

Cut off-roader pollution, Brown urges

By Steve Geissinger, Sacramento Bureau

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2008

SACRAMENTO - Attorney General Jerry Brown asked federal regulators Tuesday to set stricter greenhouse-gas emission standards for off-road recreational vehicles and agricultural and construction equipment.

"It's either this or go to high ground and wait," Brown said, referring to the coastal flooding anticipated in future years if nothing is done to combat global warming.

Brown said he would file a formal petition with the Environmental Protection Agency to set tougher standards. An EPA spokesman said the agency would not comment on the petition until it is filed.

Manufacturers insist the plan would make off-road vehicles too expensive, hurt their performance and even cause the demise of some of them.

"It just might even rule out certain kinds of vehicles in their entirety," said Derrick Crandall, a spokesman for the American Recreation Coalition in Washington, D.C., which represents recreational equipment enthusiasts and major manufacturers.

"We need to be very careful about major new public-policy initiatives."

The attorney general said he wants the EPA to use its authority under the Clean Air Act and court decisions to set emission standards for new off-road equipment, including tractors, forklifts and some lawn mowers.

The EPA, which has so far failed to grant California's wishes under the Bush administration, has been ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court to act on global-warming issues and is under increasing pressure from Democrats in Congress.

Most of the vehicles and equipment affected by the petition are used in construction and agriculture. All told, the petition addresses more than 17 million machines in California.

Crandall said that he supports environmental protection but that the industry wants to work with government on solutions, rather than see mandates. He questioned why recreational equipment was included with other off-road, industrial vehicles, which account for more than 85 percent of the 220 million metric tons of greenhouse gases spewed annually across the nation - the equivalent of 40 million cars.

But Brown said recreational equipment is a swiftly growing part of the off-road vehicle sector. He cited a California Air Resources Board study in his petition that estimated carbon dioxide emissions from recreational equipment and pleasure craft each grew by about one-third between 1990 and 2007.

The increase in emissions from construction and mining machines in the state grew at a slightly faster pace, 35 percent, while industrial machines trailed at 9 percent.

Calif. lawmaker pulls bill that would impose vehicle emission fee

By SAMANTHA YOUNG, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, January 30, 2008

SACRAMENTO - Unable to overcome auto industry opposition, a state lawmaker shelved an ambitious proposal Tuesday that would have charged car buyers a fee for purchasing high-polluting vehicles.

Redwood City Democrat Ira Ruskin said he withdrew his bill because he did not have the votes to pass it. It would have imposed a \$2,500 surcharge on vehicles that spew the highest levels of greenhouse gases.

Ruskin and environmental groups had tried for more than a year to create a program giving incentives to Californians who buy cleaner cars, sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks.

The plan would have provided a rebate of up to \$2,500 for fuel-efficient vehicles like the Toyota Prius and Honda Civic, while imposing a similar fee for buying vehicles with higher emissions like Hummers and Chevrolet Tahoes.

The lobbying by the auto industry and behind-the-scenes negotiations showcased the long-standing philosophical differences between Democrats and Republicans about how California should respond to climate change.

It was the second time Ruskin failed to get his plan out of the Assembly to make California the first in the country to enact a "feebate law." He spent the day lobbying fellow Democrats, offering unsuccessfully to amend the bill. He said he planned to reintroduce the bill later this year.

The latest collapse followed the Bush administration rejection in December of California's 2002 plan to curb tailpipe emissions. The state had sought permission to force auto makers to manufacture less polluting cars, and it is appealing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision in federal court.

The bill, the California Clean Car Discount Act, sought to encourage - but not mandate - more fuel efficient cars by raising the price of gas-guzzling vehicles beginning with model year 2011.

"This bill is the only ready-to-go option that we have that will lower greenhouse gases from new vehicles," Ruskin said in an interview before he pulled the bill.

The one-time auto fees would have targeted about a third of greenhouse gas emissions - equal to taking 20 million cars off the road by 2030 - from California's transportation sector, which accounts for about 40 percent of the state's greenhouse gases, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a sponsor of the bill.

The California Motors Car Dealers Association had argued that a surcharge on new vehicles would encourage Californians to buy or continue driving used vehicles that emit higher greenhouse gases than new cars.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers described the bill as "profoundly unfair" and said it would penalize small businesses, large families and others that need larger vehicles.

Berkeley unveils climate plan for 80 percent emissions cut Greenhouse gas goal for compliance is 2050

By Kristin Bender, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, January 30, 2008

BERKELEY - City leaders on Monday took a hydrogen-powered bus to a solar-powered building made of rice straw bales to unveil an innovative new program to reduce Berkeley's greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

About a year after 81 percent of Berkeley voters approved Measure G, Berkeley city leaders have released the draft Climate Action Plan, a blueprint for getting Berkeley residents and merchants to do their part to save the planet from global warming, city leaders said.

"Berkeley is putting meat on the bones of Measure G, which is important. It's a very (inclusive) effort and it's the sort of thing that cities don't usually do," said Dan Kammen, who directs the University of California, Berkeley, Renewable and Appropriate Energy Lab and helped the city develop the program.

Kammen credited Berkeley for tackling some of the problems that aren't the city's alone.

"All of the residents in the East Bay get their power from the same power provider and we all drive vehicles, and no one stops at the edge of their city," Kammen said.

While the long-term goal is to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050, Berkeley is aiming to slice emissions by 33 percent below year-2000 levels by 2020.

In 2000, Berkeley's emissions totaled 696,000 tons of greenhouse gases, officials said. To reach the target, emissions must be reduced by about

2 percent annually between now and 2050.

Between 2000 and 2005, emissions in Berkeley fell by 61,000 tons due to a number of city efforts already under way.

City leaders said the Climate Action Plan was hammered out over the last year during a series of community meetings and workshops and contact with at least 2,000 people.

More than 1,000 suggestions were received and many were included in the plan.

"It is not supposed to just be a list of policies for the city. It does have policies in it, but it's also about a vision on how we are going to change as a city and how we all can participate in this effort," said Cisco De Vries, chief of staff to Mayor Tom Bates. De Vries has worked on the plan since its inception.

The plan aims to:

- Send no waste to landfills.
- Ensure the majority of residents' food is produced within a few hundred miles to cut down on shipping.
- Make public transit, walking and biking the primary means of transportation and get personal vehicles to run on alternative fuels or electricity.

The 65-page document is broken into five sections.

"It's set up so you can spend as much or as little time as you want on it," De Vries said. "The point is to take a look and give your feedback (online) at any part or any level that you like to ..."

The sections are:

- Building Energy Use, which talks about a plan called Berkeley FIRST where the city finances solar panels for homeowners who pay for it through property tax payments.
- Sustainable Transportation and Land Use, which aims to boost public transit, biking and walking with car sharing, new bike routes, increased housing and retail services in the transit corridors and free public transit programs. It's a lofty goal - as of 2005, transportation accounted for 47 percent of all emissions.
- Waste Reduction and Recycling, which builds on the city's adopted goal of zero waste to landfills by the year 2020 with recommendations for mandatory recycling at public events and reduced packaging.
- Adapting to a Changing Climate, which recommends preparedness plans for increased fire risk, loss of drinking water, rising Bay waters, and increasing energy costs because of global warming.
- Community Outreach and Empowerment, which talks about long-term community-wide engagement to provide information, resources, and a way for people to learn from and help each other.

"You can change all the light bulbs you want, but that will only get you half way," city spokeswoman Mary Kay Clunies-Ross said. "To reduce emissions by 80 percent we have to find energy savings in all areas. It's not that changing light bulbs doesn't matter, it does. But so does getting people out of their cars and addressing land-use questions."

At the event, Bates said Berkeley has already taken steps to reduce its emissions.

"This effort is not starting today, it is well underway," Bates said. "Look around Berkeley. Talk to residents or business owners. You will hear about the amazing work being done to reduce energy use, cut down on car travel and go green."

Among those efforts, he said:

-Berkeley has more than 90 green-certified businesses, with 50 more businesses waiting for a green certification.

-Twenty percent of businesses have been retrofitted under the SmartLights program, saving more than \$500,000 and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 850 tons annually.

-A team of volunteers at Kyoto USA put solar panels on Washington Elementary School, and now are planning to put panels on every Berkeley school.

-Berkeley has the third highest number of solar installations of all cities in Northern California - surpassing cities many times its size.

Knoxville is country's 'asthma capital'; Allentown, Pa. 6th

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2008

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.-The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America has named Knoxville, Tenn., as the "asthma capital" of the country.

The Washington-based foundation rates Allentown, Pa., as the sixth-worst metropolitan area for asthma sufferers.

The organization reviews factors such as the number of people diagnosed with asthma, the number of asthma medications used per patient and local air quality.

The top 10 cities ranked as asthma capitals, in descending order, are: Knoxville, Tenn.; Tulsa, Okla.; Milwaukee; Atlanta; Memphis, Tenn.; Allentown, Pa.; Charlotte, N.C.; Greenville, S.C.; St. Louis; and Greensboro, N.C.

The rankings were sponsored by pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca.

QUEEN OF THE ROAD

BART to offer new bike lockers

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2008

Commuter: I hear that BART is introducing some fancy new bike lockers. Is this true? Will they be installed at all stations or is this a trial run at selected locations? How much will it cost?

I ride my bike to the Concord station and I'm hoping they might be on the list for new lockers.

Charles, Pleasant Hill

Queen: True story.

BART hopes to have 895 electronic bike lockers installed by 2012. I can't attest to their fanciness, but they are high tech.

Thankfully, Charles, you won't have to wait five years, but it will take some time. Concord is among 16 stations (which we'll list later on) scheduled to have the e-lockers installed sometime in 2009.

The transit agency's board of directors voted unanimously Jan. 24 (such a timely question) to set the price for e-lockers at three cents an hour. That's right, it will cost you less than a quarter to lock up your wheels for eight hours.

The e-lockers are operated with Smart Card technology, so several cyclists could use the same locker in a day or a week. The old lockers, which required a single key, were rented to one person on a yearly or quarterly basis.

Cyclists can buy \$20 Smart Cards online at <http://www.bikelink.org> or select retail locations (check the Web site for a list). For those frightened by new technology, there are also several silent videos on the site demonstrating locker operation.

The Smart Card works like both a debit card and a key.

By inserting the card into a computerized reader on the locker (much like an ATM machine) the secured gate will open and when the cyclist returns to collect the bike, the rental fee will be deducted from the card's balance.

The 1,006 key lockers available throughout the BART system (which cost \$30 to \$40 a year) will be phased out, the release said.

BART riders using the 19th Street, Pleasant Hill, El Cerrito Plaza and Oakland City Center/12th Street stations already have access to e-lockers being operated nearby by outside agencies.

By July, 198 BART owned e-lockers will be installed at the North Berkeley, Ashby, Rockridge, MacArthur, West Oakland, Lake Merritt, San Leandro, Dublin/Pleasanton and Richmond stations, the release said.

Next year, the transit agency hopes to install an additional 220 lockers at the Ashby, West Oakland, Fruitvale, Coliseum/Oakland Airport, San Leandro, Bay Fair, Hayward, Union City, Fremont, Dublin/Pleasanton, Concord, Lafayette, Orinda, El Cerrito del Norte, Glen Park and Balboa Park stations.

Installation of the lockers is being funded by the Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority's Measure B bicycle funds, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's Transportation Fund for Clean Air and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Safe Routes to Transit Program, the release said.

BART is contributing 20 percent of the cost by using car parking fees.

For details, check out the Bike Link Web site at <http://www.bikelink.org>.

Energy Dept. Might Drop Support for FutureGen Power Plant

By Steven Mufson, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post Wednesday, January 30, 2008

Energy Secretary Samuel P. Bodman told lawmakers yesterday that the Bush administration might drop its support for a \$1.5 billion coal-fired power plant designed to store greenhouse gases underground, citing mounting cost estimates and other possible technologies.

The project, known as FutureGen, has long had the backing of the administration, which last year asked Congress to appropriate \$108 million for the plant, and several states had competed for the site. On Monday night, President Bush said in his State of the Union message, "Let us fund new technologies that can generate coal power while capturing carbon emissions."

But in a meeting yesterday at the offices of Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.), Bodman told the senator and six other lawmakers from Illinois, where the plant was to be built, that he did not believe in the project, which he said he "inherited," and that he was going to consider other carbon sequestration projects instead, according to a person in the meeting.

Both sides left the confrontational meeting upset. Durbin issued a statement saying Bodman "has misled the people of Illinois, creating false hope" in the project.

"In 25 years on Capitol Hill, I have never witnessed such a cruel deception," Durbin said. "For five years, the Department of Energy has urged our state and others to pursue, at great expense and sacrifice, this critically important energy project."

Bodman issued a statement last night saying that "the cost of the project has almost doubled, and we've seen technological advances over the past five years that require a reassessment to ensure that the FutureGen project delivers the greatest possible technological benefits in the most cost-efficient manner."

The project is a joint venture between a private industry alliance, which would cover 26 percent of the cost, and the Energy Department, which was supposed to cover 74 percent. The Bush administration has also solicited \$10 million in contributions from several Asian governments.

A department spokesman, Julie Ruggiero, said "clean coal remains a cornerstone" of administration policy. Six weeks ago, James Slutz, the acting principal deputy assistant secretary for fossil energy, said that "FutureGen . . . remains a cornerstone of this vision."

FutureGen is one of the most advanced projects for determining whether emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, can be captured from coal-fired plants and stored, or sequestered, underground. Because half of the nation's electricity comes from coal-fired plants, carbon sequestration is considered essential to meeting targets for greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say are necessary for slowing climate change.

"FutureGen is so far ahead of any carbon sequestration project," said Michael Mudd, chief executive of the FutureGen Alliance. "It's essential for both our industry and our society in light of the need to address CO2 reductions." He said that he welcomed new projects but that they shouldn't be at the expense of FutureGen.

Mudd also defended the project's costs. He said costs had only gone up because of inflation. The cost was first estimated in 2004 at \$950 million, he said. In 2008 dollars, he said, that comes to about \$1.1 billion. He said that the \$1.5 billion final cost estimate assumed that construction costs escalate at a 5.2 percent annual rate, below what actual construction inflation has been.

He said that the Energy Department was improperly citing a \$1.8 billion figure by adding \$300 million in operating costs that would be recovered.

There had been earlier hints of reluctance from the Energy Department. After the private partners in the project picked the Mattoon, Ill., site, the department refused to issue what is known as a record of decision on the environmental impact statement, effectively blocking progress.

The lawmakers, including Illinois Republicans from the House, plan to appeal to Bush to save the project. Durbin indicated that he might block nominations to fill two key vacancies at the Energy Department.

Ill. lawmakers will fight for coal plant

By JIM SUHR , Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, January 30, 2008

ST. LOUIS - Illinois lawmakers vowed to do everything in their power to assure that a virtually emissions-free power plant is built in central Illinois, after saying the U.S. Department of Energy informed them it was pulling out of the project.

"We will not go down without a fight," Sen. Dick Durbin said in a statement Tuesday that accused Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman of "cruel deception." Durbin also accused Bodman of "creating false hope" in a project that he did not intend to fund or support.

The FutureGen Alliance, a coalition of power and coal companies, last month announced that the \$1.8 billion, 275-megawatt prototype power plant would be built in Mattoon under a plan that

called for the DOE to cover three-quarters of the cost. The site was chosen over Tuscola, Ill., and two sites in Texas.

But the DOE, frustrated by ballooning costs, wanted the announcement delayed until the project could be redesigned and costs reduced. The department also said it wasn't ready to issue its final notice that Mattoon was environmentally acceptable.

The DOE would not publicly divulge its intentions regarding the plant or discuss what was said during the private meeting with lawmakers, saying only that it planned an announcement within days.

Bodman declined to discuss the DOE's plans with The Associated Press.

"Secretary Bodman has maintained a strong commitment to the FutureGen project since we announced its public-private agreement in 2005," a statement issued by his office said. "But the cost of the plant has almost doubled and we've seen technological advances over the past five years, that require a thorough reassessment to ensure that the FutureGen project delivers the greatest possible technological benefits in the most cost-efficient manner."

Durbin and Rep. John Shimkus, a Republican from Collinsville, Ill., said they would take their case directly to President Bush, who proposed FutureGen in 2003.

Lawrence Pacheco, a spokesman for the alliance, said developers have heard from the Energy Department "about the need to restructure the program," but would not speculate about what might happen.

The alliance earlier this month offered to assume a greater share of the project's cost to allay government concerns, lowering the DOE obligation to the same level as when the project was announced in 2003 - it then was \$800 million and now is around \$1.33 billion.

The alliance said it would cover the rest and assume any further cost increases, through a combination of bank financing and repayments from revenue generated by the plant.

The DOE, in its first response to the offer, objected Tuesday, saying in a statement that if the alliance defaulted on its debt, the department could be left to pay the bill or the plant could wind up in the hands of lenders.

FutureGen is meant to test the commercial and environmental viability of using coal to generate energy while capturing the carbon dioxide and storing it underground. The greenhouse gas is one of the drivers of climate change, scientists say.

Finalist sites all coveted the roughly 3,000 construction jobs the plant was expected to generate while being built, plus another 150 permanent jobs.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wed., Jan. 30, 2008:](#)

'Transit village' points path to the future

Fresno and Valley must move to denser urban development.

Plans for Fresno's first "transit village" are a promising look at what the future holds -- or should hold -- for urban development in the Valley.

The concept unites several needs: Increasing reliance on mass transit to reduce air pollution and congestion, multi-story residential development instead of single-story, single-family sprawl, and denser populations to create economic viability for light rail or other transit alternatives.

The project now proposed would occupy part of the site of the old Elks Lodge on Kings Canyon Road at Willow Avenue. It would include 129 apartments for seniors, a public park and a big transfer depot for Fresno Area Express buses, perhaps similar to existing hubs at Manchester Center and Courthouse Park.

The apartments and other structures would be built using "green" technology such as solar panels to generate electricity and solar-powered water heaters.

The depot wouldn't be just any old bus stop. Plans include an indoor waiting lounge, space for bus drivers on breaks, vending machines and public restrooms. An area would be provided where patrons could lock up bicycles before boarding their buses.

Such transit-oriented development is under way in many cities; Fresno is a little late to the game. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't proceed with all due speed. Air quality issues and the need to conserve precious farm lands in the Valley compel us to change the habits of previous decades by shifting from our car-oriented culture to one that offers alternatives, both in transportation and in housing.

Nor is this sort of development limited in its attraction to senior citizens. There are many young people -- single or childless couples, young professionals, artists -- who would prefer such a lifestyle. They are fueling the growing demand for such housing downtown, for instance.

It's called urban living, and it hasn't been practiced much for many years hereabouts. Now more than ever we need such opportunities in Fresno and the other cities of the Valley. Our population growth continues to outpace that in the rest of the state, and we can't accommodate all those newcomers with the old patterns of planning and development.

We applaud those who've come up with this innovative concept -- for Fresno -- and hope to see it replicated across the city and the region.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., Jan. 30, 2008:](#)

Judy Case treated unfairly

Strong-arm politics reign supreme in the state Senate. Independent thinking not allowed; members must follow President Pro Tem Don Perata's dictates or be relegated to persona non grata status.

Good policy and exceptional credentials are irrelevant. As one Democratic senator stated after the thrashing Cindy Tuck received during her unsuccessful air board confirmation hearing in 2005: "This was not the Senate's finest hour."

Lesson not learned, as it was "business as usual" during Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case's confirmation. Supervisor Case brought lengthy air quality experience and a stellar career in the medical field to the table, all qualities the opposition usually covets.

Because Supervisor Case wasn't considered one of them -- a puppet mouthpiece -- her credentials were dismissed. They attacked her, with particular emphasis on her joining the unanimous vote for the Valley ozone plan. This opposition lacks credibility, as the two other nominees also affirmed the ozone plan, and their confirmations were blessed without question.

The political system is a travesty, lacks any degree of integrity, and the process leading to this vote offers another example why citizens feel so disenfranchised with their government. A "no" vote on Proposition 93 is looking better all the time.

Shirley Batchman

*Director of Industry Relations, California Citrus Mutual
Visalia*

[Merced Sun-Star Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2008:](#)

No to Wal-Mart center

Editor: The Wal-Mart distribution center controversy caught my interest the moment I heard about it during a Social Justice Club presentation at Merced College a few months ago. At the meeting, a video was shared with attendees depicting the negligent wrath of the corporate giant. Since then, I have been doing my own research and further educating myself about the pros and cons of this proposal. The stunning stories and facts I've picked up have made me definitely not want to welcome the distribution center in Merced.

I find the location to be horribly sought out. The site of the distribution center is within the vicinity of three schools. Increased traffic is a concern, as well as the air quality, which has been a rising issue in recent years -- especially for the Merced area and Central Valley in general. Merced doesn't need this huge waste-producing establishment within its borders. Nine hundred diesel trucks will be making their way to and from the center daily. The environmental impact can be quite detrimental considering how much pollution is already accumulated in the Valley from the Bay Area and our own local farming activities.

Wal-Mart's recently launched Web site attempts to address community opposition by claiming they're working to protect our environment. In recent years, Wal-Mart has been slammed with several million-dollar environmental violation lawsuits. This corporation does not have a very reputable past in dealing with such issues. It can only make one wonder what will happen next.

I urge you to do your some research and see how potentially harmful this can be to Merced's community.

Ryan Kelley, Atwater

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California's request to regulate emissions of off-road vehicles such as golf carts, tractors and construction machinery. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Pide California regular emisiones de vehículos que operan fuera de carreteras

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, January 29, 2008

El procurador general de California, Jerry Brown informó que hoy solicitará a la administración del presidente, George Bush, imponer reglamentos a la contaminación que ocasionan vehículos que operan fuera de las carreteras, del modo que las maquinarias.

El procurador dijo además que los carritos de golf, los tractores agrícolas, la maquinaria minera y la de construcción que operan con diesel, entre muchos otros, causan una contaminación similar a la de cuatro millones de vehículos.

Brown informó en un documento que "si seguimos con lo mismo de siempre, porque es costumbre, enfrentaremos graves daños por esa contaminación".