

Still air hampers efforts to quell fire

While Oliver blaze spreads, crews make progress against five other fires in the Sierra.

By Charles McCarthy / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, June 26, 2008

Lack of winds to clear away ground smoke foiled a planned daylong air assault Wednesday on a lightning fire in southern Mariposa County -- but it also stalled the spread of flames toward nearby homes.

By midafternoon, the Oliver fire -- one of more than 800 sparked in California by last weekend's lightning storms -- had spread to 2,000 acres of forest and brush, Cal Fire reported.

Residents of 12 homes along Aurora and Standard Mill roads were under a mandatory evacuation order, and a warning was issued for homes along 10 blocks of Chowchilla Mountain Road.

But firefighters made progress battling five other lightning fires in the Sierra National Forest that had burned a reported total of 1,688 acres by Wednesday.

The 105-acre Westfall fire near Fish Camp was fully contained, and crews had the 480-acre Silver Knob fire north of Ahwahnee 60% surrounded, officials said.

Meanwhile, poor air quality persisted throughout the area. San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said Wednesday that they do not anticipate an improvement in air quality for at least several days.

More dry lightning was expected toward the end of the week, although forecasters did not expect as severe an electrical storm as the one last weekend, when nearly 8,000 lightning strikes sparked fires across Northern California.

Firefighters scrambled Wednesday to tame a wildfire in the Los Padres National Forest that already burned 16 homes and is moving closer to the scenic community of Big Sur, where it threatens another 500 residences.

The blaze, which was only 3% contained, has burned nearly 30 square miles near the coast about a mile south of Big Sur, officials said.

"Unfortunately, this fire is in an area that is going to be very difficult to stop, and expectations are there won't be any stopping this fire any time soon," said Mark Savage, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

Gov. Schwarzenegger visited Monterey County on Wednesday to assess the damage and said he has called in the National Guard to help fight the fires.

"The fact is that when you have that many fires -- and there are still 700 fires left all over the state of California -- you get stretched thin with the resources," Schwarzenegger said.

The state's largest fire, about 20 miles east of the Big Sur fire in a more remote area of the Los Padres forest, also continued to vex firefighters Wednesday, having scorched more than 92 square miles and destroyed two homes. That blaze, sparked by an escaped campfire on June 8, was about 71% contained.

The governor also stopped Wednesday in Butte County, where 27 lightning-sparked fires covering about 8 square miles were threatening 1,000 homes. The blazes, which were only 5% contained, cropped up just as the county was recovering from a fire that charred 74 homes and 36 square miles earlier this month.

Fire crews from Nevada and Oregon have arrived to help California firefighters battle hundreds of blazes that are darkening skies over the San Francisco Bay Area and Central Valley, causing public health officials to issue air-quality warnings.

Today's San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District air-quality index for Fresno County is an unhealthy 174. For Madera County, it's 161, air district forecaster Gary Arcemont said.

The smoke is expected to linger until winds shift on Friday to a more southerly flow. That could help clear the smoke, but it will also return the threat of mostly dry afternoon thunderstorms over the central Sierra, the National Weather Service reported.

There will be a 20% to 30% chance of thunderstorms in the Yosemite National Park area by Saturday afternoon, meteorologist Jim Bagnall said.

The Merced-Mariposa Counties chapter of the American Red Cross opened an evacuation center in the Woodland School at Highway 49 and Woodland Drive.

If an evacuation order is issued for the entire Ponderosa Basin, the American Red Cross planned to open a disaster-response center at Mariposa High School.

Caltrans in midafternoon restricted Chowchilla Mountain Road access from Highway 49 to residents of the Ponderosa Basin area. Heavy smoke and the amount of fire equipment on the road made it difficult to travel, Caltrans warned.

Some 20 smokejumpers took off from the Air Attack base at Fresno Yosemite International Airport and parachuted into Star Lakes fire south of Yosemite National Park. They were busy Wednesday scratching a fire line with hand tools around flames that by Wednesday had consumed 30 acres in the remote and inaccessible area, the U.S. Forest Service reported.

With less than the mandatory three-mile visibility in the mountain terrain, 10 planes assigned to attack the Oliver fire in Mariposa County from the Fresno air tanker base were reassigned Wednesday morning to other fires. Crews expected to return to Fresno when and if the smoke clears in the Ponderosa Basin, pilots Todd Tompkins and Paul Farrel said.

Since the weekend thunderstorms, the Fresno base has pumped at least 120,000 gallons of retardant into tanker planes from far away as Arkansas and Oklahoma, air base manager John Harpain estimated. The

Fresno base is run jointly by U.S. Forest Service and Cal Fire personnel.

"The fire doesn't know fences," Harpain said.

Mucky air could linger through Fourth

By Joe Boesen, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 26, 2008

The air outside is foul and isn't expected to get better anytime soon.

High ozone levels typical of summer, combined with particulate matter from several wildfires, have produced a "double whammy" of poor air quality, said Brenda Turner, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

There is a fear air quality will remain poor until July 4, when blasted fireworks provide even higher levels of particulate matter.

Exposure to particulate matter can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks or acute bronchitis and increase risk to respiratory infections, according to the air district.

The smoke is from several fires, including the Oliver Fire in Mariposa County, the Clover Fire near Sequoia National Park and the Indians Fire at Los Padres National Forest.

The fires - to the east, north and west along the coast - are causing a "hodge podge" situation, where there is no singular source of particulates, said Shawn Ferreria, air quality specialist with the district. All but the Indian Fire started this weekend.

"I could not give you an end time at this point," Ferreria said of the poor air quality. "Until those fires are extinguished, this could continue."

The Indians fire, burning 10 miles west of King City and south of Monterey, started June 8 by a runaway cooking fire, said Reynaldo Rivera, spokesman for the Los Padres National Forest. That fire stretched about 58,000 acres and was 75 percent contained as of about 4 p.m. Wednesday, Rivera said.

The Oliver Fire was 20 percent contained and the Clover Fire was 10 percent contained as of 8 a.m. Wednesday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Wind patterns are expected to change this weekend, blowing smoke from the Yosemite area away from Kern County, according to Gary Sanger, meteorologist with the National Weather Service. But we may then get hit with smoke from the fires around Los Padres, he said.

"In the long term, it would take getting the fires extinguished" for air quality to improve, he said.

If the fires haven't been extinguished by July 4, air quality could shoot down as fireworks are shot up.

"The Fourth of July is the biggest particulate event of the summer," Turner said. "You will see it goes along at pretty normal then at 8 p.m., it shoots up and stays really high until 1 a.m."

It could push bad air readings to levels we haven't seen in the last couple years, she said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asked Californians Wednesday to refrain from shooting off personal fireworks on the Fourth of July to prevent forest fires.

TO CHECK ON THE AIR:

Air-quality forecasts are available by county at 4:30 p.m. each day at valleyair.org or by calling 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463).

ADVICE FROM THE AIR DISTRICT:

- Residents should avoid areas where they can see particulates or smell smoke.
- Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.
- Limit emissions by carpooling, taking public transportation, postponing unnecessary car trips and using gas grills instead of charcoal.

LOCAL FIREFIGHTERS DEPLOYED

The Kern County Fire Department has 85 personnel of varying ranks at several fires throughout Northern California, officials said Wednesday evening.

Their work includes firefighting, protecting structures, logistics, communications, emergency medical technicians, food services and air operations.

To ensure fire protection here, the department won't send out any more personnel now, they said.

This is a breakdown of how many personnel are at each fire at 1 p.m. Wednesday:

Indians Fire: 19

Oliver Fire: 18

Clover Fire: 14

Canyon Complex: 12

Madera Staging: 8

Lime Complex: 7
Shu Lightening Complex: 4
California Multi-Agency Coordination System Operations Center: 1
Basin Complex: 1
Yuba River Complex: 1

Air officials see no relief from smoke choking San Joaquin Valley

By Ken Carlson

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, June 26, 2008

Despite the smoky air, the headaches and teary eyes, Modesto area residents still went about their work and play this week.

Chris Mendes teaches young people to golf in The First Tee classes at Dryden Golf Course in Modesto, and he sympathized with parents who didn't bring their children to class.

"Two parents called and said the schools were not letting the kids out for recess on Tuesday because of the air," Mendes said before Wednesday's class. "It's better today."

At different times this week, area cities have been inundated with smoke from the wildfires in areas ringing the San Joaquin Valley. The question of when the air quality may improve depends on which agency is doing the forecasting.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Wednesday it expects no change in the poor air quality for several days and cautioned that the pollution could worsen in some areas, depending on migrating smoke and wind direction.

The National Weather Service said relief could come when a low pressure area forms off Southern California and drifts up the coast, causing a shift in upper level flows, which could clear some smoke from the region starting Saturday.

But there is no guarantee. The weather service predicts another wave of thunderstorms over the Sierra this weekend and the threat of more lightning-caused fires.

"It is going to be a gradual improvement and it depends on how the fire crews are doing with the wildfires," said Eric Kurth, a weather service forecaster. The thunderstorms are a concern because they may not have enough moisture to put out any fires they create, he said.

A valley air district cautionary statement will remain in effect until conditions improve. Unhealthy air is forecast for today, posing a health risk to everyone. People are advised to limit their exposure in areas where they can see or smell smoke.

Sore eyes, raw throats

Several Modesto-area residents said they felt the effects of working in the smoky conditions.

"My eyes felt like they were going to fall out of my head," said Teri Biedrzycki, a hot dog vendor at Graceada Park. "They were as red as that taillight."

She and her 71-year-old mother, Emily McKinney, planned to quit early Wednesday afternoon to save their strength to serve customers during the MoBand concert in the park this evening.

"I was huffing, and my throat was raw last night," said McKinney, who had surgery recently to relieve blockages in her carotid arteries. "I just take it easy and don't get overexerted."

Jim Bell, a street sweeper operator for the city, told of headaches and burning eyes. Being inside the cab of the street sweeper didn't afford much protection. "The air conditioner just brings it right in," he said.

Stanislaus County didn't have as much smoke and particle pollution Wednesday, although the fires served to elevate ozone levels.

In Ripon, the four-day Tisha Venturini Soccer Camp got under way at Mistlin Sports Park. With the warm weather and the lingering smell of smoke, more emphasis was placed on skills training than heavy conditioning.

"We're breaking it up and taking frequent water breaks," camp coach Cathi Conner said.

In Turlock, work continued at the Rite Aid construction site at Crowell Road and Monte Vista Avenue. The air pollution and heat made working difficult.

"It sucks," said John Curtin, a construction worker from Jamestown. "It's not that bad right here (in Turlock). I live in Jamestown, and up there you gotta chew through that stuff. In Jamestown, I couldn't see that house over there."

Smoke keeps temps down

According to air district officials, the air quality is going to be pretty bad until the Fourth of July holiday. Officials are asking residents to plan on attending a community fireworks display instead of lighting their own fireworks and spewing more pollutants.

Smoke from the fires is laden with tiny particles that can penetrate deep in the lungs. In addition, the wildfires are emitting nitrogen oxides and other compounds that are precursors for forming ozone, or smog.

The smoke has one beneficial aspect -- its ability to screen sunlight is dampening the heat, the weather service said. Temperatures are expected to remain in the 90s through Saturday.

Modesto golf instructor John Griston remarked that the dirty air is reminiscent of another region of California.

"I think I'm in LA," he said Wednesday at Dryden Golf Course. "I moved from LA to get away from this stuff."

Bee staff photographer Ted Benson and videographer Brian Ramsay contributed to this report.

Haze may last till weekend Lodi's air forecast as 'unhealthy'

By News-Sentinel Staff

Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, June 26, 2008

The region's hazy, smoke-filled weather is expected to continue today and possibly through the weekend.

Throughout the Central Valley, people are choking on the smoke and sweltering as temperatures continue to rise.

Today's high is forecast to be 95 degrees and temperatures are predicted to stay in the mid to high 90s through the weekend, according to the private weather forecasting firm AccuWeather.

Winds are expected to shift from the west to the north, but with hundreds of fires throughout the state, local residents can expect smoky conditions to continue. AccuWeather reports smoke has spread over most of California and much of Nevada.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecast today's air as "unhealthy," according to its Web site www.valleyair.org.

People with respiratory sicknesses are urged to stay indoors. Exposure to the smoke can cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis.

Lodi recreation supervisor Mike Reese says the city is letting its youth league coaches determine whether or not their respective teams will hold practice. However, any decision to postpone a game would have to come from the parks and recreation department, Reese said.

"We had one swim coach who decided not to have practice because of air quality," said Reese, who oversees the summer swim league. "We got a call in regards to swim lessons, but we only have the children for half an hour. The exposure is negligible."

Reese says the city wouldn't pull the plug on practices unless a smog alert warranted it. For example, he said schools sometimes receive advisories suggesting canceling outdoor recesses.

"I'm not aware of any such recommendations from air quality today," said Reese, who added a coach must respect a parent's decision to withhold a child from practice due to air quality concerns.

"Missing practice this late in the season isn't going to be a terrible thing," Reese said. "There's a higher rate of asthma among kids today, and they need to be wary on days like this."

Air district officials foresee no change to the poor air for at least several days. Some areas may actually get worse.

"We are continuing our health caution and urging people to take their local air-quality conditions seriously when determining their outdoor activities, said the district's spokesman Jaime Holt in a statement released Wednesday.

District staff also urge everyone to curtail any activities that may cause additional air pollution.

Much of the smoke in Lodi came from the Wild Fire in Napa and Solono counties that burnt 4,089 acres but is now fully contained.

While that fire has been contained, there are hundreds more throughout the state, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Unhealthy air expected through week

Officials advise limited outdoor exposure

By Sabra Stafford, staff reporter

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

Smoke generated from a slew of fires across the state has settled over the Central Valley, creating a hazy sky and prompting an air quality alert.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced on Tuesday that Stanislaus County was experiencing unhealthy air conditions, especially for those people who have heart and respiratory problems.

"The air quality is moving to the unhealthy range for the general public," said Anthony Presto, the public information representative for the air district. "No one should be out exerting themselves during these conditions.

"As a general rule, if you can smell smoke, you're damaging your lungs," he said.

The smoke is coming from the more than 800 wildfires burning across Northern and Central California. Delta breezes have pushed smoke into the Valley from the fires burning in Napa and Solano counties and a 600-acre blaze in the Stanislaus National Forest.

"Winds are transporting smoke from fires throughout California into all eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley air basin," said Shawn Ferreria, senior air quality specialist with the air district.

The air district is predicting the smoky conditions to remain throughout the week.

"There are just so many fires that they can't all be tended to," Presto said.

The Air Quality Index measures the air quality on a scale of 0 to 500. The lower the number, the better the air. Stanislaus County had an average AQI on Tuesday of 158 for particulate matter, referring to smoke particles. AQI values over 100 are considered unhealthy for sensitive groups and the general public as the number rises.

Sensitive groups include anyone with heart or lung problems, people with asthma and older adults and children. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, exposure to particulate pollution can cause serious health problems, like aggravating lung disease, causing asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase the risk of respiratory infections. Short-term exposure to particle pollution has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmias in people with heart disease.

The Turlock Unified School District sends out daily notices to the schools to inform them of the air quality and has been recommending limited outdoor exposure for the students over the past few days, according to Janet Pohl-DeMello, district spokesperson.

Poor air quality forces Western States cancellation

By John Schumacher

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, June 26, 2008

Wildfires and poor air quality led to the cancellation of the Western States Endurance Run for the first time in the race's 35-year history.

The 100.2-mile race from Squaw Valley to Auburn was scheduled to begin at 5 a.m. Saturday. But after discussions with the U.S. Forest Service and Placer County air quality personnel, race officials decided Wednesday evening not to hold the event.

"The air quality is a thousand percent above what is considered unsafe for outdoor activity," said race director Greg Soderlund. "It's just flat out not safe to put this event on."

Race called off because of air quality

At least one fire is burning near the path of the Western States Endurance Run.

By John Schumacher

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, June 26, 2008

Simon Mtuy came from Tanzania to compete in this weekend's Western States Endurance Run, an event he has finished six years in a row. This race was going to be special, with his wife and 5-month-old son on hand to watch him on the 100.2-mile journey from Squaw Valley to Auburn.

But when Mtuy, 36, climbed the first four miles of the course to Emigrant Pass on Wednesday afternoon, he didn't like what he saw: smoke.

"It looked like a big fog is coming up the other side of the mountain," Mtuy said. "It seemed a little hard for breathing."

With fires keeping air quality at unhealthy levels and at least one blaze burning near the Western States Trail, race officials decided to cancel the run for the first time since the event began in 1974. Race director Greg Soderlund said he and other race officials consulted U.S. Forest Service and Placer County air quality personnel before reaching a decision.

"The air quality is a thousand percent above what is considered unsafe for outdoor activity," Soderlund said. "It's just flat-out not safe to put this event on."

"We've got a fire that is within two miles of the trail (near Dusty Corners). Then if we get more lightning strikes on Thursday, which they're anticipating ... if we started this race, things could get really ugly and out of control."

Tim Twietmeyer, the president of the Western States Endurance Run Foundation and a five-time winner, said there was no sign of conditions improving. So instead of toeing the starting line at 5 a.m. Saturday, Mtuy and close to 400 other runners - 39 entrants are from other countries, including 12 Canadians, six Italians and four Australians - must find something else to do.

After his Wednesday climb, Mtuy wasn't surprised.

"I just came down and said, 'It doesn't seem like it's going to happen,' " said Mtuy, who arrived in the United States last month and plans to go home Tuesday. "The situation is continuing to get worse.

"It's frustrating ... I was hoping this would be a good year to take the achievement back to Tanzania. I was excited for him (his son) to see me running through the mountains."

But Mtuy, like several other runners contacted, said safety was the priority for a race that includes close to 1,500 volunteers and several hundred crew members.

"It makes sense," said Folsom's Erik Skaden, the runner-up the last two years. "It's disappointing because there was a lot of talk and hype around who was going to win the race."

El Dorado's Wayne Miles, a 62-year-old cancer survivor with two Western States finishes, said he wanted to run but agreed with the decision.

"That danger kind of appeals to me," he said. "That being said, I think safety is the most important thing for the competitors, for the volunteers, the crews and families of people."

Said Julie Fingar, a five-time Western States finisher who planned to pace a runner during the later stages of the race: "I'm just saddened all around. The whole safety issue is huge. Everybody who had planned to be out there is in jeopardy, or could be in jeopardy."

The cancellation will affect the handful of businesses along the course.

"The race has a huge impact on business," said Heather Benham, a manager at the Starlite Cafe in Foresthill. "One of our busiest days was the practice run (on Memorial Day weekend)."

Smoke from fires continues to fill Bay Area skies

AP State

In the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 26, 2008

Bay Area residents can expect another day of smoke-filled and hazy skies.

Officials with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District say the air quality in some areas will range between unhealthy to what's termed "unhealthy for sensitive groups."

Unhealthy air is predicted throughout the East Bay today, including Concord, Livermore, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek.

Unhealthy air for sensitive people - those with lung disease, as well as children and older adults - is predicted for a wide range of the North Bay - from San Rafael to Santa Rosa.

The National Weather Service is predicting that smoke and haze will cover an area from the North Bay south to Monterey County through at least Friday.

Smoke from Lake County fire a danger to some

By Steve Rubenstein, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, June 26, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO -- The smoke is getting smokier in the Bay Area from the hundreds of blazes, big and small, that have swept through dangerously dry Northern and Central California.

The air in parts of the North Bay and East Bay will officially be unhealthy and "unhealthy for sensitive groups" today, according to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. On Wednesday, air pollution was only moderate.

"We've gone up a step," said district spokeswoman Kristine Roselius. "It's terrible. There are just so many fires out there, and the smoke is coming down and impacting the Bay Area."

Seniors and children should stay inside with the windows closed if possible, a tough thing to do on a sunny summer day.

The primary source of the smoke locally remains the out-of-control Walker Fire in Lake County, which has burned 14,000 acres and is only 5 percent contained. Fire officials expect the amount of blackened acreage to grow substantially as firefighters conduct deliberate burns to curtail the fire's spread.

About 240 firefighters were catching a slight break Wednesday from improved weather, said division chief Wayne Connor of the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"We're doing a little bit better," he said. "Humidity is up and winds are down. We're able to get more of a handle on things. We're digging a lot of fire line."

The fire, which began Sunday, had threatened the Spring Valley subdivision northeast of Clearlake, but the area is now considered safe, Connor said. Bartlett Springs, Walker Ridge and Elk Mountain roads remain closed.

Health officials in Lake County said air pollution was two to three times the amount considered safe by federal standards.

"All of Northern California is being impacted by severely degraded air quality," said Lake County health officer Karen Tait. "Residents should be prepared to stay indoors and avoid vigorous physical activity."

In the Sierra, smoke from the fires was threatening to cancel the world-famous Western States Endurance Run, a 100-mile foot race from Squaw Valley to Auburn that is scheduled to begin Saturday. Organizers were expected to decide by today whether conditions would allow them to go ahead as planned.

In the Bay Area, unhealthy air is predicted throughout the Eastern District today, including Concord, Livermore, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek, the air quality district said. Unhealthy air for sensitive people - those with lung disease, for example, as well as children and older adults - is predicted for the North Counties, including Calistoga, Napa, Novato, Petaluma, San Anselmo, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, Sonoma and Vallejo.

In Monterey County, where the Indians Fire has burned nearly 60,000 acres west of King City since a campfire got out of control June 8, evacuations were ordered Wednesday for residents of thinly populated Arroyo Seco Road, from Carmel Valley Road to the Arroyo Seco campgrounds.

In that blaze, two homes and 13 outbuildings have been destroyed, 14 firefighters have been injured and more than 500 buildings are threatened. Nearly 2,000 firefighters, aided by a slight increase in humidity, were concentrating on the fire's northeast flank Wednesday.

Crews from Nevada and Oregon have arrived to help fight the hundreds of fires that have broken out in the northern half of the state, most of which were caused by lightning strikes over the weekend.

Major blazes include the 7,500-acre Lime Complex fire in Trinity County, the 2,000-acre Yuba River Complex fire in Placer County, the 12,000-acre Shu Lightning Complex fire in Shasta County and the 20,000-acre Mendocino Lightning Complex fire in Mendocino County.

"It's just extremely, extremely dry," said spokesman Daniel Berlant of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The lightning strikes Saturday were from an unusual summertime weather system that wandered into the central and northern part of the state. Another round of lightning could arrive Friday, said National Weather Service meteorologist Warren Blier, but it is not expected to be anywhere near as intense as last weekend's.

Winds are expected to shift from the northwest to the south in coming days, Blier said. That means the Bay Area may no longer be breathing the smoke from the big Lake County fire, but may instead be breathing the smoke from the big Monterey County fire.

"It could still be smoky," Blier said. "Just different smoke."

West Park gears up for environmental review

Written by Jonathan Partridge

Patterson Irrigator, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

The county is moving ahead with the environmental review process for West Park after nearly 1½ years of exclusive negotiations between the county and the would-be developer of an industrial park in Crows Landing.

Stanislaus County officials have charged EDAW - a consultant West Park has hired in the past to provide information about aspects of the industrial park - with creating an environmental impact report for the project.

The public review period opened June 18 and will last until Aug. 4, allowing people to state their opinions on what topics the report should cover.

County leaders will host a scoping meeting Tuesday at Bonita School in Crows Landing. The meeting will give people an opportunity to provide formal comments about what should be analyzed in the forthcoming environmental review.

"We're in listening mode, and we want to remain true to a very transparent process," said Keith Boggs, Stanislaus County's deputy executive officer for economic development.

PCCP West Park LLC hopes to build a 4,800-square-foot industrial park on and around a former naval airfield in Crows Landing, which is now mostly owned by the county. The project would include an intermodal hub, where goods would be shipped to and from the Port of Oakland by rail.

County supervisors voted 4-1 on April 22 to move ahead with negotiations with developer Gerry Kamilos.

Proponents say the project would provide 37,000 jobs at build-out and would reduce regional air pollution and traffic by using trains rather than trucks.

The plan has come under fire from the Patterson and Newman city councils and several other local governing agencies because of its size, possible harm to local traffic and air quality and the impact of rail on the city of Patterson.

The environmental review will set out standards and measures to protect agricultural, biological, cultural and visual resources for the project, which is expected to be finished within 30 years. Those standards would become part of a project specific plan. Project analysis would include the specific plan, rezoning, a subdivision map, the development agreement, and an airport land-use compatibility plan amendment.

Debra Lilly, an environmental project manager with EDAW's Sacramento office, said the firm will handle most of the analysis required for the report with its own staff. The traffic analysis will be conducted by engineering firm TJKM.

In the past, representatives from both companies have answered questions about West Park at public workshops and other meetings. EDAW representatives, for instance, have manned booths that detail West Park's water storage possibilities and impacts on regional air quality. Still, Lilly indicated the firm would take an objective look at the project.

"It hasn't really been a promotional activity, but it's been a scientific analysis," she said of EDAW's past work with West Park.

Boggs noted that the environmental review process must adhere to the California Environmental Quality Act, which he said has strict requirements. County staff will work to ensure the environmental review meets those requirements, he said.

"The county will scrutinize every chapter (of the document)," he said.

West Park will foot the bill for the cost of the entire environmental review process.

Kamilos said the cost is unknown, but he estimated it would be "in the millions of dollars."

"This is not an inexpensive process to go through," he said.

Boggs said a draft report may be finished in 12 to 14 months. A public comment period will follow before EDAW resumes work on the final environmental impact report.

"I think everyone is committed to not cut corners and to take this process extremely seriously," Kamilos said.

Meanwhile, the airbase will have to be established as a redevelopment area, possibly as soon as this fall, and a development agreement must be finalized between the county and the developer.

If all goes as planned, Kamilos said, construction on infrastructure and some buildings may start as soon as spring 2010.

At a glance

- ☐ WHAT: Scoping meeting for West Park Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report
- ☐ WHEN: 6 to 9 p.m. Tuesday
- ☐ WHERE: Bonita School, 425 Fink Road, in Crows Landing
- ☐ DETAILS: Comments about West Park's forthcoming Environmental Impact Report are due by 5 p.m. Aug. 4 to Keith Boggs, deputy executive officer of economic development, boggsk@stancounty.com <<mailto:boggsk@stancounty.com>>,  or 1010 10th St., Ste. 6800, sixth floor, Modesto 95354.
- ☐ INFO: www.crowsbizpark.biz

Under the scope

An environmental impact report is a specific look at a project - in this case, PCCP West Park. It covers these subjects, among others:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture
- Local and regional air quality
- Biological and cultural resources
- Soil and water
- Noise
- Potential health hazards
- Traffic
- Connections with growth
- Reasonable alternatives to the project

West Park's 1,886-acre first phase includes the 1,527-acre airfield itself, 262 acres of distribution and industrial land west of the airfield and a 20-acre water treatment facility west of the Delta-Mendota Canal. The remaining acreage would be dedicated to work on a new Interstate 5 interchange at Fink Road.

Residents discuss county blueprint plan

Written by Jonathan Partridge

Patterson Irrigator, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

Education and the environment were the top priorities among attendees at the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint workshop at Patterson City Hall on Monday.

Twenty-seven people showed up to share their views on what the San Joaquin Valley should look like in 2050, even as some of them expressed cynicism about the blueprint process itself.

"I'm concerned that communities are going to be swallowed up by a big government master plan," said Patterson resident and land-use planner Ron West.

The blueprint, a joint document created by the state, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and regional planning agencies, will outline regional goals for the entire valley from San Joaquin County to Kern County.

Stanislaus Council of Governments plans to use information from a series of meetings to create an advisory document of its own based on residents' desires, for city councils and boards of supervisors.

Attendees at Monday's meeting used blue stickers to vote for their top values for future planning before giving their input on various growth scenarios for the valley.

Most attendees opted for "moderate change" in future land-use planning - a scenario in which 50,100 acres in Stanislaus County would be used for residential purposes and in which 27 percent of homes would be multifamily dwellings, such as apartments or condominiums. A full 794,000 acres would be available for agriculture under this scenario.

By contrast, if the county kept with historical growth trends, 65,300 acres would be developed for housing and only 9 percent of homes would be multifamily dwellings in 2050.

Sixteen of 27 attendees included education and the environment among their top priorities, while the economy received 15 votes and land use received 14 votes.

In regards to land use, a few people voiced criticism of county and StanCOG leaders for their endorsement of a 4,800-acre industrial center proposed for the Crows Landing Air Facility and the surrounding area.

“We don’t want to be an inland port or a dumping ground for shipping containers,” local resident Sandy McDowell said.

Government was the lowest priority on everyone’s list, receiving only six votes. West said government “can be our biggest helper or our worst nightmare.”

Other values considered were community and transportation, which received 12 votes apiece, and public safety, which got nine votes.

Local resident Claude Delphia said he thought health care also should have been among the listed values, pointing out a need for more health care access on the West Side.

Delphia also said he thought not enough information was given on the different growth scenarios to form a significant opinion.

Other attendees had questions about the process in general. Patterson City Councilwoman Dejeune Shelton asked whether the blueprint would have certain mandates for cities, while councilmen Sam Cuellar and Dominic Farinha expressed fears that the blueprint would become more than an advisory document.

“This process is being done for a reason,” Cuellar said. “It’s not only being done to find out what we think.”

Kristen Pickus, director of planning services for consultant MIG, Inc., which is coordinating the workshops, said the blueprint has no teeth thus far.

MIG representative Anthony Zepeda said a much-discussed state Senate bill regarding the blueprint would only offer incentives for participating cities, such as putting them in a more competitive position for transportation funding.

Some people wondered if the desires of larger cities in Stanislaus County would trump those of West Side residents.

“This is just a formality,” farmer and developer Kenny Buehner said. “The county will react in the same way as to Crows Landing.”

When Pickus pointed out that Stanislaus Council of Governments works with city and county representatives alike, Delphia noted that the StanCOG policy board also supported developer PCCP West Park’s proposal for the Crows Landing airbase. Last year, the board voted to seek state bond money for the project.

Despite skepticism from some attendees, Patterson has had the best turnout of any blueprint meeting thus far with its 27 attendees. Only 21 people went to a blueprint meeting in Turlock last week, and 25 people showed up to a workshop at the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center in Modesto.

Local resident Ramona Casado, who also attended last year’s Patterson blueprint workshop, said she thought both were fun.

Pickus said after the meeting that discussions about the Crows Landing Air Facility and frustrations with county leaders were unique to the Patterson meeting. However, she said the emphasis that attendees place on a sense of community has been the same at every meeting.

StanCOG will host 13 workshops over two months. Results from the workshops will be incorporated into a county plan, which will be melded into the regional eight-county San Joaquin Valley plan.

The entire process could be complete as soon as March 2009, following a valley-wide summit in Fresno sometime after Jan. 1.

At a glance

WHAT: San Joaquin Valley Blueprint workshops

Local Spanish workshop: 7 to 9 p.m. today, Patterson City Council chambers, 1 Plaza

Other workshops (all from 7 to 9 p.m. unless indicated.): Thursday, The Alliance Free Enterprise Center, 1020 10th St., in Modesto; Monday, Riverbank Community Center, 3600 Santa Fe St., in Riverbank; Tuesday, Hughson City Council chambers, 7018 Pine St., in Hughson, 6 to 8 p.m.; July 10, Louis J. Newman Memorial Building, 649 Orestimba Road, in Newman; July 12, Doubletree Hotel, Maxi's Room, 1150 Ninth St., in Modesto, 10 a.m. to noon; July 15, Gene Bianchi Community Center, 110 S. Second Ave., in Oakdale; July 16, Ceres City Council chambers, 2210 Magnolia St., in Ceres.

INFO: 525-4600 or www.stancog.org

Air board to vet plans for war on warming

By Matthew Yi, Sacramento bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, June 26, 2008

Sacramento -- The California Air Resources Board today will consider a draft plan for how the state will fight global warming, an ambitious proposal to require cleaner cars, more energy-efficient appliances, less-polluting fuels and more reliance on wind and solar energy.

The agency's preliminary recommendations also include working with other Western states and Canadian provinces to develop a market-based system under which heavy polluters such as electric utility companies and oil refineries trade carbon credits, according to a summary of the draft plan that the air board released Wednesday.

A major step toward meeting California's goal of slashing emissions by 30 percent by 2020 under landmark legislation signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the plan also recommends imposing a fee on large polluters in order to raise \$50 million each year to help administer various new regulations and programs.

"We think the plan is of tremendous importance, not only for California but all areas that struggle with the threat of climate change," air board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said Wednesday as she talked with reporters about the plan.

The air board will discuss the plan at a hearing today and will solicit public and industry comment before putting together a completed blueprint by end of the year. The air board must adopt a plan by Jan. 1.

As expected, the outline known as the scoping plan will touch wide-ranging areas of Californians' lives as well as utilities, manufacturing firms and other companies that do business in the state. The transportation sector, which accounts for nearly 40 percent of the state's carbon dioxide emissions, will have to lead efforts to cut air pollution.

Requirements that automakers manufacture more fuel-sipping hybrids or vehicles that use fuels other than gasoline will make up nearly 20 percent of the carbon reductions, according to an air board document.

Other key areas of carbon reduction include energy efficiency in the home (appliances and housing construction); requirements that utility companies provide one-third of their power from sustainable sources such as wind and solar; and mandates that oil companies and refineries produce fuels that emit less carbon dioxide.

The plan also calls for the state to develop a cap-and-trade system that would allow high-polluting companies to buy carbon credits from low-polluting firms. Such a system would be developed in conjunction with nine other Western states and Canadian provinces that participate in the Western Climate Initiative, a coalition formed in February 2007 to address global warming, Nichols said.

At least one industry representative warned Wednesday that while fighting climate change is a worthy goal, a misguided implementation could cause irreparable harm to California's already ailing economy.

"One of the biggest questions is how much is this program going to cost and can we sustain it?" said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, a lobbyist for the Western States Petroleum Association, which represents oil refineries in California.

The draft plan includes items that are worth pursuing, Reheis-Boyd said, such as cap and trade, but mandates such as the low-carbon fuel standard could prove to be problematic for her industry.

Nichols admitted that forecasting the economic cost of fighting global warming is difficult, adding that the 11-member air board's report on that subject won't be completed until later this summer. But she said she is confident that the effort ultimately could help the state's economy grow by attracting additional investment in startups that produce low-emission technologies and products.

California already has benefited on that front, grabbing about \$1 billion, or 40 percent, of all venture capital investments in clean technology in 2006 alone, according to the summary of the air board report.

Nichols estimated that by 2020, California's gross domestic product may grow by an additional 1 percent as a result of implementing the law.

Nichols said she "can confidently say that ... this is a plan that works to the benefit of the California economy."

Bill Magavern, a Sierra Club lobbyist, said he was encouraged after the air board's staff briefed him on the plan.

"I think this plan is balanced and comprehensive and starts us down the road to a clean energy economy that we need to develop in California," he said.

State's plan for curbing emissions

Key elements of the California Air Resources Board's plan to cut greenhouse gases in the state by 30 percent by 2020:

- Require energy-efficient appliances and new building standards to save energy.
- Require all electric utility companies to provide one-third of their power from renewable sources such as wind, solar and geothermal.
- Require oil refineries to produce fuels that emit less carbon dioxide.
- Require automakers to produce aerodynamic and hybrid trucks.
- Encourage residents and businesses to install solar panels.
- Develop a market-based system that allows high polluters to buy carbon credits from low polluters.

Source: California Air Resources Board

Calif. air regulators start tackling climate law

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, USA Today and other papers, Thursday, June 26, 2008

SACRAMENTO, (AP) -- Californians will have to drive cleaner cars, use less electricity and live closer to work to achieve the reductions in greenhouse gases mandated under the state's landmark global warming law.

Those are among the measures called for in a draft proposal to be released Thursday by state air regulators who are charged with setting climate rules to implement the law signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger two years ago.

"We are asking all Californians to join with us in this effort to reduce the pollution that causes global warming," state Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols told reporters in a conference call.

The proposals contained in the 75-page draft plan reveal for the first time the methods regulators are considering as they decide how the state will meet the law's requirements.

Most of the ideas have been floated for months, but making them work is expected to be difficult. In many cases, the proposals are general and still undergoing cost analyses.

Any new regulation must go through a complex rulemaking process and could be delayed by legal challenges. The state already is fighting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in court over a 2004 regulation related to vehicle tailpipe emissions.

Republicans in the state Legislature are threatening to hold up the state budget this summer unless the global warming law is delayed.

Members of the California Air Resources Board acknowledge the difficulties but say California must do its part to combat global warming.

Warming temperatures are projected to reduce the Sierra Nevada snowpack — a major source of the state's water supply — and threaten the habitats of native plants and animals.

Rising sea levels could erode the state's coastline and top the maze of levees throughout the Central Valley.

To reach California's global warming target, regulators say oil and gas refineries must produce less-polluting fuels, utilities must generate a third of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020 and auto manufacturers must build cleaner-burning cars.

Local governments will be asked to build residential developments near public transportation, shops and businesses in an effort to reduce the number of miles Californians drive.

Homeowners will be encouraged to put solar panels on their roofs and install solar water heaters, potentially resulting in an average savings of \$200 a year in gas and electric bills.

Such policies are estimated to cut 133.8 million metric tons of greenhouse gases, 80 percent of the amount needed to get to the 1990 levels by 2020, according to the draft plan.

The remaining 20 percent could be met by the state's major emitters — utilities, the oil and gas industry, manufactures — as part of a cap-and-trade program, Nichols said.

Under such a program, businesses that cannot cut their emissions because of cost or technical hurdles would be allowed to buy emission credits from companies that have achieved cleaner emissions.

Schwarzenegger and some federal officials embrace such a carbon market.

"We believe it's the most secure and enforceable way to get the reductions that are called for under the statute," Nichols said.

Environmentalists and the Democrats who wrote California's global warming law are skeptical. They say monitoring such a market is exceptionally difficult and that more needs to be done to greatly reduce the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases produced by industry.

Exactly how industries will be asked to buy and sell credits remains one of the most complex and unanswered aspects of the plan. Nichols said regulators want to design a system that would link California to the Western Climate Initiative — a consortium of six other states and three Canadian provinces designing a regional trading program.

While regulators favor the cap-and-trade approach, the Air Resources Board is studying whether it should instead levy a so-called carbon fee on harmful emissions. That alternative could provide the best incentive for change, Nichols said.

Regulators also are weighing a smaller, separate carbon fee on California's largest emitters. That could raise the \$50 million a year needed to administer the global warming program.

What it will cost industry and Californians to reduce emissions remains unclear.

Economic models project the global warming plan would boost the state's economy 1 percent higher than if it did nothing to wean itself off carbon by 2020, Nichols said. The board plans to detail costs later this summer before it adopts the final global warming plan at the end of the year.

Business leaders say the board is moving too quickly, citing the lack of detail on cost and other key aspects of implementing the law.

"We don't really know whether what's being proposed in this roadmap are cost-effective or not," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer at the Western States Petroleum Association. "You certainly do not want to have policies that end up reducing consumers' ability to drive from A to B, heat and cool their home or turn their lights on."

The plan also envisions achieving greenhouse gas reductions through programs that encourage sustainable forestry and capture methane gas at landfills. Drivers could get money to trade in polluting cars for more fuel-efficient ones.

"Cap-and-trade isn't a silver bullet. It's one possible tool in the tool kit," said Chris Busch, an economist at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "I think the larger message is (that) a whole package of policies is needed to do the job."

California air board announces plan for carbon-credit trading

The agency's proposal would slash greenhouse emissions to 1990 levels. But it has a long way to go.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, June 26, 2008

California air regulators today announced a bold plan to slash greenhouse gas emissions that would alter the way utilities generate electricity, automakers build cars and developers construct buildings, and launch the nation's broadest market in carbon-credit trading.

California's blueprint is the first comprehensive effort to combat global warming by any American state, and comes nearly three weeks after the U.S. Senate threw out a national greenhouse gas bill that would have set similar targets.

Virtually every sector of the state's economy would be affected by the air board's plan, including coal-fired power plants and oil refineries, landfills where rotting garbage emits methane gas and forests, which would be cultivated to reduce fires.

But the California Air Resources Board draft road map for implementing the state's landmark 2006 global warming law faces daunting obstacles, among them resistance from the Bush administration, legislative snarls and some industry opposition.

The federal government has blocked California's 2002 law to cut carbon dioxide fumes from automobile tailpipes, opting for a less strict mileage standard. The controversial attempt to get utilities to generate one-third of their energy from renewable sources died in the Legislature last year and is pending before the Assembly, along with several green-building bills.

Meanwhile, the Western Climate Initiative, a group of seven states and three Canadian provinces, has yet to agree on the basics of a trading plan, much less cope with political skepticism.

In a media briefing, board Chairwoman Mary Nichols called the 99-page document "an ambitious goal that translates into a 30% cut in carbon emissions over business as usual," adding that it might "motivate other states and the nation."

The price tag for individual industries has yet to be calculated, and some companies fear it could be exorbitant. But Nichols said that overall, the benefits to the state's economy, including healthcare savings from fewer breathing ailments, would slightly outweigh the costs.

Given the projected fallout from global warming, which include increased wildfires, water shortages and illness from heat-induced pollution, "The potential costs of implementing the plan pale beside the cost of doing nothing," the document asserts.

Although most environmental and industry groups will not see copies of the plan until today's board meeting, many have been briefed and offered guarded approval.

Shelly Sullivan, executive director of the AB-32 Implementation Group, an alliance of the California Chamber of Commerce and the California Manufacturers and Technology Assn., praised the plan as "balanced and cost-effective."

"We're encouraged that this draft acknowledges the effectiveness of market systems like cap-and-trade to deliver greenhouse gas emission reductions at a lower cost for California consumers."

If California succeeds in reducing emissions from a projected 596 million metric tons in 2020 to 427 million metric tons, it will have ratcheted itself down to the amount it emitted in 1990, about 10% below today's level.

That would mean, on an average per capita basis, reducing the annual carbon footprint of every Californian from 14 tons to about 10 tons, according to the air board.

"This is the beginning of a process," Nichols acknowledged. "Now is when we begin to talk through how the program will go into effect."

Many public workshops and meetings with industries and civic groups, as well as more detailed economic modeling, remain before the board would adopt the plan, slated for November. It would

take another two years to develop regulations to lock the goals in place, officials say.

Beyond 2020, the board is committed to even more dramatic action: reducing emissions by 80% by mid-century, the level that most scientists say will be needed globally, if Earth is to avoid a dangerous level of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has endorsed the 80% goal in an executive order.

State Sen. Don Perata (D-Oakland) noted that bills to implement the plan's efficiency and renewable-energy goals are pending, but he added, "I am concerned that the plan relies on a 'cap-and-trade' scheme that raises more questions than it answers."

Under such a system, similar to one the European Union has adopted, governments set a limit on overall emissions but allow some industries, such as coal-dependent utilities, to purchase pollution credits. The credits can be traded on the market. Heavy polluters could offset their emissions by paying to clean up other industries where costs are less prohibitive, or invest in other projects that decrease carbon.

What proportion of pollution permits or allowances would be given out free and what proportion would be auctioned has yet to be worked out. That decision is likely to spark debate among industries and environmental groups.

Offsets could involve projects outside of California but within the regional Western market. They would be subject to scrutiny to certify the reductions as authentic. International offsets might be permitted for Mexican border projects or for imported cement, a benefit for state cement firms that say it would be too expensive to cut carbon.

Nichols said the partners in a Western carbon-trading alliance are "committed to this process" but said that if a stalemate persists after two years, "We have time to reassess and either go forward on our own or look at other options."

David Nahai, chief executive of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, who had expressed strong reservations about the air board's direction before the plan was issued, said in an e-mail message that "the plan goes a long way toward addressing the concerns we have voiced over using a cap-and-trade auction as the primary device to lower greenhouse gas emissions."

The DWP relies on coal to generate almost half of its electricity, potentially putting it in a position of paying huge sums to offset the pollution, money the utility says it would rather spend on switching to cleaner sources. The plan, however, would support the DWP's efforts to switch to renewable fuels "as opposed to thwarting our efforts, as prior proposals would have done," Nahai said.

Patricia Monahan, director of the California office of the Union of Concerned Scientists, noted that the plan, "while still a proposal, represents the furthest step forward any state has taken in the fight against global warming."

But Chris Busch, a Union economist, added that the Western Climate Initiative needs to be strengthened: "Until the details are filled in, the jury remains out."

From an economic viewpoint, the air board sought to head off the sort of industry attack that has stymied national legislation, by highlighting what it said would be "a green tech business boom."

Moreover, it added, the plan could save taxpayers \$2 billion in medical and other costs by 2020, by reducing harmful air pollution that would otherwise cause 340 premature deaths and 9,400 cases of asthma, it estimated. Energy-efficient buildings would save money for their occupants,

and clean cars would cost less to drive, the board noted.

"Making our state more efficient will make our state grow," Nichols said. "We can protect our economy and our environment at the same time."

California Unveils Ambitious Climate Plan

By Reuters

In the N.Y. Times, Thursday, June 26, 2008

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - California on Thursday took a major step forward on its global warming fight by unveiling an ambitious plan for clean cars, renewable energy and stringent caps on big polluting industries.

The plan, which aims to reduce pollutants by 10 percent from current levels by 2020 while driving investment in new energy technologies that will benefit the state's economy, is the most comprehensive yet by any U.S. state.

It could serve as a blueprint not only for the rest of the United States, but also for other big polluting nations like China and India, planners and environmental groups said.

"This is of tremendous importance, not only for California," Mary Nichols, chairman of the influential California Air Resources Board (CARB), said on a conference call with reporters on Wednesday. "By taking action here ... we will be able to help motivate other states in our nation."

At a meeting in Sacramento on Thursday, CARB staff will present a series of proposals that would become law in 2012, with some measures going into effect two years earlier.

The initiatives include implementing a cap-and-trade program on carbon dioxide emissions that will require buildings and appliances to use less energy, oil companies to make cleaner fuels, and utilities to provide a third of their energy from renewable sources like wind and solar power.

The program will also encourage development of walkable cities with shorter commutes, high-speed rail as an alternative to air travel, and will require more hybrid and hydrogen-fueled vehicles both to move goods and people, CARB said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose landmark 2006 law aimed at reducing the state's greenhouse gas emissions prompted CARB's plan, supports the program, Nichols said.

"AMBITIOUS, FAR-REACHING"

CARB said the measures will benefit residents of the most populous U.S. state by reducing pollution-related illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis, and by stimulating investments in new energy technologies that will create jobs.

Nichols declined to speculate on what the program will cost for individual business sectors such as the utility industry, but said the initiatives overall should benefit the state's economy by about 1 percent starting in 2020.

"Since most of the measures in this plan are designed to make our state more energy-efficient, we believe we can predict with confidence that this is a plan that works to the benefit of the California economy," Nichols said.

CARB estimated that more efficient appliances and homes would save households, on average, about \$200 a year. Meanwhile cleaner cars, while more expensive to buy, are expected to save drivers about \$30 a month in fuel.

Environmental advocates, most of whom work closely with CARB, applauded the plan.

Erin Rogers, a California coordinator for environmental group the Union of Concerned Scientists, called the program "ambitious, visionary and far-reaching."

"Unless we can lead the way and show not only the nation but the world how this can be done, we face some very serious global warming impacts in California," Rogers added. California has long been a leader in the United States on matters of climate change, and CARB said its plan will reduce annual emissions per capita to 10 tons of carbon dioxide per person by 2020 from 14 tons per person currently.

That means the state's emissions will be about 30 percent below what they would have been without the plan, Nichols said.

(Reporting by Nichola Groom; Editing by Mary Milliken and Eric Walsh)

California Will Offer Plan to Cut Harmful Emissions

By Felicity Barringer

N.Y. Times, Thursday, June 26, 2008

California will introduce a detailed plan on Thursday to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels in 12 years by requiring more energy-efficient appliances and buildings, lowering vehicle emissions and generating 33 percent of its energy from renewable sources.

But the greatest source of reductions would come from capping emissions from utilities, industrial facilities and other businesses, while allowing them to use permits to emit authorized amounts of pollutants. The companies could buy and sell these permits with their counterparts in seven Western states and three Canadian provinces.

These are the broad details of the plan by state regulators to meet the goals of California's groundbreaking 2006 law requiring reductions in carbon dioxide and other emissions that contribute to climate change.

Since the probable death of national climate-control legislation after a brief Senate debate this month, the California plan is the most comprehensive effort in the country to devise an economy-wide program to reduce heat-trapping gases.

The plan does not, however, offer details about some politically delicate questions, including the costs it will impose on various industries, among them automobile manufacturers and electric utilities, which together contribute 61 percent of these emissions.

Rather than assessing the costs that will be borne by industry, Mary D. Nichols, who heads the California Air Resources Board, said the agency's "macroeconomic analysis" had shown that the state's gross domestic product would increase by 1 percent when the plan was fully put into place.

The plan also assumes that the federal Environmental Protection Agency will reverse itself and allow the state to impose stringent emission standards on cars.

A final version of the plan, which makes a 28 percent cut in the 596 million tons of greenhouse gases the state would emit in 2020, is scheduled for adoption by California regulators by the end of the year.

The plan does not propose a formal mechanism for distributing the emissions permits, although it speaks favorably of an auction system.

In general, those companies that produce or use energy largely generated by burning coal have greater emissions and would need more emission allowances than competitors that use different energy sources.

Auctions tend to favor the low-emission companies, while free distribution favors those with substantial greenhouse gas emissions.

California utilities are divided among those that use little coal, like Pacific Gas and Electric in Northern California, and those heavily dependent on it, like the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and the coal-dependent municipal utilities have been strongly opposed to a plan that seemed likely to favor their investor-owned counterparts.

H. David Nahai, chief executive of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, said Wednesday: "What we've said is the considerable investments we're making in reducing our greenhouse gas emission footprint should be allowed to continue. We should not be put in the position of having potentially hundreds of millions of dollars" diverted to pay for allowances in a cap-and-trade market.

"This document recognizes that and recognizes that utilities such as ours are doing the right thing by increasing their renewable energy investments."

About 46 percent of his utility's output is fueled by coal and 30 percent by natural gas; renewable sources now provide 8 percent of the energy, up from 3 percent when California's climate-change law was passed two years ago.

SoCal company to pay \$1M in air quality settlement

AP State

In the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 26, 2008

TXI Riverside Cement Co. will pay a \$600,000 in penalties and spend \$400,000 toward site improvements as part of an agreement with regional air quality officials to reduce the amount of toxic cement dust escaping from a factory north of Riverside.

Officials said the settlement signed late Tuesday requires the company to eliminate outdoor storage of unprocessed cement, which was found to be the source of dust carrying hexavalent chromium into neighborhoods near the plant in the Rubidoux area. The carcinogen is the same one featured in the movie "Erin Brockovich."

Other provisions in the settlement include the company hiring someone to monitor the plant for compliance of air district regulations. The company also must give its neighbors monthly updates on cleanup efforts.

Environmentalists to sue EPA over park haze

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In S.F. Chronicle, USA Today and other papers, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- Environmentalists took steps on Wednesday to sue the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to compel states to clean up the haze plaguing the nation's parks, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas.

Federal law required all 50 states to submit plans to the federal agency by December outlining how they would reduce the pollution sullyng park vistas and diminishing air quality at places where the environment is protected. The plans would specifically target older factories and power plants without pollution controls.

But to date, only six states — North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Iowa, Missouri and Louisiana — have complied.

"This program to clean up dirty air in parks has always been the stepchild of the anti-pollution efforts. It always gets put on the back burner. As a result, go to one of these parks and there is a good chance you are not going to see the clean fresh air you expect," said David Baron, an attorney for Earthjustice who is representing Environmental Defense Fund and the National Parks Conservation Association. The two groups gave the EPA notice on Wednesday that they plan to file a lawsuit within 60 days, unless the agency enforces the deadline.

While the 1977 Clean Air Act established a national goal to restore visibility in protected areas to conditions that would exist naturally, without pollution, the EPA did not issue rules to fully meet the mandate until 1999.

Timothy Lyons, deputy press secretary for EPA administrator Stephen Johnson, said that the agency expects the remaining states to submit their cleanup plans later this year, with a few extending into 2009. The delay, Lyons said, should have no effect on meeting visibility goals by 2064, he said.

Cities take bike-transit plans for a spin

By Charisse Jones

USA TODAY, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

[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?"

Ethanol mixes finding way into traditional gas tanks

By Elizabeth Dunbar, Associated Press Writer
USA TODAY, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

GRANITE FALLS, Minn. — To save money and support neighboring farms, Scott Dubbelde began mixing gasoline and cheaper, ethanol-based fuel in his cars years ago, driving first to the gasoline pump, and then to the ethanol pump.

It has worked so well that Dubbelde, who manages a local grain elevator, mixes fuels for all three of his family cars, although only one was designed to handle ethanol-heavy blends.

The practice has caught the attention of the Environmental Protection Agency as a handful of filling stations install pumps that allow drivers to select different ethanol blends with the push of a button.

Auto manufacturers warn that ethanol can corrode fuel lines and damage hoses, seals and the fuel pump in cars not made to carry ethanol. That can lead to bad gas mileage, poor performance and may even affect the vehicle computers that warn of problems.

The EPA says it can damage emission control devices.

Yet with the price for a gallon of gas hitting a string of record highs this year, motorists are paying little heed, even at the risk of voiding their warranties.

"It works good, real good," Dubbelde said of the blends he uses in a Toyota and a Buick, which he improved through a couple years of experimentation. "No 'check engine' light comes on. I don't even think there's a difference in mileage."

The local Cenex gas station installed special blender pumps after managers saw customers mixing their own fuel just like Dubbelde.

Motorists at the station in this western Minnesota town can press a button and fill up with E85, a fuel mixture with up to 85% ethanol, or blends varying from 20% to 50% ethanol. There is little physical difference, except that blending pumps have buttons offering increasing levels of ethanol rather than 87- or 89-octane gas.

Dubbelde pumped E30 into his Buick Rendezvous SUV. He uses E20 in the family's Toyota Avalon and pumps up to 85% ethanol into his flexible-fuel pickup.

The savings at the pump are real. While regular gas was \$3.93 a gallon at Cenex recently, E85 was going for \$3.23. E20 was \$3.81, E30 was \$3.71 and E50 was \$3.52 — and that was before the 20-cent-per-gallon discount Cenex offered for ethanol blends 20% and up as part of a special promotion that day.

In some Midwestern states, E85 can be as much as a dollar cheaper per gallon than gasoline.

A few dozen gas stations in at least four states — Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Kansas — have the new blender pumps. More stations are beginning to ask about them.

Since two Cenex gas stations in Granite Falls and nearby Montevideo installed pumps in late March, overall ethanol sales at the stations have doubled, said Robin Enevoldsen, who manages promotions for the stores.

"At first we were seeing just basic, die-hard ethanol promoters and supporters using them," Enevoldsen said. "Now we see a large percentage of our community using them."

Ethanol advocates acknowledge that there is some misuse of the fuel.

"What an individual does is very difficult to control at the point of sale," said Tim Gerlach, assistant executive director for the Minnesota Corn Growers Association. "I think any retailer will tell you that misfueling is not an uncommon occurrence."

That concerns automakers, who say owners of conventional vehicles are putting their vehicle components and their warranties at risk.

The Alliance of Auto Manufacturers fears new blender pumps will confuse drivers, spokesman Charles Territo said.

"The best way to expand ethanol use is to expand the number of gas stations that offer E85 and not through the use of midlevel blends that could damage conventional vehicles," Territo said.

[The EPA said that using blends that contain more than 10% ethanol in conventional vehicles could actually increase emissions and therefore violates the Clean Air Act.](#)

"We are aware of this potential misfueling but cannot discuss specific investigations in process," EPA spokeswoman Roxanne Smith said in a written statement. "The EPA is working with industry sectors and states to assure compliance."

Robert White, of the Ethanol Promotion and Information Council, predicts demand for blender pumps will continue to rise. The Omaha-based group offers \$5,000 grants to encourage more gas stations in South Dakota to bring blender pumps on line. The South Dakota Corn Utilization Council and the ethanol industry are paying for the grants.

"The premise behind it is offering consumers a choice, because they're screaming for it," White said.

Advocates cite studies showing that vehicles can do just as well on 20% or 30% ethanol as they do with 10%.

Gas mileage decreased very little on midlevel ethanol blends compared with gasoline containing 10% ethanol — the standard fuel in Minnesota — and the car's components seemed to handle the fuel fine, said Bruce

Jones, a researcher at Minnesota State University, Mankato, who has helped lead the studies. Even on flexible-fuel vehicles, gas mileage was often better with a lower grade of ethanol than E85.

Jones, a professor who directs the Minnesota Center for Automotive Research, says more study is needed on ethanol blends, including on emissions. But from what he's seen, he's confident that states like

Minnesota will be able to move ahead with plans to eventually mandate 20% ethanol in all gasoline sold.

General Motors, Ford Motor and the Chrysler Group have pledged to double production of flexible-fuel vehicles by 2010, and there are also efforts to put flexible-fuel hybrid-electric vehicles on the market.

In rural Minnesota, where grain silos far outnumber Toyota Priuses, motorists are not waiting.

"The word is starting to get around," said Rodney Gaffney, a Yellow Medicine County farmer who puts ethanol blends in his flexible-fuel pickup and occasionally in his '97 Buick Park Avenue. "We need to keep the money in rural America instead of overseas."

Ex-EPA official gives up on progress under Bush

USA TODAY, Wednesday, June 25, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) — A high-ranking political appointee resigned from the Environmental Protection Agency after concluding there was no more progress to be made on greenhouse gases under the Bush administration.

Jason Burnett, associate deputy administrator for about a year before his resignation took effect June 9, was the principle adviser on climate change issues to agency chief Stephen Johnson. He helped developed the EPA's response to last year's Supreme Court ruling that the agency had the authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

But work on the issue was put on hold in December after Congress passed legislation enacting tougher automobile mileage requirements. Johnson has acknowledged that the next administration probably will have to decide whether carbon dioxide endangers public health as a greenhouse gas. The EPA is expected soon to issue a draft finding for public comment.

"I think that most people who have studied the Clean Air Act recognize the challenges posed by the Supreme Court case, but the nation is best served by confronting those challenges, not trying to delay the inevitable," Burnett said in an interview Wednesday.

Burnett, a policy adviser at EPA who returned when Johnson appointed him associate deputy administrator, said he came back "to work through those challenges. We made as much progress as this administration wanted and when it became clear to me that no more progress could be made I decided it was time for me to move on," Burnett said. "The choice this administration has made is to leave those challenges to the next."

Asked to respond to Burnett's comments, EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar noted that Johnson has described this as among the most complex issues the agency has undertaken. "Investing

thousands of hours and millions of dollars certainly does not suggest avoiding the issue," Shradar said.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses upcoming weather threats that might spark more fires in California. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Continúan amenazantes cientos de incendios en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, June 26, 2008

El Departamento Forestal de California informó hoy que unos 700 incendios de distintas magnitudes continúan activos en el norte del estado.

Unos siete mil bomberos de toda la costa del Pacífico estadounidense, Nevada y Arizona participan junto con soldados de la Guardia Nacional en labores de contención; intervienen por lo menos 50 aeronaves cisterna y unas 500 máquinas de bomberos.

El contingente ha controlado hasta en 90 por ciento algunos de los incendios más peligrosos, pero otros han surgido a partir de este domingo.

Una tormenta eléctrica, seca, sin lluvia, con entre seis mil y ocho mil descargas ocasionó hasta 820 incendios en el estado.