

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, June 24, 2008:](#)

Now it's 'Healthy Air Living'

Air district launches new, more aggressive educational effort.

Spare the Air days have had their day. Now it's time for Healthy Air Living. The Valley air district is about to embark on a new, more aggressive effort to get residents to make the sort of lifestyle changes we must have in order to have cleaner air to breathe.

The new program will kick off with Healthy Air Living Week, July 7-13.

It's not that Spare the Air was a failure. That program did a great deal to create awareness of the scope and difficulty involved in cleaning the Valley's polluted air. But it was, in the words of the air district's director, "episodic" in nature, tied to the very worst air days in the region.

Healthy Air Living, by contrast, will seek to promote changes in everyday behavior. It's major goals:

- Reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled through the Valley each day. The district will issue a challenge to Valley residents, business and other organizations to "Commute green in the San Joaquin," by encouraging the use of mass transit, car and van pools and greater reliance on bicycles, electric scooters, walking and telecommuting.

- Reduce emissions from equipment and other operations.

- Reduce emissions when air quality is poor. An example might be shifting employee schedules so more work is performed in the early morning and evening, when the air quality is better, and reducing activity when pollution peaks.

- Encourage more use of alternative fuels and equipment, raise energy efficiency.

There's something for everyone, including a contest for children to create art for a calendar to be distributed next year to Valley schools. Businesses and individuals will be asked to pledge changes in their behavior, and by doing so will get a chance to win a Toyota Prius hybrid car.

One new wrinkle is a focus on faith-based organizations, a resource that hasn't been effectively tapped in the clean air effort.

There has been progress in cleaning the Valley's air, but it's not enough. We won't get to the point of having clean air without major changes in the way we live, work and play. Mostly that means getting out of our cars, at least some of the time, and using them more efficiently when we must drive.

But that's not all. It means continuing to eschew wood fires on bad air days in the winter, being careful about storing paint and other materials that give off smog-forming chemicals, using propane or natural gas for barbecues.

It means planning our communities with air quality in mind -- reducing sprawl and making neighborhoods less dependent on vehicles. It means improving mass transit and building alternatives to vehicle travel, such as high-speed rail.

It means thinking harder about the impact we have on our environment and then acting on that knowledge. It means "Healthy Air Living." Start now, and don't stop.

Mariposa County shrouded in smoke

Crews fight lightning-sparked fires as mountain residents stay on alert.

By Marc Benjamin and Brad Branam / The Fresno Bee

Also in the Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

PONDEROSA BASIN -- Lightning-sparked fires spread across southern Mariposa County on Monday, prompting concerns about evacuations and placing firefighters at every driveway on a dirt, mountain road.

The Mariposa County fires had burned more than 960 acres in steep terrain by 7 p.m. Monday.

The largest, the Oliver fire, had grown to more than 500 acres and was hovering menacingly above residents on a dirt portion of Chowchilla Mountain Road that borders U.S. Forest Service land. Firefighters were stationed at individual driveways to defend homes.

The fires ignited Saturday during a thunderstorm that caused more than two dozen lightning strikes in the Sierra National Forest, said Trudy Tucker, a public affairs specialist for the Bass Lake Ranger District.

Janet Snyder, a part-time resident in Ponderosa Basin, said the Saturday rain was a nice change, but then came the fire. She said Mariposa County sheriff's deputies arrived at 8 a.m. Monday and suggested that she prepare for evacuation. Later Monday, she was waiting for more fire information and was pondering whether to leave.

"There are a few pictures and some papers," she said. "We have insurance."

Snyder said she has been evacuated once before because of fire, near her other home in Burbank.

But, in 20 years in Mariposa County, she said, "There has never been one this close."

Patty Arfsten, who arrived home Monday after being away for a few days, said she was concerned because she had never seen a fire during her 20 years on Chowchilla Mountain.

"It's jumped one ridge, gone down a ravine and it's coming down the last ridge," she said.

Mariposa County Fire Chief Jim Wilson said the fire appeared to be getting closer to some residents, but there was no wind to push the slow-moving blaze.

Evacuation was mandatory on a small portion of Standard Mill Road and one couple left their home Monday, Wilson said.

Residents in Ponderosa Basin have been fortunate for the past 50 years because there have been very few fires there. But a lack of fires has added more timber and brush, more fuel for a fire to burn, he said.

"There are some pretty heavy fuels," Wilson said. "Our objective is to box the fire in."

He said firefighters were more concerned Sunday with the Westfall fire, fearing it could overrun the mountain community of Fish Camp. But the winds died off. By Monday afternoon, the fire had burned 60 acres and was 40% contained.

A third Mariposa County fire, the Silver Knob fire, had scorched about 400 acres near Cedar Brook. By 8:30 p.m. Monday, it was 10% contained.

Smoke from the Mariposa County fires and other California fires drifted into the San Joaquin Valley, leading the region's Air Pollution Control District to issue a "cautionary statement" for people sensitive to bad air. The smoke brought increased levels of particulate matter and ozone pollution to the Valley, said Shawn Ferreria, a senior air quality specialist with the district.

The air quality for most of the district was "unhealthy for sensitive groups" Monday and is forecast to be the same today, he said. People with heart or lung disease are at risk, and others are warned to avoid prolonged exposure.

Hundreds of small fires were burning Monday across California, caused by wind and lightning in the mountains and deserts, Gov. Schwarzenegger's office said. Schwarzenegger directed the California National Guard and state firefighting operations to help, including more than 4,000 Cal Fire personnel.

"It's been a really dry spring," said Matt Shameson, a fire-weather meteorologist with the Forest Service in Riverside. Trees, grass and other "fuels" for fire are more likely to ignite because of the lack of rain, he said.

Thunderstorms were responsible for as many as 75 fires in Shasta-Trinity National Forest, about 160 miles north of Sacramento, The Associated Press reported. Fires ranged in size from less than an acre to more than a square mile. None immediately threatened homes, said Forest Service spokesman Michael Odle.

Mendocino County had as many as 90 fires, charring a total of 5,000 acres, Cal Fire officials said.

A fire that began Friday in Santa Cruz County destroyed homes and closed a stretch of highway. It was contained after charring just less than a square mile. Evacuation orders were lifted Saturday, a day after roughly 2,000 people fled their homes.

Fires cause air quality alert today

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued an air quality alert today due to fires throughout California.

Smoke from fires throughout California are being blown into the San Joaquin Valley prompting officials to issue a health cautionary statement.

Smoke may affect Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Tuolumne, Merced, Mariposa, Madera and Kern counties, according to air district forecasters.

Use caution as conditions warrant. Anyone with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors advice for unhealthy air quality exposure.

Elderly people and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

Otherwise, sunny today with a high temperature of 95 degrees, according to the National Weather Service Forecast Office. Southerly winds at 8 mph becoming northwesterly.

Tonight areas of smoke continues and mostly clear skies with a low temperature near 61 degrees. Northwesterly winds 5 to 8 mph becoming south southeasterly.

Valley to see slight cooldown, but smoke from wildfires dirties air

By Kimberlina Rocha

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

The haze in Valley skies may provide some relief from the scorching summer sun. But don't head outside just yet. Hundreds of wildfires blazing from Big Sur to Humboldt County are generating ash that's making its way to the Valley. San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board officials warn residents, especially those with respiratory ailments, to take caution.

"If you see a smoky haze or smell smoke, you're being impacted," said the Valley Air District's Jaime Holt. "Do anything possible to stay inside."

Exposure to this type of pollution could aggravate lung disease, and cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis. It could also heighten the risk of respiratory infections, according to the district.

Valley residents should limit their outdoor activities and keep hydrated throughout the day, Holt said.

Jim Dudley, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, said winds blowing from the north and northwest will continue to bring in smoke for most of the week, depending on when the fires are extinguished.

Meanwhile, cooler air flows from the Pacific will drop temperatures here to the mid-90s. Nighttime lows this week will be in the mid-50s, Dudley said. Thursday is expected to see a high of 97 and a low of 59. Temperatures Friday and Saturday will hover around 95, Dudley said. "It will warm up a bit, but it won't [be] extreme heat in any way," he said.

Firefighters battling hundreds of blazes

By Demian Bulwa, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

San Francisco -- It was a recipe for natural disaster.

Take one of the driest years on record in Northern California, add a few scorching heat waves, and sprinkle in the rarest of ingredients - coastal thunder and lightning storms in June - and what do you get?

More than 800 fires sparking up in recent days, some stalking homes and others burning so far from civilization that nobody tries to put them out.

Firefighters stretched thin, racing from blaze to blaze with little rest as commanders practice a form of triage - focus on the fires that pose the biggest threats.

And residents from Napa to Livermore to San Jose getting accustomed to living in a smoky haze, their nostrils full of the unmistakable smell of burning wood.

"We're definitely on track for a record year," Battalion Chief Paul Van Gerwen of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said Monday.

As of Friday, even before the latest surge of fires, more than twice as many acres had burned in the state as were scorched in the same period in 2007, Van Gerwen said.

"And last year," he said, "was an extremely busy year."

The smoke from the fires has spread and lingered, prompting some people who live far away from the front lines to call 911, convinced that they smell a nearby field or a neighbor's home in flames.

Others have adjusted to the new normal.

"It smells like you're right near a campfire," said 18-year-old Riley Krull, who works for her parents as a waitress at the First Street Cafe in Benicia.

"If people have any sense in their head," she said, "they're putting it together."

The smoke is heaviest in Napa and Solano counties because of the Wild Fire northwest of Fairfield. But several other fires are contributing to the brown air, at least where it isn't fogged in.

The smoke prompted an advisory Monday by Bay Area air pollution regulators.

"We're advising people to use common sense," said Kristine Roselius, a spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Allergy warnings

If you see smoke, she said, don't exercise or let your children play outdoors. If you have air conditioning, use the recycled air setting, and shut doors and windows.

Noting that her agency has received reports of the smoke aggravating allergies and bothering older people, Roselius added, "We're watching this very closely."

More unusual than the haze, weather forecasters said, were the almost unprecedented conditions that led to the fires that led to the haze.

Crunching numbers Monday, National Weather Service meteorologist Mark Strobin said downtown San Francisco received a total of 0.67 of an inch of rain from March to May, the driest spring since the agency began keeping records in 1850.

In an average year, the city gets 5.18 inches of rain from March to May.

"That's basically nothing," Strobin said of this year's output. "That's really the big message. The fuel moistures are equivalent to what they would be normally at the end of the summer, after a summer of no rain and hot weather."

Dry thunderstorms a rarity

The dry thunderstorms that struck Northern California on Saturday afternoon, igniting hundreds of fires, were a rare thing as well.

"The average number of thunderstorm days in June in San Francisco," Strobin said, "is zero."

Strobin said the Bay Area can expect low clouds and cooler temperatures through Thursday as a marine layer moves inland, but the break won't last. The region's interior valleys, he said, should see high temperatures in the 90s by Friday.

If more moisture moves into the area, Strobin said, more thunderstorms aren't out of the question.

Making matters worse, he said, is that dry thunderstorms tend to come with high winds that can whip flames. Rain falling from the base of a storm evaporates before it hits land, leaving a column of dense, cool air that rushes to the ground and then spreads out.

Monday's weather was good news for about 200 people who returned to their homes in Brisbane after a fire broke out Sunday night on San Bruno Mountain.

The fire that began near San Francisco Avenue in dry grass and brush above a quarry at about 7 p.m. was fully contained Monday morning. The cause of the fire, which burned no structures, is under investigation.

The blaze was one of scores that broke out of over the weekend.

The Wild Fire has burned 4,089 acres in Napa and Solano counties since Saturday. The blaze destroyed at least one outbuilding, was threatening 150 structures and was 60 percent contained as of Monday night, with some mandatory evacuations still in place.

Van Gerwen said more than 200 fires in remote areas remain "unstaffed" by firefighters. Still, some crews have not had a day off since the devastating Summit Fire in Santa Cruz County ignited May 22.

"When they're done with a fire, they get reassigned to another fire," he said. "It's only June. We would normally do that in August."

The battalion chief said the dry conditions are straining the goal of the agency - to limit 95 percent of fires to 10 acres or less.

The total number of fires that have started in state jurisdiction has actually decreased this year compared with last year, but the average fire has eaten up nearly four times as much acreage, records show.

"The vegetation is just primed," Van Gerwen said. "When it catches fire, it spreads rapidly, and it's difficult for the initial attack to contain it."

California ablaze

There have been fewer fires overall in California so far this year than in 2007, but the blazes to date in 2008 have scorched far more land than last year's.

Total fires in state fire protection agency's jurisdiction, Jan. 1-June 20:

- 2008: 3,912
- 2007: 6,932
- Five-year average (2004-08): 3,668

Total acres burned:

- 2008: 89,323
- 2007: 42,214
- Five-year average (2004-08): 30,938

Source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Active fires

More than 800 fires have started in Northern California in recent days, including:

-- The Wild Fire, which started Saturday, had burned 4,089 acres in Napa and Solano counties as of Monday night. The blaze, which destroyed at least one outbuilding, was 60 percent contained, with 540 firefighters on the fire lines. Mandatory evacuations remained in place on Joyce Lane, Twin Sisters Road and Wooden Valley Road, and a voluntary evacuation was in place in the Green Valley area. An evacuation center was established at the Fairfield Community Center. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

-- The Hummingbird Fire in Santa Clara County had burned 794 acres and was fully contained as of Monday night, while the nearby Whitehurst Fire had burned 200 acres and was 95 percent contained. Both blazes, located west of Gilroy and Morgan Hill, were caused by lightning strikes Saturday.

-- The Brown Fire, in Hollister and Panoche in San Benito County, had burned 3,870 acres and was fully contained Monday night. The fire was set off by lightning.

-- The Indians Fire, burning in Los Padres National Forest in Monterey County since June 8, had consumed 57,745 acres as of Monday night. It was 66 percent contained.

The Walker Fire, started by lightning Saturday near Indian Valley Reservoir in Lake County, had burned 2,000 acres and had no containment lines around it as of Monday afternoon.

-- The Basin Complex Fires, which began Monday afternoon in Monterey County, had burned 7,015 acres and was 3 percent contained as of Monday evening. The fires were burning five miles south of Big Sur.

Source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Lightning takes Northern California fires from bad to worse

By Eric Bailey, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

SACRAMENTO -- Northern California continued to suffer the fallout of what's turning into a historically bad fire season as a weekend lightning barrage set off more than 700 blazes that by Monday had burned nearly 44,000 acres.

A record lack of rainfall, severely dry vegetation and uncharacteristically windy weather have combined to create tinderbox conditions across Northern California.

The spark arrived Saturday as an unusual weather pattern sent dry lightning flashing to the ground -- again and again and again. More than 8,000 lightning strikes touched earth, according to the National Weather Service.

Fire crews, already weary from battling recent blazes that charred more than 80 homes near Chico and claimed dozens more in the Santa Cruz Mountains, were sent scurrying all over Northern California in an attempt to prevent property loss.

By most accounts, the effort was a success. Although 10 coastal homes were lost to flames this weekend north of Watsonville, property loss was relatively low amid fires that burned tens of thousands of acres of grassland, brush and forest.

Early preparation has been the key, said Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. More crews are on hand this year because of the dry conditions, he said. And with forecasters predicting the possibility of lightning strikes, fire chiefs had shifted more forces from Southern California.

"There's been some good work done the last couple of days," Berlant said.

But no one was declaring victory.

"We don't have a lid on it yet," said David Shew, a battalion chief with the forestry department. "We've got a lot of forces deployed out there, and some of these fires are going to continue growing."

Even when the latest fires are extinguished, the conditions will remain ripe for more of the same, warned John Juskie, a National Weather Service science officer.

"In historic terms, we're at record dry levels," Juskie said.

This spring, just 0.17 of an inch of rain fell in Sacramento, breaking the record of 0.55 on an inch set in 1934, he said.

The lack of precipitation has left outback and urban vegetation ready to burn. In most areas of the north, the grasses and brush are as dry now as they normally would be in October. Moisture content is less than 5%, compared with about 20% normally for this time of year, fire officials say.

In addition, "no one has seen a springtime like this with the winds," Juskie said.

Breezes, which can fan a small fire into an inferno, have been whipping for days at a time, with velocities reaching 20 mph or more. They've been caused by a clash between high-pressure storm systems moving through the Pacific Northwest and low pressure hovering over the

Southwest. Northern California sits between the two pinwheeling systems, which have caused persistent winds.

The good news, Juskie said, is that the winds should die down with summer's onset.

The bad news is that "we're still hot and dry," he said. "So we're not out of the woods. Even without the wind, we're bone dry."

As for the lightning, Juskie said it was unusual because of the vast territory it hit.

Though lightning strikes in the Sierra most summers, recent conditions sent thunderstorms reeling in from the Pacific across most of Northern California, from Monterey County up through Mendocino and inland into the far northern mountains of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, where more than 60 blazes burned in the backwoods.

In Mendocino County, 131 fires had burned more than 8,900 acres, with 50 rural homes still potentially in harm's way. Among the most threatening of the fires was a swath straddling Napa and Solano counties northwest of Fairfield. Nearly 4,100 acres had burned and 150 homes remained threatened at nightfall Monday.

With dozens of fires still burning, air quality suffered all over Northern California.

In Sacramento, smoke barreled down the valley from the various fires and left the capital city shrouded in a particulate plume. Regulators declared the air unhealthy because of the smoke, with the air quality index surging as high as 166 in Roseville and 157 in downtown Sacramento.

More than 700 wildfires dirty the air

By DOANE YAWGER

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

Thanks to wildfires blanketing Central California, Merced County's air quality could remain bad for the second day in a row today.

Shawn R. Ferreria, Fresno-based senior air quality specialist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said Monday's air quality index registered 140 in Merced County and is predicted to stay at 129 today. Any reading between 101 and 150 is considered unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Ferreria said rising ozone readings were beating out measurements of particulate matter churned out by the spate of wildfires and both ozone and particulate readings are responsible for the unhealthy for sensitive groups rankings.

A spokesman for Mercy Medical Center Merced said Monday the hospital's emergency department has not encountered any significant increase in respiratory cases because of smoky air conditions in this area.

Stanislaus County's air quality readings were 147 on Monday and predicted to be the same for today. The air district's closest live monitoring station to Merced is in downtown Turlock. It measures particulate matter 2.5 microns in size or smaller, one of the byproducts of wildland fires that are still burning in Mariposa County and other parts of the state.

Lightning strikes Saturday in the foothills triggered a number of dry vegetation fires in Merced and Mariposa counties. The impact of these fires was light Sunday but worsened Monday, with the smell of smoke evident and the sky murky.

Things were worse in San Joaquin County, Ferreria said. Monday's air quality reading there was 156 and expected to be 155 today. Air quality readings of 150 to 200 are considered unhealthy for all groups.

Ferreria said residents with asthma or other lung problems are urged to stay indoors. The small particles in the smoke are capable of getting deep into the lungs, causing health problems.

Exposure to the particle pollution can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis and increase the risk of respiratory infections, according to the air district.

Short-term exposure to particle pollution has also been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmias in people with heart disease, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, and everyone else should reduce exposure and strenuous activity, air district officials warn.

The thunderstorm system that came through California on Saturday generated 5,000 to 6,000 lightning strikes, and sparked more than 700 fires, said Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for Cal Fire.

Lightning sparks 800-plus fires in California

By Marcus Wohlsen, Associated Press Writer
USA TODAY, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO — Firefighters battled fires throughout Northern California on Tuesday, from Mendocino County south to the Big Sur area in Monterey County, after an "unprecedented" lightning storm sparked more than 800 wildfires.

Thousands of firefighters battled the blazes on the ground and from the air and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said Monday that he was alarmed by the number of fires that kept erupting.

"This is an unprecedented lightning storm in California, that it lasted as long as it did, 5,000 to 6,000 lightning strikes," said Del Walters, assistant regional chief of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Firefighters from neighboring states have arrived to help, mostly firefighting aircraft, from Nevada and Oregon after being requested over the weekend.

Schwarzenegger said he had enlisted the help "because you can never prepare for 500 or 700 or 800 fires all at the same time."

One fire started in Napa County and moved into Solano County, where it continued to burn outside of Fairfield.

After consuming more than 4,089 acres the fire is 60% contained, said Karen Stasko, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

ELSEWHERE: Peak lightning season for the Sunshine State

No homes have been destroyed, and voluntary evacuations have been lifted.

Another wildfire in a rural area of Lake County has scorched more than 10,000 acres. No homes have been destroyed, but voluntary evacuations are in place for residents of 36 homes.

Another fire is burning in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, about 160 miles north of Sacramento. It has threatened about 1,200 homes and several youth camps and forced evacuations.

In Monterey County, a fire south of Big Sur was only 3% contained after consuming 7,015 acres since it was first reported Monday.

And a wildfire west of King City in Ventana Wilderness of the Los Padres National Forest was 66% contained after burning 57,745 acres.

It also led to an emergency airlift Sunday of eight endangered California condors. U.S. Coast Guard helicopters transported the seven juveniles and one adult bird from a wildlife center to the Monterey Airport.

The governor declared a state of emergency in Monterey and Trinity Counties on Monday.

Test Drive: Honda's FCX fuel-cell car ready for its close-up

By James R. Healey

USA TODAY, Monday, June 23, 2008

WASHINGTON — Whine. There's always the whine. That's the thing with electric motors. They whine.

That was the aural signature of the Honda FCX prototype sedans whizzing around the makeshift track in the parking lot of RFK Memorial Stadium here.

Two things about that noise. Probably not much will remain when the limited-production versions of the fuel-cell car are ready for market next year. And the fact it could be heard means the rest of the car, even in prototype form, was quiet.

It will be interesting to see how the automaker deals with the noise issue. Honda knows people want to hear something when they step on the throttle. Otherwise there's little to reinforce the feeling of acceleration. A noiseless car can seem sluggish even if it's not. But what kind of sound, and how do you get it from an electric powerplant?

That's what a fuel-cell car is, after all. An electric. Gets its juice from mixing hydrogen and oxygen in a stack of membranes and separators, instead of all from a battery.

Hydrogen is plentiful. But getting it loose to use as fuel isn't easy. Most of it — 95%, says Ben Knight, Honda's vice president for research and development in America — comes from natural gas, the same fuel that heats most U.S. homes. The U.S. has roughly 3% of the world's natural gas, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Big players: Russia (27%), Iran (16%), Qatar (15%).

Honda has decided that hydrogen fuel-cell power has a mainstream, everyday future. The car company's 2008 FCX is a fuel-cell vehicle specifically for the consumer market.

It has more interior space than its midsize exterior dimensions imply. The prototypes had air conditioning and power steering, and production models are to have an array of features and accessories similar to those in a gasoline-power car.

Honda's first two generations of FCXs, derived from the defunct EV-Plus electric car, have been small, upright, blocky cars; mainly mobile housings for the fuel cell under the floor. The 2008 is quite different. It's styled to be arresting, exotic.

Honda has shrunk the fuel cell and realigned it to be vertical, not horizontal, so it fits under the center tunnel in the car. The vertical stack also speeds water flow to minimize the chance of freezing, and the compact size concentrates the stack's heat to fight freezing and allows the stack to produce power quickly, Honda says.

The automaker won't say yet how many 2008 FCX sedans it will build. But those who wind up driving them are likely to be delighted, if the prototypes are a true harbinger.

In addition to the quiet interior, they sported comfortable and stylish seats made from what Honda calls bio-fabric. It's made from specially grown plants. The idea is that they absorb enough carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, during their growth to offset the CO₂ they give off when incinerated at disposal. Never mind the eco-story. The fabric looks and feels nice. Honda claims it's durable, too.

The swoopy roofline of the FCX, so striking from outside, creates an unsettling phenomenon inside. The dashboard is huge, reached well forward from the instrument panel to the base of the windshield near the front of the car. Nothing functionally amiss, but it is visually odd. And it'd be a bear to reach all the way up there to dust. Or retrieve an item.

Just two back seating slots in the prototypes. The middle spot is eaten up by the tunnel that helps house the fuel-cell stack. Generous legroom in the rear, but it took a duck and twist to get into the back seat without a whacked noggin.

Honda says the car will hit 100 mph. No argument. It easily topped 75 mph before running out of room in the parking lot here, and showed no strain or sign of tapering off. Acceleration was reasonably quick, as generally is the case with an electric car.

Handling was unpleasant. Too much understeer from all the weight over the front wheels. And too much body lean. Surely those would be upgraded before an engineering boss would sign off for real-world use. The suspension — to the extent you could tell on the reasonably smooth parking lot — was well-tuned otherwise. Bumps were absorbed without jostling the occupants or tossing the car around. Steering and brakes worked fine but felt a little unnatural. Expected in a prototype, especially one with unusual electric hardware that powers the steering and controls the brakes.

Hydrogen — if you can find it, and you probably can't unless you live in California — can be twice as expensive as gasoline for the same energy content. However, the car will go almost three times as far on the same amount, making the cost per mile much lower.

Honda doesn't pretend that a fuel cell-car is ready for prime time. Rather, it hopes to disseminate the 2008 FCX to users who have access to hydrogen. There's a station here in Washington. Two in Las Vegas, a few in the Detroit area, mainly for use by automakers' experimental fleets, a handful in other states. California has 24 and 14 more being planned, according to the California Fuel Cell Partnership. Most are in the Los Angeles-San Diego and San Francisco-Sacramento corridors.

It's also possible to create mobile fueling stations. Generate the hydrogen, store it on a truck and take it where there are customers. Plus, because hydrogen is made from natural gas, you could connect a converter to the natural gas line that supplies your home — Honda is working on one of those — and it could not only generate hydrogen to refill your fuel-cell car, but also produce electricity to help power your home. Honda says that's still in the research and development stage.

Driving the FCX prototypes makes a hydrogen future seem possible and closer than expected.
2008 Honda FCX

What is it? Midsize, front-wheel-drive, four-door sedan powered by electricity generated by an onboard hydrogen fuel cell. Manufactured in Japan. Test cars were prototypes. Honda said regular-production models will be more refined but otherwise similar.

How soon? Next year; Honda hasn't named a date.

How much? Honda leases two current-generation FCX cars to individuals for \$500 a month. It won't say whether the '08s will be more than that. The '08s are expected to cost Honda about half

as much to make as the current models, which nevertheless will be half a million bucks each, or so.

How many? Honda won't specify. "Many, many more" than the token two in consumer hands now is all Honda says.

What's the powertrain? Electric motor rated 127 horsepower, 188 pounds-feet of torque. Single-speed transmission.

What's the fuel? Hydrogen gas, stored at 5,000 pounds per square inch in rear-mounted fuel tank.

What's the layout? Fuel cell stack is in a center tunnel, mainly under the armrest between driver and front passenger. Electric motor is atop front wheels. Fuel tank and lithium-ion battery pack to store electricity are behind rear seat.

How big? Prototypes are 187.4 inches long, 73.4 inches wide, 56.9 inches tall on a 110.2-inch wheelbase. Dimensions might vary slightly on production models.

Honda won't provide weight or interior dimensions. Trunk appears big enough to hold three sets of golf clubs.

How thirsty? Honda anticipates a gasoline-equivalent rating of about 68 miles per gallon in the Environmental Protection Agency's combined city-highway driving cycle.

Tank holds 171 liters of hydrogen gas. Honda says that's the energy equivalent of four gallons of gasoline, yielding a driving range of 270 miles at the expected mpg rating.

Overall: Impressive. The new "it" car for well-connected greenies able to get on Honda's "A" list.

NASA warming scientist: 'This is the last chance'

By Seth Borenstein, Associated Press

In the O. C. Register and other papers, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

WASHINGTON – Exactly 20 years after warning America about global warming, a top NASA scientist said the situation has gotten so bad that the world's only hope is drastic action.

James Hansen told Congress on Monday that the world has long passed the "dangerous level" for greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and needs to get back to 1988 levels. He said Earth's atmosphere can only stay this loaded with man-made carbon dioxide for a couple more decades without changes such as mass extinction, ecosystem collapse and dramatic sea level rises.

"We're toast if we don't get on a very different path," Hansen, director of the Goddard Institute of Space Sciences who is sometimes called the godfather of global warming science, told The Associated Press. "This is the last chance."

Hansen brought global warming home to the public in June 1988 during a Washington heat wave, telling a Senate hearing that global warming was already here. To mark the anniversary, he testified before the House

Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming where he was called a prophet, and addressed a luncheon at the National Press Club where he was called a hero by former Sen. Tim Wirth, D-Colo., who headed the 1988 hearing.

To cut emissions, Hansen said coal-fired power plants that don't capture carbon dioxide emissions shouldn't be used in the United States after 2025, and should be eliminated in the rest

of the world by 2030. That carbon capture technology is still being developed and not yet cost efficient for power plants.

Burning fossil fuels like coal is the chief cause of man-made greenhouse gases. Hansen said the Earth's atmosphere has got to get back to a level of 350 parts of carbon dioxide per million. Last month, it was 10 percent higher: 386.7 parts per million.

Hansen said he'll testify on behalf of British protesters against new coal-fired power plants. Protesters have chained themselves to gates and equipment at sites of several proposed coal plants in England.

"The thing that I think is most important is to block coal-fired power plants," Hansen told the luncheon. "I'm not yet at the point of chaining myself but we somehow have to draw attention to this."

Frank Maisano, a spokesman for many U.S. utilities, including those trying to build new coal plants, said while Hansen has shown foresight as a scientist, his "stop them all approach is very simplistic" and shows that he is beyond his level of expertise.

The year of Hansen's original testimony was the world's hottest year on record. Since then, 14 years have been hotter, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Two decades later, Hansen spent his time on the question of whether it's too late to do anything about it. His answer: There's still time to stop the worst, but not much time.

"We see a tipping point occurring right before our eyes," Hansen told the AP before the luncheon. "The Arctic is the first tipping point and it's occurring exactly the way we said it would."

Hansen, echoing work by other scientists, said that in five to 10 years, the Arctic will be free of sea ice in the summer.

Longtime global warming skeptic Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., citing a recent poll, said in a statement, "Hansen, (former Vice President) Gore and the media have been trumpeting man-made climate doom since the 1980s. But Americans are not buying it."

But Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., committee chairman, said, "Dr. Hansen was right. Twenty years later, we recognize him as a climate prophet."

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register editorial, Tuesday, June 24, 2008:](#)

Biking to work?

Looking for a cheaper way to get to work?

Today's inflated gas prices has a lot of folks thinking the same way. If it seems as if there are more people on bicycles around Visalia lately, it's probably because there are.

However your daily life is being affected by high gas prices, a new forum online offers a place and learn about share about alternative transportation: [www.Visalia TimesDelta.com/Forums](http://www.VisaliaTimesDelta.com/Forums).

If you have started using a bike for your daily commute, or even if you are thinking about, we invite you to share your experience with others.

If you have been using a bicycle as your regular transportation for a while, you can offer valuable advice to others who are seeking to follow your example.

And if you just plan are fed up with high gas prices and are seeking ways to beat those prices at the pump, a new forum at [www.Visalia TimesDelta.com](http://www.VisaliaTimesDelta.com) might be just what you're looking for.

Go online and share your tips on bicycle commuting, on using car pools or alternative transportation or on other ways you are coping with high gas prices.

Joining in the conversation helps all of us.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, June 24, 2008:](#)

A belated return to electric car technology

John-David Hughes [letter June 18] asks, "Where are our legislators?" They are doing what they always are doing: collecting funds and support for their re-election.

General Motors' EV-1 was abandoned as a result of the California Air Resources Board decision to pursue hydrogen-fueled vehicles.

Honda came out with such a vehicle recently. It can be leased for \$600 a month and fueled at one of three hydrogen stations in California.

GM is now touting its Volt E-Flex Propulsion system vehicle due out in 2010. The 40-mile range battery is holding things up.

When CARB backed off electric vehicles, GM sold its interest in the Ovonic battery to Texaco. In an Oct. 9, 2000, press release GM Vice Chairman Harry J. Pearce said in part "we improved the range of our world-class GM EV-1 to more than 150 miles with the GM Ovonic nickel metal hydride technology." Apparently they don't keep notes.

Phoenix Motorcars says it will be selling its electric vehicle with a range of 100 miles in 2009. It is the fourth-largest auto manufacturer in Korea. GM is the fourth-largest auto manufacturer in Fantasy Land.

Cordell Hemphill, Sanger

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California prepares for an integral plan against air pollution. The plan consists of rules, sanctions and promotions of new technology to reduce pollution. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Prepara California plan integral contra contaminación del aire

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California presentará esta semana un plan integral contra la contaminación del aire.

La presidenta de la oficina, Mary Nichols adelantó que se trata de una mezcla de reglamentos, sanciones y promoción de nueva tecnología para reducir la contaminación.

El mismo proyecto proporcionara incentivos a quienes presenten ideas novedosas que sirvan contra el deterioro aéreo.

El plan incluye alcanzar a refinerías, empresas energéticas en el estado, la industria, la agricultura, el manejo de desechos e inclusive los gobiernos locales.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses trash, could it be turned into clean fuel?](#)

La basura, ¿podrá ser acaso un combustible limpio?

Terra, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - A unos 45 minutos del centro de Los Angeles, una máquina del tamaño de un pequeño camión aplasta toneladas de restos de comida, papel toalla y otros desechos domésticos en una creciente montaña de casi 109 yardas de alto.

Para Waste Management, firma que opera el vertedero, esto es más que una mera pila de basura. Ductos fijados en lo profundo de la montaña extraen gas de los desperdicios en descomposición y lo envían a una planta que lo convierte en electricidad.

Salvo por el enorme compactador que pasa sobre la basura, esto luce como un vertedero común. Y ni siquiera huele mal. No obstante produce suficiente energía para abastecer 2.500 casas en el sur de California.

Desperdicios, basura, como sea que se le quiera llamar, los 1.600 millones de cosas que el mundo desecha cada año -550 libras por persona- están siendo promocionados como una potencial fuente de energía limpia.

A medida que aumentan las preocupaciones por el cambio climático y los precios de los combustibles fósiles, como el petróleo y el gas natural, se disparan a precios récord, más compañías deciden invertir en formas de usar el gas metano para abastecer a hogares y vehículos.

Alrededor del mundo, los vertederos donde la basura municipal es recogida y enterrada son uno de los mayores productores de metano, un gas cuyo efecto invernadero es 21 veces peor que el del dióxido de carbono. Si ese gas en cambio es almacenado y quemado para generar electricidad, sus defensores dicen que las emisiones de dióxido de carbono resultantes son menos nocivas para el medio ambiente que las del metano original.

En Estados Unidos, los recolectores de basura como Waste Management y Allied Waste Industries Inc están expandiendo rápidamente la cantidad de proyectos de conversión de gas a energía en sus vertederos, mientras que compañías incipientes están desarrollando las últimas tecnologías para transformar la basura en etanol, gas y electricidad.

"Somos capaces de tomar ese recurso y convertirlo en un verdadero valor financiero para nosotros. En un sentido muy básico, ayuda a mejorar nuestras ganancias," dijo Ted Neura, director senior del departamento de energía renovable de Allied Waste, con sede en Phoenix, que está convirtiendo basura en energía en 54 de sus 169 vertederos en Estados Unidos y tiene otros proyectos más en camino.

Las credenciales "verdes" que acompañan a esos proyectos son un beneficio adicional, agregó Neura.

"Uno comienza a mirar a los vertederos en forma diferente cuando se les asocia con un proyecto de energía renovable," afirmó.

Los ambientalistas no han mostrado mucho entusiasmo. Nathanael Greene, director de políticas de energía renovable para el Consejo de Defensa de Recursos Naturales (NRDC por su sigla en inglés), sostuvo que promocionar los beneficios de los vertederos era como ponerle "lápiz labial a un cerdo." En cambio, deberíamos esforzarnos más por reducir los desechos, afirmó.

EL BIOGAS ALREDEDOR DEL MUNDO

Biogás, otro nombre para el metano producido de desperdicios, estiércol y otra materia orgánica, ha sido más desarrollado en Europa, donde Alemania tiene el 70 por ciento del mercado total. En Gran Bretaña, el gas de los vertederos representa una cuarta parte de la energía renovable del país, proporcionando electricidad a unos 900.000 hogares.

Los proyectos de transformación de desechos en energía también están expandiéndose en el tercer mundo, donde el rápido crecimiento económico ha generado un fuerte aumento en los desperdicios municipales, pero los esfuerzos por recolectar el metano emitido por la basura en descomposición han sido menores.

El año pasado, el Banco Mundial reveló un acuerdo para la instalación de un sistema de recolección de gas y generación de energía en un vertedero en Tianjin, China, argumentando que las oportunidades para otros proyectos de ese estilo en el país más poblado del mundo eran enormes.

En países menos desarrollados que China, no obstante, debe ser instalada la infraestructura para la recolección de residuos para que proyectos energéticos de ese tipo hagan sentido.

"Algunos de los países en desarrollo están fascinados con las posibilidades de implementar (métodos de) incineración," dijo Henrik Harjula, funcionario ambiental de la Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico (OCDE).

"Normalmente el problema es que es como colocar una instalación moderna en la jungla. No hay nadie que se encargue del mantenimiento," agregó.

En Estados Unidos, la tecnología para producir electricidad a base de desperdicios ha existido desde la década de 1970, según el vicepresidente de energía renovable de Waste Management, Paul Pabor, quien dijo que los incentivos impositivos federales creados en el 2005 y los mandatos estatales para producir un porcentaje de su electricidad a base de fuentes renovables ha reforzado el reciente crecimiento de esos proyectos.

Los ambientalistas reconocen que es preferible convertir metano en energía a liberarlo en el aire, pero difieren con presentar el gas producido en los vertederos como renovable.

"Esta es una opción ambientalmente preferible, pero no es renovable en el sentido que no es algo que se pueda hacer para siempre," dijo Greene del NRDC. "Antes de que sumemos incentivos a la producción de energía a base de basura, necesitamos presentar los incentivos adecuados para que podamos maximizar la cantidad que reciclamos," explicó.

DE LA BASURA A LAS GANANCIAS

Pese a los argumentos sobre cuán "ecológico" es realmente el biogás, Waste Management y Allied Waste se están beneficiando de sus nuevas fuentes de ingresos. Neura, de Allied Waste, dijo que la compañía genera menos del 5 por ciento de sus ganancias de la venta de electricidad, pero que está evaluando todos sus vertederos para determinar el mejor modo de desarrollarlos.

Los proyectos energéticos en vertederos son mucho más pequeños que las plantas de electricidad que operan con gas o carbón, produciendo cada una unos cinco megavatios de electricidad, precisó Neura. Eso es suficiente para abastecer a 4.000 hogares.

Waste Management, con sede en Houston, que actualmente produce energía en 100 de sus 280 vertederos en Estados Unidos, planea invertir 400 millones de dólares en los próximos cinco años para construir otras 60 plantas similares.

Para producir el gas suficiente como para que una planta de electricidad sea viable económicamente, los vertederos deben contener una gran cantidad de desechos orgánicos y deben haber estado operando por varios años, dijo Pabor.

En este momento, también deben estar ubicados en estados donde los precios de la energía sean lo suficientemente altos como para que la electricidad de los vertederos compita con la de

la red eléctrica. Por otro lado, también deben estar lo suficientemente cerca de las líneas de transmisión como para que los costos de interconexión no se salgan de control.

Por otro lado, en su más reciente esfuerzo, Waste Management se unió el mes pasado a un creciente número de compañías que están usando la basura para abastecer vehículos. En California, la firma está construyendo la mayor instalación del mundo que convertirá biogás en gas natural licuado que posteriormente utilizará en camiones pesados de recolección de basura. Terra/Reuters

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses forest fires in California are under control.](#)

Bajo control, incendios forestales en California

(AP)

El Mexicano, Monday, June 23, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO, California-Temperaturas más frescas ayudaron el lunes a los bomberos a ganar terreno ante centenares de incendios forestales que han calcinado varias hectáreas del norte de California.

Uno de esos incendios se diseminó casi 15 kilómetros cuadrados en el condado de Napa, una región vinícola, e ingresó al área rural de Solano. Allí amenazaba a más de 100 edificios en una zona arbolada al suroeste de Sacramento, la capital del estado, dijo Roger Archey, portavoz del departamento forestal de California.

Las llamas estaban contenidas en un 40% el lunes por la mañana, luego de destruir una casa, dijeron las autoridades. Algunos residentes recibieron órdenes de evacuar el área, dijo la portavoz de la agencia Nancy Carniglia.

Incendios forestales han destruido más de 175 viviendas en lo que va de año en el norte de California, luego de los dos meses más secos en la historia del estado.

Unos 40 kilómetros al sur de San José, muchos residentes estaban siendo autorizados a regresar a sus casas el lunes, de donde se vieron obligados a salir por dos incendios atribuidos a relámpagos. Las autoridades dijeron que uno de los incendios estaba 90% contenido y el otro 50% contenido.

Tormentas eléctricas habían causado hasta 75 incendios en el Bosque Nacional ShastaTrinity, al sur de Sacramento, pero ninguno estaba amenazando viviendas por el momento.

En otras partes del país, los bomberos trataban de frenar un incendio forestal en el sur de Nuevo México que había consumido 17.500 hectáreas de prados y maleza desde que comenzó en el Bosque Nacional Lincoln, dijo un vocero del Servicio Forestal federal.

Otros dos incendios iniciados por relámpagos han calcinado casi 12.000 hectáreas en Nuevo México, uno al oeste de Roswell y el otro al oeste de Ratón.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the NO DRIVE day will affect the state of Mexico. Holograms will be distributed to certain vehicles during NO Drive days to circulate in Mexico City.](#)

Afectará el No Circula automovilistas del estado

Se distribuirán hologramas para su circulación en el DF

Pedro I. Oseguera

El Sol de Cuernavaca, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

Cuernavaca, Morelos.- A partir del primero de julio el programa "Hoy no Circula", que se aplica en el Distrito Federal y la zona metropolitana, se hará extensivo los sábados para todos los

automóviles que ostenten placas de la República Mexicana y el extranjero. De acuerdo a lo manifestado por el titular de la Comisión Estatal del Agua y Medio Ambiente, Jorge Hinojosa

Martínez, será hasta el primer día de septiembre cuando los vehículos con placas de Morelos puedan obtener durante su verificación el holograma que les permita circular todos los días en la capital de la República Mexicana, fecha en la que se estará empezando a sancionar el desacato de dicha norma.

En entrevista, dijo que a partir del primero de septiembre en los centros de verificación acreditados en el estado de Morelos, los automóviles que pasen el examen de no contaminar el medio ambiente podrán tener el holograma que les permita circular todos los días de la semana en el Distrito Federal y el área metropolitana, entre las 5 de la mañana y las 10 de la noche.

Dijo que antes del primer día del mes de septiembre, los automovilistas que así lo consideren pertinente podrán verificar sus automóviles en los centros de verificación de la capital de la República, sin embargo, y a pesar de que la medida del Hoy no Circula sabatino iniciará el próximo sábado 5 de julio, las unidades con placas con terminación 5 y 6, calcomanía amarilla, no podrán circular en la capital de la República y el área metropolitana si no cuentan con el holograma cero o doble cero.

Recalcó que será hasta el último día de agosto cuando los automovilistas que viven en el estado de Morelos puedan acudir al Distrito Federal a realizar su verificación, para de esa manera obtener su verificación vehicular.

Finalmente, el funcionario dijo que se calcula que alrededor de 20 vehículos son los que todos los días se trasladan del estado de Morelos al Distrito Federal y que, en caso de no tener su holograma con cero o doble cero, podrían dejar de circular los sábados en la capital de la República y el área metropolitana