

S.J. air board's plan to reduce greenhouse gases rejected

Climate strategy may be considered again in August

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Friday, June 20, 2008

FRESNO - San Joaquin Valley air cops' first stab at reducing greenhouse gases - including a possible carbon "bank" for businesses - was rejected Thursday, even though board members voted 7-1 in favor.

The only opposition came from Fresno cardiologist John Telles, the newest board member, appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as part of a recent restructuring of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board.

Telles' "no" vote was all that was needed to defeat the plan, since three board members were absent, and four positions on the 15-member board are vacant. Eight "yes" votes were needed for a majority.

CUTTING CARBON

The climate plan would consider:

- Establishing a carbon "bank." Businesses could reduce greenhouse gas emissions and earn credits, which could be sold to other businesses.
- Developing guidelines for cities and counties that increasingly must consider climate change when studying the environmental impact of a range of projects.
- Starting a voluntary program in which businesses that emit greenhouse gases pay the district. The money would be used for grants for emissions reductions elsewhere.

Some board members were frustrated with the outcome.

"Are you saying we're just going to sit back and do nothing?" said Ronn Dominici, a Madera County supervisor. "I totally disagree."

Telles said he was glad the district was looking into reducing greenhouse gases. But, he said, the state plan to reduce those gases to 1990 levels by 2020 doesn't authorize local agencies to come up with their own plans.

Besides, doing so would take money away from other district programs, Telles said.

"Even though you say it's for free, I can't believe it's for free," he said. "My major concern ... is whenever we do something like this, we're removing resources from our primary project: to reduce air pollution in this district."

Greenhouse gases responsible for climate change are not regulated the same way as traditional air pollutants like ozone or particulate matter.

Although the plan was defeated, board members asked for it to be reconsidered at a meeting in August.

The proposal from district staff does not immediately start new programs or rules, but allows them to be studied over the next year.

"This was just the first bite of the apple," said Leroy Ornellas, a San Joaquin County supervisor who chairs the air district board. "We're going to have a lot more opportunities to thumbs-up or thumbs-down some of these measures."

The most controversial idea is establishing a carbon bank, where businesses or other entities could voluntarily reduce emissions to obtain credits that can be sold to other businesses.

This is already done in the Valley with traditional pollutants.

"Our hope is that by setting up a local bank, we get the benefits here locally," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director. "There are many businesses coming to us now, saying they want to make early reductions."

Environmental groups Earthjustice and the Center for Biological Diversity criticized the carbon bank idea Thursday as emphasizing flexibility over real emission reductions. It will "do nothing to address the serious problem of global warming," said Sierra Club representative Kevin Hall of Fresno.

Air-quality essay winners announced

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, June 23, 2008

The Tulare County Association of Governments recently honored the winners of the sixth annual "Make A Difference in Air Quality" student essay and poster contest.

The grand prize winner of the essay contest was Athena Niayesh, a student at Veva Blunt Elementary School. The grand prize winner of the poster competition was Jemimah Ostrea, a student at Orosi High School.

Other poster winners include students in the following grade levels:

K-3: Justin Docanto, Oak Valley Elementary School.
4-6: Kennedy Hammond, Royal Oaks Elementary School.
7-8: Daisy Lopez, Farmersville Junior High School.
9-12: Liselda Carreon, Orosi High School.

Other essay winners include:

K-3: Jessica Botello, Royal Oaks Elementary School.
4-6: David Mickelson, Veva Blunt Elementary School.
7-8: Verenice Botello, Green Acres Middle School.
9-12: Daniel Lovik, Mt. Whitney High School.

More than 300 Tulare County students participated in the contest.

Blueprint for county future under discussion

Written by Jonathan Partridge
Patterson Irrigator, Friday, June 20, 2008

Some people express shock when they hear that the state predicts 1.2 million people will live in Stanislaus County by 2050, says Stanislaus Council of Governments senior planner Lark Downs. Others, he said, argue the population should be higher.

Local residents will have a chance to voice their own opinions about regional planning next week at a couple of Patterson workshops on the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process.

"We're welcoming everyone to come and jump into the process now," said Kristen Pickus, director of planning services for consultant MIG Inc., which will help coordinate the workshops.

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 Kern County to San Joaquin 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, to be used by city councils and boards of supervisors.

StanCOG will host two meetings at Patterson City Hall - one in English on Monday evening and one in Spanish on Wednesday.

Next week's workshops are a follow-up to a series of meetings StanCOG hosted throughout the county last year. At that time, 439 attendees discussed regional priorities for the county. About 25 people showed up in Patterson.

Overall, attendees throughout the county favored the following priorities:

- Providing more public services for all ages
- Planning proactively for growth, with an emphasis on curbing sprawl, providing adequate infrastructure and preserving agriculture and open space
- Reducing traffic and increasing public transit, bicycle paths and road maintenance
- Controlling crime
- Improving air quality
- Increasing educational opportunities and job training
- Using alternative energy
- Identifying new sources of funding

The meetings come at a time when legislators are considering a state Senate bill that would mandate blueprint processes throughout the state. As a result, some city leaders seemed wary when StanCOG officials talked about the blueprint at the June 3 City Council meeting.

Now, StanCOG staff has come up with four growth scenarios for 2050, based on the input from the earlier meetings. Attendees will evaluate those scenarios next week, discuss a vision statement and evaluate "guiding principles" for the blueprint process.

The meetings come at a time when legislators are considering a state Senate bill that would mandate blueprint processes throughout the state. As a result, some city leaders seemed wary when StanCOG officials talked about the blueprint at the June 3 City Council meeting.

Mayor Becky Campo said at the time she was worried by the rumor that the state might withhold money from cities if they do not participate.

Patterson City Councilwoman Annette Smith said this week that she is all for regional planning, but she does not want the state to dictate it or have the desires of larger cities trump the needs of smaller ones. She said she fears cities might lose their autonomy.

In fact, many cities have expressed the desire that the blueprint not be used by the state to take land-use authority away from them, Downs said. He said no such thing is happening at this time.

Results from the workshops will go before the county's various city councils before the StanCOG policy board votes on a plan. That plan eventually will be melded into the regional eight-county San Joaquin Valley plan. Downs said the entire process could be complete as soon as March 2009 following a valley-wide summit in Fresno.

At a glance

WHAT: San Joaquin Valley Blueprint workshops

WHEN: English-language workshop, 7 to 9 p.m. Monday; Spanish-language workshop, 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday

WHERE: Patterson City Council chambers, 1 Plaza

INFO: 525-4600

Passenger train sparks several fires along tracks

Service delayed for nearly an hour when crew stops engine.

By VICTOR A. PATTON

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Jun. 21, 2008

A Merced County firetruck driven by Tom Wells puts water on a vegetation fire ignited by an Amtrak train heading south on the tracks. The fires started at Tower Road and Highway 140 and continued on to the Madera County line Friday afternoon.

An Amtrak train with faulty wheel equipment started numerous grass fires along train tracks in areas of Le Grand and Planada on Friday, prompting a response from several fire agencies, according to Cal Fire firefighters.

Battalion Chief Kevin Lawson of Cal Fire said firefighters responded to the scene around 2:53 p.m.

The fires started around the areas of Highway 140 and Tyler Road and spanned all the way to the border of Merced and Madera counties. Luckily, no one was injured and no structures were destroyed, Lawson said.

"It was very dynamic and complex," Lawson said about the fires. "Every time you turned around there was another one popping up."

A total of 45 firefighters responded to the scene, as Cal Fire received assistance from the Merced Fire Department as well as Cal Fire engines from Madera and Mariposa counties.

Lawson said about 20 fires, which varied in size, were started by sparks from the train's wheels. The fires were contained by 4:45 p.m. and burned about 50 acres.

After the train's operators realized there was a problem, the train was stopped near the border of Merced and Madera counties, which halted train traffic for about 45 minutes, Lawson said.

Lawson said it's not the first time that faulty train equipment has started a grass fire. "Sometimes you don't catch them in time and the locomotive has already passed," Lawson said.

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Crews gain ground on wildfires in California

By MARCUS WOHLSEN

Associated Press Writer

OC Register, Monday, June 23, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Cooler weather Monday helped firefighters gain ground on hundreds of wildfires that have charred bone-dry terrain in both wine country and remote forests in Northern California.

One fire spread across nearly 6 square miles in Napa County and moved into a mostly rural area of Solano County. It threatened more than 100 buildings as it fed on grassy woodland about 40 miles southwest of Sacramento, said Roger Archey, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

It was 40 percent contained Monday morning after destroying one house, officials said. Some residents had been ordered to evacuate, said agency spokeswoman Nancy Carniglia.

Elsewhere, firefighters in southern New Mexico were trying to stop a wildfire that has consumed 43,000 acres - or more than 67 square miles - of grass and brush since starting in the Lincoln National Forest, a U.S. Forest Service fire information officer said.

Two other lightning-sparked wildfires also have burned nearly 30,000 acres - or more than 46 square miles - in New Mexico, one west of Roswell in the southeastern part of the state and the other west of Raton in the north.

Wildfires have destroyed more than 175 homes in Northern California so far this year. Blazes started popping up in the region just as California's unofficial fire season began in mid-May, following the state's driest two-month period on record.

About 25 miles south of San Jose, many residents were being let back into their homes Monday after being chased out by two fires blamed on lightning that blackened a total of about 2 square miles. Officials said one fire was 90 percent contained Monday and the other 50 percent contained.

Thunderstorms were responsible for as many as 75 fires in Shasta-Trinity National Forest, about 160 miles north of Sacramento. They 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, fire officials said.

South of San Francisco, a fire that started Friday in Santa Cruz County, destroying homes and closing a stretch of highway, was contained after charring just less than a square mile. Roughly 2,000 people fled their homes Friday.

It was the third major blaze to hit Santa Cruz County in the past month. A 520-acre blaze destroyed 11 buildings in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and a fire near Corralitos covered more than 4,200 acres and destroyed about 100 buildings.

Just south of San Francisco, residents of the small city of Brisbane were being allowed back into their homes Monday after a grass fire scorched several hundred acres.

Cooler air, lighter winds aid firefighters

[Marisa Lagos, Tanya Schevitz, Chronicle Staff Writers](#)

SF Chronicle, Monday, June 23, 2008

Napa -- Cooler conditions and lighter winds were helping firefighters Sunday night contain a 3,500-acre blaze in Solano and Napa counties, but the fire was threatening 300 homes and people were being ordered to evacuate.

The so-called Wild Fire began Saturday in Napa County and quickly spread across the Solano County border, nearly tripling in size overnight and burning at least one home and a barn in the Twin Sisters area. By late Sunday, the fire was 35 percent contained.

The fire was one of four major wildfires burning in California on Sunday during one of the busiest weekends for California firefighters this year. On Saturday, a lightning storm sparked 371 fires throughout Northern California - mostly minor grass fires, but two grew to become major incidents.

In Napa and Solano, the cause of the Wild Fire was still under investigation. More than 400 firefighters were battling the blaze, which began northeast of Napa and northwest of Fairfield, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"It is cooler. The winds are still being a hamper in the situation, though," said Tony Mariani, a department spokesman. The fire was moving southeast in the Green Valley Road area.

Mandatory evacuations remained Sunday on Joyce Lane, Twin Sisters Road and Wooden Valley Road, and a voluntary evacuation advisory was in place in the Green Valley area. An evacuation center was established at the Fairfield Community Center.

The fire caused the closure of Highway 12 throughout much of the day, according the California Highway Patrol.

April Ferguson, who works at the front desk at Massage Envy in the Green Valley Crossing Shopping Center near Interstate 80, said the closure made her late for work because traffic was clogged and a detour was confusing as people tried to get around the fire area.

"It is all hazy over here, and you can smell it," she said.

Cordelia firefighter Greg Bell said that with a continuation of the lower temperatures, the crews should be able to get on top of the fire in a couple of days.

"Today it has helped a lot," he said.

Temperatures are expected to return to normal seasonal levels of about 60 degrees in San Francisco and the 90s in the inland areas after a few days of blistering heat.

"We are back to a much more typical summertime pattern, with a marine layer along the coast and temperatures cooling off," said Warner Blier, a science officer at the National Weather Service. "The cooler air mass and higher relative humidity should help some, but it won't make it all the way to some of the fires burning inland."

No more thunder and lightning storms are expected in most of Northern California, although there is a slight chance they might hit the Sierra Nevada in the far north, he said.

Even as cooling temperatures helped firefighters contain and control some of the fires burning around Northern California, another fire started in an area that had been spared in the devastating Summit Fire in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties in May.

A fire broke out at about 4 p.m. Sunday on Russell Ridge in a drainage area of dense redwood trees that didn't burn in the original Summit Fire - which ate up 4,270 acres and destroyed 35 homes and dozens more structures in May, said Paul Van Gerwen, a spokesman with Cal Fire.

The cause of the new fire was unknown, although it could have been started by lightning, which ignited more than 300 blazes since Saturday when a dry lightning storm swept through Northern California, he said, adding that firefighters are nervous about it.

"There is a chance for the embers to go east over the ridge," he said.

Among the other major California blazes:

-- The Whitehurst/Hummingbird fires have been burning west of Gilroy and Morgan Hill in Santa Clara County, where the two fires, sparked by lightning Saturday, had consumed about 950 acres. Both blazes were 50 percent contained. Evacuations were ordered for about 128 homes, including 75 on the CordeValle Golf Course. A shelter is set up at Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill.

-- The Brown Fire, in Hollister and Panoche in San Benito County, had burned 6,000 acres with no containment. The fire, sparked by lightning Saturday, was spreading fast over steep terrain.

-- The Indians Fire has been burning in Los Padres National Forest in Monterey County since June 8 and has consumed more than 56,000 acres. It was 57 percent contained Sunday night.

In addition, a 630-acre fire was burning north of Watsonville and was nearly contained Sunday night. An undetermined number of homes had been destroyed.

No damage estimate was available Sunday but Van Gerwen said he saw burned homes and that did assessments were surprised.

"The comments were, 'Wow, there is more damage here than we thought,' " he said.

E-mail the writers at mlagos@sfnchronicle.com and tschevitz@sfnchronicle.com.

Air quality worsens as fires continue to burn

By Niesha Lofing

Sacramento Bee, Monday, June 23, 2008

Wildfires burning throughout the region and state continue to challenge firefighters, threaten homes and worsen air quality.

Sacramentans woke to weather forecasts of high temperatures and smoky skies Monday.

Fires are burning in several neighboring counties -- virtually surrounding the Sacramento area -- and driving smoke into the valley.

The intensity of the fires and faint breeze are contributing to the smoky haze.

"We have light winds about 10 mph, so the smoke isn't moving very much," said Felix Garcia, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

High temperatures Monday are forecast around 90 degrees, he said.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District recommends that people stay indoors if they smell smoke. Particulate matter from smoke is unhealthy to breathe, the district's Spare the Air Web site states.

Hundreds of fires were sparked by a series of lightning strikes over the weekend throughout Northern California.

The Wild fire burning northeast of Napa, northwest of Fairfield, has burned 3,750 acres and is 40 percent contained, according to California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection officials.

The fire has destroyed one home and an outbuilding, is threatening 300 structures and has forced evacuations in Napa and Solano counties, Cal Fire's Web site states.

The American Red Cross has set up an evacuation center at the Fairfield Community Center, located at 1000 Kentucky St.

Sixteen fires were reported in Amador and El Dorado counties. The Soldier fire, located three miles northeast of Pollock Pines and north of Highway 50, has burned 40 acres and was 35 percent contained late Sunday evening.

Seven fires were reported in Nevada, Yuba and Placer counties. The Mosquito fire, which had burned 75 acres by late Sunday, is located near Mosquito Ridge Road south of Michigan Bluff near Foresthill, the Web site states.

Farther north, 24 fires were reported in the Butte County area, 36 fires in Tehama and Glenn counties and 50 fires in Lassen and Modoc counties.

A fire in Butte County also prompted a highway closure early Monday morning. Highway 70 at Highway 149 in Oroville is closed, according to an online traffic alert issued by the California Highway Patrol at 6:50 a.m.

Idling trucks big contributors to air pollution.

Volunteers to pursue, educate big-rig drivers in West Oakland

By Sean Maher - Staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, June 22, 2008

Citing serious health problems associated with pollutants in Oakland's air and across the Bay Area, several volunteers will hit the streets Tuesday seeking to curb what they say is a serious contributor to the problem: truck idling.

"In 2005, children living in West Oakland were five times more likely to be hospitalized for asthma and four times more likely to have an emergency department visit for asthma than children in California overall," said Jessica Henn of Ditching Dirty Diesel Collaborative, which organized the Anti-Idling Day of Action.

In West Oakland, volunteers will pursue truck drivers face to face at the Mayway Warehouse truck parking facility on 12th Street, at the truck scales on Maritime Boulevard, and by the recycling centers in the Clawson neighborhood.

Henn said their goal is to be educational rather than aggressive.

A 2003 report by The Pacific Institute found that some West Oakland residents "are exposed to roughly five times more diesel particulates than residents in other parts of Oakland. West Oakland residents may have an increased risk of one extra cancer per 1,000 residents due to diesel particulate exposure over a lifetime." Another Pacific Institute report found an average of 6,300 truck trips per day coming in and out of the Port of Oakland resulted in a total of 4,700 hours per day total idling or creeping.

Henn said that "at the Port though there are no unions and not really many big employers," so the collaborative members are focusing on the face-to-face meetings with individual drivers.

A report released in March by the California Air Resources Board found that diesel emissions from heavy duty trucks are the largest contributors to potential cancer risk levels in the West Oakland community." In addition to the health risks, Henn said the volunteers will be reminding drivers that idling is both expensive (because of rising gas prices) and illegal.

CARB declared diesel exhaust a toxic air contaminant in 1998.

"If someone calls the 1-800-END-SMOG number and reports an idling vehicle, a letter gets sent to the owner of the idling vehicle as a warning and the letter requests that the owner send something back (to CARB) telling them what they're going to do to correct the problem," Henn wrote in an e-mail.

Volunteers also will cover parts of Richmond, San Leandro, and the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood in San Francisco.

NASA, Air Resources Board to Examine California Air Quality

NASA

Fresno Bee, Thursday, June 19, 2008

NASA and scientists from the California Air Resources Board are conducting a series of research flights this month that are examining the atmosphere over the state to better understand the chemical dynamics of smog and greenhouse gases.

NASA's DC-8 airborne laboratory is flying from the NASA Dryden Aircraft Operations Center, Palmdale, over an area from San Diego as far north as Trinidad Head along the coast north of Eureka. The DC-8 is configured for atmospheric composition measurements as part of a large environmental science campaign to study the impact of air pollution on the Arctic's atmospheric chemistry and changing climate. It will use the same suite of instruments for the California Air Resources missions. NASA is also sending a specially outfitted P-3 aircraft from the NASA Ames Research Center, Mountain View, Calif., and an ER-2 from NASA Dryden to fly over the state for additional sampling during the same time period.

The flights will gather samples aimed at helping the Air Resources Board obtain a better picture of greenhouse gas emission sources throughout the state. Other goals of the flights are to understand what type of pollution is being blown into the state from off-shore vessel traffic and to distinguish the differences in air mass chemistry between urban and rural areas.

"We will provide highly advanced capability to develop critically needed information on pollutant emissions and atmospheric concentrations both offshore and onshore over California, allowing us to better model air quality and future climate change," said Hanwant Singh, an Ames project scientist.

"This collaboration will give us information on how pollution is created, transported and even destroyed," said Bart Croes, chief of the Air Resources Board's Research Division. "The use of highly sophisticated technology, data gathered at levels far beyond our normal reach and

collaboration with NASA's very knowledgeable technicians and scientists, combine to create a rare opportunity."

NASA Dryden's DC-8 mission manager Frank Cutler said the airborne laboratory will fly four flights of varying altitudes between June 18 and 25, including low-level passes over California's Central Valley and coastal areas. One mission will take the aircraft over the ocean off Santa Barbara to investigate areas of natural methane seepage.

Flights will be coordinated with a series of NASA Earth observing satellites as they pass over the state. Researchers can use these simultaneous measurements to validate satellite data and improve modeled predictions of the impact of atmospheric pollution on California.

The Air Resources Board, a department of the California Environmental Protection Agency, has been a leader in developing and implementing aggressive pollution control measures to combat smog and particulate matter for 40 years. The agency is also working to reduce 25 percent of the state's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, as required by the Global Warming Solutions Act that Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed in 2006.

Spare the Air not having much impact in Vallejo

By Jessica A. York - Vallejo Times-Herald
in the Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, June 22, 2008

The loss of intermittent free transit rides to promote cleaner air may have little impact in the area, Vallejo's transit officials say.

Vallejo's ferry and out-of-town bus services have already suffered a seesaw in ridership as ever-mounting gas prices push commuters to seek ways out of their cars at the same time Vallejo has increased its fares.

The pollution awareness-raising free rides have been ongoing in the Bay Area since 2004, with the aim of reducing pollution for specific days but also to introduce drivers to long-term alternative transportation. The Spare the Air program, though, has been an expensive proposition.

Program sponsors Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District cut back to one preset promotional day, last Thursday, for free ferry, bus and train rides this year. That compares with the three or more free days triggered by high air pollution forecasts in past years.

Vallejo Transportation Department Superintendent Crystal Odum Ford said overall bus and ferry ridership has been down compared with last year, using figures through April. Express bus routes, though, had seen a 5 percent ridership increase in both March and April, and 10-day and day ferry passes have also risen with the warm season, Ford said.

Ford said Spare the Air days most often provide one-time ridership spikes and do not necessarily translate into new long-term riders.

"We did get an increase in riders during Spare the Air, definitely," Ford said. "We got a few new (long-term riders), but I would not say we got anything substantial, for new riders."

Ford said the free ride days could also cause some chaos - especially for the more novel ferry system.

"We would always like to get more people trying transit (but) it is disruptive if we get a lot of new passengers," Ford said. "People don't always know we have a capacity of 300 and that they have to get off at the end of the line, ... not just go back and forth. I wouldn't say (Spare the Air) hurt, but it doesn't help us."

The Bay Area program directors apparently also felt the venture was not drawing enough new riders. MTC spokesman Randy Rentschler said the program was just too costly in comparison with other ways of reducing smog-filled skies.

Last summer, for example, ridership on BART, CalTrain and 27 other Bay Area transit agencies increased by 665,000 people, or 22 percent, from normal levels during two August days that rides were free.

But it cost \$4.6 million for the two agencies to reimburse the transit operators for tickets and fares, surveys and marketing materials. Surveys later showed that only 2.9 percent of the riders on those days said they rode free because of the program and would have otherwise driven a private vehicle instead.

An agency board member noted \$4-a-gallon gas prices are boosting transit ridership without incentives. That helped to spell the end of the traditional Spare the Air program last month. The campaign is set to be rebranded "Spare the Air Every Day" and expanded to urge the public to regularly reduce energy use.

Opposition mounts to clean air change affecting parks

By DUNCAN MANSFIELD - AP Environmental Writer

Washington Post, Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee and other papers, Sunday, June 22, 2008

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. -- Critics fear the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will adopt a rule in the waning days of the Bush administration that will make it easier to build coal-fired power plants near national parks.

The proposed change, pending since last June, comes as the utility industry moves into its biggest building boom in coal-fueled power plants in decades. To meet growing electricity needs, more than 20 plants are under construction in 14 states and more than 100 are in various stages of planning.

Tennessee Sen. Lamar Alexander, the third-ranking Republican in the Senate, vowed in an interview with The Associated Press to push Congress to overrule the EPA if it enacts the rule, perhaps as early as this summer.

The new rule would change the way states, the EPA and others calculate the impact of a new pollution source, like a coal plant, on a park's maximum pollution load, said John Bunyak of the National Park Service's Air Resources Division in Denver. Instead of weighing peak periods of pollution, the new rule would use annual averages.

Don Barger, southern regional director for the National Parks Conservation Association, compared it to a person sticking one hand in a block of ice and the other in a fire.

"Your average temperature is just fine, but your hands are not," he said. "You are getting some real impact there."

As an example, he said air quality in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the country's most-visited national park with more than 9 million visitors a year, recently reached an "orange alert" pollution warning. The park straddles the Tennessee-North Carolina border.

When that happens, "the park is getting hammered. People in the park are getting hammered. Plants in the park are getting hammered," Barger said. "It doesn't matter where it averages out some other time. You have a family from Ohio on vacation. It is the only time they are going to be there. What views can they see? What air are they breathing?"

EPA spokeswoman Cathy Milbourn said the rule is part of an EPA program to prevent air quality degradation in national parks and would not change the level of emissions allowed in clean-air areas.

But in a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, Alexander writes that the National Park Service and the EPA's own regional air quality experts have determined the proposal would result in undercounting of actual pollution sources.

Alexander wrote that the National Park Service says the rule "provides the lowest possible degree of protection" for 156 so-called Class 1 areas that include the country's most revered national parks and preserves, from Arcadia in Maine to Yellowstone in Wyoming.

Seven senators have signed the letter: Democrats Thomas Carper of Delaware, Benjamin Cardin of Maryland, Ken Salazar of Colorado and Jon Tester of Montana, and Republicans Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, Elizabeth Dole of North Carolina and John Warner of Virginia.

More than 1,300 people have sent letters to the EPA over the proposal. Many are form letters that begin, "I am outraged to learn about EPA's proposed rule change that would undermine laws that protect air quality in Class 1 national parks, which are supposed to have the cleanest air in the country."

Others back the agency. M. Cheryl Heying, director of the Utah Division of Air Quality, wrote that Utah "strongly supports the direction that EPA is taking," saying the rule change recognizes the complexities of permitting decisions and the need to give states flexibility in the process.

Alexander isn't against coal, which fuels about half the electric power generation in this country. But he worries a half dozen new coal plants are planned in Kentucky, Virginia and North Carolina, all within 200 miles of the Smokies. Thirty already operate in the region.

"It is important to remember the Smokies has among the highest levels of ozone or smog in the eastern United States, either inside or outside a national park," Alexander said. "And it has one of the highest rates of sulfur and nitrogen pollution in North America."

Benicia environmental group to speak on clean energy

By Sara Stroud - Vallejo Times-Herald
Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, June 22, 2008

BENICIA - A group is hoping to bring matters of global environmental import down to a local scale Tuesday night with a public forum about greenhouse gas reduction and green industry.

Hosted by Benicia First, the forum will feature speakers discussing how cities can minimize their carbon footprints while thriving economically. City officials also will be on hand for a question-and-answer period.

"This is a unique opportunity for Benicians and for people in Vallejo," to find out what's happening in other communities, Jerome Page of Benicia First said.

The evening's first speaker will make a presentation about the threat of global climate change and discuss how cities can meet the greenhouse gas reduction targets of AB32 - the 2006 state legislation that mandates a 25 percent emissions reduction by 2020.

The next speaker will focus on cleantech - a business sector that aims to eliminate or greatly reduce environmental impacts and emphasizes new technologies - and how it is thriving in the Bay Area.

The evening's final presenter will address how green industry can boost a city's economic outlook and what municipalities can do to court such businesses.

"This is where things are going," Page said of cleantech and environmentally sensitive commerce. "We wanted to bring that to life."

Though Benicia First! initially mobilized in opposition to the proposed Benicia Business Park, Page said the forum will not focus on any specific development. The concepts up for discussion Tuesday have implications for all future development in Benicia, he said.

A roundabout way to tame traffic

By Will Oremus - MediaNews

Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, June 22, 2008

Each fall, administrators at Notre Dame de Namur University sit down with the incoming freshmen to discuss a new danger they'll be exposed to as college students.

No, it's not sex or drugs. It's the hellacious experience of trying to make a left turn onto Ralston Avenue from the campus driveway.

"It's an absolute nightmare," said Richard Rossi, the university's communications director.

"You've got just a steady line of traffic, and you have to wait and pray there's a break in it, and if there is, that there's not another car waiting on the other side to make a turn."

Or, he joked, "You can close your eyes, stomp on the accelerator and hope for the best."

On Tuesday, the Belmont City Council will look at a plan to restore some sanity to the city's main east-west drag.

A stoplight would replace the four-way stop that clogs traffic on Ralston Avenue at South Road.

The two-way stop at the entrance to Notre Dame would be replaced with a roundabout, saving motorists from ever taking that dreaded left turn again.

The plan comes out of a new study of traffic at several key intersections on Ralston between El Camino Real and Alameda de las Pulgas.

The study was meant to support the city's plan for a roundabout at Ralston and South Road, for which it had lined up a \$500,000 grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Instead, it showed that a roundabout probably wouldn't fit there and a stoplight would work better anyway.

For about \$200,000, the report found, a stoplight there would cut out about a minute of delay for the average driver on Ralston.

Public Works Director Ray Davis is recommending that the city change its grant application to request the stoplight instead of the roundabout.

If the air quality district agrees, Davis said, city staff will negotiate to use the remaining \$300,000 for a round-

about at the Notre Dame entrance.

The roundabout would eliminate left-hand turns, and simulations show it would also smooth traffic on Ralston.

The drawback is that building the roundabout would require taking a patch of land from the university.

That would likely mean closing off Laxague Drive, the small road that leads from the university driveway to historic Ralston Hall.

Instead, motorists would have to circle around behind the building.

Also, the university might be asked to match grant funds for the project.

Notre Dame administrators have yet to formally review the proposal, said Maureen Freschet, executive director for community relations.

"I don't think we'd take any kind of position until we can see the fiscal impact," she said.

Belmont Council Member Coralin Feierbach said she can see the appeal of a Ralston roundabout, perhaps with a fountain in the middle.

But Feierbach wondered if the changes would just be "Band-Aids to the real problem" of too many cars on the road.

On Tuesday, the council will be asked to discuss the plans and direct staff on how to proceed.

Free BART smashes record

Erik N. Nelson - Oakland Tribune
in the Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, June 20, 2008

With its last breath, the doomed anti-smog Spare the Air Day free transit program declared that it could deliver public transit riders like nothing else, pumping up trips on BART to nearly 400,000 and an all-time record Thursday.

But at a cost of nearly \$2 million a day, the free rides are to end in favor of a Spare the Air program that appeals to drivers' environmental stewardship to switch to transit during hot, smog-prone summer days.

A record 394,400 trips were made on BART on Thursday. That's 32,000 trips more than the next-highest day of free rides on BART for the Spare the Air program, set Aug. 29, 2007.

"It's fantastic, and I wish we could offer free rides every day, because obviously people respond to that," said Gail Murray, president of BART's governing board and a representative of central Contra Costa County.

The record was also believed to have been helped quite a bit by gasoline prices routinely above \$4.50 a gallon in the Bay Area that are already boosting ridership in a big way even when transit isn't free.

BART spokesman Linton Johnson praised the free-ride program, especially in Thursday's symbolic form. In previous years, Spare the Air Days were declared when hot, stagnant air was forecast, and harmful ozone levels were expected for the following day.

"People had several weeks' notice; they could circle it on their calendar that there was going to be free transit that day," Johnson noted.

The previous record was also set while gas prices were above \$4 a gallon, edged upwards by the throngs that went to San Francisco to cheer and jeer the running of the Olympic torch April 9. That day, BART saw 391,900 trips, only 2,500 fewer than Thursday.

The third-highest ridership in BART's 36-year history, 389,400, also had some help. It occurred on the Friday that the Bay Bridge was closed for construction last Labor Day weekend.

Other modes of public transportation also saw major ridership jumps Thursday, reported John Goodwin, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which bankrolled the free rides along with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. These included a 17-percent increase over normal ridership on Caltrain and a 66-percent jump on Vallejo Transit.

WSU land/water conservation unit on USDA chopping block

By JAMIE HENNEMAN

Capital Press, Friday, June 20, 2008

Several units of the USDA Agriculture Research Service may be shut down as the agency tries to fit into a tightened budget for the entire agency.

President Bush's budget for the federal government would cut \$84 million from the \$1.1 billion the agency received in 2008. Instead, the agency would receive \$1.037 billion for 2009. One of the ARS research units on the short list of potential cuts is the Land Management and Water Conservation Research unit on the Washington State University campus.

ARS director of information Sandy Hays said the Land Management and Water Conservation unit at Pullman is one of many units nationwide that are potential candidates for closure.

"We have 1,200 research projects within 22 national projects that have 2,100 scientists working on them," Hays said. "So the scope of the cuts is quite large, and there is a lot of negotiation that will take place between now and the final budget approval."

Ideally, the budget for the federal government would be completed by Oct. 1 after being debated in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

In the meantime, the six scientists working at the Land Management and Water Conservation unit will continue to work. Projects include global climate change and agricultural mitigation strategies, along with biofuels and alternative crops and cropping systems.

The unit has also worked on monitoring air quality in relation to wind-blown dust and is currently improving the Wind Erosion Prediction System for the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Scientists are also helping farmers identify how to reduce dust emissions. Dryland organic farming systems have also been designed and evaluated for the Pacific Northwest through the unit's work.

By networking with producer groups and nonprofit organizations, scientists Don McCool, Frank Young, Ann Kennedy, Jeff Smith, Brenton Sharratt and David Huggins have also examined how to prevent soil erosion and enhance water quality along with studying carbon sequestration and sustainable soil management.

White House uses executive privilege in EPA spat

By ERICA WERNER

Fresno Bee, Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Friday, June 20, 2008

WASHINGTON -- President Bush asserted executive privilege Friday to withhold documents from a congressional investigation into whether he pressured EPA to weaken decisions on smog and greenhouse gases.

White House officials notified a House committee of the rare assertion about 15 minutes before the committee was to vote on holding the head of the EPA and a White House budget official in contempt of Congress for not providing the documents.

The committee's chairman, Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., then canceled the vote while expressing skepticism over the privilege claim.

"I have a clear sense that their assertion of this privilege is self-serving and not based on the appropriate law and rules," Waxman said from the dais of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing room.

"I don't think we've had a situation like this since Richard Nixon was president when the president of the United States may have been involved in acting contrary to law, and the evidence that

would determine that question for Congress in exercising our oversight is being blocked by an assertion of executive privilege," he said.

Waxman said he wanted to review Attorney General Michael Mukasey's rationale for the executive privilege claim before deciding what to do next. He said he would not abandon his attempts to get what he wants from Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson and Susan Dudley, administrator for information and regulatory affairs at the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Executive privilege, while not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, is grounded in the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers and is sometimes invoked to keep executive branch deliberations private.

President Bush has also asserted executive privilege to keep his chief of staff, Josh Bolten, and former White House counsel Harriet Miers from having to provide information to Congress about the firing of a group of U.S. attorneys in what Democrats consider a political purge.

In February the Democratic-led House voted to hold Miers and Bolten in contempt of Congress despite the assertion of executive privilege. When Mukasey refused to refer the contempt citations to a federal grand jury, the House Judiciary Committee sued in federal court to enforce them, arguing that Bush was making an overly broad use of executive privilege.

Waxman contends the White House intervened with EPA to produce more industry-friendly outcomes in setting new smog standards and denying California and more than a dozen other states permission to cut greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks.

EPA and White House officials have turned over thousands of pages of documents in response to Waxman's subpoenas, but Waxman contends they are keeping back some that would clearly reveal President Bush's role.

These include documents about Bush's participation in the smog decision, talking points on the smog rule for Johnson to use with Bush, and communications about preparing talking points for Bush to use in discussing the greenhouse gas waiver with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. It's not clear that such a formal conversation between Bush and Schwarzenegger ever happened - spokesmen for Schwarzenegger and EPA said Friday they were not aware of it.)

These documents and others are referenced in a June 19 letter from Mukasey to Bush supporting a claim of executive privilege to block their release. The letter was provided Friday to Waxman's committee.

"I believe that publicly releasing these deliberative materials to the committee could inhibit the candor of future deliberations among the president's staff in the (Executive Office of the President) and deliberative communications between the EOP and executive branch agencies, particularly deliberations concerning politically charged issues," Mukasey wrote.

"Accordingly, I conclude that the subpoenaed materials at issue here fall squarely within the scope of executive privilege."

A congressional committee can overcome an executive privilege claim if the documents in question are critical to fulfilling its functions, Mukasey said, but he argued that's not the case here. He cited the many documents Waxman already has received and the conclusions he's been able to draw from them.

On the smog issue, EPA and White House officials have acknowledged that only hours before the rule was announced in March, President Bush intervened directly on behalf of White House staff who opposed a tougher standard to protect the environment from smog.

On the California greenhouse gas issue, Waxman's committee staff produced a report last month concluding from interviews with high-level EPA officials that Johnson initially supported giving

California full or partial permission to limit tailpipe emissions - but reversed himself after hearing from the White House. Waxman contends such intervention by the White House could be illegal since the outcome, according to Waxman, runs contrary to the Clean Air Act.

More than a dozen other states were also blocked from implementing the tailpipe emission limits after Johnson rejected California's request for a required federal waiver in December.

White House Refuses To Release Documents On Air-Quality Policy

Officials Again Cite Executive Privilege

By Spencer S. Hsu and Carrie Johnson
Washington Post, Saturday, June 21, 2008

The Bush administration yesterday invoked executive privilege and refused to turn over key documents sought by a House investigative committee, escalating a fight over the [White House](#) role in U.S. policy on greenhouse-gas emissions and ozone air quality standards.

Rep. Henry L. Waxman (D-Calif.), chairman of the [House Oversight and Government Reform Committee](#), called off a threatened contempt of Congress vote against Environmental Protection Agency Administrator [Stephen L. Johnson](#) and a White House budget official while congressional Democrats decide how to respond.

Lawmakers say the two Bush administration officials refused to respond to subpoenas for documents about communications between the White House and [EPA](#). The papers concern White House intervention in Johnson's December decision to overrule EPA officials who were in favor of granting California and 17 other states permission to mandate a reduction of vehicle emissions by 30 percent by 2016.

In March, the EPA also issued tougher health standards for smog, but they were not as strict as levels recommended by an EPA science advisory board after [President Bush](#) sided with the [White House Office of Management and Budget](#) in opposition.

"Administrator Johnson has repeatedly insisted he reached his decisions on California's petition and the new ozone standard on his own, relying on his best judgment," Waxman said. "Today's assertion of executive privilege raises serious questions about administrator Johnson's credibility and the involvement of the president."

In a letter to Waxman released yesterday, OMB Director [Jim Nussle](#) called the committee's threat of a contempt vote an "unjustified course" that failed to respect and balance the interests of a co-equal branch of government. Separately, EPA Associate Administrator Christopher B. Bliley told the committee that the administration turned over the "vast majority" of responsive documents, withholding fewer than 25 of more than 10,000.

Nussle wrote that the government is acting "to preserve the confidentiality that is essential to the ability of current and future Presidents to receive candid analyses, advice and recommendations" from senior advisers.

In addition to Johnson, House investigators sought records from Susan Dudley, administrator for information and regulatory affairs at the OMB.

Administration critics are trying to obtain the waiver California needs through a federal lawsuit and congressional legislation.

The confrontation is the latest showdown between Congress and the administration over executive privilege, under which presidents can prohibit executive branch officials from testifying or can withhold documents from Congress involving internal deliberations.

Earlier this year, the House sued former White House counsel [Harriet E. Miers](#) and chief of staff [Joshua B. Bolten](#), seeking to compel them under subpoena to turn over information about the firing of nine U.S. attorneys. A hearing is scheduled for Monday in federal court in the District.

The House Judiciary panel also is engaged in a tug of war with former White House policy aide [Karl Rove](#), who maintains through his attorney that he cannot answer questions about the U.S. attorney documents because of the privilege issue.

Peter Shane, a law professor and executive privilege expert at [Ohio State University](#), said the conflicts are "part and parcel of a larger effort to reinstate what the Bush administration believes to be the proper scope of executive power."

In the EPA case, Shane said, Congress appears to be conducting an investigation of a policy decision that already has been made, a factor that he said ultimately could give lawmakers "an upper hand."

Beijing reveals plan for Olympic car ban

By STEPHEN WADE, AP Sports Writer
SF Chronicle, Friday, June 20, 2008

BEIJING, China (AP) --Beijing will pull half its 3.3 million vehicles off the roads during the Olympics, betting the move, plus a stringent ban on construction and heavy industry, will clean the city's noxious **air** when the games open in seven weeks.

Vehicles will be allowed on the roads on alternate days — according to even or odd car registration numbers — from July 20 until Sept. 20.

In addition, 300,000 heavy polluting vehicles — aging industrial trucks, many of which operate only at night — will be banned from July 1.

A deadly earthquake last month and fierce human-rights protests on international legs of the Olympic torch relay have removed some of the scrutiny from Beijing's chronic **air** pollution. But sparkling venues and \$40 billion spent to improve infrastructure have not disguised the fact that **air quality** remains a contentious issue for the games.

International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge had said outdoor endurance events lasting more than an hour will be postponed if **air quality** is poor.

"Ironically, the one place where expectations are so low are on the environment, where China may come out looking better than people thought," Victor Cha, director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, said in an e-mail.

"Pea-soup **air** at the opening ceremony would be their worst nightmare, however," Cha added.

The Beijing Olympics take place on Aug. 8-24 followed by the Paralympics Sept. 6-17. About 500,000 foreigners are expected for the Olympics with 10,000 athletes and about 30,000 journalists set to attend.

Under the temporary plan announced Friday, between 30 and 70 percent of 300,000 government-operated vehicles will be taken off the roads. Officials also expect a strong increase in the use of public transportation, with several new subway lines set to open. Several others have opened in the last year.

The traffic plan was announced on a day when Beijing sweltered under a thick haze of pollution, limiting visibility to a half mile. Conditions were even worse on Thursday, although both days the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau's Web site described conditions as only "slightly polluted."

"Perception is often different from the scientific monitoring statistics," said Du Shaozhong, deputy chief of Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau. "We base our findings on data."

"We now have 27 monitoring stations which all use state of the art equipment," Du added.

Du had repeatedly denied charges that officials moved the monitors away from polluted areas to get better readings.

"We have the confidence and capacity to provide good **air quality** for the Beijing Olympics," Du said. He estimated car emissions would be cut 63 percent by the ban and other measures.

The plan will also prohibit most vehicles entering the city from outside Beijing. These vehicles will need special permits and will need to meet **air quality** standards. Officials said violators would be punished under "applicable regulations," but gave no specific details about fines or other sanctions.

Officials said that 95 percent of the city's 66,000 taxis would be operating during the games, with 21,000 buses available.

A similar plan was tested last summer in a four-day period, and the measures announced Friday were widely expected.

Five days after the July 20 ban goes into effect, special Olympic traffic lanes will begin operating and will stay in place until Sept. 25. The city will set aside 165 miles of roadway, where certified Olympic vehicles will be allowed to move from hotels, Olympic venues and the Athletes Village. The average speed is expected to be 35 mph.

Setting aside special lanes is the only way to move traffic through Beijing's chaotic, crowded road system.

Officials announced several months ago that during the same two-month period, most construction in the city will halt, heavy industries will close and even spray painting will stop to clean Beijing's **air**. Some reports suggested that production cutbacks will come even sooner.

Beijing takes government, party cars off road

Washington Post, OC Register, Monday, June 23, 2008

BEIJING (AP) -- Half of all cars belonging to the government and Communist Party were ordered off Beijing's clogged roads Monday, part of an effort to help clean the city's air ahead of the Olympics.

Despite the ban, the skyline remained shrouded in smog, and traffic was bumper-to-bumper during afternoon rush hour on freeways and Chang An Avenue, which cuts through the heart of the city.

Under the edict, announced on the city's Web site, half of all government and Communist Party cars were not being used from Monday until July 19.

On July 20, another rule begins that will ban half of Beijing's 3.3 million cars on alternate days, depending on whether their license plate numbers end in odd or even numbers.

In addition, 300,000 heavy polluting vehicles - aging industrial trucks, many of which operate only at night - will be banned from July 1.

The auto ban is part of an anti-pollution plan that also will halt construction and heavy industry during the Olympics.

"To meet the air quality standards and to realize safe and smooth traffic is our solemn promise to the international community," the Beijing government notice said.

Officials also expect an increase in the use of public transportation, with several new subway lines set to open. Several others have opened in the last year.

Officials said that 95 percent of the city's 66,000 taxis would be operating during the games, along with 21,000 buses.

Chronic gridlock and polluted skies have emerged as problems for the city as it gears up for the Aug. 8-24 Olympics, a source of tremendous excitement and national pride. About 500,000 foreigners are expected for the games, with 10,000 athletes and about 30,000 journalists.

International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge said earlier that outdoor endurance events lasting more than an hour will be postponed if air quality is poor.

Ground-level dust, soot and industrial emissions mixed with car exhaust creates a gray-brown haze that often blankets the city of 17 million.

"As a short term matter, restricting the use of the automobile is sensible and the only thing they could do right now," said Fred Salvucci, senior research associate at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Transportation and Logistics. "The big question is whether it will help enough."

Salvucci, who also served as Massachusetts' secretary of transportation for 12 years, said curtailing auto traffic should help by lowering congestion and thereby shortening the hours that vehicles travel.

"With less stop and go, and less congestion, vehicles travel less hours and engines will be more efficient and generate less pollution," he said.

In a dry run - and a sign that officials understand the gravity the problem - Beijing imposed similar traffic controls in August 2007 for four days, removing hundreds of thousands of private cars from city streets.

In 2006, about 800,000 private and bureaucratic vehicles were not allowed to take to the roads during a six-day meeting between Chinese and African leaders in another successful experiment.

[The Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Friday, June 20, 2008:](#)

Traffic lights out of sync

The recent Brookings Institute study on carbon emissions for major U.S. cities shows that Bakersfield residents are smart about their energy use in residences, emitting the lowest carbon from home energy use in the study, but having the worst record for automobile emissions.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that Bakersfield's citizens are conservative when in control of emissions in their home energy habits. However, much of what happens because of their auto travel is controlled by government policies.

One related issue that has been raised on this page time and again is the negative effect that our city's unsynchronized traffic signals have on air pollution. No private citizen can control how this problem affects his driving habits.

I am no traffic engineer, but it doesn't take a scientific degree to rationalize the environmental harm such poor execution causes, let alone the increased chances of red-light running by drivers desperate to "make" the greens. Stopping a group of cars on a 45 mph- or 55 mph-limit street for one car to access that street is ludicrous. It results in idling engines at the light, increased fuel consumption on start-up, and heavier brake wear, hence more fuel and brake particulate pollution in the air.

In my 10-year memory as a Bakersfield resident, our City Council has never once addressed this issue. Yet it is, I believe, on the top ten list of quality-of-life grievances of city residents, right up there with painfully loud motorcycle mufflers. Why can't our elected officials address this matter?

GREGG K. KNOWLES, Bakersfield

[Fresno Bee, Guest Commentary, Saturday, June 21, 2008](#)

Less wood in fireplaces, less air pollution

By Dr. David Lighthall

Through increased regulation of pollution sources, the San Joaquin Valley is slowly and painfully coming to grips with its extreme vulnerability to ozone and PM 2.5 (fine particulate air pollution

less than 2.5 microns in diameter). But even stronger regulation by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is needed.

Over the next decade and beyond, new controls established for mobile (vehicle and equipment) and stationary (industry and agriculture) pollution sources will require businesses to invest billions in cleaner technology. At the same time, households will be asked to make lifestyle changes to protect our health.

A case in point is Rule 4901, put in place by the Valley Air District in November 2003. It restricts household wood burning when stagnant winter weather makes it likely that residents will be breathing more than 65 micrograms per cubic meter of PM 2.5 averaged over 24 hours. Records indicate that over the life of the rule (about 600 winter days), 30 nightly bans were called in Fresno County and 36 in Kern County, the most populous of the air district's eight counties.

With a grant by the district, the Central Valley Health Policy Institute at California State University, Fresno, is evaluating Rule 4901's impact on air quality in Bakersfield and Fresno. Before sharing our results, it is worth noting the research behind the rule.

With millions in funding support from agriculture, industry and taxpayers, CARB launched the California Regional PM 10/PM 2.5 Air Quality Study in 1999. Extensive air sampling and chemical analyses undertaken by researchers revealed a disturbing finding: Evening concentrations of harmful PM 2.5 were extremely high in South Valley cities during thermal inversions.

Commonplace in Valley winter, thermal inversions occur at nightfall when cold dense air from mountain slopes slides underneath the warmer daytime air mass. Instead of warm air rising and dissipating pollutants upward to an elevation of several thousand feet, pollutants concentrate in several hundred feet of air space.

Very low or nonexistent evening wind compounds this 10-fold reduction in mixing volume. Chemical analyses revealed that wood smoke was a predominant component of evening spikes in pollution and accompanying federal health standard violations.

Natural isn't always healthful

Wood smoke may be natural, but it is not harmless. Epidemiology and toxicology studies conducted in California and around the world have established solid, mounting evidence that excess exposure to wood smoke contributes to elevated rates of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease and premature death. A major element of wood-smoke risk is the high fraction (90%) of ultrafine particles -- less than 1 micron in diameter -- that slip past the lungs and into the bloodstream.

Urban wood-burning during inversions creates a neighborhood concentration effect. As wood smoke flows out of chimneys, it slowly envelops the ground-level air space.

Even if windows are closed, neighbors' furnaces draw air contaminated by wood smoke into their homes, turning an outdoor air pollutant into an indoor threat and transferring one family's source of heat into a neighbor's health threat because of leaking stoves and fireplaces. However, those most at risk are the residents of wood-burning homes.

Our statistical analysis of wintertime PM 2.5 data, collected hourly by monitors in Bakersfield and Fresno, indicates that daily bans make a big difference. The monitor data provided clear evidence that on most nights when wood burning was restricted, there was noticeably less evening pollution than the night before, even though the thermal inversion was just as strong or even worse. In other words, a majority of wood burners have been complying with the rule.

The rule also has contributed to less overall burning. Based on a statistical model of the relationship between PM 2.5 levels and weather conditions developed from data collected prior to Rule 4901, actual nighttime PM 2.5 levels in the four post-rule winters averaged 31% lower than our meteorological model predicted in Fresno and Bakersfield.

California Air Resources Board scientists recently concluded that PM 2.5 pollution is more harmful than previously thought, estimating that 1,000 premature deaths could be avoided each year in the Valley if the federal standard was met.

Mortal threat

Given this mortal threat and the effectiveness of Rule 4901, the Valley Air District has ample scientific justification for reducing the threshold for wood-burning bans to the new federal daily standard of 35 micrograms per cubic meter of air. Valley residents can rest assured that further reductions in wood-burning will allow everyone to breathe a bit easier, especially our children and other vulnerable groups.

Dr. David Lighthall is senior scientist at the Central Valley Health Policy Institute at California State University, Fresno.

[Tri-Valley Herald Editorial, Sunday, June 22, 2008](#)

Sunday Perspective

By Jack Z. Smith - Commentary

Amid the furor over sky-high oil prices and \$4 gasoline, the news media have given minimal attention to an increasingly significant factor contributing to rising energy prices: the relentless uptick in global population.

We're adding 77 million energy-consuming people to the planet every year. That increase is more than triple the population of fast-growing Texas, the second-most populous state in the world's third most-populous nation.

The bulk of the global population jump is in developing countries where energy consumption rates also are rising the fastest.

That phenomenon not only is fostering greater worldwide demand for fossil fuels (oil, natural gas and coal), but also squeezing precious fresh-water supplies and steadily decreasing land available for crops at a time when food prices are soaring.

Given this backdrop, it was pleasing to see a news article outlining Egypt's intensified efforts to rein in its rapid population growth at a time when the government is dealing with lengthy bread lines and riots over flour rationing.

In only about 25 years, Egypt's population has roughly doubled, to 81 million, making it the most populous Arab nation and the 16th most populous of the world's 200-plus nations.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has launched a new family planning campaign based on concerns that the nation's population would double by 2050 based on current growth rates.

The slogan for the \$80 million campaign is simple: "Two children per family - a chance for a better life."

Indeed, that's roughly the birth rate necessary to eventually stabilize the world's population.

That lower birth rate would reduce the growing pressure on the world's finite supply of fossil fuels, fresh water and arable land. It also would temper the damage that continued population growth is causing in terms of [air and water pollution](#), destruction of rain forests and extinction of plant and animal species.

Population growth also accelerates concern about climate change (aka global warming). Can you believe we're facing the potential extinction of the magnificent polar bear as a result of melting Arctic ice?

As the United Nations Population Fund has noted, stronger family planning programs and increased formal education for women raise their living standards, lower their birth rates and reduce the number of unwanted children entering the world.

The less that women face unwanted pregnancies, the lower the number of potential abortions.

Even if the world's birth rate were instantly lowered to two per woman, there would be continued population growth for a considerable time because many nations currently have a large number of women of child-bearing age.

Take China, the world's most-populous nation and a country well known for its governmentally mandated "one-child" policy. China is still gaining 7 million people annually as a result of natural growth (births exceeding deaths), according to demographer Carl Haub of the Population Reference Bureau.

Growth continues because China allows many exceptions to its "one-child" policy (resulting in an actual birth rate of about 1.6) and because the nation has many women of child-bearing age, Haub said.

The United States, with 304 million people, is the world's biggest energy glutton and is growing at nearly 3 million people annually, with immigration a major factor.

In 2050, the U.S. is expected to have 420 million people, an increase of 116 million, and will retain its ranking as the world's third-most populous nation, according to PRB projections made in 2007.

It would be laudable if America spent far less money on ill-fated foreign adventures such as the Iraq war and instead focused overseas expenditures on family planning programs, reduction of poverty and disease, agricultural development, improving water systems and enhancement of women's rights.

In a future presidential administration, that actually might happen.

[OC Register Blog, Monday, June 23, 2008:](#)

Southern California pollution sinking into desert

Deserts suck.

Suck carbon dioxide, that is. The [Mojave Desert](#) is absorbing more of the airborne pollutant than previously thought, says Lynne Fenstermaker, a scientist at the [Desert Research Institute](#) in Nevada. And it may be that this nearby desert is doing more than absorbing car exhaust from our freeways. The study by Fenstermaker and colleague Jay Arnone has found that the Mojave can absorb as much carbon dioxide as a temperate forest.

"Without deserts, the annual rate of [man-made] carbon dioxide rise might be twice as rapid as it is presently and might therefore promote more rapid global warming," Arnone said in a recent [press release](#).

And since deserts make up more than 30 percent of the Earth's land surface, if all deserts were absorbing as much as the Mojave, "Then the amount of carbon dioxide taken up each year would match the amount emitted to the atmosphere globally through burning of fossil fuels," Arnone says.

Carbon dioxide in the Mojave Desert is absorbed both by plants and by microorganisms in the top layer of the soil. This "microbiotic crust" contains lichens, mosses, and blue-green algae. All of these do some type of photosynthesis, which turns carbon dioxide into sugar, that they then use for food.

You wouldn't think that the sparse vegetation on a desert would be able to take up so much carbon dioxide, but in an [El Niño](#) year, where the deserts get a large amount of rainfall, the

population of annuals can be quite high, Fenstermaker says. And the more plants there are, the more carbon dioxide they inhale.

At this point, they're not sure exactly where the carbon dioxide is going. That is, if the vegetation or the soil layer is doing more of the work. But more studies are planned. They also want to take measurements in deserts worldwide, to see if other deserts suck as much carbon dioxide as the Mojave.

The Mojave study is funded by the [Department of Energy, Terrestrial Carbon Processes project](#).

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses hundreds of wildfires are contributing to the poor air quality in California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Cientos de incendios contribuyen a deteriorar el aire en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, June 23, 2008

Autoridades ambientales en California advirtieron que cientos de incendios de diversas magnitudes, provocados por una tormenta de descargas eléctricas el fin de semana, mantenían enrarecido el aire en la región norte del estado.

La mayoría de los siniestros fueron pequeños pero algunos obligaron a evacuaciones en los condados de Butte, Shasta, Santa Cruz y el este de Sacramento.

Un recuento del Departamento Forestal de California mencionó hasta 600 incendios registrados hasta el momento.

El gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger desplegó tropas y helicópteros de la Guardia Nacional en apoyo y dispuso a las instituciones de emergencia de su administración para servicio del área entre Madera y los límites con Oregon.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses NASA and the Air Resources Board will analyze the air quality in California.](#)

Estudian juntos la NASA y California la contaminación del aire

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, June 20, 2008

La Administración Nacional de Aeronáutica y el Espacio, la NASA, y el gobierno de California iniciaron un nuevo proyecto para analizar conjuntamente la contaminación del aire que respiran los californianos.

La Nasa puso en vuelo un avión laboratorio que analizará partículas químicas del aire a lo largo de toda la costa de California en el Pacífico.

La información de composición química de la contaminación que encuentre la Nasa será comparada con la que detectan sensores de la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California.

El proyecto busca comparar la contaminación sobre California continental y el mar para decidir medidas preventivas contra el sobrecalentamiento.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the fight against over 400 wildfires in California.](#)

Combaten más de 400 incendios en California

El Mexicano, Monday, June 23, 2008

SACRAMENTO, California, 22 de Junio. Tormentas de relámpagos iniciaron hasta 400 incendios en el norte de California que seguían ardiendo el domingo, mientras las autoridades en el sur del

estado estaban cerca de apagar un incendio forestal que destruyó más de una decena de casas y obligó a miles de personas a evacuar la zona.

La oficina del gobernador Arnold Schwarzenegger dijo el sábado que los relámpagos iniciaron casi 400 incendios desde el condado de Monterey hasta los límites de California con el estado de Oregón, al norte. El gobernador pidió que la Guardia Nacional de California ayude en los esfuerzos para tratar de controlar los incendios.

El mayor incendio fue de casi cinco kilómetros cuadrados (tres millas cuadradas) en un bosque denso a 64 kilómetros (40 millas) al sureste de Sacramento, que amenazó a diversas casas de campo dispersas en la zona. Diversos habitantes recibieron órdenes de evacuar sus viviendas, dijo Nancy Carniglia, del Departamento de Protección Forestal y Contra Incendios de California.

El incendio comenzó en el condado de Napa la tarde del sábado y se extendió rápidamente a una zona principalmente agreste del condado de Solano. El fuego estaba contenido en un 10% para la mañana del domingo, informó Carniglia.

Las tormentas de rayos fueron responsables de más de 60 incendios en la reserva boscosa de ShastaTrinity, a 257 kilómetros (160 millas) al norte de Sacramento. Esos incendios tuvieron tamaños que iban de menos de 0,4 hectáreas (un acre) a 303 hectáreas (750 acres).

Ninguno de los incendios amenazó algún hogar de inmediato, dijo Michael Odle, portavoz del Servicio Forestal. Cuadrillas de bomberos acudieron el sábado a combatir los dos incendios mayores.

Otros incendios estaban dispersos a lo largo del norte de California, donde unos 90 incendios que iban de 0,4 hectáreas (un acre) a 50 hectáreas (125 acres) de extensión, ardían tan sólo en una zona del condado de Mendocino, informaron autoridades del Departamento de Protección Forestal y Contra Incendios.

En el sur de San Francisco, un incendio que calcinó hogares y cerró una carretera estrecha había sido contenido en un 90%.

Hacia el sur, a lo largo de la costa, los bomberos luchaban contra un incendio de casi 128 kilómetros cuadrados (80 millas cuadradas) en una parte remota del Parque Nacional de Los Padres en el condado de Monterey, el incendio había sido contenido en un 55%.

La Guardia Nacional participa en el tercer de cinco niveles de despliegue, con un comando móvil en la región de los incendios.

En Watsonville más de mil 200 residentes fueron evacuados; al este de San Francisco, en Napa, el fuego consumía parte de un viñedo y hasta el momento no hay reportes de muertos.

Este es un reporte parcial del CDF de este día: en el condado Butte 21 incendios y alerta de evacuación; en el condado de Shasta 62 incendios; Mendocino 60, Humboldt 50, Tehama 34, Lassen 27; 15 en San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Madera, Mariposa y Merced de forma respectiva. En Fairfield, 60 kilómetros al este de Sacramento se evacuaron 400 casas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses electrical thunderstorms start over 600 wildfires in the state of California.](#)

Provoca tormenta eléctrica más incendios en California

El Diario Dijital, Sunday, June 22, 2008

San Diego— Una tormenta eléctrica provocó más de 600 incendios y temperaturas sin precedentes, por lo que el gobernador de California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, ordenó ayer que la Guardia Nacional estatal refuerce a miles de bomberos movilizados para controlar los siniestros.

El mandatario ordenó que la Guardia interviniera con seis helicópteros en apoyo a aeronaves cisterna de los bomberos y del Departamento Forestal de California (CDF), que contabilizó de manera preliminar 602 incendios.

El servicio meteorológico estadounidense emitió una alerta el viernes por potenciales incendios, con temperaturas de 38 grados centígrados, que llegaron hasta los 45 en la frontera y las inmediaciones de Sacramento, con condiciones de sequía y humedad ambiente mínima.

Las condiciones crearon una tormenta de descargas eléctricas entre el Valle de San Joaquín y los límites con Oregon. Se reportaron por lo menos cinco mil descargas entre la noche del sábado y la mañana de ayer.

El subdirector forestal de California, Mark Jarvins, dijo que se pudieron haber registrado unas seis mil descargas de "nubes sin humedad".

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El Servicio Meteorológico advirtió que continuarán en la semana las altas temperaturas y que pudiera generarse otra tormenta de relámpagos durante la siguiente semana.