

## **Woodstove change-out program opens**

The Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2009

Low-income residents in valley portions of Kern County can receive between \$750 and \$1,500 toward the purchase of a new, efficient gas, pellet or woodstove by surrendering their old equipment.

The program is run by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in an effort to reduce air pollution caused by wood-burning.

For more information, contact the air district at 392-5500, or visit [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## **Smog: Hey buddy, check that tire pressure**

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009

The long arm of air quality law is expanding to include air pressure -- in your tires.

Next month, the state will consider a rule to require proper tire inflation. How does that help the air?

Properly inflated tires mean a car's engine doesn't work as hard, which means you burn less fuel. And that means fewer emissions from carbon dioxide, or greenhouse gas.

Tires also would last longer, meaning there would be fewer tires to dispose of.

Will the California Highway Patrol pull you over, whip out a tire gauge and write you up if your tires don't have enough air?

No. Actually, the proposed California Air Resources Board rule would require repair shops to check the pressure and make note of it on the invoice.

My question: Will this add another \$5 to the cost of my oil change? Was I unwise to buy my little portable compressor to keep my own tires properly inflated?

## **School energy projects 'saving millions with nickels'**

BY JEFF NACHTIGAL, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Feb. 9, 2009

Energy Manager Steve Tolin is always on the lookout for ways to coax more energy savings in the Kern High School District.

A brand new, efficient air-chilling unit might save the district thousands over its lifespan, but many more efficiencies can be gleaned through careful inspection.

So Tolin spends time on the little stuff: sticking lightweight, data-logging thermometers on computers to track energy use; considering a motion sensor on a Pepsi machine light for nighttime shutoff; and talking up the value of closing a door or shutting off a computer monitor on his regular visits to campuses.

It all adds up.

"We're saving millions with nickels," Tolin said.

### **SAVING TEACHERS**

Energy efficiency isn't new — KHSD has saved more than \$1.1 million through PG&E rebates since 1990. But with big state budget cuts looming, KHSD and other school districts are focusing on energy savings:

- Two years ago, the Rosedale Union School District took an aggressive look at its energy use. Everyone joined the effort to conserve, said John Mendiburu, assistant superintendent of business.

"The motivation was seeing money turned around and given back to the classroom, support, staff and for supplies," he said.

Students at Centennial and Rosedale North elementary schools recycle paper, and the money earned goes back to their schools.

The energy saved equaled 1.5 teaching positions this year, Mendiburu said.

- By changing how it measures and tracks its HVAC and lighting systems, Fruitvale School District cut \$99,000 from its utility bill last year, said Brian Prine, director of maintenance, operations and transportation.
- KHSD contracts with a consulting company to help it find identify savings. The \$50,000 per month cost isn't cheap but saves much more: in one 43-month period, the district shaved \$7 million off its \$25 million bill.
- If the heat is too high in a Bakersfield City school, temperatures in all 42 schools can be adjusted from a new central thermostat system.

Two months ago, the district installed automatic shutdown software on all its 4,475 workstations, saving \$10,735 over one month, with the cost of software covered by a PG&E rebate, said spokesman Steve Gabbitas.

- The chiller loop project at Bakersfield College will connect three buildings so air is cooled by one chiller unit, instead of one unit for each building. The project will cost about \$500,000, but seven years of utility bill savings will cover the cost.

After that, the savings are "all gravy," said Rick Wright, Interim director of planning and facilities and a former president of the college.

- Cal State Bakersfield is adjusting its cleaning schedule so custodians will sweep and mop partly during regular university hours so lights don't have to burn all night.

"Intuitively we think it will save us energy, on the non-technical side of savings," said Pat Jacobs, assistant vice president of facilities.

#### GOING SOLAR

[CSUB also plans to install solar panels mounted on the rooftops of parking canopies to generate the equivalent amount of energy as removing about 5,900 automobiles from the road, according to the school.](#)

Kern High schools haven't gone solar because it hasn't been viable fiscally, said Bill Voss, KHSD director of business.

But solar options may change soon for KHSD and other districts. CSUB hosts a solar conference for schools this week.

Once the infrastructure is in place, the people side of energy management comes into play, said PG&E spokeswoman Cindy Pollard.

"It's how you use the commodities. Where you set your thermostat," said Pollard.

That's where Steve Tolin comes in.

"If you need it, use it, but when you're done with it, turn it off," Tolin tells people.

### **Lodi-area dairies feel the pinch of reduced prices and lower demand**

By Marc Lutz

Lodi News Sentinel, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2009

Cathy Kaehler maneuvers a well-worn and embattled golf cart among the herds of dairy cows that populate her family's Lodi farm. Uncertain about the future of the business that has consumed her family's life for the past 50 years, Kaehler mutters, "I'm getting too old for this."

Kaehler, in her faded blue coveralls and with her grumpy and protective Queensland heeler Izzy by her side, devotes 12 or more hours of her day to a farm that is running non-stop. Kaehler's 700 cows require milking twice a day, making the line to the milking machines an endless procession. The recent decline in dairy prices has placed an even heavier burden on Kaehler and the other dairy farmers in San Joaquin County.

"It just affected us in December," Kaehler said, adding that her family's dairy, which is part of a cooperative of other dairies, had a good year in 2008.

Dairy is indeed the largest agricultural commodity in the county, worth about \$4.6 million last year. California leads the nation in milk production.

However, since September 2008, the price of liquid milk produced by dairies has dropped from \$18.20 per hundred pounds (or 850 gallons) down to about \$10.68, according to a report published by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Group. Weigh that against soaring feed prices, and it's a disastrous mix.

"Costs for the dairy farmers have risen dramatically," said Scott Hudson, the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner. Hudson said farmers have to budget for feed, the cost of veterinary bills and paying their employees, and costs related to compliance with state regulations such as water and [air quality standards](#). Environmental regulations passed during recent years heaped extra costs onto dairy farmers, Hudson said.

Many California farmers blame the state's government for the recent reduction in the price of milk.

"The state lowered our price by \$0.37 a month ago, which was a slap in the face when we're the lowest-receiving state in the nation," said Hank Van Exel, owner of Van Exel Dairy in Lodi. Prices are set by the California Department of Food and Ag, based on the prices quoted by the CME Group, in order to keep prices fair for farmers.

According to Bill Schiek, an economist for the Dairy Institute of California, the main reason for the low prices is market demand, not the state.

"People think it was due to the Department of Agriculture in California," Schiek said. Not so, Schiek continued. There was an increased demand for dairy, so many farmers increased the number of cows to compensate. However, increased demand also equaled increased consumer prices. "A lot of (consumers of) dairy began to substitute with cheaper commodities. People who were using whey started using corn products instead," Schiek said. An example would be a restaurant seeking more affordable ingredients in order to keep their operating costs down.

That rapid drop in demand for dairy left most farmers with extra milk-producing cows to feed and care for, but no way to unload their product.

Case van Steyn, a dairy farmer in Galt, said farmers didn't prepare themselves for the chance that prices would drop so low.

"The industry was guilty because we never thought the price would get that low again. Now it's coming back to bite us in the you-know-where," van Steyn said. "It's going to take a great big bite out of us."

Van Steyn said he believes dairies around the size of his — about 1,000 head of cattle — will weather the storm, but smaller dairies may not make it.

Van Exel echoes that sentiment: "I would daresay that 20 percent of dairies are going to go out of business."

And Van Exel points out that unloading cattle isn't always an option, as the animals are worth about half what they were in July, and even at bargain prices, nobody's buying.

Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, says he's meeting with officials to find a way to help dairy operators squeezed by a sudden drop in prices.

After two years of increased consumer demand worldwide, economic stagnation has reduced milk consumption.

Cardoza said that he has been meeting with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. So far, the USDA has spent \$93 million to buy 115 million pounds of surplus dry milk in an attempt to support prices.

But until something is done, farmers are faced with too much supply and not enough demand.

Kaehler's Dairy, which produces about 6,300 gallons of milk a day, only has the capacity to store 4,000 gallons on premises. A truck from the cooperative hauls away about 6,000 gallons twice a day, so juggling output and storage can sometimes be tricky.

The option to slaughter the cows has been discussed in dairy circles. For Kaehler, that's not an option. "I love animals. I couldn't do that," Kaehler said, suddenly looking contemplative.

At the Kaehler Dairy, where Kaehler runs the daily operations, her sister oversees the bookkeeping and some mechanic work. Their two brothers do a majority of the farming, but measures like growing a portion of their own feed, recycling manure and selling calves, and cutting the budget by 10 percent may still not be enough.

Reducing oat and alfalfa hay feed to parts of her herd to help them produce less milk is another option, but Kaehler hesitates with the reduction since it takes a long time for dairy cows to regain their maximum amount of milk. If demand skyrockets, they wouldn't be able to catch up quickly enough.

"I don't know what we'll do," Kaehler said, patting Izzy and watching over her herds.

## **Feds host meeting on PCB plan for Kettleman**

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

For 27 years, Chemical Waste Management has stored and buried waste contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls, a highly toxic substance also known as PCBs. Eleven years after the intended expiration of its permit, federal environmental officials are still trying to decide whether the facility should get a permit renewal to continue its management of the chemical for at least another decade.

Kettleman Hills, the West's largest hazardous waste landfill, is the only California facility permitted to accept PCBs, making it a key location for the country's waste control.

But more than 1,500 Kettleman City residents -- mostly poor Latino farmworkers -- live less than four miles from the edge of the landfills. And they are far from pleased at having cancer-causing chemical waste nearby, alongside two highways where hundreds of diesel trucks pass through each day and sludge farm operations are situated nearby.

On Wednesday, Kettleman City residents weren't shy in voicing their concerns.

They not only told federal officials that a PCB operation is too close to their community, but complained of high rates of asthma and cancer rates as well as cases of cleft palate among babies.

"You don't know what's happening in this town. There's a lot of people dying of cancer," said Angela Borroyo, a 42-year resident of Kettleman City. "Since 1997, we have lost a lot of people ... Do you know what kind of pain we've been going through?"

Borroyo was among a horde of residents who attended the public meeting hosted by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials at the town's elementary school cafeteria Wednesday night.

Some of the same people filled the room nearly two years ago, when U.S. EPA officials held a community meeting to propose a draft permit renewal as well as an Environmental Justice Assessment that found no evidence that Kettleman City or Avenal are adversely affected by the landfill.

Irate with the findings, the residents have since flooded the EPA with comments, officials said.

"We received about 350 comments. Since that time, we've been reviewing those comments. A few of these comments asked for some technical information about the facility that we didn't have," said Cheryl Nelson, manager of EPA's Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Facilities Management Office. "So we're now requiring (the company) to collect additional data, and we're going to use that information to do a reassessment of our decision."

The meeting was held to explain to Kettleman City residents what that additional data is and how the EPA will use the information.

PCBs -- once used in paints, lubricants, transformers and other products -- have been linked to cancer and birth defects. Congress banned their use in 1976.

Specifically, the EPA is telling Chem Waste to monitor the air throughout the day as well as the soil, water and vegetation around the facility more closely for PCBs to determine whether the chemical is released from the facility and if so, whether it's bad enough to make people sick.

The state has monitored PCBs in the air twice a month during the past few years but has found nothing.

The U.S. EPA will go much further, said Patrick Wilson, EPA's senior toxicologist. The agency will require monitoring of the air around the facility throughout the day looking for individual PCBs, or "congeners," that are linked to birth defects and cancer, Wilson said.

Bob Henry, Kettleman Hills operations manager, said a new study required by the EPA presents an "opportunity" for the facility to clear its name.

"The congener study the U.S. EPA is requiring the facility to do, I think, will have the finality to it as to whether the facility has any releasing of PCBs," Henry said. "If there are health conditions here in town, it'll be good to demonstrate that it's not coming from our facility."

Of some 700,000 cubic yards of waste dumped in the facility each year, about 50,000 account for PCB waste, said Nelson.

During Wednesday's meeting, Wilson quoted county-provided statistics and said that 2.97 cases of birth defects per 1,000 live births were reported from Kettleman City between 1998-2005 -- a number far lower when compared with 13.7 for Kings County and 12.27 for the entire Valley.

Such a report set off an angry reaction from residents who counted off families they know and identified at least five babies born with birth defects over the past year.

"How can a community this small have so many birth defects going on and nobody's alarmed?" said Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a member of People for Clean Air and Water in Kettleman City. "He can look up his statistics on the Internet, but the fact is that we live them. We see these people everyday. It's happening."

Mares-Alatorre urged the EPA to conduct an in-depth community health survey.

Bradley Angel, executive director of San Francisco-based Greenaction, called Wednesday's meeting a "victory" for the community.

"Tonight's meeting was an outcome of the victory won by the community in stopping the EPA from issuing a PCB permit renewal two years ago," Angel said.

Angel criticized the EPA, saying it is ignoring the cumulative effects of the landfill operation on Kettleman City residents' health.

"Aren't they also exposed to cancer-causing chemicals from pesticides? Aren't they also exposed to chemicals from diesel? And aren't they also exposed to other stuff released from Chem Waste that you don't recognize? Isn't it true that a little bit of each of these can add up in your body to cause cumulative health impacts?" Angel said.

Henry said the Kettleman Hills Facility has a good environmental record. He invited anyone from the community to tour the facility.

Wednesday's PCB permit process meeting won't be the last time this year that environmental groups and residents are expected to protest and voice concerns against the landfill operations.

Henry sees that as a positive.

"It's very positive that the fear of the unknown is addressed," Henry said. "And it's not an unknown. It's the unexplained that we're working on."

Tension, however, is flaring up because the facility is reaching capacity and needs to expand.

The company now operates a new bioreactor, which uses liquid to speed up the breakdown of non-hazardous waste, and is poised to start operating new municipal solid waste landfill B-17 this month.

Chem Waste now wants to expand one of its landfills from 53 acres to 64 acres and build a new 64-acre landfill.

A controversial battle is continuing on these proposals.

Angel vowed to fight the projects to the end.

"I've worked with at least 1,000 communities like this, and what's going on here is one of the most egregious violations of human rights and justice that I've seen," he said.

## **Second Front Page**

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, February 09, 2009

The state Air Resources Board is cracking down on do-it-yourselfers who repair and recharge air-conditioning systems of cars. The new regulation includes a deposit and recycling program patterned after pilot program by industry in Southern California. It will cost an estimated \$11 for each ton of greenhouse gases prevented from entering the atmosphere. The original 2007 proposal to ban the do-it-yourself cans outright carried an estimated cost of \$159 per ton.

## **Both sides sound off on proposed coal plant in Ely**

By Scott Sonner - Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

RENO, Nev. -- Environmentalists say a water-sucking, carbon-emitting, coal-fired power plant shouldn't be built anywhere in the world, let alone Nevada's high desert, but union workers say they desperately need the 2,500 construction jobs the \$5 billion project would create.

The two sides sounded off in Reno Thursday night at the first of four public hearings to be held through next week on the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's draft environmental impact statement analyzing the coal plant the state's biggest utility wants to build 20 miles north of Ely and about 50 miles west of the Utah state line.

NV Energy's plan also calls for construction of 250 miles of transmission lines that for the first time would connect northern and southern Nevada's power grid - something even opponents of the coal plant say they would support if the lines were used to move renewable energy, such as geothermal and wind power.

"This is viewed as a major federal action and possibly having major impacts," said Joe Incardine, BLM's national project manager leading the review of the proposed plant.

"I've heard views on all sides of the coin and that's what BLM needs to hear. ... We want your comments. We want to know what you are thinking," he told more than 100 people who turned out to speak or submit written comments the agency intends to collect through April 3.

Hearings also are scheduled Tuesday in Las Vegas, Wednesday in Ely and Thursday in Elko on the proposal that would require the sale of 3,000 acres of federal land to the utility and consume 8,000 acre feet of water a year. An acre foot is equal to 325,851 gallons of water and typically will meet the annual water needs of a family of four.

The BLM document issued Jan. 2 notes that state environmental regulators have concluded the power plant's operation would not exceed federal or state air quality standards.

"It will be the cleanest coal-fired power plant in America," said Mark Severts, project communications director for NV Energy, formerly Sierra Pacific Power Co.

But BLM's review also acknowledges that "greenhouse gas emissions from the operations would include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide totaling the equivalent of 10.6 million" tons of carbon dioxide annually.

"I'm very concerned about global warming. We don't need to release any more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than we already are doing," said Marge Sill, a longtime member of the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter based in Reno.

"It's kind of nuts to even be thinking about this," added Graham Stafford, another member of the club.

John Wilkinson, an avid outdoorsman who has hiked Nevada's mountain ranges for years, said he took Amtrak from his home in San Jose, Calif., so he could speak "in defense of clean air in eastern Nevada."

He pointed to BLM projections that the plant's emissions would result in a 7 percent reduction in visibility in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Jarbidge Wilderness near the Idaho state line some 150 miles away.

"This is a priceless, spiritual resource," Wilkinson said.

"I'm sickened by the thought of what could happen," he said. "I'm getting old and may not get back to these areas, but other generations should have the opportunity. They shouldn't have to ask their grandparents what happened to the clean air."

Arlan Kusters was among more than a dozen members of the Reno-based Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 350 who submitted written comments in support of the project. He said it would help lessen U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

"More than ever, technology can ensure a safe environment and a project like this is good for the economy," he wrote. "At these dire times, more jobs are needed."

Ken Heinbaugh, a former White Pine County commissioner who lives about 5 miles from the plant site in Steptoe Valley, said the project would help stabilize northeast Nevada's turbulent mining-based economy.

"When mining is good, we have a boom and when it's bad, we have a depression," said Heinbaugh, chairman of the Steptoe Valley Energy Advocates. "This project would bring jobs and tax revenue into the county. I believe the benefits greatly outweigh the negatives."

## **Oil industry faces policy changes, slumping prices**

By JOHN PORRETTO, AP Energy Writer  
Modesto Bee, Monday, Feb. 9, 2009

HOUSTON — One of the oil industry's biggest challenges this year will be managing exploration and production amid the worst global recession in a generation, trying not to scale back so much that it sets the stage for another round of painful price spikes.

At the same time, industry leaders will certainly want a say as President Barack Obama shapes the nation's energy policy and looks to reduce America's dependence on fossil fuels.

Some of the energy sector's heaviest hitters will meet in Houston this week at an annual conference organized by Cambridge Energy Research Associates, a consultancy. CERA is chaired by author and economic researcher Daniel Yergin.

The list of scheduled speakers includes the top executives of European oil giants BP PLC and Royal Dutch Shell PLC and Saudi Arabia's oil minister, Ali al-Naimi.

The five-day conference, which begins Monday, comes only a week after many oil and gas companies reported their worst quarterly earnings in years, dragged down by crude's 60 percent price drop in the final three months of 2008.

Oil continues to hover near five-year lows around \$40 a barrel.

Everyone in the business - drillers, producers, service companies - is trying to muscle through the latest boom-bust cycle. So far, the world's biggest oil companies aren't scaling back spending on new oil and gas projects as much as smaller and mid-size producers. But any curtailment of production could cause supply problems once the world's economies start to rebound.

"You don't want to fall into the type of situation we had after the 1998 price collapse, when Wall Street put enormous pressure on energy companies to cut back investments," said Yergin, whose history of the oil

industry, "The Prize," won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992. "When demand started again, people were running double time to try and catch up.

"It's very challenging," he noted. "You're making investments that will have a 10- to 15-year time horizon."

Where prices go in 2009 is anyone's guess. Some forecasters see oil slipping below \$30 a barrel, while others have it averaging about \$50 a barrel. The biggest factor is the recession's duration, and most economic news right now points to a protracted downturn.

That scenario is playing out in the heart of the oil patch.

For the 11th straight week, the number of working oil and gas rigs dropped in the United States last week, with the most severe decline in Texas, noted analyst Stephen Stork. The drop off in drilling activity shows how badly the recession has cut into energy demand and slowed spending.

"More to the point, the number of total rigs employed in the U.S. dipped below 1,400 for the first time since July 2005," Schork wrote in a report.

Falling crude prices have affected the global energy complex, including the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which produces 40 percent of the world's oil.

OPEC Secretary General Abdalla el-Badri said Monday because of falling prices, member states have postponed 35 of 150 new oil and gas production projects. That likely will mean OPEC will not meet its goal of raising capacity by five million barrels a day by 2012, when most expect the recession to be a bad memory.

In the U.S., even as the industry navigates this difficult period, it's preparing to adjust to Obama's plans for a "green energy economy."

Obama's new energy secretary, Steven Chu, has vowed to aggressively pursue policies aimed at addressing [climate change](#) and achieving greater energy independence by developing clean energy sources.

Chu is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who has promoted alternative energy and warned of [global warming](#) as director of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California.

"I think it's very clear there's going to be a big emphasis on climate change," Yergin said. "The appointment of Steven Chu is a notable statement."

Some in the industry are leaning toward a cap-and-trade system to cut [carbon emissions](#) over a tax on them. ConocoPhillips Chairman Jim Mulva has suggested cap-and-trade - which allows a company with reduced emissions to sell a credit to another business that needs to exceed the emissions limit to operate - is more widely understood and has a better chance of working through the political process.

But Exxon Mobil Corp. chief Rex Tillerson has said a carbon tax would be more transparent and effective. A cap-and-trade system, he noted, would require establishment of new markets to trade carbon credits and new regulators to monitor them.

"There's a strong sense we're going to be moving into an era in which there's going to be more focus on energy policy," Yergin said. "But the reality is there's no simple answer for such a policy in a \$14 trillion economy."

## **Obama seeks tougher controls on mercury emissions**

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, SF Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

WASHINGTON—The Obama administration signaled Friday that it will seek more stringent controls on mercury pollution from the nation's power plants, abandoning a Bush administration approach that the industry supported.

The Justice Department on Friday submitted papers to the Supreme Court to dismiss the Bush administration's appeal of the rule, which a lower court struck down last year.

Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Agency said it would begin crafting a new rule limiting mercury emissions from power plants.

The court was expected to decide later this month whether it would take the case. Last year, an appeals court ruled that the Bush plan violated the law by allowing utilities to purchase emission credits instead of actually reducing emissions.

Such a plan would have allowed some power plants to release more mercury pollution than others, creating localized "hot spots" where concentrations are higher, states and environmental groups argued. The law requires all facilities to install the best technology available to curb emissions.

Power plants are the biggest source of mercury, which finds its way into the food supply. It is commonly found in high concentrations in fish. Mercury can damage developing brains of fetuses and very young children.

"It is yet another Bush administration policy they are not going to go forward with," said David Bookbinder, the Sierra Club's chief climate counsel.

The EPA also announced Friday that it was starting the review of the Bush administration's decision to deny California and other states the right to control emissions of the gases blamed for global warming for cars.

In a statement, the agency said there were significant issues with the previous administration's denial of the California request that represents a significant departure from the law.

While the administration has signaled it is breaking with its predecessor on several issues, Friday's filing on mercury is the first outright reversal of a legal position taken by the Bush administration at the Supreme Court.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson told reporters at a green jobs conference in Washington that the Obama administration would draft its own rules under the Clean Air Act to curb mercury emissions.

Jackson—who led the environmental department in New Jersey, one of 17 states that sued the Bush administration in 2006—said the EPA would likely set limits on the toxic metal from power plants, as required by the law.

"We're better off spending all our resources making rules that will stick instead of fighting the courts on this one," Jackson said.

Representatives of the utility industry, which is still asking the Supreme Court to take up an appeal, said Friday that a new rule would further delay clean up of mercury and cost more than the Bush proposal.

"From an environmental perspective, the thing that is a real shame about all this is had the court left the mercury rule in place we would have had much greater mercury reductions at a lower cost," said Jeff Holmstead, head of the Environmental Strategies Group at the law firm Bracewell & Giuliani, which represents power producers.

## **Plant's workers exposed to mercury, EPA says**

Susan Sward, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F.Chronicle, Sunday, February 8, 2009

At a Mojave Desert chemical plant, a demolition crew toppled a 50-foot-high tank, accidentally spilling an estimated 90 to 100 pounds of highly toxic mercury and contaminating the workers' clothing.

About two weeks later, a crew knocked down a second 50-foot-high tank, spilling another estimated 90 to 100 pounds of mercury at the same Searles Valley Minerals plant 170 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

Together, the two incidents produced the West's biggest spill of mercury - a potent neurotoxin - in two decades, said Robert Wise, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on-scene coordinator. He said he has referred the matter to the U.S. Department of Justice for review.

Government documents suggest that Searles Valley Minerals failed to follow proper procedures for reporting the spills and also initially understated the amount of mercury that had been spilled.

According to an EPA report and interviews, the company's failure to follow proper reporting procedures might have exacerbated health risks to six demolition workers who still had mercury on their clothes weeks after the first spill.

Exposure to mercury occurs from breathing contaminated air, and experts say that at high levels, mercury can damage the brain, kidneys and a developing fetus.

Searles Valley Minerals' executive director, Arzell Hale, defended the company's actions, saying the Sept. 24 spill was inadvertent and the Oct. 10 spill occurred because of a contractor's mistake. He said he was unaware of any damage to workers' health.

The spills occurred at the plant in the San Bernardino County town of Trona -- where 2 million tons of chemicals are produced annually -- when a contractor was tearing down an old portion of the plant that had been used to produce fertilizer.

Hale stressed that once the spills occurred, the company cooperated fully with the EPA investigation, and the EPA confirmed that.

The spills represent a new problem for Searles Valley Minerals, which was the subject of a Chronicle report in July detailing a campaign against the plant by a former employee who said the facility's toxic chemicals had gravely harmed many workers' health. The company denied the allegations, but several legislators responded to the series by calling for an investigation of the plant's safety record.

### **6 reportedly exposed**

Wise said six demolition workers at the site were exposed to contamination from the mercury spills. He added: "I have been involved in this response program for 21 years, and this is the biggest spill we ever responded to in the region," which includes California, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii and Guam.

Hale said that before the first spill, the company had "understood the mercury and other known hazardous substances were removed from the plant."

Environmental groups and experts familiar with mercury's toxicity were critical of the company's handling of the spills and said new demolition laws are needed.

"This is really alarming -- I am just shocked -- especially because the hazards of mercury have been known for so long concerning its environmental contamination," said Julia Quint, a retired toxicologist for the state Department of Public Health.

At this point, only one company hired in connection with the demolition is talking publicly. James Cannon of Bakersfield-based J and J Clean Up Service, a subcontractor on the job, said he provided four workers with cutting torches for the demolition. He said that before the first spill, his workers were told by supervisors at the site that the tank was safe for removal. Before the second tank was knocked over, supervisors assured his workers that it was "welded up tight and nothing would come out," he said.

Cannon said his workers then made the cuts that made it possible for other workers to knock over the tanks. He added he did not know which company employed the supervisors who gave his employees their instructions. The prime contractor, Advanced Steel Recovery of Fontana (San Bernardino County) and another subcontractor, Western Scrap of Bakersfield, declined to comment.

On the day of the Sept. 24 spill, Searles Valley Minerals notified the state's Office of Emergency Services about a spill of one pint of mercury -- equal to 14 pounds. About three weeks later, the company amended its report to 90 pounds.

After the first spill, San Bernardino County hazardous material specialist Curtis Brundage said the company called to say "they had it under control, they had a cleanup contractor on site, and it was a small spill.

Had the more accurate information been transmitted to us, we would have responded. We would have found out that workers had tracked mercury all over and employees had it on their clothes and tracked it back" to the apartments where they were staying.

After the first spill, Hale said an approach was devised to avoid another problem, but a second spill occurred when the demolition contractor used inadequate equipment.

The company reported the Oct. 10 spill to the state as six pounds and about a week later amended that amount to 90 pounds. The company did not, however, immediately notify the National Response Center, the Coast Guard-run headquarters for such reports, about either spill.

The law requires that when a mercury spill exceeds one pound in a 24-hour period, the center must be notified immediately. Instead, Wise said the company filed the reports on Oct. 21 after he told them to do so.

Under laws effective last year, any company failing to notify the center promptly about a reportable spill could face a fine of up to \$32,500 a day, EPA officials said.

### **Too big to handle**

On Oct. 21, Wise arrived at the plant site after county regulators told him the spills were too big for them to handle.

There is still visible mercury throughout the debris piles," Wise wrote in his report. "In addition, underneath the concrete floor of the structure is a series of canals and raceways containing a large quantity of mercury."

Wise said it was the demolition workers who faced contamination from the mercury - because they were there when the tanks toppled over and because they wore mercury-contaminated clothes for weeks after the first spill.

Once he learned about the workers' clothing, Wise said he had Searles' environmental contractor decontaminate the rented condos where the workers lived in Ridgecrest (Kern County), about 25 miles from the plant. He said the contractor also ripped carpet out of a worker's two cars and took away two children's car seats because of high mercury readings in those vehicles.

After the spills, Wise referred the case to federal prosecutors for review. He declined to comment on what possible violations the office might be investigating.

Thom Mrozek, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles, declined to comment on the case, saying his agency doesn't discuss the status of investigations, "including whether we have opened one."

At the plant site, Wise said 75 to 100 tons of steel from the debris site has been sent to a Nevada landfill, and about 2,000 tons of mercury-contaminated soil has been removed; in addition, 50 drums of high-level mercury waste were "shipped offsite for mercury recovery."

Meanwhile, the companies involved in the demolition are arguing over how the spills happened, he said: "Everyone admits the first crystallizer (tank) was just an accident. The people involved in the demolition didn't know mercury was in there. The issue is the second one where they knew mercury was in there, and it was still knocked over."

Whatever is determined about how the mercury was spilled, experts say that it is a substance to be taken very seriously.

### **Mercury's toxicity**

Philip Landrigan, a mercury expert who is chairman of Mount Sinai School of Medicine's Department of Community and Preventive Medicine in New York, said that given the size of the spills, "there is a high likelihood the demolition workers' exposure exceeded federal mercury limits. For workers, the principal route of exposure is by inhalation, and once the mercury gets in the body, it travels around, and it is directly toxic to a number of organs. But you worry most about its toxicity to the brain, nervous system and kidneys."

Bill Magavern, director of Sierra Club California, said the spills at Searles Valley Minerals indicate the need for new laws governing demolitions.

"We need to make sure buildings are clear of mercury and other hazardous materials prior to demolition," Magavern said. He added that the law now requires a professional survey assuring asbestos has been removed from a site, but "there is no similar requirement to have a professional survey for mercury and other hazardous materials."

## **The promise and peril of the 'clean-energy economy'**

**The Obama administration envisions 'a second Industrial Revolution' to escape oil dependence and invigorate the economy. But familiar obstacles loom.**

By Jim Tankersley

L.A. Times, Monday, Feb. 9, 2009

Reporting from Washington -- President Obama's plans to lead America out of recession rest in part on a task bigger than a moon shot and the Manhattan Project put together.

His goal, which past presidents have spent more than \$100 billion chasing with limited success, is to replace imported oil and other fossil fuels with a "clean-energy economy" powered by the wind, the sun and biofuels.

The stakes are high. If Obama succeeds, he could spark a domestic jobs boom and lead an international fight against climate change. If he fails, he could cripple existing industries and squeeze cash-strapped Americans with higher energy prices.

"We essentially need a second Industrial Revolution that can generate lots of energy cleanly, cheaply, sustainably," Energy Secretary Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, said in an interview last week.

"We have a lot of necessity," he added, and the Energy Department and the rest of the administration "have to start inventing right, left and center."

Success hinges on whether Obama can nurture alternative energy sources to the point where they cost no more than fossil fuels, an effort that most experts say will require heavy doses of brainpower, cash and market manipulation.

It also requires clearing most of the same hurdles that frustrated Obama's predecessors, including technology bottlenecks, a shortage of capital to finance innovation and, above all, daunting economic factors that have repeatedly trumped good intentions.

To help renewable energy compete on price, Chu and other officials say, the administration wants to revamp energy research and spend more on it, starting with billions of dollars in the pending economic stimulus bill; create demand for clean energy by forcing utilities to draw from renewable sources such as wind turbines and solar panels; string thousands of miles of transmission lines to bring wind and solar power to consumers; and levy a de facto tax on fossil fuels through a nationwide cap on greenhouse gas emissions.

"I'm not going to call it a once-in-a-generation challenge," said Deborah Wince-Smith, president of the Council on Competitiveness, a collaboration of business, labor and academic leaders. "It's even more rare than that."

By the end of this year, the Energy Department's spending on 35 years of clean-energy research will exceed the total inflation-adjusted cost of the Apollo program, which sent Americans to the moon, and the Manhattan Project, which developed the nuclear bomb -- an estimated \$117 billion combined.

That research, economists say, has made wind, solar and other alternative sources of energy cheaper. But fossil fuels remain cheaper yet.

Renewable sources make up about the same sliver of America's energy portfolio as they did three decades ago, about 7%, while the nation's reliance on imported oil has doubled.

Experts say more money would help. The federal government spends about the same amount on energy research today, adjusted for inflation, as it did in 1968: about \$3 billion.

The private sector has only begun to outpace government spending on energy research in the last year, according to a new study by Daniel Kammen, founding director of UC Berkeley's Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory.

"Energy is the biggest chunk of our national expenditures," he said in an interview, "and we just neglect it."

Investment ran high in the oil-shocked 1970s, then slumped in the '80s and '90s. It was rising again in recent years until the financial crisis froze lending.

"If we as a country want to move forward and address energy security, we need to resolve the credit crisis as it relates to the energy industry," said John Denniston, a partner at venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers.

Then there's the question of how research dollars are spent. In a recent report, the Brookings Institution urged the Energy Department to partner more closely with academia and the private sector to help bring better, cheaper clean-energy technology to market.

The report suggests modeling today's research on the regional agricultural extension services, created in the late 1800s, that pioneered advances in crops and industry.

"Agriculture was something that needed new technology and a green revolution," said James Duderstadt, a former president of the University of Michigan and the lead author of the study. "But it could only go into the marketplace by working hand in hand on a regional basis with farmers."

Chu said last week that he would recruit "the smartest people" to the Energy Department and charge them with bringing clean-energy technology to market. But to drive down prices, he said, the government must help those sources "scale up" to a size that lets them compete with Big Oil and other fossil fuel providers.

Free-market advocates don't like the idea. The policies Chu and Obama hope would boost demand for renewables, including an electricity mandate and an emissions cap, "would likely increase consumer energy costs and the costs of a wide array of energy-intensive goods, slow GDP growth" and kill jobs, the Institute for Energy Research, a free-market think tank that has taken funding from oil interests, said in a recent report.

Price Fishback, an economic historian at the University of Arizona, said that when it comes to bringing technologies to market, "governments haven't typically done a very good job of picking winners."

But clean-energy researchers say government has long helped fossil fuels, offering tax breaks and subsidizing transmission systems, such as railroads, that carry coal to power plants.

Stephen Long, a leading biofuels researcher at the University of Illinois, said that without those subsidies, many biofuels could easily compete with coal as an affordable energy source. Given America's land area and research talent, Long said, there's no reason clean energy can't someday replace fossil fuels entirely.

Obama seems to agree.

"Inaction is not an option that is acceptable to me, and it's certainly not acceptable to the American people," he said last week in a speech promoting the stimulus plan at the Energy Department. "Not on energy, not on the economy, not at this critical moment."

## **Environmental Views, Past and Present**

N.Y. Times, Sat., Feb. 7, 2009

WASHINGTON — In his first weeks in office, President Obama has dismantled many environmental policies set by the Bush administration. But in some areas, he will be building on the work of his predecessor, rather than taking it apart.

Mr. Bush was not known for his concern over the environment. In the eight years of his tenure, he opened vast tracts of public lands to drilling, mining and timbering, earning the enmity of many environmentalists.

His critics accused him of easing restrictions on polluters, subverting science and dragging his feet on global warming. But even those who view his environmental record most harshly acknowledge that he also took significant action. He improved air quality, gave renewable energy a large financial boost, left behind the largest marine sanctuaries ever established and started a dialogue that could help lead to the next international treaty on climate change.

So far, Mr. Obama has devoted most of his attention to reversing Mr. Bush on a variety of issues. Within days of taking office, he froze a series of last-minute actions by the departing Bush team and ordered regulators to write tough new rules on automobile emissions and fuel economy.

Earlier this week, he upended Bush administration policies on drilling in Utah and the operation of coal-fired power plants. But as Mr. Obama moves further, a bigger challenge may be to decide how much to preserve of the broad landscape left to him by Mr. Bush — environmental and energy policies that encompass land, air, water, wildlife and climate. - JOHN M. BRODER

## **New Direction on Pollution**

### **Air**

The Bush administration's signature efforts to control air pollution revolved around the tiniest and deadliest of pollutants: the fine particles linked to death from pulmonary and cardiac disease. Mr. Bush's actions achieved marked improvement in air quality but fell short of what scientists, and in some cases the courts, demanded. This leaves the Obama administration two options for reducing the number of people exposed to unhealthy amounts of fine particles or other pollutants.

It can step up the enforcement of existing law — the administration signaled earlier this week that it would forcefully pursue power plants that skimp on required pollution controls — or it can focus on reviewing and revising policy. Or both.

Another sign of the new direction came Friday when the Environmental Protection Agency accepted a judicial demand to regulate mercury emissions from power plants. Power-plant regulation will be central to any new policy.

Bush administration officials say regulation of diesel engines and other pollution rules prolonged thousands of lives. "America is going to have the most consequential set of clean-air requirements, on a generational scale," said Mr. Connaughton, the former environmental quality chairman.

Michael Wara, a Stanford law professor and an expert on the Clean Air Act, agreed that the Bush administration "did some good." But, Mr. Wara added, it was "the least amount that they could, given the scientific realities."

A two-front strategy emerged. Diesel-engine pollution was attacked aggressively through controls on engines and new mandates for the fuel itself, to cheers from environmentalists. Power-plant controls, however, became the source of increasing hostility, and eventually lawsuits, between environmentalists and the Bush administration.

It was not that the Bush administration took no action. Its diesel controls and its 2005 rule intended to cut major power-plant pollutants 70 percent through the Eastern United States, in principle, did as much to reduce pollution and improve health as all but three previous rules in American history.

But other accommodations letting old, heavily polluting coal-fired plants expand rather than shut down infuriated environmental groups. They came to believe that the 2005 power-plant rule that did make significant pollution cuts served another purpose: to forestall any additional cleanup requirements as long as Mr. Bush was in office.

That implicit imperative seemed evident in fall 2006 when the environmental agency ignored its scientists and refused to tighten the national standard for chronic exposure to ultrafine particles, passing up the chance to avoid what scientists said would be thousands of premature deaths.

Environmental groups took to the courts. The administration's legal defeats piled up. The biggest blow came in July when federal judges threw out the 2005 power-plant rule, challenged this time by some in the industry.

The Obama administration must now decide what can be salvaged and forge a new approach to enforcing the Clean Air Act. - **FELICITY BARRINGER**

## **Utility provides dredging plan for Tenn. ash spill**

By Duncan Mansfield, Associated Press Writer  
Contra Costa Times, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.—The nation's largest public utility wants to start dredging toxic-laden coal ash from a Tennessee river inundated by a massive sludge spill six weeks ago that destroyed homes in a rural neighborhood.

The Tennessee Valley Authority has submitted a plan to state regulators to use hydraulic dredges to pull the material from the river channel, pump it to an area of the Kingston Fossil Plant site where it can dry and then move it to temporary storage on a former ash pond that was converted to a recreation field years ago.

The process could take several weeks.

Also, the TVA, responding to an enforcement order by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, has turned over hundreds of pages of documents covering decades of operation at the Kingston plant, where the spill occurred Dec. 22.

The state agency is overseeing the cleanup and considering fines for violating the Clean Water Act.

The coal ash breached an earthen wall that held back a 55-foot-tall mountain of coal-burning byproducts. Some 1.1 billion gallons of sludge was released over 300 acres, and TVA estimates as much as 2.3 million cubic yards of ash entered the river.

"This is just the beginning," TVA spokeswoman Barbara Martocci said Friday of the dredging plan for the Emory River.

Meanwhile, new results from state environmental testing show no evidence the fly ash has harmed air quality in the area or that levels of radioactive radium in samples exceed what is typically found in fertilizers.

"All samples contained significantly less radium than the average concentrations typically found in phosphate fertilizers," the state environmental agency said on its Web page.

TVA has built a temporary wall in the river to prevent the ash from flowing downstream into Watts Bar Lake. But the accumulating ash is now increasing the risk of flooding. TVA has warned lakeside residents up to 11 miles upstream and is pressing to begin dredging.

"We understand that time is of the essence," TDEC spokeswoman Tisha Calabrese-Benton said Friday, though she couldn't say when TVA will get the go-ahead. "It is on the fast track."

TDEC, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers all are reviewing the plan TVA presented Thursday.

To comply with TDEC's order, TVA has now turned over more than 600 documents to the state.

One 200-page document includes a 1964 TVA letter describing the Kingston plant as "the largest steam-electric plant in the world" when it was completed in 1955. Today, the plant consumes 14,000 tons of coal a day and generates enough electricity to power 670,000 homes.

"We are going to go through it all," Calabrese-Benton said of the documents.

TDEC is still waiting for lab results of air filter sampling to measure heavy metals. But Calabrese-Benton said the amount of particulates in the air are within national air quality standards.

[Fresno Bee commentaries, Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009:](#)

## **TWO VIEWS: Action will show world we're ready to lead again**

By Wayne Madsen

WASHINGTON -- Seeking to convince the world that the United States finally is serious about slashing Earth-threatening carbon emissions, President Obama is urging Congress to fast-track his plan for a carbon cap-and-trade system.

Obama, noting that 184 countries have signed the Kyoto Protocol to fight global warming, hopes to have the far-reaching legislation enacted in time for the next U.N. environmental conference in Copenhagen this December.

The Kyoto agreement expires in 2012 and it's high time for the United States -- an environmental pariah during George W. Bush's eight years -- to become a global leader on this crucial issue.

Obama's ambitious goal would require all Americans to abandon wanton consumption and adopt a green lifestyle that would reduce our nation's carbon emissions by 15% from 2005 levels by 2012 and 80% by 2050.

To do so, he may have to alienate two of America's most steadfast allies, Italy and Poland -- countries currently led by governments highly simpatico with the Bush-Cheney policy of pooch-pooching the well-documented threat of catastrophic climate change.

Obama will have to use all of his rhetorical skills and perhaps even hint at strong sanctions to force the Poles and the Italians not to veto the European Union's aggressive cap-and-trade program -- the same regimen he would like to install here.

At the same time, he must convince American motorists to give up their gas-guzzling SUVs and luxury sedans and adopt a "carbon-lite" lifestyle that turns its back on economic gluttony in favor of conservation and recycling.

With Democrats controlling both houses of Congress, Obama should have enough votes on Capitol Hill -- especially now that Henry Waxman, D-Calif., has vanquished recalcitrant auto industry ally John Dingell, D-Mich., as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Waxman has promised a bill mandating carbon emission caps by Memorial Day. His longtime ally, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., is committed to ramming the legislation through her chamber and onto the president's desk.

For low-elevation island nations like the Maldives that are already affected by the damaging effects of rising sea-levels, quick-action by Obama will be viewed almost as a biblical deliverance.

Globally it should receive a wave of standing ovations.

Obama has already signaled a major change from Bush policies by ordering the Environmental Protection Agency to review a rule that prevented California and 17 other states from adopting stricter automobile emission controls than those required by the federal government.

If the EPA grants the states a waiver from current weaker federal emission standards, the move will provide an important kick-start for a new federal policy that can be proudly taken by U.S. representatives to the meeting in Denmark.

It is estimated that a U.S. cap-and-trade emissions trading system on carbon dioxide, sulfur oxide and nitrogen oxide emissions could create a \$1 trillion market by 2020.

That kind of vigorous activity will ensure the creation of millions of "green collar" jobs that will transform America. Such a new market will provide a powerful engine to move a damaged American economy far away from today's rocky shoals.

Opponents of cap-and-trade legislation dubiously argue that such a system will destroy the U.S. economy -- a mind-boggling assertion when you consider the huge number of new jobs it will create. And it's ironic in the extreme, since their good friends on Wall Street -- working with Bush's pro-business regulators -- already have accomplished the destruction of most of the economy.

The new administration is duty-bound to bring the United States into line with the rest of the world in embracing Kyoto and preparing for Copenhagen.

In doing so, President Obama has a chance to redeem America in the court of world opinion by joining the avant garde of the green revolution.

*Wayne Madsen is a contributing editor to the Progressive Online Journal.*

## **TWO VIEWS: Emissions plan would jack up prices, throw burden on consumers**

By Mark J. Perry

FLINT, Mich. -- At a time when proposals for higher taxes are politically unpopular, Congress is coming up with other strategies to raise the revenue at the expense of the American public.

Key congressional committees are expected to begin debating legislation that would impose mandatory limits on greenhouse-gas emissions. If Congress is successful, the typical American will not be victimized as a taxpayer, but as a consumer.

The proposed legislation would create a European-style market-based system that caps the maximum allowable amounts of carbon dioxide from power plants, manufacturers and vehicles.

If companies emit more than their cap allows, they must buy "carbon permits" on the market from companies that have extra ones.

This "cap-and-trade" system is designed to give companies an incentive to reduce emissions, but unknowing consumers would be "taxed" through higher home energy bills and the rising costs of fuel, food and consumer products.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has vowed to hold a floor vote on cap-and-trade legislation before negotiators meet later this year in Copenhagen under U.N. auspices to work toward a new international climate change agreement.

"Cap and trade is there for a reason," the San Francisco Democrat said recently. "You cap and trade so you can pay for some of these investments in energy independence and renewables."

What this really means is that by collecting such fees from utilities and other companies, Congress would be placing an unfair burden on consumers' shoulders to reduce carbon emissions.

Some members of Congress are actually recommending an almost open-ended collection of fees from companies. The assumption is that firms like utilities, whose only source of revenue in many cases is the ratepayers, are a bottomless pit of funding.

Consumers should pay their fair share of the cleanup, but the proposed fees far exceed that. The frightening part is that we still do not have a credible cost estimate for the cleanup effort.

Worse yet, Congress is preparing to spend tens of billions of dollars on renewable energy sources and improvements in energy efficiency in the hope they will replace fossil fuels. But solar, wind and geothermal energy cannot provide the large amounts of "base-load" electricity that our economy requires.

On the other hand, nuclear power, natural gas and clean coal can do the job, but these solutions have been closed down by environmentalists.

When Europe launched its system in 2005 as a way to meet its targets under the Kyoto Protocol, it cast itself as a leader in the fight against global warming. But Europe's first three years of cap-and-trade have not worked as intended. Emissions have risen instead of fallen. And cap-and-trade has imposed a significant cost on their economies from lost competitiveness, lost jobs and lost investment.

If we're not careful, carbon cap-and-trade in the United States could be disastrous, especially if it is linked to Europe's system.

Importantly, no concrete plans are in the works to require China -- the world's leading emitter -- and other developing countries to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions.

Although the United States and the other leading industrialized countries have set a goal to cut emissions by 50% by 2050, developing countries like China and India have not accepted mandatory caps on carbon emissions.

If we penalize our own companies for carbon emissions, why should we exempt companies in developing countries from that requirement? In effect, by collecting fees from American companies -- with the cost ultimately borne by consumers -- we are subsidizing our foreign competitors at our own expense.

It's time we developed a fair system by first recognizing that greenhouse gas controls must be implemented globally: No one nation can do much on its own to reduce climate change. And we need to gauge the real costs involved in reducing carbon emissions, and then set a clearly defined limit on what American consumers should pay.

*Mark J. Perry is a professor of finance and economics at the Flint campus of the University of Michigan.*

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009:](#)

## **Leaders must set a healthy example for the rest of us**

Bad news. Women's Health magazine calls Bakersfield the worst place for women to live in America. Men's Health magazine rates Bakersfield 94th out of 100 cities in a various health categories, including [air quality](#), cancer rates and visits to the gym.

But these shortcomings represent a national problem, not just something specific to Bakersfield.

It has been said that the failing U.S. economy is not a financial problem but a health problem. Mike Adams, editor of NaturalNews, writes that "the demise of Chrysler and GM is due in large part to health issues." It's not just health care costs, Adams believes, but the fact that diseased, medicated workers have poor productivity, a high number of missed work days, poor cognitive function and a tendency to recover more slowly from injury. An unhealthy employee, Adams says, is an expensive, non-productive burden on a company.

Preventative care would seem to be the answer, but as Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin wrote in the American Journal of Health Promotion, "Today, we do not have a health care system in America; we have a 'sick care' system, and it is costing us dearly."

Americans spent almost \$7,200 per person on health care and are not living as long as people in 41 other countries including Japan, Guam, Jordan and most nations in Europe. A study done in 2005 of 153,000 adults from all 50 states that looked at preventing and controlling chronic diseases -- not smoking, getting physical activity and controlling weight -- found that only 3 percent were living a healthy lifestyle.

Most of us know how to live healthy but we just don't do it.

We in Kern County are no different than any other place in the United States. However, Kern County outranks the state in obese children and in diabetic deaths.

Kids are less active now, in part due to video games and computer activities. Children need to be taught while they are young the techniques of living a healthier lifestyle, how to eat better and to exercise on a regular basis.

As parents, if we are making unhealthy choices, how do we expect our children to make healthy choices? Children learn by example.

If the mayors of other cities are urging their citizens to exercise, why can't our leaders do the same? West Des Moines, Iowa, is pushing fitness. So are Columbia, S.C., Oklahoma City and Philadelphia. A leader doesn't have to be a boss; his actions and behavior can be as influential as any mandate.

When I talk about leaders, I don't just mean our government officials, but our physicians and educators too. Some are already trying to make a difference. Look at the teachers from Mountain View Middle School, Calletano Gutierrez and Dean Perry, who teach their students to not only exercise but to make healthy food choices.

A couple of years ago, a local dentist, Aaron Breaux, was offering kids money in exchange for their candy from Halloween. In my eyes this was a two-fold benefit -- it not only had a positive impact on the kids' dental health but also on their physical health.

And just recently, Kenneth Dyar, a physical education teacher from Delano, was named the state's teacher of the year. He not only encourages kids to participate in sports, but to also be physically fit. He has helped to develop a lifetime fitness approach to his P.E. program.

In 1990, Bakersfield was honored as an All-American City. Now we rank as the worst city for women and near-worst for men from a health standpoint. We need to reclaim ourselves and show that our city is one of the best cities in the nation to live. We can do this by changing our lifestyles.

I am talking about finding an exercise plan that works for you, be it tai chi, cycling, swimming or even walking. The same goes for nutrition. Find a plan and stick with it.

Physicians, myself included, can be leaders in the improvement of one's health, but once again we must lead by example. Researchers say that fit leaders are better leaders. Physicians are leaders in our community whether we like it or not. I try -- I've been teaching tai chi for many years.

People who exercise on workdays are happier, suffer less stress and are more productive. Adults should aim to get in two hours of exercise a week, and children should run and play for at least an hour a day.

Get busy! And happy Chinese New Year.

***Dr. Cheng-Tsung Yeh of Bakersfield is a doctor of internal medicine.***

[Commentary in the Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2009:](#)

### **Daniel Weintraub: Seeds of growth ready for fertile ground**

By Daniel Weintraub, Sacramento Bee

AS CALIFORNIA'S economy struggles to rebound from the collapse of the housing bubble, it is difficult to imagine what will lead us out of this hole. We had the dot-com boom and bust, and then a housing-led recovery that turned out to be a mirage. Is there some industry, some idea that can reignite sustainable growth in this once-golden state?

Maybe not. And maybe that's the wrong way to think about the problem.

It could be that there are six or eight or 10 major industries that together will form the foundation for the new California economy.

The Internet is here to stay, and the Silicon Valley remains a hotbed of innovation in that field. Biotechnology centers in San Diego and San Francisco are poised for additional growth. Los Angeles has lost some of the movie business but is still a center for multimedia arts and entertainment.

And the Central Valley is making a pitch to be the new home of research and development in green industry, including solar power and water technology.

Peter Weber, a retired corporate executive and civic activist from Fresno, has studied what makes economies tick and is promoting a regional approach as a long-term strategy for California. He thinks local governments and the state should make the development of regional economic clusters their top priority.

"I think the potential return on investment is huge for the state," Weber, who was a vice president for FMC Corp. before retiring in 2001, told me last week. "We are spending a lot of time on government accountability, budget reform, fiscal reform. All of that is broken and needs to get fixed.

"The one thing that does not get discussed is how we grow the size of the pie so we have more revenues that generate a higher tax base that enables us to invest in building a better future. I am absolutely convinced that the answer to that is through growing regional economies."

Weber points to the experience of Akron, Ohio, as an example.

Devastated by decline of the rubber tire business, Akron was in a deep economic slump in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Then private sector, government and academic leaders came together to leverage the region's expertise with rubber, a naturally occurring polymer, to become a center for the development of modern, polymer-based synthetic materials.

The University of Akron built a Department of Polymer Engineering, and the Polymer Processing Society was created in 1985 to attract research to the region. By the end of the decade, Weber says, more than 300 polymer companies were operating in Akron.

Now there are more than 2,600 such firms in Ohio, and the industry employs more than 31,000 people in and around Akron. The Akron metropolitan area saw its gross domestic product grow by an average of 6.7 percent per year between 1990 and 2007, which was triple the rate of what it had been for the decade before.

If California's GDP could be increased by just 1 percent above what it otherwise would be, the extra growth would mean \$17 billion a year in company revenue and between \$2.5 billion and \$5 billion in new

tax revenue, Weber said in a paper he wrote on the idea for California Forward, a nonpartisan political reform group.

Weber is convinced this is achievable and he doesn't think it requires the creation of new government agencies or a process of picking industry winners and losers through some kind of government industrial policy. Rather, he proposes less than \$100 million in new spending over five years in a program that would rely on "challenge grants" to give incentives to the private sector, academia and local governments to nurture industry clusters that are forming naturally in their regions.

He has already seen such an approach begin to work in his adopted home town of Fresno. There, former Mayor Alan Autry put Weber in charge of drafting a plan to end the city's 25-year history of double-digit unemployment.

That plan became part of a regional initiative that has rallied an eight-county region around the development of five industry clusters: agribusiness and food processing; manufacturing, including water technology; supply chain management; health and medical care; and renewable energy.

With support from the Schwarzenegger administration, local governments that had been rivals are communicating and cooperating. Business, agricultural and environmental groups are finding more consensus on contentious air quality issues. The region's water supply wars, if not ended, have subsided, and the region came together on a route for California's planned high-speed railroad.

With the entire state's economy hurting, it is too soon to judge how all of this will translate into economic growth, but the spread between the San Joaquin Valley's unemployment rate and the rest of the state has shrunk.

"I think this has had a dramatically beneficial effect on the San Joaquin Valley," Weber says.

No single idea is going to revive California's economy. But if the state and local governments can stop fighting each other long enough to step back and ask what they can do to promote economic growth rather than retard it, all of us will no doubt be better off.

[L.A. Times editorial, Monday, Feb. 9, 2009:](#)

### **Clearing the air with China**

#### **A summit and partnership on global warming could allow the U.S. and Beijing to get past the blame game.**

As President Obama pursues green infrastructure projects and other programs aimed at fighting climate change, he is eventually going to have to confront an unpleasant truth: None of it will matter unless the developing world, particularly China, does the same. With China having passed the U.S. as the country with the highest greenhouse gas emissions in the world, and with its per-capita emissions rising four to six times faster than ours, any carbon reductions here will be more than canceled out by increases there.

A smart way of addressing that problem was presented last week in a report by a multi-disciplinary team of experts, who proposed that Obama convene a summit with Chinese President Hu Jintao to outline a plan of action against global warming and create high-level councils in both countries to develop ways to implement it. What makes this project, a joint effort of the Asia Society and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, different from the usual think-tank fodder is that it was co-chaired by Steven Chu, who as the new secretary of Energy presumably has Obama's ear when it comes to climate policy.

The idea of cooperating more closely with China on such matters isn't new. Former Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson began a series of high-level talks on economic issues with China in 2006, and last year he convened a session on energy and the environment that established various goals and set up task forces to address them. But climate change wasn't really Paulson's priority -- the session took place in June, when high oil prices were the top economic and political issue, and it was aimed mainly at putting downward pressure on oil demand and prices.

International summits and task forces seldom lead to much concrete progress (Paulson's initiative went pretty much nowhere), but there's reason to think a U.S.-China partnership on climate change could be different. Each country tends to blame the other for the problem; China points out that the U.S. is historically the world's biggest contributor to greenhouse gas concentrations and says it should be free to

industrialize just as the U.S. was, and the U.S. says imposing carbon controls here would give China a competitive economic advantage. Working together, the two countries could improve economic prospects for both while disadvantaging neither. The global economic crisis, meanwhile, presents an opportunity for both countries to invest in projects that cut carbon and create jobs.

In the next year, there will be much talk of a successor to the Kyoto Protocol global climate agreement, but a bilateral effort by the U.S. and China is arguably more important. Obama should see that it happens.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses list of dangerous pollutants hidden in homes is released. Six different sources have been identified as air pollutants inside homes which could possibly be more dangerous than outdoor air pollution. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Emiten lista de peligrosos contaminantes ocultos dentro del hogar**

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

Autoridades y grupos ambientales han identificado seis diferentes fuentes de contaminación del aire dentro de los hogares estadounidenses, que incluso podrían ser más peligrosas que el deterioro del aire en exteriores. De acuerdo con la Asociación Americana del Pulmón hay por lo menos 63 marcas de "purificadores de aire" que producen ozono dentro de los hogares. El ozono es el principal contaminante que producen los autos. Las alfombras sin limpiar absorben gérmenes, polvos y bacterias que luego emiten en forma de gases. Las autoridades advierten sobre algunos tipos de pinturas para interiores que se producen con residuos de plomo. La gran mayoría de los productos de limpieza son tóxicos, excepto los que explican en etiquetas lo contrario. También contaminan considerablemente algunos tipos de gabinetes que desprenden fibra, y las estufas sin ventilar en cocinas cerradas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Costa Rica is recognized for reducing carbon emissions.](#)

### **Reconocen a Costa Rica por reducir emisiones de carbono**

La Opinión, Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2009

WASHINGTON (EFE).- El Consejo para la Defensa de los Recursos Naturales (NRDC) reconoció el compromiso de Costa Rica en su esfuerzo por reducir sus emisiones de carbono y ha incluido al país en su lista de "BioGemas" del mundo, que recoge lugares de especial belleza natural para evitar su destrucción.

El NRDC empezó este programa en 2001 para destacar la belleza natural y la biodiversidad de algunos lugares, pero también para proteger áreas que corren peligro de ser contaminadas o destruidas, por las compañías petroleras y otros peligros relacionados con turismo o desarrollo no sostenible.

Las zonas incluidas en la lista de "BioGemas" abarcan desde Alaska hasta la Patagonia, pero por primera vez un país entero ha sido reconocido en su conjunto.

La organización ha querido reconocer el esfuerzo de Costa Rica por ser el primero en marcarse como meta ser un país "neutro" en emisiones de carbono para 2021, según explicó a Efe, Serena Ingre, una portavoz de la organización.

El plan consiste en reducir todas las emisiones al mínimo y generar mecanismos para compensar las que son imprescindibles, "es una meta increíble, estamos hablando de un país pequeño pero es un modelo para el resto del mundo", aseguró Ingre.

El NRDC está trabajando con el Ministerio de Energía y Medio Ambiente del país para desarrollar medidas encaminadas a convenir su objetivo y ha firmado un convenio con la compañía de luz nacional y el Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad, para trabajar en varios proyectos de eficiencia energética y energía renovable.

Estas medidas, según la organización, ayudarán a Costa Rica a reafirmar su posición de líder ambiental mundial y reducir la presión sobre su biodiversidad y otras áreas naturales.

"Nuestra meta es asegurar soluciones ambientales a largo plazo para proteger la biodiversidad única de Costa Rica y para reducir la amenaza que pesa contra sus áreas naturales", señaló el director ejecutivo de NRDC, Peter Lehner.

El NRDC ha incluido, además, otras 13 áreas naturales y seis especies silvestres, entre ellos, el Monumento Nacional Carrizo Plain en el centro de California y el Delta Peace-Athabasca en Alberta, Canadá, amenazados por la explotación de petróleo y gas.

Esta iniciativa cuenta con el apoyo de 400.000 activistas de todo el mundo, que velan para que los países conserven sus recursos naturales a través de la página de internet [www.SaveBioGems.org](http://www.SaveBioGems.org). EFE

## **Listo anteproyecto para modernizar el transporte público**

Por Luis García Higuera

La Voz de la Frontera, Monday, Feb. 9, 2009

Mexicali, B.C.- El ingeniero Óscar Barceló, director del Sistema Municipal del Transporte, informó que en días pasados, se llevó a cabo una reunión con el asesor que se contrató para realizar los estudios sobre el programa de modernización del transporte público en Mexicali, arquitecto Isaac Espinoza.

En dicha reunión participaron el presidente municipal, licenciado Rodolfo Valdez Gutiérrez, los transportistas involucrados en el proyecto, y el Sistema Municipal del Transporte, y se trataron varios puntos relacionados con el tema.

El punto neurálgico de esta reunión, es que los estudios realizados con anterioridad, como análisis, encuestas y demás, ya fueron concentrados en un solo documento y se aterrizaron en lo que se ha constituido ya como un anteproyecto para dar paso a lo que será la modernización del transporte público en Mexicali.

En esta reunión también se determinó lo que se ha llamado "Línea Express I", la cual correrá desde el centro de la ciudad, hasta los puentes que hacen el cruce del ejido Puebla con la carretera a San Luis, esta línea tendrá circulación exclusiva por una vialidad y contará con unidades nuevas, las cuales contarán con equipo de registro electrónico para dar lectura a tarjetas inteligentes, comunicación con las centrales, etcétera.

Con estas mejoras al sistema de transporte, se pretende ofrecer un servicio limpio, oportuno y más barato para el usuario, el cual resultará en un beneficio económico y de reducción de tiempos para todo el público.

Mencionó también que al tener ya este anteproyecto en las manos, se podrá dar marcha a todos y cada uno de los proyectos que se tenían como por ejemplo, quiénes participarán en el programa, la puesta en marcha del uso de la tarjeta electrónica y el cambio de las unidades viejas por nuevas, los cuales se tenían detenidos pues no se habían podido definir por la falta del anteproyecto.

"Con esto, este ayuntamiento no va a tener más análisis y estudios por hacer, y de no ser factible que se instituya en esta administración, ya queda el documento para que las administraciones posteriores puedan darle una continuidad al proyecto", puntualizó.

"Lo que sí vamos a terminar, es el corredor industrial Palaco, que va desde el centro de la ciudad, por todo el Bulevar Palaco o Gustavo Vildósola, ese sí se va a terminar en esta administración", finalizó.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses climate change affects Latinos disproportionately and states that share US-Mexico border due to higher temperature levels.](#)

### **Cambio Climático es a minorías en estados fronterizos**

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, Feb. 9, 2009

El impacto del cambio climático en los estados que son fronterizos con México será mayor para los residentes miembros de minorías étnicas, aseguró un experto de la Universidad Loyola de Nueva Orleans. Según el ambientalista, Robert Verchick, desde ahora, cuando el sobrecalentamiento ha

aumentado unos dos grados Fahrenheit a la temperatura promedio, el cambio climático afecta desproporcionadamente a los latinos.

Verchick dijo que algunas de las repercusiones son enfermedades, una pobre calidad del aire y deslaves de tierra, entre otras. Agregó que hay una fórmula que confirma que el sobrecalentamiento afecta más a las minorías. Y que el Riesgo es igual a Exposición más Vulnerabilidad. Según esa fórmula, los residentes latinos están más expuestos al aumento de temperaturas y están más vulnerables.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses pollution levels drop during "a day without vehicles" in Bogota, Columbia.](#)

### **Contaminación en Bogotá baja en el día sin autos**

La Opinión, Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009

BOGOTÁ, Colombia (EFE).- La contaminación con monóxido de carbono (CO) en la capital colombiana alcanzó niveles inferiores hasta en el 51 por ciento por efecto de la salida de circulación de más de 1,14 millones de vehículos particulares, en la décima jornada anual del llamado "Día por el aire limpio" que se realiza en la ciudad.

En ese porcentaje disminuyó la concentración de CO en el pico matinal de mayor tráfico que presenta Bogotá, que es de tres horas, según los resultados de las mediciones realizadas por la Secretaría Distrital de Ambiente (SDA).

"Esta disminución hace evidente que la concentración de CO se asocia con la restricción a vehículos particulares", explicó a la prensa el titular de la SDA, Juan Antonio Nieto.

El funcionario advirtió de que el CO es el principal contaminante que generan los vehículos automotores, de los que en la capital colombiana circulan en un día normal más de 1,4 millones de unidades.

El material particulado (PM10), el segundo contaminante del aire en importancia, también cayó el 31 por ciento durante este día de restricción, dijo Nieto, para quien la jornada dejó resultados positivos que estuvieron por encima de los alcanzados en 2008.

El titular de la SDA lo atribuyó a la mejor calidad del diesel que se distribuye en la ciudad, principal combustible para los vehículos de servicio público y que ahora contiene "entre 250 y 300 partes por millón de azufre", contra las cerca de 1.200 partes por millón que lo componían a comienzos del año pasado.

La jornada sin vehículos particulares en Bogotá se instituyó como "Día sin carro", por mandato de una consulta popular que ordena su realización el primer jueves de cada febrero para incentivar el uso de transportes alternativos.

Entre ellos está el de la bicicleta, medio que puede desplazarse por los 354 kilómetros de "ciclorrutas" que se han construido en la ciudad.

Esta vez, los cerca de siete millones de habitantes de Bogotá pudieron hacer uso de 1,074 autobuses articulados del sistema masivo de TransMilenio, 16,200 autobuses, microbuses y colectivos, y 50 mil taxis, que es el parque automotor de servicio público que existe en la ciudad.