

Businesses fear green law will put them in red

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Monday, August 17, 2009

STOCKTON - Green-minded businesses want to know: How much green will it cost them to comply with sweeping new climate change regulations?

Representatives of the California Air Resources Board visited Stockton last week, where they met with members of the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce "Green Team San Joaquin," a coalition of businesses and local government organizations that are striving for environmental responsibility while staying in the black.

That may not be easy, at least in the short term, when it comes to the climate change law known as Assembly Bill 32.

The law, passed in 2006, requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. While most of the regulations focus on large emitters such as utilities and power plants, advocates warn there will be trickle-down to small businesses, including spikes in energy and fuel costs.

"The numbers are pretty staggering," said Edwin Lombard, a consultant representing business interests. "We're seeing a recent trend of businesses moving to other states, and that's something we'd like to see stopped."

He cited a recent California State University, Sacramento, study reporting that implementing the law will cost small businesses on average \$49,691 per year, higher than state Air Board estimates.

That, in turn, will increase the cost of goods and services. As a result, families will face increased costs of \$3,857 per year, the study found.

Virgil Welch, special assistant to Air Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols, told Green Team members that savings will be found down the road.

"That study talks about costs," he said. "It says nothing about saving. Being more efficient and reducing waste can save you money."

The emphasis of last week's meeting was not arguing over the law, but figuring out how to help businesses navigate the rules. The Air Board has published a toolkit of strategies for businesses at www.coolcalifornia.org.

La Brea Fire now 60 percent contained at 85,686 acres

By Doug Keeler

Taft Midway Driller, Sunday, August 16, 2009

Taft, Calif. - Firefighters made good progress in their battle to halt the spread of the week-old La Brea Fire on Saturday.

The fire is now 60 percent contained, up from 25 percent contained Saturday morning.

It had burned 85,686 acres by Sunday morning.

Much of the progress has been made on the west flank of the fire, where there was a major blow up on Thursday that forced about 150 evacuations.

But firefighters said there is still a lot of work to do on the east flank of the fire where it is burning in the high country above Highway 166.

Engines have been placed near the homes scattered along the Foothill Road area above Cottonwood Canyon.

Some evacuations are still in place, but the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and firefighters are evaluating the orders on the west side today.

Difficult weather with highs in the 90s and steep terrain are still going to make the fight to contain the fire difficult, firefighters said.

United States Forest Service and the Santa Barbara County narcotics investigators have determined the cause of the fire. They said it started from a cooking fire at an illegal marijuana farm.

Investigators discovered the farm and believe the people responsible for it may still be in the forest trying to hike out.

Illegal styling products targeted in Stanislaus, San Joaquin Counties DA part of fight against gels, sprays that hurt air

By Merrill Balassone

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, August 14, 2009

Call it "Hairspray: The Lawsuit."

The Stanislaus County district attorney's office is holding firm against unlawful hair products by taking part in a statewide lawsuit against several national retailers who stock beauty supplies alleged to violate California environmental law.

The lawsuit, filed in early 2008, seeks penalties of at least \$17 million, with amounts to be levied based on each day a prohibited hair product is offered for sale, according to court papers.

District attorneys from Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Sacramento, San Bernardino and Solano counties have joined in the lawsuit, and the state attorney general's office represents the rest of the state.

An October hearing has been set to try to settle the case, which names Longs Drug Stores, Target, Rite Aid, Walgreens and Ralphs, among other defendants.

The hair products — including some sold at Raley's, Longs and Rite Aid stores in Modesto, Turlock, Ceres and Escalon — were found to contain elevated amounts of smog-forming volatile organic compounds, state environmental authorities said.

These chemicals in the hairsprays, gels, mousses and other styling products cause emissions that "degrade air quality, increase greenhouse gases and harm human health," the lawsuit reads.

Investigators with the California Air Resources Board found 11 violations at Stanislaus and San Joaquin county drugstores and supermarkets.

"There are dozens of these stores in Central Valley counties supplying hundreds or thousands of products per year," said Matthew Maclear, an attorney with the California District Attorneys Association who prosecutes environmental cases for rural California counties.

"We don't want people using illegal consumer products in their house that could potentially hurt their families, nor do we want consumers using products that can make the air we share worse," Maclear said.

Five of Rite Aid's area stores were found to stock products that violate state limits on VOC content, according to the lawsuit.

Attorney Alexander Medina, who represents Rite Aid in the lawsuit, did not return calls for comment. Officials from Rite Aid and Longs, which is now CVS, also did not respond.

The lawsuit names a New Jersey-based company that provides the products to the retail stores — without authorization from the brand manufacturers.

The products are meant to be distributed only by authorized salons or wholesalers, Maclear said. Officials are not clear where Pro's Choice Beauty Care Inc. gets its products.

Because California's air quality standards are the most stringent in the nation, products formulated for other parts of the country and world that should not be distributed in California make their way here through unauthorized channels, Maclear said.

While the amount of VOCs in each product is small, Californians use more than a half- billion items that contain them each year, including deodorants, hairspray, cleaning products, spray paint and insecticides, according to the Air Resources Board.

VOCs create ozone, which has been found to contribute to asthma, other respiratory diseases and cardiovascular problems, said Dimitri Stanich, Air Resources Board spokesman.

Stanich said the air pollution created by VOCs should be of special concern to residents in the Northern San Joaquin Valley.

"All the air pollution is trapped and stays there for a long period of time," Stanich said. "It benefits everyone in the area to quickly reduce those emissions."

LOCAL VIOLATIONS

Investigators with the California Air Resources Board took samples of products at these area stores and found elevated levels of smog-forming chemicals in some hair products:

Rite Aid, 2135 Jackson Ave., Escalon

- Nexxus Comb Thru Natural Hold Design & Finishing Spray

Raley's, 2401 Orangeburg Ave., Modesto

- ABBA Exacting Medium Hold Working Hairspray

Rite Aid, 2920 Whitmore Ave., Ceres

- Paul Mitchell Freeze & Shine Super Spray
- ABBA Exacting Medium Hold Working Spray

Rite Aid, 3900 Pelandale Ave., Modesto

- Joico Ice Finisher Hairspray
- Joico Ice Hair Finisher Hairspray
- Rusk W8Less Internal Restructure

Rite Aid, 1032 Oakdale Rd., Modesto

- Zotos Big Sexy Hair~Spray & Play Harder

Rite Aid, 651 N. Golden State Blvd., Turlock

- L'Anza Curls & Color Styling Formula Finishing Freeze

Long's Drugs, 2405 Geer Rd., Turlock

- Paul Mitchell Freeze & Shine Super Spray

Cash for Clunkers pays high price, prof says

By Mark Glover

Sacramento Bee, August 15, 2009

The federal government's Cash for Clunkers program is paying far above the going price to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, according to a University of California, Davis, economics professor.

The analysis by Christopher Knittel, who also serves as a faculty associate at the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies, said that while carbon credits are projected to sell in the United States for about \$28 per ton, even the best-case calculation of the cost of a clunkers rebate is \$237 per ton.

More likely scenarios produced a cost of more than \$500 per ton, Knittel said. The analysis does not incorporate the program's other objectives: stimulating the economy and providing a sales boost for automakers.

The full text of Knittel's analysis can be viewed at www.ucei.berkeley.edu.

California employees face quandary over carbon offsets

By Tom Knudson
Sacramento Bee, Sunday, August 16, 2009

Al Gore buys them. So do the Grateful Dead, Hollywood celebrities and, increasingly, many climate-conscious executives and consumers.

For those who travel the world by air but don't want to contribute to global warming in the process, compensating with so-called carbon offsets has become a fashionable solution.

The sale of these credits for environmentally friendly activities, investments in everything from wind energy to carbon stored in forests, jumped from \$97 million in 2006 to \$331 million worldwide in 2007 – about a quarter of it in the United States.

But one global green leader does not offset its travel, even though its employees regularly fly around the world warning about the dangers of climate change and devising strategies to combat it. That leader is the state of California.

"As a state employee, you are put in an awkward situation," said Tony Brunello, deputy secretary of climate change and energy at the Natural Resources Agency who has traveled to Europe, South America and Indonesia.

"We are trying to push (emissions) reductions," Brunello said. "It would help us, as state workers, to have some clear direction on what you do and you don't offset."

His quandary hit home after a recent trip to Brazil for which no offsets were purchased. When The Bee asked about that, Brunello decided to buy them himself.

"Do we need a policy for how this stuff works?" asked Sandy Cooney, a spokesman for the resources agency. "Absolutely, yes – because one does not exist."

To buy or not to buy

In all, more than two dozen top state officials and 19 legislators have logged more than a million air miles flying around the world on climate-related business since 2006, a recent Sacramento Bee investigation found. In the process, they emitted roughly 400,000 pounds of heat-trapping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The Bee, which last month reported many state trips were funded by corporate donations routed through non-profit organizations, also found no shortage of surprises in the policy vacuum around carbon offsets.

While Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger touts the value of offsetting travel and pays for it with his own money, some state employees will not say what choice they make.

"Offsets are a personal decision," said BreAnda Northcutt, deputy secretary of communications at the California Environmental Protection Agency who has traveled to Belgium, Poland, Germany, Britain and China on climate-related business. "I'd rather not discuss it."

Two of the governor's most trusted global warming gladiators hold divergent views.

Linda Adams, secretary of Cal-EPA and the state's lead climate negotiator, who has flown on official business to at least eight nations since 2006, said offsets help shrink her large carbon footprint. Like her boss, she pays for them herself.

"It's an individual choice," Adams said. "I think it's very important, and I'm very supportive of offsets in general."

Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board, which enforces the state's pioneering Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, said the credits do not yet yield proven climate benefits.

"When I travel by airplane, I do not buy offsets," Nichols said in an e-mail. "I do not think offsets are particularly credible."

One type of offset popular with Adams and other state officials – the sale of credits representing carbon stored naturally in California forests – also is one that some specialists say falls short.

"Forestry offsets have a lot of superficial appeal," said Michael Wara, assistant professor at Stanford Law School and an expert on carbon trading. "But my view is that preserving forests as an offset is tough to do well – and the current state of the art in California is not good enough."

'Anyway' offsets

In the United States, where offset purchases are voluntary, they are traded in a regulatory netherworld with limited government oversight.

Across Europe, where emission reductions are mandatory, and where carbon offset trading is more widespread under the Kyoto protocol, Wara has uncovered flaws.

More help coming for crews battling Calif. fires

By Brooke Donald - Associated Press Writer
In the Modesto Bee, Friday, August 14, 2009

DAVENPORT, Calif. -- California deployed more fire crews across the state Friday to gain control of a series of growing wildfires that have forced hundreds of people to flee their homes.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Lockheed Fire has prompted officials to issue mandatory evacuation orders for about 2,400 people in the mountain communities of Swanton and Bonny Doon in Santa Cruz County.

The blaze, which started Wednesday night, blackened 6.4 square miles of remote wilderness and was only about 5 percent contained Friday morning, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said.

The fire, about 10 miles north of the coastal city of Santa Cruz, has damaged only two small structures but was threatening more than 1,000 others. There have been no reports of injuries related to the fire, whose cause is under investigation.

The Lockheed Fire was about three miles from the site of last June's Martin Fire, which burned 520 acres and destroyed 11 buildings in Bonny Doon, home to about 2,000 people and several wineries.

The area's rugged terrain and limited access were hampering the roughly 700 firefighters currently at the scene. About 300 more firefighters, six helicopters and six fixed-wing aircraft were expected Friday, officials said.

Higher humidity from overnight fog and light winds were also welcome news to ground crews trying to prevent the fire from spreading.

"It was burning within the interior of where the fire is," CalFire spokesman Mike Mohler told the Monterey Herald. "The fire didn't move forward ... It's absolutely great news."

Smoke plumes extended over 50 miles from Santa Cruz to Monterey, but winds were blowing the smoke out toward the Pacific Ocean, said Richard Stedman, director of the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District. Officials were monitoring air quality, but do not believe it has reached unhealthy levels.

Farther down the coast, more than 1,800 firefighters were battling a wildfire around the Los Padres National Forest that had grown to nearly 105 square miles by Friday morning, said U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Valerie Baca.

More than 230 homes and ranches in canyons and ridges near the La Brea Fire are under evacuation orders as a week-old wildfire continues to grow in northern Santa Barbara County.

Hot, dry conditions were expected Friday.

In Alameda County, a grass fire near the Altamont Pass has grown to about 16 square miles in a mostly remote area north of Interstate 580. The Corral Fire was about 10 percent contained Friday morning.

In far northern California, two separate wildfires forced the evacuation of more than 30 homes.

In Trinity County, about 25 homes were evacuated as gusty wind fed the Coffin Fire, which has burned about 1.9 square miles near Lewiston, CalFire spokeswoman Mickie Jakez said. The blaze was 50 percent contained Friday.

Brenda Eitzen, 60, of Los Molinos has been arrested on suspicion of sparking the fire when she threw out a lit cigarette, Jakez said.

Farther east, a fire covering more than 27 square miles forced the evacuation of 10 homes near Burney, which is about 200 miles north of Sacramento. More than 1,600 firefighters were working on the Shu Fire, which was 70 percent contained Friday.

S.F. makes deal to close dirty power plant

By Robert Selna

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, August 14, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO -- The heavily polluting power plant on San Francisco's southeastern waterfront would close by the end of next year under a legal settlement announced Thursday between Mirant Corp. and City Attorney Dennis Herrera.

The 40-year-old fossil-fuel plant, which officials say is one of the dirtiest in the state, spews particles and chemicals from a bayside smokestack. Its cooling system, which sucks in millions of gallons of bay water per day, kills fish larvae and discharges heated water into San Francisco Bay.

The settlement appears to end a decadelong contentious debate among city officials, community leaders, energy providers and environmentalists about whether the plant, located south of Mission Bay, should be retrofitted or closed.

It is not yet certain, however, if state energy officials will allow it to be closed.

In April, Herrera sued Atlanta-based Mirant for failing to retrofit brick buildings on its property, but it was clear that the intent of the suit went beyond making the buildings safe.

"This is a major step forward for a San Francisco that will be cleaner, greener and healthier because of what we've achieved today," Herrera said of the settlement at a news conference Thursday.

The legal accord that would end the lawsuit obligates Mirant to shutter the plant by the end of 2010 and work with the city to overcome possible objections from state energy monitors. The company also would pay \$1 million for health initiatives in the neighborhood, including possible asthma clinics.

In return for its pledge to close the facility, Mirant, which owns the property, will get expedited city review for any future development projects. Herrera also retracted his demand that the five unoccupied brick structures on the site be fixed.

Mirant spokesman Chip Little said the company agreed to the settlement because it wanted to end the lawsuit and saw benefits in the city's other promises.

The settlement must be approved by the Board of Supervisors and Mayor Gavin Newsom.

Yet a potentially much bigger hurdle for closing the plant is the California Independent System Operator.

The ISO ensures that cities have reliable energy supplies that can withstand power line failures and other emergencies. The agency has demanded that San Francisco have some power generation within city limits.

The city has told the ISO that it can meet the energy reliability requirements through multiple sources, including a 53-mile transmission cable that will run under the bay to Pittsburg. That line is scheduled to start delivering power from East Bay fossil fuel plants by spring. Renewable sources, including solar power, and greater energy efficiency would also help meet demands, city officials have said.

Herrera said the city would present a formal plan to the ISO in the coming months but did not commit to a date.

The power grid monitor reacted cautiously to news of the legal settlement.

The ISO's role "is to protect system reliability and safety for the citizens of San Francisco and California without regard to local politics or economic interests," ISO spokesman Gregg Fishman said in a statement.

"The ISO will continue to require local measures to be available at the level necessary to ensure that San Francisco reliability is consistent with that of other major metropolitan areas."

Residents in the Dogpatch neighborhood, where the plant is located, said they have waited a long time for it to close. A Pacific Gas and Electric Co. plant near the shoreline in Hunters Point closed in 2006 after long-standing community opposition.

"We are thrilled and would like to see it shut down as soon as possible," said Janet Carpinelli, president of the Dogpatch Neighborhood Association. "The talk has gone back and forth as the pollution has continued all night long and every day."

Air quality advisory issued for Clark County

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, August 14, 2009

LAS VEGAS -- The Department of Air Quality and Environmental Management has issued an air quality advisory for Clark County.

The advisory - prompted because of smoke from California wildfires - will be in effect from Friday through Sunday.

Air quality officials don't think unhealthy levels of air pollution will arise but plan to keep watching the situation.

Carbon capture project in West Virginia illustrates obstacles to 'clean' coal A contraption attached to an existing power plant will capture emissions from only about 15% of output. The device, set to go on line next month, is hugely expensive and also uses a lot of energy.

By Steven Mufson, Washington Post

In the L.A. Times, Thursday, August 13, 2009

Washington - At a bend in the Ohio River, a bulky new device is being attached to a 30-year-old coal plant near the small town of New Haven, W.Va.

The device is being housed in a building four stories tall and bigger than a football field. A 150-

foot-tall exhaust stack -- so wide that it would take six adults with their arms fully stretched to reach around it -- will reach into the sky. And pipelines will run out of the building and into saline aquifers two miles underground. The entire contraption will start up as early as September.

The purpose: capturing carbon dioxide emissions and stashing them in underground rock formations -- a crucial part of the global effort to slow climate change. This is the technique that promoters say will make coal "clean" and critics say is an expensive pipe dream.

The stimulus package devoted \$2.4 billion to pilot projects. On Monday, the Obama administration awarded \$20 million of that to a program that uses supersonic shock waves to compress carbon for storage, on top of \$408 million in stimulus money awarded to two other carbon pilot projects. It has pledged \$1 billion more to a model plant called FutureGen.

If the Waxman-Markey climate bill becomes law, a new Carbon Storage Research Corp. would pump an additional \$1.1 billion a year into researching this nascent technology, and first movers would get billions of dollars more in bonus emission allowances that could be sold.

Coal companies and environmentalists alike are counting on a breakthrough in carbon capture and storage technology to siphon off harmful emissions from the world's coal plants. Coal plants account for a third of U.S. greenhouse emissions. In the last five years, China has brought on line coal-fired electricity equal in size to total U.S. installed capacity, and new plants are starting up in the developing world regularly. Without a breakthrough on coal plants, it may be impossible to meet emission limits climatologists say are needed.

Yet carbon capture and storage remains the Holy Grail of the coal industry, an idea that could contain the damage inflicted by coal-burning power plants but a technology that remains expensive, energy intensive and largely untested. Even optimists say it will not be commercially available for six to 10 more years. Pessimists say it might take much longer and may never be ready for widespread use without attaching a punishingly high price to carbon.

"There is no credible pathway towards prudent greenhouse gas stabilization targets without CO2 emissions reduction from existing coal power plants," Ernest Moniz, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a member of President Obama's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, said in a report this year. "We urgently need technology options for these plants and policies that incentivize implementation."

Coal "is still the elephant in the room," John Ashton, special representative for climate change at Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said at a meeting in Washington last month. "We can't deal with it; we can't tame it without . . . carbon capture and storage."

He said that to meet the newly agreed-upon target of limiting global warming to 2 degrees, nations must make carbon capture "standard technology by 2020."

The West Virginia plant belongs to American Electric Power Co., an electric utility that is the largest consumer of coal in the United States. Said Michael Morris, chief executive of AEP, "Clearly carbon capture and storage is essential for a company like AEP, and I would argue equally essential for the United States, because you can't go through the process of prematurely shutting down half the supply base of the American utility industry."

But the AEP project illustrates the tremendous obstacles ahead. As big as it is, the equipment there will capture the emissions from only 20 megawatts of power generation, a meager 15% of the plant's output. Morris' predecessors were smart enough to buy lots of extra land at the West Virginia plant, but other coal plants would have trouble finding room.

The big capture device, built by France's Alstom, would take the exhaust of the plant after the coal is burned and "bubble" it through a solution of chilled ammonia. The CO2 would bond with

the ammonia and be separated from other gases. Then the carbon dioxide would be separated from the ammonia and compressed for storage.

The huge carbon capture and storage devices are hugely expensive too. AEP executives estimate that the cost of carbon capture for a modest-size coal plant of about 235 megawatts would start at \$700 million. That works out to about \$100 for a ton of carbon dioxide, far above the projections made by the Environmental Protection Agency about prices under a cap-and-trade scheme similar to one passed by the House in June. MIT put the cost of carbon capture and storage at \$50 to \$70 a ton. (The Waxman-Markey bill would give the first six gigawatts of plants - equal to about seven average-size plants -- a \$90-per-ton subsidy in the form of free allowances.)

Capture-and-storage devices also require large amounts of energy. The Alstom approach uses about 15% of the power plant's energy output; other processes use as much as 30%. That means the utility must buy other energy sources to cover the shortfall. (The energy lost is part of the \$700-million cost, AEP executives said.)

As a result, many experts say countries would be better off retrofitting old coal plants or replacing them with new, more efficient ones. Retrofits could result in emission reductions of 4% to 5%, MIT said in its study. More-costly replacements of older plants could cut more than a quarter of their emissions.

China Plant Stormed Over Lead Poisoning Of Children

By Reuters

In the N.Y. Times, Monday, August 17, 2009

BEIJING (Reuters) - Chinese protesters on Monday broke into a smelting works they blame for the lead poisoning of hundreds of children, smashing trucks and tearing down fences, state news agency Xinhua said.

More than 600 children living near the Dongling metal smelter, in northwest Shaanxi province, have dangerous amounts of the heavy metal in their blood and 154 are so sick they have been admitted to hospital, the report added.

Protests against pollution are increasingly common in China, although the police normally try and nip them in the bud before they become violent. In other cases, officials show up and mollify residents with promises of financial or other aid.

Monday's protests began after news spread around villagers that the poisoning had sparked a suicide attempt by one 19-year-old student, Xinhua reported.

The student drank pesticide after her parents refused to pay for her to take a blood test, Xinhua said.

The government is only offering free tests to children under 14, and there has been no investigation into whether adults might be affected by lead from the smelter, the report added.

Around 100 policemen had been mobilised by midday, and the mayor of nearby Baoji city, who heads a newly formed pollution control team, arrived to ask protesters for restraint.

By early afternoon, most protesters had returned home, Xinhua said.

The lead poisoning scandal emerged last week, after worried parents took their children for medical tests.

All the affected families live near the Changqing industrial park in Shaanxi province. The county government was supposed to help relocate villagers living close by in 2006, but the plan is running far behind schedule.

The 100,000-tonne lead and zinc plant suspected of causing the poisoning is run by China's fourth-biggest zinc producer Dongling Group.

A company source told Reuters it had been shut for repairs since late July and it was unclear when production would resume. Xinhua said operations were suspended on August 6.

LAX SAFETY STANDARDS

China's pollution and lax product safety standards have long been a source of tension and unrest, particularly when residents of pollution hotspots -- dubbed "cancer villages" because of high disease rates -- feel they are being ignored.

A child who swallows large amounts of lead may develop anaemia, muscle weakness and brain damage. Where poisoning occurs, it is usually gradual.

Cases involving children are particularly sensitive in a country where many families have only one son or daughter. China was shaken last year by a tainted milk scandal, which killed at least six children.

Dongling is still running two other zinc lines in a separate area of Shaanxi province, with combined annual capacity of 150,000 tonnes.

A local environmental protection official said tests showed waste discharge from the lead smelter, and nearby ground and surface water, and soil, met national standards, Xinhua reported.

But there are high levels of the heavy metal in the air near the factory.

"Lead content in the air along the main routes near the plant is 6.3 times that of monitoring sites 350 metres from the roads," said Han Qinyou, head of the Baoji Municipal Environmental Protection Monitoring Station.

Lead poisoning sickens 600 kids in China

By Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, August 14, 2009

BEIJING, China (AP) -- More than 600 children have been sickened with lead poisoning in a northern Chinese province where authorities shut a smelter earlier this week thought to have caused the contamination, state media reported.

More than 80 percent of the 731 children living in the two villages near the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. in Shaanxi province have tested positive for lead poisoning, nearly double the number reported earlier this week, the official Xinhua News Agency reported late Thursday.

It said lead levels in children were as high as 506 milligrams per liter of blood — more than 10 times the level considered safe by China.

Families who lived near the factory began bringing in sick children to hospitals and clinics in July and blamed the smelting factory for contaminating nearby soil, air and the area's water supply, the report said.

Local officials say they plan to relocate all 581 households living within 500 meters (1,600 feet) of the factory within the next two years, the report said.

Families had originally been slated for relocation even before the plant opened in 2006, but local officials blamed the delay on "readjustments in the overall planning," the report said.

Of the sickened children, 166 will be hospitalized and the remainder will receive at-home treatment to remove the lead from their bodies, according to Xinhua.

A spokesman for the local government, surnamed Wang, confirmed the new numbers and said the case was under investigation but refused to comment on whether sicknesses are linked to environmental pollution caused by the smelting company. He refused to give his full name as us common among Chinese officials.

Factory accidents and chemical leaks are common in China and are often blamed on lax enforcement of environmental regulations and safety rules and poor worker training.

Lead poisoning can damage the nervous and reproductive system, cause high blood pressure, anemia, memory loss, and, in extreme cases, cause victims to fall into comas and die.

China's waterways, especially its major rivers, are dangerously polluted chemicals after decades of rapid economic growth and poor enforcement of pollution controls.

China: Air Pollution Changes Rainfall Patterns

By Cornelia Dean

N.Y. Times, Friday, August 14, 2009

Air pollution in eastern China is altering rainfall patterns there, resulting in fewer days of light rain, American and Chinese researchers report in an article to be published Saturday. The researchers, who based their conclusions on mathematical models and rainfall data from scores of weather stations in the region, attributed the change to high levels of particulate pollution. It has long been known that particles in the atmosphere, including pollutants, encourage the formation of water droplets and hence rainfall. But the researchers theorize that there are now so many particles in the air that when droplets form they are too small to fall as rain. They say that though overall rainfall was virtually unchanged, the number of days of light rain in northeast China fell by about 25 percent from 1960 to 2005; in southeast China, the decline was 21 percent. The researchers, from the Pacific Northwest Research Center, Beijing Normal University and elsewhere, reported their findings in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*.

Clash at China smelter after 100s of kids poisoned

By Christopher Bodeen, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post, Monday, August 17, 2009

BEIJING -- Police clashed with residents of two neighboring villages in northern China where nearly all the children were poisoned by lead apparently from a nearby smelter, reports said Monday, the latest sign of growing anger over China's rampant industrial pollution.

Several hundred villagers tore down fences and blocked traffic outside the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. in Shaanxi province after news of the poisoning emerged last week, state media and villagers said. Fighting between angry parents and scores of police broke out Sunday, and trucks delivering coal to the plant were stoned.

No immediate word on injuries or arrests was available. Local officials, police and people at the company refused to confirm the reports.

China's breakneck economic development has left much of its soil, air and waterways dangerously polluted, and environmental showdowns with outraged residents are growing. Authorities routinely pledge to close down polluting industries, but often back down because of their importance to the local economy.

At least 615 out of 731 children in two villages near the Dongling smelter have tested positive for lead poisoning, which can damage the nervous and reproductive systems and cause high blood pressure, anemia and memory loss. Lead levels in the children were more than 10 times the level considered safe by China.

Air quality tests done near the smelting plant in Shaanxi found unusually high lead levels, according to the official Xinhua News Agency, although officials say groundwater, surface water, soil and company waste discharge all meet national standards.

Li Li, a resident of Gaozuitou village, located about half a mile (1 kilometer) from the plant, said in a telephone interview that her two daughters began developing blotchy skin, yellowing hair and memory problems as far back as January, but doctors had been unable to explain the cause.

After word broke last week of the lead contamination, Li said she took the girls, aged 9 and 12, in for tests and both were found to have high levels of lead.

Some people have already sent their children to schools farther away, said Li, 36, who said her cabbage and tomato crops have withered as well.

"You can see how bad the pollution is, but we don't have any money. Now, I sleep badly and I can't eat well either," Li said.

Local officials plan to relocate all 581 households living within 1,600 feet (500 meters) of the factory in the next two years, according to Xinhua.

It was unclear whether the plant had been closed and what its future might be.

In a separate report Monday, Xinhua said a chemical company boss in central China was sentenced to ten years in jail on Friday for criminal environmental negligence after his plant illegally dumped chemicals into a river in central China's Jiangsu province.

Earlier reports said the Biaoxin Chemical Company in Yancheng city had been illegally dumping chemicals in the Xiangyanggang River since 2007. An investigation was triggered after the plant discharged a massive amount of phenol in February this year, forcing two water plants to shut for three days and cutting water supplies to at least 200,000 people. Phenol is used to make products such as air fresheners, medical ointments, cosmetics and sunscreens.

Biaoxin's chairman, Hu Wenbiao, filed an appeal with the Yancheng Intermediate People's Court on Monday, Xinhua said.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Monday, August 17, 2009](#)

Bicyclists have rights, too

Bicyclists are every bit as human as automobile drivers. Bicycles are, according to the DMV, to be treated the same as automobiles. The differences between an automobile driver and a bicyclist is that the latter does not create planet-killing smog, does not create noise pollution, does not drive drunk and slaughter people, does not occupy 100-plus square feet of road space, is attempting a healthy lifestyle and does not destroy the pavement as cars, trucks, and buses do.

Ninety-nine percent of automobile drivers are in such a hurry that they disregard the law by forcing cyclists off the road, clearing them by inches instead of feet, gunning their engines and/or honking at them for no apparent reason. Let's visualize modes of transportation where everyone shows respect for each other and not contempt. Riding a bicycle should not be defensive.

Bicyclists also pay taxes, and I have yet to see a cyclist cause an accident by talking or texting on a cell phone at 70 mph and weaving in and out of lanes. Public roadways are a privilege, not a right, and absolutely not an entitlement. Perhaps drivers should pay more attention to the business of driving instead of harassing cyclists.

BEVERLY GARST, Turlock