firework celebrations could exacerbate the problem.

"Until fire and weather conditions change, the air basin is at risk for even worse air quality if residents don't take these current conditions into account when planning their July 4 activities," Holt said.

Lodi likely to see more smoke; may worsen over the weekend

Lodi News Sentinel, Saturday, June 28, 2008

With more than 11,000 firefighters battling 1,211 fires throughout the state, Lodi can expect smoky skies for the foreseeable future.

Forecasts even predict that the situation may worsen over the weekend.

The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's](#) forecast for today is for more unhealthy air.

Private weather forecasting service AccuWeather is predicting that a storm system approaching the coast could cause lightning strikes, sparking more fires.

The peak number of storms will come today and "most of the storms will produce little or no rain and numerous cloud-to-ground lightning strikes."

Most of the fires that have blanketed the valley with smoke are the result of lightning strikes from a system that passed through last weekend.

Air district officials have advised everyone to try and limit their activities outdoors and anyone with respiratory issues is urged to stay out of the smoke.

Exposure to the smoke can cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis.

Smoke screened

By Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Friday, June 27, 2008

A lingering pall of smoke from hundreds of Northern California wildfires prompted the city to cancel all its outdoor events this weekend and forced teachers to keep summer-school students inside until the skies clear.

Tracy's annual fireworks show, meanwhile, is still set for sundown on Independence Day next week, despite the air quality, drought-level dryness and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's recent appeal to cities to voluntarily cancel the fiery celebrations.

Last year, Tracy's Fourth of July festivities drew a crowd of about 2,000 people to the stadium at Tracy High School as some folks around town set off firecrackers - illegally - on their own around town.

"We're just going to be very, very cautious," said Sophia Valenzuela of the Tracy Chamber of Commerce, which organizes the annual show.

Two fire trucks will be on hand, she added, in case sparks from one of the 500-plus mini sky-high explosions ignite anything.

The city, on the other hand, will wait till the skies clear.

Following advice from the Tracy Fire Department, a city-sponsored open-air movie night Friday was canceled, as were swim, tennis and golf lessons. Soccer camps and dog-obedience classes were canceled through Sunday, too.

The city will refund participants for the missed classes.

Air regulators warned Central Valley residents this week to stay indoors as much as possible and avoid vigorous exercise, especially if they suffer from breathing problems, such as asthma and lung disease.

Sutter Tracy Community Hospital's emergency wing admitted an unusual number of patients, said Dr. Andy Su, though he offered no exact number.

As ash permeated the air earlier this week, West High School's summer school principal Rashmi Ahuja has checked for air-quality updates on the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) Web site at 4:30 p.m. every day to decide whether to coop up students the next school day.

"The health and safety of the students comes first," she said.

For students, that means no stretch breaks in the quad, no outdoor workouts for physical education classes and no stepping foot outside the classroom, unless it's to go to the bathroom or head home.

That's been the drill since Monday.

Students seem to be taking it all in stride, though, Ahuja said at the end of a week of relegating them to their classrooms.

"No fights have broken out," she offered.

Smoke should start to clear this weekend, forecasters and air-quality experts guessed Friday, when airborne soot limited visibility to roughly 1 to 4 miles, depending on location.

The tiny particles congested the valley enough to prompt the pollution control district to deem the air unsafe for the normally free-breathing population at large - not just asthmatics, children and older adults.

Schools countywide cordoned off students in classrooms and gyms for P.E., as at West High, according to the San Joaquin County Office of Education.

About 6,000 individual lightning strikes sparked 800 wildfires throughout Northern California last weekend, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Experts anticipate more of the same this weekend.

"We're just looking at this day by day," air district spokesman Anthony Presto said Friday, when wildfire ash from surrounding counties cast an apocalyptic cloud over the valley's nearly windless air basin.

High pressure building over the valley could act as a lid, pointed out Shawn Ferreria, the district's air-quality specialist, which would trap the pollution in and around Tracy until the wind picks up.

But even if Tracy sees a breeze sometime soon, Ferreria added, it would likely just blow in more smoke from two large fires in Madera County.

Dry lightning strikes, more fires and worsened air quality from thousands of fireworks come July 4 might very well be in store this week, according to the National Weather Service.

"It doesn't look good for Tracy," Ferreria said.

Wildfires force officials to pick their battles

By Scott Lindlaw

Madera Tribune, Tuesday, July 01, 2008

With hundreds of wildfires raging across remote, rugged parts of California for a second week, fire officials have been forced to strategically choose which to fight and which to leave to burn for weeks or even months.

The number of fires burning in central and Northern California - more than 1,000 according to state fire officials - means authorities can't send firefighters to battle every blaze, Jason Kirchner, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service, said Monday.

"It's like eating an elephant - you've got to eat it one bite at a time," he said.

It's also impossible to attack wildfires in some rugged, remote areas because the risk to firefighters is too great, he said.

"We have to take a step back, figure out where the best place is to make a stand and sometimes wait for the fire to come to us in those situations," he said. "We've got to pick the battles we can win."

Long-running wildfires are not unusual in California. It was four months before firefighters controlled a blaze that blackened more than 240,000 acres of Santa Barbara County backcountry last year.

What is extraordinary this year is the number of fires burning at the same time, Kirchner said. The weekend of June 21, some 1,200 fires were burning - a figure Forest Service officials said appeared to be an all-time record in California.

The Forest Service put the figure at about 600 on Monday. It attributed the gains to its tactic of attacking small fires first, and to significant assistance from other states and Canada.

State officials, however, counted more than 1,000 ongoing blazes. The source of the discrepancy was apparently a different counting method.

Also unusual, Kirchner said, was that there have been no significant injuries to civilians or firefighters even though some 570 square miles have burned in California this season. There were, however, a few minor injuries as harsh terrain hampered firefighters' efforts to battle a blaze in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

"It is extremely steep, very rugged territory, and there are a lot of injuries, twisting ankles, slipping on hills," Kirchner said. Burning debris is "rolling downhill right past your containment line. It's very complicated, difficult, dirty firefighting work."

Even so, firefighters managed to increase their containment of that 30,000-acre fire from 15 to 23 percent.

Two wildfires choked parts of the Sierra Nevada foothills, sending up plumes of smoke that darkened patches of the 100-mile stretch between Sacramento and Reno.

The fires in the Tahoe National Forest blanketed portions of the Interstate 80 corridor linking the two cities and the foothill communities in between where tens of thousands of people live.

Along the Pacific, fire officials said fog and humidity helped them gain ground against a blaze that was just 3 percent contained in the storied town of Big Sur. John Heil, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service, said it had blackened about 39,600 acres.

Firefighters poured personnel and equipment into the area to ensure the fire did not reach the town, said John Ahlman, a spokesman for the Los Padres National Forest.

Heil said there was a possibility of rain in the far northern part of the state this week. But the changing weather pattern could also bring new lightning and high winds, which could touch off new blazes and fan the current ones, he said.

"Unless it rains, and we get some really good rainfall, you can pretty much expect it to be here right through October," he said.

In Arizona, strong wind turned a wildfire that had burned nearly 4 square miles of wilderness away from the remote mountain community of Crown King north of Phoenix, officials said Monday. However, there was still no containment and the community was still considered threatened, said Prescott National Forest spokeswoman Debbie Maneely. About 120 residents voluntarily evacuated Sunday as flames got to within a mile of the former mining town.

Crews in central New Mexico's Manzano Mountains were doing mop-up operations Monday on an almost 9-square-mile fire that destroyed six homes and 10 outbuildings. Residents who left last week were allowed to return Sunday. The fire, started by lightning June 23, was 95 percent contained.

In Guffey, Colo., about 40 miles west of Colorado Springs, most of the 100 residents who fled a 1,115-acre lightning-started wildfire were allowed back Sunday. Final evacuation orders were expected to be lifted Monday.

Smoke clears slightly, but air is still bad

By Todd Milbourn

Sacramento Bee, Monday, June 30, 2008

The curtain of smoke hanging over the Sacramento Valley thinned a bit Sunday, but officials continued to caution against breathing too deeply.

The outdoor air remains unhealthy, they said, especially for the young and old and people with respiratory or other health problems.

That said, Sunday was an improvement as mild temperatures and calmer winds helped firefighters make progress on the more than 1,000 wildfires burning across the state, many ignited by lightning strikes.

"This is pretty much the clearest day we've had in six days," said Jamie Arno, a spokeswoman for the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality District.

Smoke from fires has produced some of the worst air quality in a decade for the Sacramento region, which has the unfortunate geography of being a smoke-trapping bowl between the Coast Range and the Sierra Nevada.

"Our advice is: If you can see or smell smoke, get out of it and go inside," Arno said.

Firefighters in stalemate against Calif. wildfires

By MARCUS WOHLSEN Associated Press Writer

Tri-Valley Herald and Washington Post, Sunday, June 29, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO—Firefighters on Sunday had battled more than a thousand wildfires burning throughout Northern California to a stalemate, but forecasters said dangerous fire conditions would not relent anytime soon.

No new major fires had broken out Sunday as fire crews inched closer to getting some of the largest blazes surrounded, according to the state Office of Emergency Services.

But a "red flag warning"—meaning the most extreme fire danger—was still in effect for Northern California until 5 a.m. Monday. And the coming days and months are expected to bring little relief.

Forecasters predicted more thunderstorms and dry lightning through the weekend similar to the ones that ignited hundreds of fires a week ago. Meanwhile, a U.S. Forest Service report said the weather would get even drier and hotter as fire season headed toward its traditional peak in late July and August.

Lower-than-average rainfall and record levels of vegetation parched by a spring drought likely mean a long, fiery summer throughout Northern California, according to the Forest Service's state fire outlook released last week.

Already the fires now burning will take weeks to months to fully bring under control, the report said.

Those blazes were mostly sparked by lightning storms that were unusually intense for so early in the season. But summer storms would likely grow even more fierce, according to the Forest Service.

"Our most widespread

and/or critical lightning events often occur in late July or August, and we have no reason to deviate from that," the agency's report said.

The blazes have scorched more than 556 square miles and destroyed more than 50 buildings, said state emergency services spokesman Gregory Renick.

Air quality districts from Bakersfield to Redding issued health advisories through the weekend, urging residents to stay indoors to limit their exposure to the smoky air. Air pollution readings in Northern California are two to 10 times the federal standard for clean air, state air regulators said.

On Saturday, President Bush issued an emergency declaration for California and ordered federal agencies to assist in firefighting efforts in Butte, Mendocino, Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, and Trinity.

But California emergency officials said that state and local governments would also need federal financing to cover the costs of fighting so many fires this early in the year.

Federal aid now includes four Marine Corps helicopters, remote sensing of the fires by NASA, federal firefighters, and the activation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

More than 18,000 firefighters, nearly 1,700 fire engines and bulldozers, and more than 80 helicopters and aircraft were fighting more than 1,000 active fires Sunday, Renick said. The blazes threatened more than 10,000 buildings across the region, he said.

In hard-hit Butte County, 31 fires have burned 25 square miles and threatened 1,200 homes. Though the blazes had spread since Saturday, firefighters increased containment to 20 percent.

More than 120 fires had scorched nearly 56 square miles in Mendocino County, and 900 homes were still under threat Sunday. Overall containment on the fires had grown to 20 percent Sunday, up from just 5 percent the day before. In Shasta-Trinity counties, fires that had burned nearly 69 square miles and threatened 230 homes were just 10 percent contained.

A wildfire in the Big Sur region of the Los Padres National Forest charred more than 50 square miles and destroyed 16 homes as authorities advised more evacuations. The blaze was still just 3 percent contained more than a week after breaking out in the popular outdoor destination's steep mountain forests.

The fire has forced the closure of a scenic stretch of coastal Highway 1 and driven away visitors at the peak of the tourist season.

Further south in the Los Padres forest, firefighters reported good progress on a separate wildfire that started three weeks ago. The blaze has scorched 95 square miles of remote wilderness, but officials predicted it would be fully contained by Thursday.

Rockets' red glare to dim this July 4

Dry conditions, booming costs lead many cities to drop or ban fireworks

By Alex Johnson

MSNBC, Monday, June. 30, 2008

It was eerily quiet at Aaron Waugh's fireworks stand in Princeton, W.Va.

"Pretty slow, pretty slow," he concluded. "More people need to come in."

The solitude at Rocket World, which opened last week, is being replicated at fireworks shops and seasonal stands across the country. Just a few days before the Fourth of July weekend, fireworks sales are down dramatically.

It's a double blast. Authorities scared of setting off wildfires in drought conditions have imposed new bans on fireworks displays across a swath of the West and the Southwest. At the same time, a massive explosion at fireworks factories in China created a global shortage that has driven prices beyond the means not only of many backyard revelers but even of many local governments, forcing them to cancel municipal celebrations.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger pleaded with residents this week not to buy or use fireworks in California, where wildfires sparked by lightning are burning up hundreds of thousands of acres in the northern part of the state.

"Don't buy the fireworks, don't go out and play with fireworks, because it's just too dry and too dangerous to do those things," Schwarzenegger said.

What goes up must come down

Numerous municipalities across California and other states responded to the threat by banning fireworks displays.

"Even if someone takes a legal firework and throws it up in the sky, that's now an illegal firework," said Sean Collins, a spokesman for the Kern County Fire Department, in the Bakersfield area.

What goes up - like fireworks - must come down, and authorities can't take a chance that that will be in tinder-dry forests or brushlands.

"Those that go up in the air and fall away from where people are are the ones that traditionally give us the problem," said Judge Dan Gattis, chief executive of Williamson County, Texas, in the central part of the state, which has set a \$500 fine for using fireworks this summer.

Fires in many counties in eastern North Carolina led authorities to include holiday fireworks in their bans on outdoor burning. Similar bans have been declared in parts of Oregon, Idaho and Utah.

"Something benign as a sparkler ... can send sparks off into the grass," said Jessica Gardetto, a spokeswoman for the federal Bureau of Land Management, which banned fireworks in all of the nearly 12 million acres of public lands managed by the agency. "All it takes is a breeze, and then you've got a wildfire."

Hundreds of cities priced out of market

But even if you live in a part of the country where fireworks remain legal, you could be disappointed next week.

In February, an explosion in the port city of Sanshui in southern China destroyed 20 fireworks warehouses. It was the worst of a series of safety problems at Chinese facilities in the past year. In response, China, which supplies 90 percent of the world's cherry bombs and sparklers, shut down most exports.

"At present, China's fireworks export is experiencing some unprecedented difficulties," the Chinese pyrotechnic trade group said.

Coupled with the dollar's weakness against the yuan, the Chinese currency, the shortage drove up the cost of fireworks nearly 20 percent across the board, making them a luxury many Americans and governments can't afford in tight economic times.

"Fireworks company owners are at a loss as they have no control over the severe price increases nor the lack of shipping coming from China," the National Fireworks Association said in a statement. "There is no indication when or if this situation will get better."

Art Rozzi, of Rozzi Fireworks in Cincinnati, home to the annual Riverfest July 4 celebration, estimated that available supplies this year have plummeted by 40 percent.

"We've always imported some of the best stuff in the world to showcase at Riverfest and our other shows," Rozzi said. "And we're worried that we won't get everything we want."

Charlie Wald, a third-generation pyrotechnician at Wald & Co. in Greenwood, Mo., said he had to pay almost double for his crates this year, calling the pressure "the worst anybody in the industry has ever seen."

"There was a lot of shortage on some companies that didn't get their product in," Wald said. "They're more than likely going to have to pinch and choose what fireworks displays they can shoot and which they can't."

Local towns close down the show

As a result, cities and towns that plan all year for their annual Fourth of July celebrations couldn't get enough shipments, and others concluded that it's just not worth it.

Officials in Chula Vista, Calif., called off their Fourth of July fireworks show not because of the wildfire risk but because they couldn't afford the estimated \$40,000 cost, said Liz Pursell, a spokeswoman for the city. And Chula Vista is by no means alone.

Matt Sutcliff, CEO of Premier Pyrotechnics in Richland, Mo., said the company, one of the nation's biggest fireworks vendors, had to reject orders from more than 700 small towns and cities. The company lost 4,800 cases of fireworks in the Chinese explosions, and there wasn't enough time to resupply by July 4.

Bans and rising prices are especially painful for the thousands of schools, churches and nonprofit groups that rely on seasonal fireworks sales to fund their budgets.

After Schwarzenegger urged Californians to boycott fireworks, "my reaction was great - what do we do now?" said the Rev. Victor Vasquez, pastor of Olive Drive Church in Bakersfield.

It's not small change. City officials estimated that nonprofit groups in Garden Grove, Calif., alone would normally make \$1.2 million during just four days of fireworks sales.

Tim Jacobson, president of Garden Grove's Pony Baseball league, said he feared for the sales that funded his 300-member Little League for decades.

"Everything we do, from the scoreboards to the fences, it's all from fireworks money," Jacobson said.

Victory Life Center, a small Pentecostal congregation in Westfield, Ind., had hoped July 4 fireworks sales would help pay for a new church building.

The church invested \$8,000 in supplies and rent for a shop. But with each sign and banner that went up came a citation from the city to cease and desist.

"Activities and outreach - it takes money. And that was the whole intent and purpose, not greed, just to impact our community," said the Rev. Randy Adams, the church's pastor. "It's going to be devastating if we're not able to sell and recoup at least our expenses."

But Jerry Beyersdorff, CEO of the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce in Watsonville, Calif., said authorities were in a no-win situation.

"That's a significant amount of money that the nonprofits will be forfeiting if there's no fireworks sale," he said.

"On the other hand, you can't equate \$5,000 [a nonprofit] would make with somebody's house or their animals."

Calif. firefighters battle more than 1,400 blazes

USA TODAY and Washington Post, Monday, June 30, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - The good news in northern California is that more than a thousand wildfires aren't growing. The bad news: There's no relief in sight.

No new major fires had broken out Sunday as fire crews inched closer to getting some of the largest of 1,420 blazes surrounded, according to the state Office of Emergency Services. Some 364,600 acres - or almost 570 square miles - have burned.

A "red flag warning" - meaning the most extreme fire danger - was still in effect for Northern California until 8 a.m. ET Monday. And the coming days and months are expected to bring little relief.

Lower-than-average rainfall and record levels of parched vegetation likely mean a long, fiery summer throughout northern California, according to the Forest Service's state fire outlook released last week.

The fires burning now were mostly sparked by lightning storms that were unusually intense for so early in the season. But summer storms would probably be even fiercer, according to the Forest Service.

"Our most widespread and/or critical lightning events often occur in late July or August, and we have no reason to deviate from that," the agency's report said.

The blazes have destroyed more than 50 buildings, said Gregory Renick, state emergency services spokesman. More than 19,500 firefighters are battling the blazes and 926 helicopters have been used.

A wildfire in the Los Padres National Forest has forced the closure of a scenic stretch of a coastal highway and driven away visitors at the peak of the tourist season.

Air quality districts from Bakersfield to Redding issued health advisories through the weekend, urging residents to stay indoors to limit exposure to the smoky air.

A fire in the Piute Mountain area has burned more than 1,000 acres, causing some small communities to be evacuated, most vacation homes, *The Bakersfield Californian* reported Monday.

On Saturday, President Bush issued an emergency declaration for California and ordered federal agencies to assist in firefighting efforts.

But California emergency officials said state and local governments would also need federal financing to cover the costs of fighting so many fires this early in the year.

Federal aid now includes four Marine Corps helicopters, remote sensing of the fires by NASA, federal firefighters, and the activation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In Arizona, residents of a remote mountain community north of Phoenix were evacuated Sunday as a 500-acre wildfire moved toward town, but a late afternoon wind shift spared all but one structure in Crown King. Flames came within a mile of town.

The surrounding ponderosa pine forest has a large number of dead trees, victims of a bark beetle infestation that has killed millions of trees across the West in recent years. About 120 people were evacuated from the town of about 400 scattered homes and summer cabins, said Debbie Maneely, a spokeswoman for the Prescott National Forest.

Evacuation orders were lifted Sunday morning for residents of Tajique in central New Mexico, where a blaze has destroyed six homes. The fire, sparked by lightning June 23, was more than 60% contained.

In Guffey, Colo., about 40 miles west of Colorado Springs, most of the 100 residents who fled a 1,115-acre lightning-started wildfire were allowed back home Sunday. Final evacuation orders were expected to be lifted Monday morning.

Big West: Alternative refining process 'would work'

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, July 1, 2008

Big West of California officials said Monday they're open to a new proposal that would allow the company to boost gas and diesel output without introducing new hazardous chemicals into the community.

The company's comments were the first in response to a revised environmental impact report released Friday that detailed an alternative option with fewer environmental impacts than the company's plan, which involves the use of a toxic acid.

"We still think the current proposed system is a good one but we also think (the new alternative) would work," said Big West Health, Safety and Environmental Director Bill Chadick. "The county will ultimately make that choice and we're comfortable either way."

"Alternative D," as it's called in the report, would convert gas oil into gasoline and diesel by building a new processing unit similar to one currently operating at the refinery. Not only would it reduce hazards from toxic chemicals but it would also reduce air pollution, greenhouse gases and create less odor, the report said.

Critics of the refinery's original plan were cautiously optimistic about the new option.

"I think the fact that people organized around this issue, put pressure on the company to come up with a less toxic alternative, is a win for local residents," state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, a vocal critic of the refinery's plans to use the hazardous chemical modified hydrofluoric acid, said in an e-mail.

Big West should get credit, Florez said, for "including a less toxic alternative" in the environmental report.

Betsy Ramsey, spokeswoman for Bakersfield Citizens Against Hydrofluoric Acid, a group of local residents, nurses, police officers and firefighters opposed to modified HF, said the new option sounded like a good idea but the group wanted more time to thoroughly review the report before commenting.

Asked why the refinery hadn't considered the alternative previously, Chadick said the decision to expand the refinery was made by executives with parent company Flying J when it purchased the Bakersfield refinery more than three years ago. The design is based on processes used at Flying J's only other refinery, located in Ogden, Utah.

But with community concern raised here about the use of dangerous chemicals, Chadick said managers at the local refinery decided to look at other ways the facility could be expanded.

Chadick agreed Monday that "Alternative D" was "clearly the environmentally superior project" but cited several reasons the company prefers its original plan.

The company's proposal would allow it to produce its own alkylate, a highly sought-after and key blending component for the production of clean-burning fuels. "Alternative D" would require that Big West continue to purchase alkylate from other producers.

"It's a smart business decision to be able to have your own ... so we're not subject to whatever people want to sell it for," Chadick said.

The company has also already placed orders and paid for equipment needed for the project design it proposed. It's likely another company could buy the equipment but not without some financial loss, Chadick said. He didn't immediately know how much the company could lose.

Gloria Smith, a San Francisco-based attorney representing local residents and environmental groups concerned about the expansion, said "Alternative D" may be a good option to address concerns about toxic chemical risks. But she said other environmental issues are still a concern.

For example, soil around the refinery is known to be contaminated with heavy metals such as lead and chromium. Smith's clients are concerned the contaminants might get swept into nearby neighborhoods by winds during construction.

Smith has hired experts to review the new report and said she would comment further once they've conducted a full review.

The release of the report Friday started a 45-day comment period leading up to a vote on the project by the Planning Commission in September and the Board of Supervisors in October.

Kern County Planning Department Division Chief Lorelei Oviatt said the agency is interested in public input on the project and "Alternative D."

Planning Department staff will eventually make a recommendation on whether the Planning Commission should approve or deny the project. The department could condition approval by requiring Alternative D, Oviatt said.

Following a planning commission vote, the project will require final approval by the Board of Supervisors because the county is also seeking to adjust the refinery's current "by-right" zoning so that any significant projects in the future must undergo environmental review and public decision-making.

The county suggested the zone change due to the refinery's location in a heavily populated area.

Since the 1950s, the refinery has been under "by-right" zoning, meaning that, with a few exceptions, new industrial development or modifications can take place on the property without county approval or environmental review.

Environmental review was only required for the expansion because certain conditional use permits were needed for storage tanks, injection wells and height exceedences on some equipment.

Kern County Planning Director Ted James said the new zoning would give "the county a better way of controlling and providing information to the public about land use changes on this property."

HOW TO COMMENT

A copy of the Big West environmental impact report is expected to be available for review at the Kern County Planning Department, 2700 M St., Suite 100, Bakersfield.

Public comments on the project will be accepted through Aug. 11. Comments should be mailed to the Planning Department at the address above.

Planning staff will also hold informational workshops on the report prior to a public hearing and vote by the Kern County Planning Commission to approve or deny the project.

The public hearing is scheduled to be 7 p.m. Sept. 25.

India prime minister unveils plan to combat climate change

USA TODAY and New York Times, Monday, June 30, 2008

NEW DELHI (AP) - India's prime minister announced a plan Monday to combat global warming by focusing on renewable energy, even as he stood by a refusal to commit to greenhouse gas emission targets that could stall the country's economic growth.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh laid out an eight-point plan that he said would enable India to shift away from fossil fuels and embrace solar energy and sustainable development without sacrificing the rapid economic growth of recent years.

"Our vision is to make India's economic development energy-efficient," Singh said, releasing the National Action Plan. "But I also believe that ecologically sustainable development need not be in contradiction to achieving our growth objectives."

The plan will focus on a host of issues including water conservation, protecting the Himalayan ecosystem and sustainable agriculture, he said. He gave no cost estimates, timetable or specific benchmarks for implementation.

India's has the world's fourth-largest emissions of the greenhouse gases blamed for global climate change. With a soaring economy that many predict will continue to grow in coming years, the government says energy consumption could quadruple over the next generation.

With that growth in mind, Western leaders have called for India, along with China, to set strict emission caps. But India has maintained that it needs rapid development to fight poverty among its 1.1 billion people and that its per-capita emissions are far lower than those in rich nations.

India produces roughly 1.2 tons of emissions per capita annually, while the United States produces about 20 tons per capita and the world average is 4 tons. India produces about 4% of the world's greenhouse gases.

Singh said Monday that emissions standards had to "fair and equitable" - an apparent reference to what India sees as the West's unfair demands that it limit its emissions at the same rate as more developed countries which produce far more greenhouse gas.

"Our people want higher standards of living, but they also want clean water to drink, fresh air to breathe and a green earth to walk on," Singh said.

Singh repeated his government's pledge that greenhouse gas emissions at a per capita level will not exceed those of developed countries.

Emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants - mostly from burning fossil fuels for electricity and transportation - are blamed for rising global temperatures that threaten the environment.

A U.N. report has estimated that emissions cuts of between 25% to 40% by 2020 are needed to stop global temperatures from rising so high they trigger widespread environmental damage.

Refinery environmental report released

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, June 28, 2008

A new report on the Big West of California refinery expansion shows two hotly debated chemicals carry about the same risks to the community but a third option would have significantly fewer hazards.

The public hearing is scheduled to be 7 p.m. Sept. 25.

Big West could boost its gas and diesel output using equipment that doesn't require either of the acids at the center of recent controversy, according to the report released Friday.

But it's unclear whether the alternative would be acceptable to Big West.

Big West officials were out of town or on vacation and not available to comment Friday. They did release a statement saying they look forward to sharing the benefits of the project.

Project opponents said they needed time to read the 3,000-page document before weighing in.

A NEW OPTION

"Alternative D," as it's called in the report, would convert gas oil into gasoline and diesel by building a new processing unit similar to one currently operating at the refinery. Not only would it reduce hazards from toxic chemicals but it would also reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases and create less odor, the report said.

"It has the least environmental impacts," said Kern County Planning Department Division Chief Lorelei Oviatt. "We're very interested in what the public thinks about this alternative."

Refining experts hired by the county thought up the alternative.

The Kern County Planning Department could recommend the project be approved using Alternative D but Oviatt said staff has not yet decided what it will suggest.

The option has drawbacks. Because the equipment is geared toward diesel production, the alternative would mean more diesel output and less gasoline than proposed in the original expansion plans.

Refinery officials have said that equipment needed for the original proposal has already been ordered, so the company could take a financial hit.

BENEFITS, DRAWBACKS

The new report is a follow-up to an initial environmental document released last year but found inadequate due to lack of information on the hazardous chemical hydrofluoric acid.

The refinery has since said it will use a safer form of the chemical, called modified hydrofluoric acid, or modified HF. But a local citizens group, unions and state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, have pushed for sulfuric acid, which is used in similar processes at other refineries.

A comparison of both chemicals in the environmental report found the risks of using either acid to be nearly the same, though sulfuric acid may carry slightly more impacts.

A disastrous accident involving sulfuric acid could create an acid mist cloud affecting areas up to 10 miles from the refinery, according to the report. Under the same circumstances, a modified HF spill could create a vapor cloud capable of traveling up to 6.5 miles from the facility.

An HF cloud is known to cause serious burns to the lungs and skin and exposure can be fatal. A sulfuric acid mist can also cause severe skin and lung burns.

Sulfuric acid could create more air pollution than modified HF.

"Both acids have impacts and we have to evaluate how much risk the community can take on in terms of the benefits this project will bring," Oviatt said.

By contrast, "Alternative D's" worst-case scenario is a fire or explosion that could impact areas within 2 miles of the facility. Members of Bakersfield Citizens Against Hydrofluoric Acid, a group of residents, police officers, firefighters and nurses who have pushed for sulfuric acid, said Friday they just received a copy of the document and would comment early next week.

OTHER IMPACTS

The report also looked at the possibility of building a new refinery in Elk Hills or the Mojave Desert but ruled that out since it would cost \$6 to \$7 billion, more than 10 times the price of the expansion.

Also in the report were details about impacts to air quality, climate change, traffic, water and endangered and sensitive species.

One section explains how Big West plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by planting 1,000 trees and set aside \$6 million to curb emissions at the facility and in the community.

Bill Chadick, the refinery health, safety and environmental director, said earlier this week that staff from Attorney General Jerry Brown's office had approved of the company's climate change mitigations.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The report's release starts a 45-day comment period that culminates with a public hearing before the Kern County Planning Commission on Sept. 25.

The Planning Commission will vote to approve or deny the project as proposed. It can approve a project on the condition that "Alternative D" or sulfuric acid be used.

Big West has lobbied county planning staff to skip the Planning Commission and go straight to the Board of Supervisors for a decision, citing a November deadline to use multi-million dollar air pollution credits to offset expansion costs.

Zoning ordinances allow circumvention of the Planning Commission but county planning staff have decided against allowing it in this case.

"Given the kind of interest in this project and the importance of this project," Oviatt said, "we don't think that's appropriate."

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Big West's "Clean Fuels Project" would allow the facility to nearly double gasoline production and increase diesel output by 60 percent without increasing crude oil coming into the facility.

The refinery would add equipment to convert an intermediary petroleum stream, called gas oil, into transportation fuel. Currently the refinery can't convert all its gas oil to fuel so it sells the product to other refineries in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas.

Big West's parent company, Flying J, said when it bought the refinery from Shell Oil in 2005 that an expansion would be needed to ensure the facility's long-term viability.

The project is expected to cost about \$700 million.

The Kern County Planning Commission must approve a conditional use permit for additional storage tanks and a zone variance for equipment that will exceed height requirements.

The project also requires an air permit from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and a separate environmental permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The expansion would create about 100 new jobs at the refinery paying an average of about \$70,000 a year, double the facility's property taxes from about \$1.5 million to \$3 million annually, and create 1,200 construction jobs, refinery officials say.

Opponents have raised concerns about the use of a controversial chemical called modified hydrofluoric acid, as well as increased air pollution and truck traffic on Rosedale Highway.

HOW TO COMMENT

A copy of the Big West environmental impact report is expected to be available for review at the Kern County Planning Department, 2700 M St., Suite 100, Bakersfield.

Public comments on the project will be accepted through Aug. 11. Comments should be mailed to the Planning Department at the address above.

Planning staff will also hold informational workshops on the report prior to a public hearing and vote by the Kern County Planning Commission to approve or deny the project.

Valley's smoky air is a pollution lesson

Peaks, inversion layer hold in the haze

By Maddalena Jackson

Sacramento Bee, Sunday, June 29, 2008

For the Sacramento region's residents, the past week's smoky shroud has been one addition to the list of peculiarities that arise from living in a furrowed basin ringed with ragged mountains.

The smoke from hundreds of wildfires, jammed into that basin much like fog in winter, is expected to stay with us until fires are extinguished, according to the National Weather Service forecast.

Even as Delta winds Saturday improved conditions for many areas in the southern Sacramento Valley, experts were concerned about the possibility of storms over the northern mountains today, bringing unpredictable winds, making firefighting difficult and prolonging smoky conditions.

Unpleasant those conditions may be, but they do come with the territory. Weather experts and longtime residents are familiar with inversions, which keep air - and smoke - trapped in the Sacramento Valley.

With a little clearing Saturday, children at the farmers market in Davis played in fountains under the watchful eyes of their parents and still grayish skies. Newcomers wondered if this happened every summer. Longtime residents knew better.

"It's a temporary inconvenience," said Mike McDonald, 64, selling honey and almonds from his farm in Capay, west of Woodland. "It used to be that the Valley fills like that when they're burning rice fields. I think people are just not used to it."

Over the years, the Valley has experienced other lingering phenomena, high pressure systems yielding stagnant air:

- In December 1985, fog settled into the Valley for 17 consecutive days with visibility less than a quarter-mile.

- Summer 2006 brought a heat wave that claimed 13 lives with day-and-night highs at or over 100 degrees for 11 consecutive days.
- That September, smoke from a fire in Tahoe National Forest flowed down the canyons of the American River.
- And now health advisories Saturday urged residents to stay inside from Bakersfield to Redding. Air pollution is two to 10 times the federal standard for clean air, according to a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board.

Weather in the Sacramento Valley is governed largely by these ponderous pressure systems that lumber slowly across the West. Like a lid on a bowl, a pile of air lies overhead. Most of the Valley may be above sea level, but we really live on the floor of another ocean: the atmosphere.

"It's like waves," said Angus Barkhuff, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Sacramento. High-pressure systems rise, and lows dip toward us, as if we stood at the bottom of the sea.

Currently a high-pressure system over the Southwest has spread to Sacramento like a large, heavy blanket.

"A stagnant air pattern is what I would call it," said Barkhuff.

A good Delta breeze helps bring in fresh air. The breeze is drawn in from the Pacific by hot air rising above the Valley - as if the Valley were drawing a breath from the ocean, passing through the mouth of the Carquinez Strait.

It is like trying to breathe with someone sitting on your chest - in this case, an air mass heavy enough to crush the more than 200-by-40-mile "chest" of the Sacramento Valley.

With breathing restricted, smoky air eventually heads south into the San Joaquin Valley, and filters down through the Tehachapi Mountain passes, said Anthony Wexler, director of the UC Davis Air Quality Research Center. Air also can leak east into the Tahoe basin, or squeeze through other canyons. Smoke lingers on the ground and sinks into low spots at night.

"When the sun goes down, the ground sees a cold sky," explained Wexler. Heat moves through "radiation to the sky from the ground, so the ground gets cold, and air near ground gets cold, and cold air sinks. It flows downhill like water does, into valleys."

"The atmosphere (has) lots of things happening at the same time," he added.

One of those things is the location of the jet stream, a strong current of air flowing across the Northern Hemisphere.

In winter, it dips south toward the Sacramento Valley, pushing weather systems more quickly overhead.

"In winter we get storms coming through, which clears out fog," Barkhuff said.

In the summer, the jet stream moves north, away from the Sacramento Valley, and the Southwest's high-pressure system traps heat and pollution.

"The high-pressure system blocks all the storms, sends them northwest," said Barkhuff. "It happens pretty much every summer."

This is a normal summer, with the exception of the smoke from nearly 1,000 lightning-triggered fires in Northern California.

Thunderstorms occur when air drifts in off the ocean, slamming into the Coast Ranges. The air cools as it rises, forcing water particles to condense into clouds.

"After it crosses the Coast Range, the air settles back down," Barkhuff said. The air flows across the ceiling of the Valley, leaving lightning-struck fires behind, and as it hits the east rim of the Valley, the turbulence and fires begin again.

The particles, chemicals and haze carry serious health risks, but the smoke also offers one small consolation: cooler temperatures.

Like cold, white fog in the winter, the smoke reflects heat back into space, Wexler said.

"I hate the heat, so anything that'll hold the heat off a little longer is beneficial to me," said Brett Babcock at the farmers market in Davis.

It is cooler - and also darker. Fatumah Davis, 16, and Shoua Lor, 16, were at the market selling salsa. Both remember smoke from previous years, but not quite like this.

Lor said she sometimes awakens late because there's less light, like those winter mornings enshrouded in dense fog.

"If it weren't for the fires," said Barkhuff, "we'd be having typically warm summer weather."

Smoky air an exercise in frustration for Northern California athletes

By M.S. Enkoji

in the Modesto Bee, Saturday, June 28, 2008

With a 129-mile bike race on the horizon, Will Harris doesn't have a day to lose training for the grueling competition.

Let alone a whole week lost to lung-scorching, dingy air blanketing Northern California.

Where does a guy go for fresh air? Los Angeles. Yes, the city that practically put smog in the dictionary.

"I just want to get out of the area," said Harris, who is headed there this weekend. "I hope I can get some exercise and relatively clean air."

The great outdoors became the great void for athletes young and old this week as wildfire smoke blotted the sun for days in the region, forcing people like Harris to re-channel their vigor - or not.

"I don't see a point in breathing in all the air," said Harris, 46, who is training for a July bike race. "I think it does more harm than good."

Heavy smoke and fires forced the first cancellation ever of this weekend's 35th annual Western States Endurance Run, a 100.2-mile ultramarathon from Squaw Valley to Auburn. About 400 runners, including elite athletes, were shut out almost at the starting line.

Even without world-class status, athletes throughout the Valley are sitting out canceled soccer and swimming practices, training and workouts.

Some ventured out, defying the drabness. Sacramento River Cats players take the field and just hope to find the ball.

"The biggest challenge for our guys is adjusting their sight. With all the smoke, they can't see the ball," said Gabe Ross, the minor league baseball team's assistant general manager.

Pro tennis players soldiered on in the haze - \$15,000 was at stake at a Shingle Springs tournament.

"It's been quite tough for the guys out there," said Don Lynd, general manager of the Millennium SportsClub El Dorado. "They've been huffing and puffing. It's tough just sitting and watching."

"I've never seen it like this before," he said. "The only thing I could compare it to is Mount St. Helens. I was up there in Washington when it blew (in 1980), and everything was covered with ash. This feels like that."

In a bright-yellow jersey atop his bike, 90-year-old Lou Heinrich, a retired biologist, briskly rode on the American River Parkway on Friday morning.

"I don't have any problem exercising in this," he said. "The largest particulate matter from fires is coughed right back up. So I don't think anyone should worry about this."

Early Friday morning, Prescott Williams, 63, ran the streets of Davis in a white tank top, black ear buds for his MP3 player and a red bandanna on his forehead.

"I've cut way down on exercising," he said. "I can really feel it in my lungs, but I'm not going to go indoors to exercise. I'm sorry, but I just hate it indoors."

It might not be over, with more lightning-ignited fires and uncooperative weather predicted.

Normally, Nicole Dolney purposely lengthens her cycling commute into downtown, adding miles by detouring onto the parkway. But she shaved her 25-mile round trip down to a five-mile straight shot once the air dimmed.

"I haven't been doing anything else," said Dolney, a 29-year-old scientist with the state Air Resources Board. "I'm not sure the air in a gym is much better."

Besides missing the exercise, a stress reliever for her, she longs for the peace on the parkway.

"There's a sense of being outside and enjoying nature there on the river," she said.

On Fridays, the Capital Athletic Soccer Academy fields about 350 youths at Larchmont Community Park, with many teams practicing daily for tournaments, said Kari Hawkins, the club's administrator.

"But it's been a week of no soccer," she said.

The Sacramento Swim League canceled practice several times this past week, but Heidi Satter let her 10-year-old son, a team member, go swimming anyway.

"My son has no asthma or anything like that. He's as healthy as they come," she said.

An exercise physiologist with the University of California, Davis, Sports Medicine clinic said the dangers differ for children and adults, for the sick and the strapping.

Generally, a good rule is to exercise outside before 10 a.m., or when it is cooler than 80 degrees, said John Hansen, the physiologist.

Walking the dog around the block is probably OK for the healthy, he said. Consider how much air you're gulping in, how much volume is moving across tissue, causing damage, he said.

Hansen said exercise junkies training indoors should boost time on the stationary bike by about 15 percent to 25 percent to compensate for natural difficulties such as wind.

For runners, up the treadmill grade at least 1 percent to simulate road conditions, he said.

John Blue, president of the 500-member Buffalo Chips Running Club, doesn't have a treadmill, so he's sitting through lunch at work instead of doing a seven-mile run from his downtown office. "I'm assuming missing a few days of running will hurt me less than running in this stuff," he said.

Still, there is a competitive training drive that knows no day off, said Blue, 44.

"Those of use who are compelled to train, we feel off if we can't," he said. "There's an imbalance in your life. In the short term, it makes us kind of cranky."

The training director for the Buffalo Chips is also a psychology professor at California State University, Sacramento.

George Parrott, who is hoping to finally get a run in today, said that for athletes focused on competitions, such as the Western States, training can border on obsession.

"Sport has a funny way of sometimes taking control," he said.

He recommends always preparing for something that could prevent competitions: weather, injury, unforeseen reasons.

"That's the dilemma about recreational sport; it should be recreational and enriching," he said.

For some, the lure of the outdoors can't be squelched.

On the Yolo Causeway on Friday morning, the Sacramento skyline was barely visible as John Bachman, 49, of Davis cycled toward his downtown Sacramento job.

"I'm one of those foolish people who keep working out," he said. "I do worry about it a bit. I can feel it a little in my chest."

Bachman says that although about half his co-workers quit biking to work, he won't. "Hey, I grew up in the San Fernando Valley," he said. "So this is nothing,"

Cycling the opposite way on the causeway, Sean Sullivan wore a blue surgical mask.

"I had heard all the warnings about being out in the smoke, so I've scaled back. But some friends told me if I got the mask, it would be safe. So here I am."

For those who work outside, the options are slim.

The California Department of Industrial Relations suggests minimizing strenuous work and wearing respiratory masks for minimal protection, said Kate McGuire, a department spokeswoman.

Near McKinley Park, tree climber Agustin Rivera fed branches of a sick magnolia tree into a wood chipper.

Coupled with the tree pollen and dust, the smoky air has made his job rough, he said.

"Sometimes, it feels like you can't breathe," Rivera said, but added he has no choice. "I could stay home, but who's going to pay my rent or my bills? Regardless of the weather, we have to work."

Pentagon spars with EPA on hazardous waste cleanups

USA TODAY, Tuesday, July 01, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Defense Department is refusing to comply with orders or sign contracts to clean up 11 hazardous waste sites, and has asked the White House and Justice Department to intervene on its behalf.

The dispute between the Pentagon and the Environmental Protection Agency has simmered over the last year since the EPA began issuing orders compelling the Air Force and Army to clean up four properties where contamination poses an "imminent and substantial" risk to public health and the environment. To date, the Pentagon has agreed to comply with only one of those orders, at an Air Force missile plant near Tucson

In separate letters in May to the White House budget office and the Justice Department, Pentagon officials challenged the EPA's authority to issue orders under other environmental laws to force Superfund cleanups at Air Force bases in New Jersey and Florida and at the Army's Fort

Meade in Maryland. The Defense Department dismissed the EPA's claim that soil and groundwater pollution at the three bases was dangerous enough to warrant such action.

Senate Environment Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., agreed Monday with a request by Maryland's two Democratic senators, Barbara Mikulski and Benjamin Cardin, to hold a hearing on the Pentagon's noncompliance with the EPA's orders.

At eight other Superfund sites, the Pentagon is objecting to "additional provisions" that it says the EPA added to proposed cleanup contracts. Those eight facilities are in Massachusetts, Virginia, Maryland, Alabama, New Jersey, Florida and Hawaii.

Report: Two-thirds care for environment because it's God's creation

By Ashly McGlone, Religion News Service

USA TODAY, Tuesday, July 01, 2008

From Christians in Hawaii to Buddhists in Connecticut, and from Jews in New York to Muslims in Wisconsin, people of all walks of faith are finding a myriad of ways to care for the environment, according to a first-of-its-kind report from the Sierra Club.

According to the report, "Faith in Action: Communities of Faith Bring Hope for the Planet" 67% of Americans said they care about the environment because it is God's creation.

Highlighting faith-based environmental initiatives in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, the report praises the "breadth, depth and diversity of spiritually motivated grassroots efforts to protect the planet."

The 36-page report highlights different programs, from Episcopalians working to restrict oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to a large-scale recycling program at a Southern Baptist megachurch near Orlando

The report said faith communities are leading a new eco-conscious wave that is rolling across the nation, "greening" all areas of religious and secular life. Reducing their carbon emissions, protecting endangered species and launching energy awareness campaigns are just some of the efforts being made.

The report is the latest indicator of a fledgling alliance between environmental groups and religious institutions, even as some conservative religious groups remain skeptical about the causes and concerns over climate change.

"Lasting social change rarely takes place without the active engagement of communities of faith," the report said.

Most state workers in Utah shifting to 4-day week

By Larry Copeland <<http://www.usatoday.com/community/tags/reporter.aspx?id=378>>

USA TODAY, Tuesday, July 01, 2008

Utah this summer will become what experts say is the first state to institute a mandatory four-day work week for most state employees, joining local governments across the nation that are altering schedules to save money, energy and resources.

Gov. Jon Huntsman, a first-term Republican, says he's making the change to reduce the state's carbon footprint, increase energy efficiency, improve customer service and provide workers more flexibility.

"The reaction (from the public) has been very much a willingness to give this a go," he says.

The change will apply to about 17,000 employees, roughly 80% of the state workforce, Huntsman says. Public universities, the state court system, prisons and other critical services will be exempt. Residents still will have sufficient access to state offices, many staying open from 7 a.m.- 6 p.m., and more than 800 state services are available online, he says.

Leslie Scott, executive director of the National Association of State Personnel Directors, says Huntsman's action is a first. "Most states have a four-day work week option for their employees, but Utah is the first to go to a mandatory four-day work week," she says. "A good number of the states are encouraging their agencies and managers to offer a four-day work week whenever possible."

The four-day work week is fairly common among city and county governments. Rex Facer, an assistant professor at Brigham Young University whose research team is studying the four-day work week concept, estimates that about one-sixth of U.S. cities with populations above 25,000 offer employees a four-day work week. His projection is based on the team's continuing survey of 150 city human resource directors.

Facer expects more cities to begin shuttering offices on Fridays. "The increasing pressures the American is facing around gas prices is certainly a significant factor, and the overall fiscal pressures governments are facing in general," he says.

Jacqueline Byers, director of research at the National Association of Counties, says the four-day work week is gaining in popularity among county governments. Marion County, Fla., has a mandatory four-day work week for employees; Oconee County, S.C., and Walworth County, Wis., have it for road work crews, while Will County, Ill., has it for the auditor's office. Oakland County, Mich., is seeking volunteers for a four-day work week, and Miami-Dade County, Fla., and Suffolk County, N.Y., are moving toward it, she says.

"They like it for a couple of reasons," says Byers. "They're not able to give raises, so this is like a bonus, to cut off one day's commute. Also, if they can close a whole department (for a day), they save money for the county."

It takes some adjusting. "One thing that has to be changed is the level of expectation from taxpayers, because they've always wanted five-day access," Byers says. "They have to adjust to offices that are open longer on weekdays, but closed on Fridays."

Cities offering employees condensed work weeks include Coconut Creek, Fla., Birmingham, Ala., and Avondale, Ariz., according to the National League of Cities.

In Utah, the new schedule starts Aug. 4. In the meantime, Huntsman says, the state is moving to iron out problems for employees with child-care concerns and those using public transportation that currently would not accommodate a longer workday.

Huntsman says the change will help Utah reach its goal of reducing energy use 20% by 2015.

Beyond the energy and financial implications, the four-day work week is a quality-of-life issue for many. Huntsman says it is especially popular among younger employees and that his action will make Utah more competitive in luring talent.

Facer agrees that an improved "work-life balance" often results from a shorter work week.

"More and more young workers are entering the work force," Facer says. "They're looking for ways to enhance their work-life balance. Alternative work schedules offer more of this work-life balance than do traditional work schedules."

Stronger emissions plan urged

Air Resources Board considers steps to cut the time Californians spend on the road.

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Friday, June 27, 2008

Environmental and land-use groups are urging the state Air Resources Board to bolster its plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions with more aggressive measures to slow the growth in the number of miles Californians drive.

At a public meeting Thursday, the board released the draft of a strategy to cut the state's greenhouse gas emissions back to 1990 levels by 2020.

It includes measures to reduce emissions from vehicles, including requirements that vehicles become much more fuel-efficient and oil companies reduce the carbon content of the fuels they sell.

But the proposals to reduce driving are relatively modest.

Californians drive about 830 million miles each day, a figure projected to grow to roughly 1 billion by 2020. The board's proposal would reduce that to roughly 985 million miles daily, according to Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Oakland-based Transportation and Land Use Coalition.

Earlier studies had contemplated that new policies could cut the 2020 figure by an additional 50 million miles daily. Several regional bodies, including the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, have projected that deeper cuts are possible through changes in land-use planning.

"Regions want that number to be higher," Cohen told the board Thursday. "We need ARB's help in getting some enabling regulations."

The ARB has considered several ways to reduce driving:

- "Pay-as-you-drive" insurance, which ties premiums directly to miles traveled.
- Congestion pricing, which charges a fee for vehicles driving crowded routes at peak times.
- Fees on housing developments located far from job and retail centers, which could be used to fund incentives for infill development.

Several board members voiced support for stronger action to trim driving, and it's possible the plan will be amended. The agency must adopt a final version of the plan by the end of the year.

Cities take bike-transit plans for a spin

By Charisse Jones

USA TODAY, Tuesday, July 01, 2008

Correction: This story, originally published June 25, 2008, incorrectly reported that Washington, D.C., this summer will launch the nation's first public bike-sharing program. Lexington, Ky., began such a program in May 2007.

Led by Washington, D.C., several cities across the U.S. are launching or considering public bike-rental programs to give residents and tourists an alternative to \$4 gas, pollution and congestion.

The nation's capital is set this summer to become the first U.S. city to rent bikes to the public following the widely publicized success of a bike-sharing program Paris began in July.

"The American conscience has changed over the last few years with global warming creeping into the lexicon," says Paul DeMaio, founder of MetroBike LLC, which helps develop the initiatives.

That awareness, he says, coupled with rising energy costs, are prompting U.S. cities to seek two-wheeled solutions to congestion and pollution. "American cities, D.C. being the first, have thought about this and are working toward adding this to their cadre of transit options," DeMaio says.

For an annual fee of \$40, D.C. residents or visitors will be able to swipe a membership card and borrow a bike, returning it to any one of 10 kiosks downtown. The pilot program, which will start with 100 bicycles, is being paid for by Clear Channel Outdoor as part of its advertising contract with the city.

Other municipalities considering or starting bike-share programs:

***Denver and Minneapolis-St. Paul** each will provide 1,000 free bikes for use during the Democratic and Republican conventions this summer, and the cities plan to continue such a program once the delegates leave town.

"We think of the convention as ... a pilot for our longer-term initiative," says Parry Burnap, Denver director of greening for the Democratic convention, which runs Aug. 25-28. Bikes are "a great alternative to paying \$4 a gallon for gas. ... Part of this is conveying to the world what Denver is, a healthy and vibrant place to live and work."

Humana, an insurance company that is sponsoring the convention bike programs with Bikes Belong, an advocacy group, will donate 70 bikes to each host city to use in permanent programs.

***Arlington County, Va.**, this fall will begin requesting proposals from companies interested in managing a program in the Washington suburb. Bike racks will be placed at subway stations and parking areas used for a car-sharing program already underway. "With car-sharing, bike-sharing and transit all located at the same location, we want people to see how easy it is to get around without owning a car in the county," says DeMaio, who is helping with the planning.

***Philadelphia** has launched a study to determine what type of bike-share program would work best, says Maura Kennedy, a spokeswoman for Mayor Michael Nutter. Hundreds of residents packed a City Council hearing on bike-sharing in April, says Alex Doty, executive director of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia.

Chicago, whose mayor, Richard Daley, visited Paris last year and saw its bike-share program firsthand, is seeking a manager for his city's effort. San Francisco hopes to launch a program next year. Salt Lake City also is exploring the idea.

While biking saves gas, some critics say there are far better ways to curb congestion and save energy.

"Is getting 2 to 3% of people to bicycle to work going to save energy? Not really," says Randal O'Toole, senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute. "The most cost-effective thing a city can do to save energy and reduce greenhouse emissions is to coordinate traffic signals. ... It's the starting and stopping and idling that causes most air pollution ."

Obstacles to public bike programs include financing and bike theft, city officials say.

Washington's requirement that riders provide a credit card when they sign up should help control theft, says Karyn LeBlanc, spokeswoman for the district's Department of Transportation. "If a bike is missing for a long period of time," she says, "we can charge the card, or contact the person to (ask) where is the bike?"

[Merced Sun-Star, Editorial, Tuesday, July 1, 2008:](#)

Our View: So we can breathe easier

New state plan will change vehicles we drive, fuels we use, sources of electricity and buildings we work in.

California is on fire, and it's only July 1. Smoke turned the sky orange last week, foreshadowing the kinds of extreme weather the West will encounter as the Earth's thermostat continues to rise. Officials called the 1,400 fires burning across the state "unprecedented."

Against this backdrop, the California Air Resources Board released a long-awaited plan Thursday to reduce emissions tied to global warming. It's an ambitious plan, with auspicious timing, and it surely is being watched by policy-makers around the world.

Known as the "scoping plan," this draft document lays out a set of regulations and market mechanisms the state will pursue in reducing its greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020 -- roughly a 30 percent cut.

Over the next 12 years, the plan will change the vehicles Californians drive, the fuels they use, their sources of electricity and the buildings in which they work. Undoubtedly, it will raise energy

costs, hurting businesses that can't adapt and helping those that can. The air board now will analyze the full economic impact, a needed step for fine-tuning the final product.

Though it is trendy in some circles to dismiss the state's climate crusade as a political gimmick, an honest examination shows otherwise. California is preparing to implement a 2003 law requiring automakers to reduce emissions from the vehicle fleets they sell. Both contenders for president have pledged to issue a waiver for this law. When they do, cars sold across the country will become cleaner and more fuel-efficient.

That's not political symbolism. That's leadership.

The scoping also plans to marry reductions in carbon dioxide to cuts in pollution such as soot and smog-forming chemicals. Those cuts will have direct benefits to human health.

More worthy of scrutiny is a proposed regional system of capping and trading emissions that California hopes to organize. To date, few states have passed laws binding them to cut emissions. Without such caps, it's hard to imagine how a regional market can work. Other aspects of the scoping plan also are dubious.

Except for the long-delayed high-speed rail system, the report is fairly nebulous on what role the state should play, if any, in encouraging mass transit and alternatives to the automobile. The Building Industry Association has lobbied against such an approach, and it appears the air board has decided to dance around this issue.

That's not leadership.

Still, the air board's blueprint is courageous. It sets high thresholds for use of renewable energies (33 percent by 2020) and commits the entire state government to being a better steward of its resources. It also mentions the possibility of a carbon tax -- an option that deserves serious consideration.

More than any other government in the world, California is creating a template for tackling global warming, learning from the mistakes of the European Union and putting pressure on Congress to pass a federal law.

The state can't go it alone, but Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger deserves credit for pushing this cause forward. So does his air board. But they can't do it alone. Our part is to set aside carping from cynics and help turn this plan into action.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, July 1, 2008:](#)

Air board starts planning to reduce greenhouse gases

Effort launched as state stagnates under filthy air from forest fires.

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Over the next 12 years, the plan will change the vehicles that Californians drive, the fuels they use, their sources of electricity and the buildings in which they work. Undoubtedly, it will raise energy costs, hurting businesses that can't adapt and helping those that can. The air board will now analyze the full economic impact, a needed step for fine-tuning the final product.

Although it is trendy in some circles to dismiss the state's climate crusade as a political gimmick, an honest examination shows otherwise. California is preparing to implement a 2003 law requiring automakers to reduce emissions from the vehicle fleets they sell. Both contenders for president have pledged to issue a waiver for this law. When they do, cars sold across the country will become cleaner, and more fuel-efficient.

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The report is fairly nebulous on what role the state should play, if any, in encouraging development that accommodates transit and options to the automobile. The Building Industry Association has lobbied against such an approach, and it appears the air board has decided to dance around this issue.

Even with those shortcomings, the air board's blueprint is courageous on many fronts. It sets high thresholds for use of renewable energies (33% by 2020) and commits the entire state government toward being a better steward of its resources. It also mentions the possibility of a carbon tax -- an option that deserves serious consideration.

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[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, July 1, 2008:](#)

Many reasons to bike

Gas prices? What are those?

In response to the article about pedaling past the pump, I would like to comment that the most important quote of the article was, "I couldn't be happier. I don't know why I haven't been doing this a lot longer."

There are numerous good reasons to bicycle to work and the store and wherever you may be going. They include cleaner air for everyone, more exercise for you and the reason that everyone is talking about now -- gas prices.

But the absolute best reason is that it is fun -- really fun. Every day for almost free you can have more fun than you will ever have in your car. So let loose, lighten up, save money and have some fun. Get on your bikes and ride.

ROBERT E. SMITH, Bakersfield

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Monday, June 30, 2008](#)

Air board's plan would have state breathing free

California is on fire, and it's only June. Smoke turned the sky orange last week, foreshadowing the kinds of extreme weather the West will encounter as the Earth's thermostat continues to rise. Officials called the 1,100 fires burning across the state "unprecedented."

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[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Monday, June 30, 2008](#)

Fireworks worsen air pollution

Kudos to our governor for suggesting we refrain from buying backyard fireworks this year to reduce the fire risk. There is an equally compelling reason for doing so -- the incredibly dangerous pollution released into the air we breathe. We sit in a bowl of smoke and haze that is already hazardous. We don't need to add clouds of acrid smoke produced by fireworks set off in the yards and streets of our neighborhoods.

Those depending on fireworks sales as fund-raisers are surely upset. It is time for all those worthy causes to look elsewhere for the money they need. The same programs in other cities and counties that ban firework sales have found ways to support their programs. The same can be done here.

CAROLYN KERR, Denair

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, June 29, 2008:](#)

Fireworks neither safe nor sane for California

BY LOIS HENRY, Californian staff writer

I have a new title: Enemy Of Fun.

If your idea of fun is setting off combustibles that shoot sparks, smoke, magnesium, copper and barium into the air (i.e. fireworks), then yes, I'm the Enemy Of Fun.

We need to ban all personal fireworks in Bakersfield, Kern County and the entire state, for that matter.

I've heard all the arguments against a ban - too much government intrusion, one night of fireworks isn't that bad for our air, it penalizes responsible people, nonprofits depend on fireworks sales for fundraising.

Sorry. None of those tip the scales for me when I compare the costs of personal fireworks.

Last year, personal fireworks caused 88 fires in Kern County and 26 in the city. Three of those city fires were full-on structures.

It's harder to pin down fireworks related injuries. Hospitals don't note the cause of a burn or lost finger. And people don't tend to call the authorities if they blow out an eye using an illegal firework.

Anecdotally, I'm told by Kern Medical Center that its emergency room sees about eight to 10 fireworks burn cases over the holiday.

Please recall, though, that in 2004, Raymond Reilly III, 45, was killed by a modified legal firework. That's a cost that can never be recovered.

Air readings from every Fourth of July since 2004 show particulate matter, known as PM2.5 - tiny bits of soot and smoke that lodge deep in lung tissue causing major problems for anyone with a respiratory condition - goes through the roof between 9 and 10 p.m. It happens all over the valley, but Bakersfield has higher readings by far.

We had been just barely squeaking under the Environmental Protection Agency's standard for PM2.5 and that standard was lowered in late 2006 by nearly half. There's no way our air will meet the standard now, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District tells me. Firework smoke, even just one night, does not help.

The PM2.5 spike has been so consistently bad the district is going to study whether a new fireworks rule is needed. That study won't be done until 2012. I don't know why it would take that long to figure out that we shouldn't needlessly add more junk to our already crummy air.

The county and city each have enforcement teams of 15 firefighters paired with 15 law enforcement personnel that try to keep up with the hundreds of calls. So many people called last year, the teams were running an hour behind.

"People are fed up with the illegal fireworks," Kern County Deputy Chief Brian Marshall told me. The county issued 100 citations last year and seized 2,500 pounds of illegal fireworks.

But catching people using the illegal stuff isn't easy, Fire Chief Ron Frazee said.

Unless you see someone shoot off a bottle rocket or M-80, you can't arbitrarily check every package, especially at some of the large block parties.

I wondered why the fire departments need Johnny Law riding along since any firefighter can cite you for illegal fireworks.

Protection.

Firefighters have been threatened and assaulted (live fireworks thrown at them) by rowdy revelers who mix alcohol with their pyrotechnics.

Lovely.

And, of course, our beleaguered animal shelters can hardly handle the extra dogs running wild and crazed with fright by what sounds like a war zone. The Kern County Animal Control shelter took in about 30 more dogs last year during the July Fourth week than an average week earlier in the year.

The only real challenge to an outright ban, in my mind, is how nonprofits can make up the money they'd lose.

The city permits about 70 organizations to sell fireworks, the county permits nearly 200.

Those groups make a lot of money from fireworks sales.

I doubt there's a way to entirely make up for that loss. But there are plenty of ideas out there such as phasing out the sales over several years to give the groups time to develop other fund-raising avenues or allowing the nonprofits to sell tickets to community shows and take a cut of the proceeds, or sell concessions at the shows.

That's how they did it in Torrance, even expanding their community show into a daylong event.

"They make much the same or more (money)," according to Bob Gebel with the Torrance Fire Department. "There are associated city costs but...we were willing to absorb (the costs) for common sense safety."

So far, there has only been one real champion for a ban locally and that's Frazee.

It hasn't won him any friends. He even got threats on his home phone. Threats!

But what a fireworks ban really needs is political leadership. After a round of phone calls to all our city council members and county supervisors, I only found one supporter.

"I would support a ban, realizing that it would need to be countywide," said Bakersfield City Councilwoman Sue Benham. "It would not be effective to do in just the city."

Air quality was her No. 1 issue.

"There are so many things about our air quality that we can't control and this is one we can," she said.

OK, so it's Frazee, Benham and me against, oh, pretty much the rest of Kern County.

It's a start!

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that the fires in central and northern California quintuple the air pollution, as stated by ARB. The San Joaquin Valley faces the worst air pollution, which is traditionally the second region with the worst air quality in the nation. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Cientos de incendios activos quintuplican contaminación del aire en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, July 1, 2008

Cientos de incendios que permanecen sin control entre el centro y norte de California quintuplicaron la contaminación del aire en la región, informó hoy la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California.

El vocero de dicha agencia, Dimitri Stanich dijo que unos mil 400 incendios de diversas magnitudes multiplicaron la contaminación que ahora se encuentra en la región, diez veces por encima del límite que establece el gobierno federal como índice saludable.

La peor contaminación la enfrenta el Valle de San Joaquín, tradicionalmente la segunda región más deteriorada en el país y que ahora enfrenta cientos de incendios.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Chile's capital is on the verge of second health advisory in four days, due to the high levels of air pollution.](#)

La capital chilena amanece con una nueva preemergencia ambiental por contaminación

Hoy Internet, Tuesday, July 1, 2008

Santiago de Chile, 1 jul (EFE).- La capital chilena amaneció hoy con una nueva preemergencia ambiental, la segunda que se decreta en menos de cuatro días, debido a los altos niveles de contaminación atmosférica, informó la Intendencia (Gobernación) de la Región Metropolitana de Santiago.

La Intendencia decretó el pasado sábado una preemergencia ambiental y rebajó después el nivel a "alerta ambiental", lo que supone menos actividades prohibidas, pero las malas condiciones de ventilación de la capital llevaron a aumentar de nuevo la restricción de uso de fuentes contaminantes.

La preemergencia ambiental conlleva la prohibición de circulación de un 60 por ciento de los vehículos sin convertidor catalítico y del 20 por ciento de aquellos provistos de este elemento entre las 07.30 y las 21.00 hora local (11.30 GMT y 01.00 GMT del miércoles).

La restricción no afecta a los automóviles que circulan con gas natural o electricidad, las ambulancias, las funerarias y los vehículos de Carabineros, Gendarmería y Bomberos.

Además, se prohíbe el funcionamiento de todo tipo de chimeneas de hogar, aunque estén provistas de sistemas de doble cámara o mecanismos de captación de partículas, en toda la Región Metropolitana hasta la medianoche de este martes.

Las bajas temperaturas que se han registrado en Santiago, de 6,2 millones de habitantes, también han influido en los altos índices de polución.

Asimismo, no pueden funcionar un total de 847 fuentes fijas, como industrias y calderas, hasta la medianoche de este martes, y tampoco se pueden realizar quemas agrícolas, medida que rige de manera permanente desde el 1 de abril.

Según el informe de la autoridad metropolitana de salud, a las 08.00 hora local (12.00 GMT) las estaciones de los municipios de Pudahuel, Cerro Navia y Cerrillos presentaban niveles regulares, con 171, 129 y 116 partículas contaminantes respectivamente, mientras que las otras seis estaciones de monitoreo registran índices buenos.

En invierno, la contaminación en Santiago, situada en un valle rodeado de montañas, aumenta debido a la ausencia de vientos que dispersen las partículas nocivas y al fenómeno de inversión térmica (temperaturas más bajas en las capas inferiores de la atmósfera), que mantiene las partículas contaminantes a nivel del suelo.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses G-8 considers nuclear energy to stop global warming. The summit will take place the 7-9 of July in Hokkaido, Japan.

Considera G-8 energía nuclear para frenar calentamiento global Llevarán a cabo su cumbre del 7 al 9 de julio en Hokkaido, Japón.

Notimex

La Voz, Monday, June 30, 2008

Tokio, 30 Jun (Notimex).- Los líderes del Grupo de los Ocho (G-8) acordarán en su cumbre del 7 al 9 de julio en Hokkaido, Japón, una nueva iniciativa para expandir el uso de la energía nuclear civil para frenar el calentamiento global.

Un borrador de la declaración final de la cumbre, obtenido por la agencia japonesa de noticias Kyodo, señala que el acuerdo enfatizará los principios de no proliferación y seguridad nuclear.

La iniciativa nuclear del grupo se produce mientras la escalada en los precios del petróleo impulsa a algunos países a diversificar sus fuentes de energía. China, India y Rusia están incrementando su número de plantas nucleares.

Pero hay preocupaciones sobre potenciales accidentes y desviación de tecnologías nucleares hacia fines militares.

"Reconociendo que asegurar la no proliferación y la seguridad forman una base sólida para la transparencia internacional y la confianza en el desarrollo sustentable de la energía nuclear, acordamos una iniciativa para asistir a países a lograr esos objetivos", dice el documento.

"Afirmamos el papel del Organismo Internacional de la Energía Atómica en este proceso", añade.

De acuerdo con el borrador, el G-8 también acordará establecer objetivos nacionales y formular planes de acción para mejorar la eficiencia energética y promover el uso de fuentes de energía limpias, como la solar, seguidos por mecanismos de monitoreo.

El G-8 considera también un plan para invertir en investigación y desarrollo de tecnologías novedosas para el ambiente, incluyendo la captura y almacenamiento de bióxido de carbono, con un monto tentativo de por lo menos 10 mil millones de dólares.

El documento expresa que los líderes del G-8 creen que "compromisos o acciones reforzadas de todas las principales economías son esenciales para abordar el cambio climático".

Con ello, según Kyodo, el G-8 busca involucrar a China, India y otras importantes economías emergentes en la reducción de sus crecientes emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero, a los que se atribuye el calentamiento global.

Algunos datos muestran que China ya sobrepasó a Estados Unidos como el principal emisor de gases de efecto invernadero en el mundo.

Lo que está en juego en la cumbre es si los líderes del Reino Unido, Canadá, Francia, Alemania, Italia, Japón, Rusia y Estados Unidos pueden acordar una meta concreta de reducción de las emisiones para mostrar su resolución de abordar el cambio climático.

El borrador no hace referencia a la propuesta formulada el año pasado por Japón para reducir en 50 por ciento las emisiones de gases causantes del efecto invernadero para 2050.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the state of California is under emergency due to the fires in the northern part of the state. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

California en emergencia

El Mexicano, Monday, June 30, 2008

Los Ángeles, 29 Jun (Notimex). El presidente, George W. Bush, declaró este fin de semana, área de desastre federal el Norte y centro de California, ante los más de mil distintos incendios que se tienen vigentes en la zona.

La declaración de emergencia servirá para proporcionar equipo y alivio financiero de la Agencia Federal para la Administración de Emergencias (FEMA) para los condados de Butte, Mendocino, Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta y Trinity.

Los incendios, provocados principalmente por relámpagos sobre un área que resiente una fuerte sequía, han convertido el aire del Norte de California en una mezcla insalubre de humo y ceniza y ha obligado a cancelar eventos deportivos y otras actividades al exterior.

Los distintos incendios han arrasado unas 124 mil hectáreas y han destruido cuando menos 28 casas.

Sin embargo, más de seis mil 800 viviendas están amenazadas a lo largo de California, informó Cheri Patterson, vocera del Departamento de Bosques y Protección de California.

Más de 17 mil bomberos de 35 entidades del país combates los incendios. El esfuerzo incluye mil 194 camiones bomba y 85 helicópteros, de acuerdo con el departamento.

La senadora demócrata por California, Dianne Feinstein, dijo al agradecer en un comunicado, la declaración de emergencia del presidente "que el Estado está realmente seco y caliente" por lo que esta será una larga temporada de incendios.

Uno de los mayores siniestros, el incendio Basin cerca de Big Sur, había quemado ya 12 mil 157 hectáreas y sólo había sido contenido en un tres por ciento la noche del sábado, dijo Kathy Good, vocera del Bosque Nacional de Los Padres.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a new business that smells good. Dairy waste will be used to generate energy and it will help improve air quality.](#)

Un negocio que huele bien

Desperdicio del ganado genera energía y ayuda a mejorar el aire.

Por Eduardo Stanley

El Sol, Friday, June 27, 2008

TULARE - El Valle huele feo. La falta de circulación del aire -por ser un valle cerrado entre altas montañas- hace que muchas veces tengamos la sensación de que el aire no se mueve, que está "pesado".

Y en parte es así. La polución, el calor y el olor -creado en gran parte por los fertilizantes y las miles de vacas- hacen al aire del Valle casi irrespirable y produce enfermedades como el asma.

Tenemos el extraño privilegio de contar con el aire más contaminado del país. Comunidades como Arvin, al sureste de Bakersfield, lideran la lista.

Sin duda se están haciendo esfuerzos para mejorar la calidad del aire que respiramos, en gran parte gracias a la actividad de grupos y activistas ambientalistas y del público.

Pero muchos empresarios también aportan soluciones.

Por ejemplo, en el caso de las lecherías, que tanto contribuyen al mal olor y a la contaminación del Valle, hay soluciones que algunas empresas están estudiando o experimentando.

Las vacas producen altos niveles de gases que contaminan el ambiente gracias a su dilatado proceso digestivo. De las 2.5 millones de vacas en el estado, una de cada cinco vive en el Valle. Cómo controlar el gas que producen? O mejor dicho, cómo reciclar los desperdicios del ganado de manera productiva y al mismo tiempo reducir el efecto de los gases?

"La principal fuente de contaminación del Valle proviene de los vehículos y de la polución que nos llega del área de la Bahía", dice Roy Sharp, un especialista en temas agropecuarios e impulsor del "digestor".

Este nombre evoca el proceso de digestión por medio del cual el cuerpo asimila parte de los alimentos y desecha lo que no le sirve. Solo que el digestor procesa los desperdicios del ganado y los transforma en energía y fertilizantes, además de reducir el olor.

"Este proceso es conocido desde hace mucho tiempo, nosotros lo perfeccionamos y lo adaptamos a nuestra producción de puercos", afirma Sharp.

Para esto, los desperdicios de las vacas se envían -por medio de agua- a un sistema de tres lagunas donde se "filtran" los desperdicios. En la mayor de ellas, cubierta, la fermentación produce gases. Estos son "atrapados" y enviados por tuberías para que hagan funcionar generadores de energía. Es decir, los gases son la energía y los motores generan electricidad para el funcionamiento de la lechería.

Este es el caso de la lechería Hilarides, de Tulare. "Cuando se complete la instalación del digestor, generará unos 2,000 Kw por hora", explica Sharp. "Una casa pequeña requiere 500 Kw por mes, quiere decir que esta empresa tendrá suficiente energía para 2880 casas al mes".

El costo, \$1.5 millones de dólares. "Esta inversión esperamos recuperarla en cuatro años", dice Anthony Samoos, gerente general de la empresa.

La lechería dispone de 8,000 vacas que producen entre 18 y 20 mil galones de leche al día. Y mucho desperdicio, que va a parar a la laguna principal de 14 acres, cubierta de una lona verde donde se captura la energía.

Pero el 'digestor' no solo produce energía, sino que también el componente líquido es usado como fertilizante. "Lo usamos en nuestro propios cultivos", dice Samoos mientras señala un campo de maíz junto a la lechería.

El primer "digestor" del área se instaló en el Valle en 1982, gracias a la dedicación de Sharp. "Creo que existen unos 12 en el Valle, pero estoy seguro que poco a poco veremos más 'digestores' a medida que se mejoren los diseños", dice este entusiasta de la ganadería, de 81 años.

Finalmente, Sharp explica que los desperdicios del ganado son casi totalmente procesados, reduciéndose así la cantidad de basura y olor. Y contribuyendo así a mejorar un poco el aire que respiramos.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses more than 1,300 active fires continue to burn in California.](#)

Más de mil 300 incendios continúan activos en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, June 30, 2008

Más de mil 300 incendios de diversa magnitud continuaban activos hoy en el norte de California, informó el Servicio Forestal federal.

Por lo menos 18 mil bomberos y personal de equipos de apoyo continuaban labores de contención en la región que va de la parte media de California a la frontera con el estado de Oregon.

El presidente, George W. Bush declaró el fin de semana área de desastre en la región.

Los incendios iniciaron por una tormenta de descargas eléctricas secas, sin lluvia, que de acuerdo con el Servicio Forestal pudiera repetirse próximamente.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Schwarzenegger exhorts the US to follow in California's footsteps with energy.](#)

Exhorta Schwarzenegger a que EU siga el rumbo energético de California

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Monday, June 30, 2008

El gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger instó a unos 800 funcionarios, industriales, académicos y grupos ambientalistas a seguir el rumbo energético de California para garantizar menor contaminación del aire en el país.

Al hablar en una convención en el estado de La Florida, Schwarzenegger dijo que Estados Unidos "necesita seguir el rumbo que tomó California sobre una nueva política energética; una que reduzca las emisiones de gases que producen el efecto invernadero, tenga innovación tecnológica y variedad de combustibles para los consumidores".

California, dijo, tiene el 44 de energía solar y 37 de energía eólica, o de vientos.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses 1,400 fires continue to burn in the northern part of California. President Bush declared Saturday a state of emergency which will allow federal agencies to join the battle to extinguish the fires.](#)

Continúan sin extinguir más de 1.400 incendios en el norte de California

Hoy Internet, Monday, June 30, 2008

Los Ángeles (EE.UU.), 30 jun (EFE).- Los bomberos continúan combatiendo hoy unos 1.400 incendios en diferentes áreas del norte de California, donde los fuegos han devastado unos 1.450 kilómetros cuadrados de bosques y áreas residenciales.

El capitán Alex Entenman, del Cuerpo de Bomberos en el Condado Kern, indicó hoy que un incendio quemó más de 800 hectáreas en el área de Piute, al este de Bakersfield y 165 kilómetros al norte de Los Ángeles.

Las autoridades ordenaron la evacuación de unas 50 residencias en las áreas de French Meadow y Brown's Meadow donde la mayoría de las estructuras son casas de verano, dijo Entenman.

Más de 450 bomberos del Condado Kern, el Servicio Forestal de EE.UU., y otras agencias estatales y federales seguían combatiendo el fuego esta mañana en esa zona.

Con el amanecer se reanudaron las labores de cientos de bomberos y voluntarios que han contenido cerca del 3 por ciento de un incendio forestal que ha arrasado más de 100 kilómetros cuadrados y destruido unas 20 casas en la región Big Sur del Bosque Nacional Los Padres, unos 110 kilómetros al noroeste de Los Ángeles.

Big Sur es una región escasamente poblada donde el fuego obligó ayer al cierre del tránsito en un tramo de 20 kilómetros de la Autopista 1 entre Lucia y Big Sur.

El presidente estadounidense, George W. Bush, declaró el sábado pasado una emergencia para California lo cual permite que las agencias federales se sumen a los esfuerzos por contener y apagar los incendios.

Esa ayuda incluye helicópteros de la Infantería de Marina que trasladan grandes bolsones llenos de agua, la movilización de bomberos federales y la información obtenida sobre los incendios desde los satélites de la agencia espacial NASA.

La mayoría de los incendios fueron producidos por tormentas eléctricas y rayos que encontraron la vegetación reseca tras semanas de escasas lluvias, según el Servicio Forestal.

En Arizona las autoridades evacuaron ayer a los habitantes de una comunidad en las montañas al norte de Phoenix cuando un incendio que había arrasado 200 hectáreas se aproximó a la localidad de Crown King.

Por su parte las autoridades de Guffey, Colorado, permitieron el retorno a sus hogares del centenar de residentes evacuados durante el fin de semana cuando se acercó un incendio, iniciado por rayos, que había quemado 450 hectáreas de bosques y pastizales.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Earthjustice demands a fast answer from EPA before the Supreme Court's ruling.](#)

Exige Earthjustice respuesta rápida de EPA ante decisión de la suprema (en inglés)

Noticiero Latino

Earthjustice, Eastern Press Secretary

Radio Bilingue, Friday, June 27, 2008

Earthjustice Statement on Court Refusal to Order Faster EPA Response to Supreme Court Global Warming Decision

Washington, D.C. - Yesterday, a federal appeals court denied a request by states and environmental organizations to order the Environmental Protection Agency to respond to the Supreme Court's landmark global warming decision issued more than a year ago. The groups made the request to the appeals court in April, seeking to require EPA action on a longstanding petition to limit greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles. In March 2007, the Supreme Court held that EPA had illegally refused to limit those emissions. Earthjustice is co-counsel for Sierra Club in the case.

The following statement is from David Baron, managing attorney at Earthjustice's Washington, D.C. office:

"Although we're disappointed the court did not order EPA to act right now, we'll continue to push EPA hard for swift adoption of strong limits on greenhouse gases --- and we'll return to court again if EPA foot-dragging continues for too long."

"This Administration is fiddling while the planet melts. Instead of adopting the real limits urgently needed to cap greenhouse gases, EPA is planning to only issue a list of options for discussion. Meanwhile, the threats from global warming are mounting at an alarming rate.

"The delay here is really inexcusable. According to a House committee investigation, a detailed EPA proposal to address motor vehicle greenhouse gases was sent to the White House last December, but has not seen the light of day since. There simply is no justification for this delay. The time to act on global warming and save our planet is now."