

San Joaquin Valley ground zero for diabetes

Poverty, lifestyle seen as factors in high rates here.

By Barbara Anderson, The Fresno Bee and Natalya Shulyakovskaya, Center for California Health Care Journalism

In the Fresno Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Feb. 16, 2009

Every week in the central San Joaquin Valley, at least 19 people die of diabetes -- and the death toll is rising.

The disease has reached epidemic proportions nationwide, but few places are as stricken as the Valley's eight counties, from San Joaquin to Kern.

Nowhere in California are people more likely to die of diabetes than here.

The complex web of reasons include obesity and poverty.

The Valley's fast-food, car-centered culture is partly to blame, health experts say, because it packs pounds on waistlines. The agriculture-based minimum-wage job market keeps people poor and unable to afford healthier foods, they say. And a doctor shortage has stalled efforts to bring the epidemic under control.

Now the disease touches nearly one out of every 10 people who live in the Valley -- compared to 1 in 13 statewide.

It steals eyesight, burns nerves, disables organs. It kills.

An analysis of state death records and other statistics by The Fresno Bee and the Center for California Health Care Journalism at USC paints a vivid picture of the disproportionate toll diabetes takes here: Minorities are up to twice as likely as whites to die from diabetes and its complications.

Less educated residents are more at risk. Almost half of those who die lack high school diplomas.

The poor -- regardless of ethnic background -- are more likely to get the disease than other Valley residents.

Many people don't even know their bodies are in trouble until it's too late. Symptoms start slowly, and the disease can take years to kill. So diabetes probably is a bigger health menace than anyone knows.

In fact, doctors and health officials say diabetes leads to heart attacks, strokes and high blood pressure but often is not listed as even a contributing factor on death certificates.

Recent advances in treatment are slow to reach the Valley, where doctor specialists of any type are in short supply.

The Fresno Bee's analysis shows diabetes kills people sooner here.

Statewide, 27 percent of people killed by diabetes died before turning 65. In the Valley, the figure is 32 percent.

Yet despite widespread concern in the medical community about the threat of diabetes, for many patients the diagnosis still comes as a surprise.

Diabetics have too much glucose, or blood sugar, that builds up in their bodies. It attacks organs, nerves and blood vessels anywhere in the body, blocking nutrients they need to function.

Insulin regulates blood sugar. In Type 1 diabetes -- the most common type among children -- the body's immune system destroys pancreatic cells that make the hormone insulin.

About 90 percent to 95 percent of diabetics have Type 2, in which the body becomes resistant to insulin produced in the pancreas, and gradually the organ stops producing the hormone, allowing blood-sugar levels to rise out of control. Scientists know that genetics play a role: Type 2 diabetes runs in families and is more prevalent in African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Women also can become diabetic during pregnancy. This can develop into Type 2 diabetes.

But lifestyle and environmental conditions -- such as physical inactivity and poor diet -- are major causes and are driving the rise in diabetes in the Valley.

Almost 24 million American adults have diabetes. In the Valley, almost a quarter million -- 244,000 adults -- have been diagnosed, according to estimates based on the 2007 California Health Interview Survey, conducted by researchers at UCLA.

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness and kidney failure. And diabetics are two to four times more likely than average to suffer strokes or heart attacks, according to the CDC.

Many people can control their diabetes with diet and exercise, but pills and insulin are a mainstay for others.

And more people are on insulin every year. Diabetes rates have been increasing nationally since 1990, reaching an average of 7.5 percent of adults in 2007. California had a rate of 7.8 percent, according to the 2007 statewide health survey by the University of California at Los Angeles.

The Valley outpaces both. Here, the diabetes rate is 9.4 percent.

These numbers are likely underestimates. Health experts say at least a quarter of the people who have diabetes nationally don't know they have it. In its early stages, people don't feel bad.

A web of factors Obesity and poverty play the biggest roles in diabetes here, but the causes are complex. Many factors combine to make the Valley fertile ground for the disease.

Doctors cite urban sprawl, for example. People drive instead of walk because there's little choice. The result is inactivity that leads to obesity -- as well as [air pollution](#). Recent research suggests [air pollution](#) could contribute to diabetes: A study at Ohio State University Medical Center found mice exposed to air pollution and fatty foods didn't process insulin as efficiently.

Experts see rising obesity as the leading cause of the proliferation of diabetes. They expect the number of diabetics worldwide at least to double in the next two decades.

Trouble with care

Patients who can't afford care usually delay treatment, said Dr. Soe Naing, a diabetes specialist in Fresno.

Naing sees uninsured patients and those on Medi-Cal. But he's in the minority.

Few doctors in the Valley, other than those in federally subsidized clinics, are willing to accept Medi-Cal's low payments.

Even private insurance is no health-care guarantee. Patients with good insurance might not be able to get quick appointments with diabetes specialists, who are rare in the Valley.

Family doctors have little time to educate patients about diabetes, a disease that requires a lifelong commitment to self-management.

When patients are diagnosed, they have a lot of information to digest -- from how to give themselves an insulin shot to foods they should eat in moderation, such as potatoes, rice and beans.

Doctors refer diabetics to certified diabetes educators, but they're in short supply, too. The scarcity of Spanish-speaking educators is especially troubling, said Angel Ponce, a registered dietician and certified diabetes educator who has been working with diabetics for a decade in the Valley.

Diabetes hits minorities the hardest. Almost 8 percent of deaths among Native Americans were due to diabetes -- twice the percentage of deaths from diabetes among whites, according to The Fresno Bee's analysis.

Five percent of blacks and Asians died from it. And 6 percent of Hispanics died from diabetes.

A financial struggle Every month, diabetes outreach worker Maria Zapata gathers Spanish-speaking diabetics at support group meetings offered by the West Fresno Health Care Coalition. Most who attend are low-income. At some point, the conversation invariably turns to the cost of medical supplies.

"We have people who can't buy anything," Zapata said.

A diabetic needs to keep blood-sugar levels in control to avoid complications. Good control means daily checking of blood glucose levels. The goal is to keep levels as close to normal as possible.

According to the American Diabetes Association that means 70 to 130 milligrams per deciliter before meals, and less than 180 two hours after starting a meal.

To know the numbers, a diabetic pricks a finger and puts a drop of blood on a testing strip. The patient checks the blood on a glucose meter, a machine about the size of a deck of cards.

Doctors usually recommend Type 2 diabetics check their blood sugar levels one or two times a day. Each testing strip costs \$1, Zapata said.

Many of the support-group members can't afford \$60 a month for test strips, she said. So they test less often and can't regulate their medications as well.

Social disparities

Research more and more is tying diabetes to poverty, and for all too many diabetics in the Valley, poverty is a fact of life.

Six of the poorest counties in the state are in the region. Among those six, the poorest is Tulare County. Almost 24 percent of that county's residents lived in households with incomes below poverty level, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

This doesn't bode well for the fight against diabetes in the Valley.

Mexican-American adults are 1.7 times more likely to have diabetes than whites, according to a new state legislative task force report on diabetes and obesity. But poor whites in the Valley get diabetes as often as poor Hispanics.

The gap between poor whites and affluent whites is similar to the gap between poor and affluent Hispanics, according to The Fresno Bee review of data from the California Health Care Survey, a bi-annual telephone survey of 50,000 Californians.

Federal research shows that ethnic differences in diabetes rates tend to disappear with improvements in living standards, said Ann Albright of the CDC.

Education, which is closely linked to income, also shows up in the statistics. Those with little education are more likely to die from diabetes, an especially troubling trend since the Valley has more high-school dropouts than the state average.

U.S. reverses, seeks global treaty on mercury

By Tom Maliti, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times and other papers, Monday, Feb. 16, 2009

Nairobi, Kenya -- The Obama administration reversed years of U.S. policy Monday by calling for a treaty to cut mercury pollution, which it described as the world's gravest chemical problem.

Some 6,000 tons of mercury enter the environment each year, about a third generated by power stations and coal fires. Much settles into the oceans, where it enters the food chain and is concentrated in predatory fish like tuna.

Children and fetuses are particularly vulnerable to poisoning by the toxic metal, which can cause birth defects, brain damage and peeling skin.

Daniel Reifsnyder, the deputy assistant secretary of state for environment and sustainable development, told a global gathering of environmental ministers in Nairobi, Kenya, that the United States wants negotiations on limiting mercury to begin this year and conclude within three.

"We're prepared to help lead in developing a globally legally binding instrument," he said. "It is clear mercury is the most important global chemical issue facing us today that calls for immediate action."

The statement represented a "180-degree turnaround" from policy under the Bush administration, said Michael Bender, co-coordinator of the Zero Mercury Working Group, a global coalition of 75 environmental organizations working to reduce mercury exposure.

"The change is like night and day. The Bush administration opposed any international legal agreements on mercury, and President Obama is in office less than one month and is already supporting a global agreement," he said.

Bender said his group has had more discussions over mercury control in the past two weeks than it has in the last eight years and that the U.S. government included many of his group's ideas in the proposal being presented in Nairobi.

Mercury is also widely used in chemical production and small-scale mining. The toxin can travel thousands of miles through the air or water.

Substitutes exist for almost all industrial processes that require mercury, but more than 50 percent of mercury emissions come from coal-fueled power plants, complicating efforts to regulate it in countries that rely on coal for power.

A proposal drafted by the United States obtained by the Associated Press would form a negotiating committee in conjunction with the U.N. environment program to help countries reduce their mercury use, clean up contaminated sites and find environmentally sound ways to store mercury. The European Union has banned mercury exports starting in 2011. The United States has a similar ban that will be effective in 2013, legislation that was sponsored by Obama when he was a U.S. senator.

Forums put focus on valley's growth

By Garth Stapley

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, February 17, 2009

If growth is your passion but stuffy, formal meetings are not, the Valley Futures Forum might be right for you.

The Modesto-based Great Valley Center, joined by several groups with stakes in the Northern San Joaquin Valley's success, figures people ought to have a casual venue for exploring and chatting about growth issues over refreshments. They're joining forces to present a series of monthly roundtable discussions starting Thursday.

"We're just trying to bring people together to talk about how to grow well," said David Hosley, president of the Great Valley Center.

The monthly series kicks off with an appearance by Edie Chang, planning chief for the California Air Resources Board's Office of Climate Change. She'll discuss her office's plan to reduce emissions.

Other Valley Futures Forums could focus on traffic, housing density, farmland preservation, or water and sewer services, said Cindy van Empel, a senior planner at Modesto City Hall. She

floated the series idea to the Great Valley Center after attending several sessions of a similar effort in Redwood City.

The timing is good, Hosley said, as attention continues to focus on regional planning efforts such as the eight-county Blueprint process and Gov. Schwarzenegger's California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley.

Some communities have tackled growth issues in other ways, such as Measure E passed a year ago by voters throughout Stanislaus County.

Co-sponsoring the Valley Futures Forum are the American Planning Association, the Building Industry Association of Central California, the Congress for the New Urbanism, the Local Government Commission and the Modesto Chamber of Commerce.

Don't let those big names scare you, organizers say -- regular people are more than welcome.

"We need more opportunity to talk, at a time when incredible changes are taking place," Hosley said.

The Valley Futures Forum intends to hold sessions at 5 p.m. every third Thursday of the month at the Great Valley Center, 201 Needham Ave., Modesto. Tickets are \$10. For details, contact Cindy van Empel at nuplanner@gmail.com.

Highlights of plan to close Calif. budget deficit

By The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald, Modesto Bee and other papers, Monday, February 16, 2009

From key provisions of the proposal to close California's \$42 billion budget deficit through June 2010:

Economic stimulus

- Grants up to \$400 million in tax credits for companies with 20 or fewer employees that hire new workers over the next two years. Allows businesses to claim a credit of up to \$3,000 per full-time job created.
- Provides up to \$100 million a year for five years in tax incentives for movie studios to film in California, known as the runaway production credit.
- Reformulates taxes for corporations that operate in multiple states. Republicans say the tax break would encourage investment in California while critics called it a giveaway that could cost the state \$690 million a year.
- Allows unlimited public-private partnerships on state transportation projects through 2017.
- Speeds up construction on 15 state public works projects, 5 local transportation projects and 10 redevelopment agency projects by allowing one company to do both the design and construction.
- Removes environmental hurdles and accelerates permit approval for 10 road projects in seven counties through 2010. Allows the state to expand partnerships with private companies to build projects from design to construction.
- A 2007 off-highway diesel regulation requires bulldozers, airport baggage trucks and ski resort snowcats to begin reducing emissions from their fleets in 2010. The rule phases in the regulation through 2020 for fleets of large vehicles. The budget proposal would delay the initial phase-in requirements, requiring fewer vehicles to comply in the early years.
- Exempts environmental reviews for selling surplus state property.

— A state grant program offers funding to companies that take steps to reduce [harmful emissions from their vehicles before state air pollution](#) requirements go into effect. The budget proposal would allow farmers to access that money even if the requirement has already taken effect.

— Exempts some rural communities from paying prevailing wage on public work projects.

Saving the majestic Sequoia

By Laura Casey, Contra Costa Times

Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, February 14, 2009

Photographer Jeff Jones fell in love with the Sierra high country in 1978, on his first backpacking trip.

Over many years and through several trips to the adjacent Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, Jones recorded what he saw in these protected expanses of nature with his camera.

Through photography and prose, Jones and National Parks Service ranger William C. Tweed take Oakland Museum of California visitors on a tour of the Sequoia and Kings Canyon parks — to places that many of us will never see — in hopes that we, too, will fall in love with the parks and work to protect them.

"The reason I want to have this exhibit is because nature is stunningly beautiful and I wanted to share that beauty with others," Jones says.

"Future of Sequoias: Sustaining Parklands in the 21st Century," which runs through Aug. 23, presents 40 of Jones' photographs coupled with English and Spanish panels by Tweed that give some insight into the reserves. Along with facts about tree age and size, the panels relate threats to the parks and its giant trees — threats such as air pollution and climate change.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon parks are about a four-hour drive from Oakland, near Fresno and Visalia. They are home to 30 groves of the Giant Sequoia, the largest tree in the world. Yosemite, by comparison, has three groves of the majestic trees.

There are nearly 800 miles of trail in the parks. And while some adventure-seekers, like Jones, spend days hiking through it, some of the groves of Giant Sequoias are near easily accessible roads.

And the trees are stunning. You can almost feel the snow and smell the wet limbs and branches in Jones' "Soaring Sequoia," photographed from the tree's base up to its tip.

Jones' method of recording nature scenes is by taking multiple, panoramic pictures of an area — too big for just one shot — and then using a software program to stitch them into a panorama.

The result is a highly-detailed works of art with sharp colors and crisp lines.

But "Future of Sequoias" isn't just a one-man show. Oakland Museum curator Dorris Welch brought together displays of animals that would live in the parks, using specimens, displays and publications from the museum collection and the National Park Service.

In one display, a piece of the trunk of a centuries-old sequoia is labeled to show how many forest fires it survived. In another, the use of African-American "Buffalo Soldiers" to protect the parks is explained.

The parks' trees and other features are endangered by high levels of pollution from cars, agricultural dust, pesticides and coal plants. Smog gets trapped in the lower San Joaquin Valley, stagnates in the sun and prohibits growth.

The exhibit explains these threats, as well as other past dangers that have been addressed.

"This really highlights a National Park," says Welch, who also is a big fan of the two parks and visits them regularly.

"Future of Sequoias: Sustaining Parklands in the 21st Century" is the last exhibit at the Natural Sciences Gallery, a place that visitors have known and loved for decades. It will close for remodeling in August.

Climate warming gases rising faster than expected

By Randolph Schmid, AP Science Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, February 14, 2009

CHICAGO—Despite widespread concern over global warming, humans are adding carbon to the atmosphere even faster than in the 1990s, researchers warned Saturday.

Carbon dioxide and other gases added to the air by industrial and other activities have been blamed for rising temperatures, increasing worries about possible major changes in weather and climate.

Carbon emissions have been growing at 3.5 percent per year since 2000, up sharply from the 0.9 percent per year in the 1990s, Christopher Field of the Carnegie Institution for Science told the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

"It is now outside the entire envelope of possibilities" considered in the 2007 report of the International Panel on Climate Change, he said. The IPCC and former vice president Al Gore received the Nobel Prize for drawing attention to the dangers of climate change.

The largest factor in this increase is the widespread adoption of coal as an energy source, Field said, "and without aggressive attention societies will continue to focus on the energy sources that are cheapest, and that means coal."

Past projections for declines in the emissions of greenhouse gases were too optimistic, he added. No part of the world had a decline in emissions from 2000 to 2008.

Anny Cazenave of France's National Center for Space Studies told the meeting that improved satellite measurements show that sea levels are rising faster than had been expected.

Rising oceans can pose a threat to low level areas such as South Florida, New York and other coastal areas as the ocean warms and expands and as water is added from melting ice sheets.

And the rise is uneven, with the fastest rising areas at about 1 centimeter—0.39 inch—per year in parts of the North Atlantic, western Pacific and the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica, she said.

Also, highly promoted efforts to curb carbon emissions through the use of biofuels may even backfire, other researchers said.

Demand for biologically based fuels has led to the growing of more corn in the United States, but that means fields were switched from soybeans to corn, explained Michael Coe of the Woods Hole Research Center.

But there was no decline in the demand for soy, he said, meaning other countries, such as Brazil, increased their soy crops to make up for the deficit.

In turn, Brazil created more soy fields by destroying tropical forests, which tend to soak up carbon dioxide. Instead the forests were burned, releasing the gasses into the air.

The increased emissions from Brazil swamp any declines recorded by the United States, he said.

Holly Gibbs of Stanford University said that if crops like sugar and oil palm are planted after tropical forests are burned, the extra carbon released may be balanced by lower emissions from

biofuel in 40 to 120 years, but for crops such as corn and cassava it can take hundreds of years to break equal.

"If we run our cars on biofuels produced in the tropics, chances will be good that we are effectively burning rainforests in our gas tanks," she said.

However, there could be benefits from planting crops for biofuels on degraded land, such as fields that are not offering low productivity due to salinity, soil erosion or nutrient leaching.

"In a sense that would be restoring land to a higher potential," she said. But there would be costs in fertilizer and improved farming practices.

In some cases simply allowing the degraded land to return to forest might be the best answer, she said.

Cruise ships cited

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009

JUNEAU, Alaska—State regulators have cited eight cruise ships for air quality violations in 2008.

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation issued 10 notices of violations—a fivefold increase from 2007

The notices were issued to ships owned by Celebrity, International Shipping Partners, Princess Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, Holland America and Royal Caribbean.

Celebrity is owned by Royal Caribbean Ltd. Princess and Holland America are owned by Carnival Corp. Miami-based Norwegian Cruise Line is owned by the Genting Group and Apollo Management.

The DEC took 224 readings, compared to 170 the previous year.

Denise Koch, the DEC's cruise ship program manager, says the increase alone doesn't account for the jump in violations found.

DEC regulators take readings on their own schedule, but they also take readings if people call with complaints about a particular ship.

Not every complaint results in a violation. But a complaint led to at least one notice of violation: for the International Shipping Partners-owned Clipper Pacific, known as the "Peace Boat" for the big peace sign on its side.

"They are helpful, and the Peace Boat was a good example of that," Koch said. "It was very smoky. We got lots of complaints, and we went out and did a reading."

John Binkley, president of the Alaska Cruise Association, said the violations should be seen as a proportion of all the readings: 10 out of 224.

"We've dropped from an A+ to a solid A," he said, adding that the goal is zero violations.

Former President Clinton pushes green energy during L.A. stop He announces a partnership between his Clinton Climate Initiative and the city to refit 140,000 street lights in L.A. with energy-saving light-emitting diodes

By Marla Dickerson

L.A. Times, Tuesday, February 17, 2009

It's the green economy, stupid.

It was hard not to think of this twist on his long-ago campaign slogan as former President Clinton toured the Los Angeles area on Monday, making the case that the quickest way out of the country's latest economic morass lies in the wonky topic of energy efficiency.

Subjects as mundane as lightbulbs and insulation would be deadly-dull stuff in the hands of a less gifted public speaker, but since leaving office in 2001, Clinton has become something of a crusader for unsexy fixes such as building retrofits to generate U.S. jobs, cutting dependence on foreign oil and slashing carbon dioxide emissions.

Appearing at City Hall with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Clinton announced a partnership between his Clinton Climate Initiative and the city to refit 140,000 Los Angeles street lights with energy-saving light-emitting diodes, or LEDs. The program is projected to save taxpayers an estimated \$48 million over seven years in lower energy costs while removing the carbon dioxide equivalent of 6,700 cars a year from the road.

"If every city followed the example of Los Angeles and reduced the electricity used by their street lights by 50%, it would be equivalent to eliminating over 2 1/2 . . . coal plants per year," Clinton said.

Clinton later led an environmental roundtable discussion at a solar-powered airport hangar at Bob Hope Airport in Burbank. Designed by Shangri-La Construction of Century City, the 60,000-square-foot facility generates enough clean power to run the building's lights, recharge ground equipment and operate an aircraft's electrical system while it's being worked on inside the hangar. Built for \$17 million, it cost about the same as conventional construction to erect, its owners say, but with a fraction of the carbon footprint and future operating costs.

Clinton said making such projects profitable was the only way to advance a green agenda domestically and persuade the rest of the world to join the United States in fighting climate change.

"The Chinese and the Indians and the Thais and the Indonesians are not going to get serious about this unless we can prove that it's good business," Clinton said. "If the world decides tomorrow to change the way it uses energy, it would create more jobs in more places than anywhere in human history. . . . But we have to change the mind-set . . . that we can't do it without hurting the economy."

Diesel trucks run on cow power

California Farm Bureau Federation

In the Los Banos Enterprise, Friday, February 13, 2009

Two diesel trucks that have been converted to run on biomethane debuted at World Ag Expo in Tulare this week. This renewable fuel reduces emissions and air pollution, along with dependence on fossil fuels. Biomethane is carbon negative. The fuel was made from cow waste at Hilarides Dairy in Lindsey. The farmer uses methane to generate electricity as well as produce fuel for his trucks. Nationally, dairy cows could power about a million vehicles a year with clean-burning biomethane.

Dairies will face global warming regulations, scientist says

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Feb. 13, 2008

The next big air pollution hurdle dairies face is greenhouse gas emissions. That's according to Dr. Frank Mitloehner, a UC Davis air-quality specialist who made a presentation Wednesday at a World Ag Expo seminar. Kings County dairies churned out \$692 million worth of milk in 2007, making it the county's top agricultural commodity.

Dairies are regulated by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for volatile organic compounds that contribute to smog formation. They have a smorgasbord of compliance options, everything from covering silage piles to managing manure more carefully.

Greenhouse gas emissions of methane and nitrous oxide aren't regulated yet, but they will be in a couple of years, based on AB 32, the landmark California anti-global warming law that cleared the Legislature in 2006, Mitloehner said.

Mitloehner's presentation focused on greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming and how agriculture contributes to the problem -- and how it does not.

Agriculture actually reduces its own global-warming contribution because the plants suck up carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, Mitloehner noted.

The same applies to the cropland that goes to feed the dairy cows that belch out methane.

Dairies and other farms should get credits factored into the regulations, Mitloehner argued.

Mitloehner sought to counter claims that livestock operations are responsible for more greenhouse gas output than vehicular traffic.

His estimate is that livestock operations -- primarily dairies -- are responsible for only 2 to 3 percent of California's greenhouse gas emissions, with transportation accounting for more than 6 times that amount.

He concluded that most of the emissions come from ground fertilizer application.

For dairies, that means applying manure to cropland at "agronomic" rates -- enough to feed the plant at just the right time -- will be a key to meeting global warming regulations, Mitloehner said.

Such rules could dovetail with current water-quality rules, which require farmers to essentially do the same thing.

Mitloehner suggested the possibility of building manure digesters to generate electricity or heat water.

Kings County area sources who have manure digesters say the system still has some kinks to be worked out before it becomes profitable.

Mitloehner noted the increase in the number of California dairy cows over the last 20 years.

The number of cows has gone up 3 percent per year, while the amount of milk produced per cow has risen 1.6 percent annually over the same period, he said.

According to his calculations, a cow in Tulare County has less of a greenhouse gas impact than a cow grazing in Petaluma in the Bay Area because the Tulare County cow produces twice as much milk.

So he advocates that dairy farmers figure out a way to get rid of their replacement stock.

As a rule of thumb, for every milk cow on a local dairy, there is one replacement animal waiting in the wings.

The reason for that is the short life span of the average milk cow, which only produces its peak milk output for two and a half lactations and only lives an average of 4.5 years.

Meanwhile, the replacement heifers and dry stock on dairies are emitting greenhouse gases without producing milk, Mitloehner said.

He said dairy owners need to increase the pregnancy rate of milk cows and extend their lifespan - a switch from current breeding practices that focus on maximum milk output per lactation.

Local dairyman Jake DeRaadt was skeptical of that idea.

He said the price of replacement heifers is so low, dairy owners would prefer to ship their heifers out of state and ship them back in as needed rather than try to breed cows that live longer and get pregnant more often.

"I don't think (Mitloehner's) argument is going to hold a lot of water," he said.

As for fertilizer emissions, milk producers are already trying to apply manure to cropland at agronomic rates, he said.

"We might just fine-tune it," he said.

PG&E offering money for anti-greenhouse gas projects

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer

Friday, Feb. 13, 2009

As part of its ClimateSmart program, Pacific Gas and Electric is seeking proposals from local dairies, landfill operators, governments and educational campuses for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To qualify, a project must reduce emissions through methane capture at a dairy or landfill, or through tree planting. If selected, PG&E will enter into a contract to pay for each ton of emissions the project eliminates from the atmosphere.

Funding for the projects comes from ClimateSmart customers who choose to pay an additional fee on their monthly bill to offset the global warming impacts caused by their power consumption.

A typical household pays \$5 a month. One hundred percent of the fee goes to carbon-reduction projects.

So far, ClimateSmart has funded two forestry programs in California that will achieve a combined reduction of 236,000 tons of carbon dioxide. But the company plans to sign contracts by the end of the year for an additional 1.3 million tons of reductions, for a total investment of \$14.6 million, said Robert Parkhurst, PG&E's manager of climate protection and analysis.

For dairies that want to capture methane, a university that wants to plant trees or local government that operates a landfill, a carbon reduction project "is a way to produce revenue while doing something to protect the environment," Parkhurst said.

More than 30,000 PG&E customers have enrolled in ClimateSmart since it started in June 2007. Bakersfield ranks among the Top 10 cities for customer enrollment, with 2.1 percent of customers opting in. Along with residential customers, participants include the city of Taft and the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce.

Project bids are due April 2. An informational session will be held Feb. 28 in San Francisco. For more information, visit [this site](#) or call 588-6869.

Study of natural gas drilling air pollution at Texas site released

Mike Lee, The Fort Worth Star-Telegram

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Feb. 13, 2009

Air pollution from natural gas drilling in the Barnett Shale is a big problem but it can be easily controlled with existing technology, researchers said this week.

The giant natural gas field, with 7,700 wells and counting, produces nearly as much air pollution as all the cars and trucks in the Metroplex, according to a study by Al Armendariz of Southern Methodist University and Ramon Alvarez of the Environmental Defense Fund. And unlike most oil and gas production, it's centered on a highly populated area.

"We have to come up with viable solutions," Alvarez said.

"The good news is that there are a lot of viable technologies to reduce the emissions."

Gas drilling creates several kinds of pollution.

Carbon dioxide and soot are created by the engines used to power pipeline compressors.

Methane, the primary ingredient in natural gas, is a powerful greenhouse gas. It can escape from leaky pipes and equipment, and it is also sometimes vented into the air when wells are being completed.

Volatile organic chemicals, including hazardous chemicals such as benzene and formaldehyde, are released from leaky tank batteries, where crude oil is separated from natural gas.

The year-round average for all types of drilling-related pollution is 191 tons per day. In the summer, when North Texas' air pollution is at its greatest, the emissions can rise to 307 tons per day because the heat causes more evaporation.

A draft of the study released in November pegged the number at 262 tons per day.

To read the complete article, visit www.star-telegram.com.

Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009:

Rio Mesa's 'litigation magnet'

Madera County plans in a vacuum, to the detriment of the entire region.

In the eyes of its developers and their supporters, the Rio Mesa area in southeast Madera County will one day be a sparkling new community of upscale homes and comfortable suburban living. In the eyes of its detractors, Rio Mesa is like watching an accident about to happen, and being too far away to help.

Rio Mesa has been on the drawing boards for more than a decade. It would ultimately put 100,000 residents on land that is largely used for grazing cattle today.

It has become a litigation magnet. Most recently, several environmental groups, Fresno County and the Chawanakee Unified School District have filed lawsuits, together and separately, questioning the Madera County Board of Supervisors' unanimous approval of two massive projects in the area. They have a number of well-founded concerns about the planning process being used to advance Rio Mesa.

The overarching problem is the absence of comprehensive planning for this mammoth undertaking. The existing Rio Mesa area plan is a relic of 1995, when southeastern Madera County was in the running as the site for the new University of California campus. The campus ultimately went to Merced, but the plans weren't updated.

Each of the Rio Mesa area projects is being planned separately, which is bad planning. The cumulative impact of all the plans -- on water, air quality, transportation, schools, historical resources -- must be taken into account, and it hasn't been.

Fresno County officials, for instance, are concerned about the impact of 100,000 new residents just across the county line, and they should be. Many of those new residents will work in Fresno and Clovis, bringing more traffic to already inadequate roads. That has to be addressed -- and hasn't been.

The Rio Mesa area includes much of the historic lands of the Dumna tribe, and their concerns have similarly gone unmet. An archeologist hired to study the area complained in a letter to the county that evidence of human remains she found was not included in the draft environmental impact report for the area, a serious omission.

There are real and unresolved concerns about water for the projects. The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust is troubled by the impact of one of the projects on the river and the parkway, and has sued to stop it.

As planned, the Rio Mesa projects are all classic suburban sprawl, which is increasingly viewed with skepticism by both experts and the public. As planned, they would be low-density, miles from job centers and indifferent to regional concerns.

That's the most troubling aspect of Rio Mesa and Madera County's attitude. Throughout all of this, Madera County has blithely forged ahead, operating as if in a vacuum. It's been that way since 1893, when its residents seceded from Fresno County. The proud posture of stubborn independence may be appealing, but it sometimes makes for poor neighbors.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sat., Feb. 14, 2009:](#)

A boost for high-speed rail

Stimulus bill has a big down payment on essential federal share of funding.

Good news for California's high-speed rail project emerged in the final days of haggling over the stimulus package in Congress: The amount of funding for high-speed rail nationwide was quadrupled, from \$2 billion to \$8 billion.

High-speed rail actually had zero funding in the original House version; the \$2 billion was added in the Senate, then increased to \$8 billion in conference.

It's not clear exactly what happened to cause the bump in funding, but at least one source said the pressure came from the White House. That's a bit of a surprise. While President Obama spoke glowingly of the prospects of high-speed rail during his campaign, the administration had been curiously silent on the subject since taking office.

More good news: A request by the Federal Railroad Administration for expressions of interest to develop high-speed rail corridors was met with answers from more than 80 companies and state departments of transportation.

Skeptics questioned the wisdom of California's \$10 billion Proposition 1A, passed by voters in November, in part because it relied on federal and private sources of funding for the balance of the \$40 billion the California system is expected to cost.

Now there's solid evidence that proponents of the initiative were right: Federal and private sector interest is strong, and there's money to match that enthusiasm.

"This overwhelming response is remarkable given the current state of the economy," said John Mica of Florida, the ranking Republican on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and a strong proponent of high-speed rail, who has led an effort to involve the private sector in its development.

Critics of high-speed rail's inclusion in the stimulus package argued that it isn't ready to give an immediate boost to the economy; hundreds of billions of conventional road and highway projects are ready to start right now, while construction of high-speed rail is still a few years away.

But there are elements of high-speed rail that are ready to go today -- grade separations, for instance, as well as planning and engineering tasks, all of which can put people to work immediately.

High-speed rail is essential to America's future. It will reduce dependence on oil and dramatically lower greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution. It will provide a cheaper and more pleasant alternative to increasingly costly air travel. It belongs in the stimulus bill.

[Letter to the Washington Post, Saturday, February 14, 2009:](#)

A 'Green' Car's Impact

Warren Brown is misleading the driving public by describing battery-powered cars as consuming "no fossil fuels" ["A Jaw-Dropping Ride, Batteries Included," *On Wheels*, Jan. 25].

He, like many others, failed to note that the electricity used to charge these vehicles will, in all probability, be generated from fossil fuels, most likely coal. While this may reduce dependence on foreign oil, its impact on the environment is far from clear.

This is not to say that battery-powered cars are not a good idea. But it does highlight the complexity of energy balances and the need for accuracy to make sound environmental decisions.

The benefit of no tailpipe emissions from a battery-powered car in Washington needs first to be measured against increased air pollution from the stack of an electric power plant elsewhere. Then other differences will need analysis before it is known whether the net impact on the environment is favorable.

It is vital that energy balances be based on good science. There is a temptation for issues that are economic to masquerade as environmental. The debate still rages as to whether ethanol in gasoline is a good idea or only a way to sell corn.

Ted Pockman, McLean

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California and other states prepare proposals for EPA with the purpose of obtaining part of the 300 million dollars to be used in fighting air pollution from diesel emissions. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Quieren que se apliquen los 300 millones del paquete para limpiar el aire

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, February 16, 2009

California y otros estados preparan propuestas para entregarse a la Agencia de Protección Ambiental con el fin de obtener parte de unos 300 millones de dólares destinados a combatir la contaminación que causa el consumo de diesel.

Ese presupuesto forma parte del paquete de medidas de estímulo económico propuesto por el presidente Barack Obama y que aprobó el Congreso el fin de semana. Se espera que el mandatario firme el presupuesto para convertirlo en ley mañana martes.

El presupuesto para California se usará en un programa de ayuda a camioneros para que cambien sus motores o unidades más contaminantes. Los dueños de camiones dicen que es muy caro hacer los cambios, pero el programa reduciría hasta en 90 por ciento la contaminación por diesel, una de las más peligrosas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses global warming risk increases due to human consumption and higher increase in carbon emissions now than in the past decade.](#)

Aumenta el riesgo de calentamiento global

By Randolph Schmid, Associated Press

In La Opinión, Sunday, February 15, 2009

CHICAGO (AP) — Pese a los temores generalizados por las advertencias sobre el calentamiento global, los seres humanos arrojan a la atmósfera emisiones de carbono incluso con más celeridad que en la pasada década, advirtieron el sábado los investigadores.

El dióxido de carbono y otros gases emitidos al aire por la actividad industrial y de otros tipos han sido culpados por el aumento de las temperaturas y posibles cambios climáticos.

Las emisiones de carbono han aumentado un 3,5% al año desde el 2000, frente al 0,9% anual en la década de 1990, dijo el científico Christopher Field, de la Institución Carnegie para las Ciencias en la reunión anual de la Asociación Estadounidense para el Avance de las Ciencias.

"Escapa a la totalidad de las posibilidades" la situación considerada en el informe del 2007 de la Comisión Internacional sobre el Cambio Climático, agregó.

El factor más importante en este aumento es la adopción generalizada del carbón como fuente energética, dijo Field, "y sin una atención extraordinaria, las sociedades continuarán centradas en las fuentes de energía que sean baratas, y eso significa el carbón".

Las pasadas predicciones sobre la disminución en las emisiones de gases causantes del efecto invernadero fueron demasiado optimistas. Entre el 2000 y el 2008 ninguna parte del mundo experimentó esas mermas.

Anny Cazenave, del Centro Nacional de Estudios Espaciales, en Francia, dijo en la reunión que las mediciones mejoradas vía satélite indican que el nivel de los océanos crece con más rapidez de lo calculado.

Ese aumento puede hacer peligrar las zonas bajas como el sur de la Florida, Nueva York y otras zonas costeras al caldearse los océanos y crecer gracias al fundido de las capas de hielo.

Además, el aumento es desigual. En las zonas de mayor aumento llegan a un centímetro por año (0,39 pulgadas) en partes del Atlántico Norte, el Pacífico occidental y el Mar Austral que rodea la Antártida, indicó.

Por otra parte, las gestiones para reducir las emisiones de carbono mediante el uso de biocombustibles podrían tener el efecto inverso, según otros científicos.

En la internet:

AAAS: <http://www.aaas.org>

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses artificial tree cleans air. In Lima, Peru the first viable artificial tree was installed to purify the air in this polluted city; they plan to install 400 artificial trees throughout the city in the next four years.](#)

Limpian el aire limeño con un árbol artificial

La Opinión, Saturday, February 14, 2009

LIMA, Perú (EFE).- El primer árbol artificial viable en el mundo se instaló en Lima para purificar el aire de esta contaminada ciudad, confirmaron hoy fuentes de la empresa ecológica creadora del depurador, que pretende instalar en Perú unos 400 aparatos de este tipo en los próximos cuatro años.

Se trata del purificador de aire urbano PAU-20, una especie de árbol metálico que a pesar de carecer de ramas, tronco y hojas es capaz de imitar artificialmente la fotosíntesis y convertir las partículas de dióxido de carbono en oxígeno.

El ingeniero Fernando Eguren, uno de los creadores del purificador que empezó a operar desde ayer en Lima, dijo hoy a Efe que previamente a la creación del PAU-20 se desarrollaron otros dos proyectos similares en Chile y México, pero resultaron inviables porque los costes eran demasiado altos.

"Las máquinas desarrolladas en México o Chile proponían un consumo de entre 48 y 68 kilovatios por hora y un mantenimiento continuo, mientras que nosotros apenas utilizamos 2,5 kilovatios (el equivalente a 25 bombillas de 100 vatios) y alrededor de 60 litros de agua cada cinco horas", puntualizó Jorge Gutiérrez, otro de los fabricantes del también denominado "Superárbol".

Esta gigantesca máquina de más de cuatro metros de altura recoge el aire contaminado para liberarlo del polvo, gérmenes y bacterias, y reducir los gases procedentes de los motores de los automóviles, según explicaciones de los creadores del PAU-20.

Así, los habitantes de Lima, que de acuerdo con un estudio del Banco Mundial hecho público en 2008 es una de las ciudades más contaminadas de Latinoamérica, podrán disfrutar de los 200 mil metros cúbicos de aire limpio que el esperado purificador emite cada día.

De hecho, este árbol-robot fue creado por la empresa peruana especializada en desarrollos ambientales Tierra Nuestra para ubicarlo específicamente en la capital peruana con el fin de reducir los altos niveles de contaminación que presenta la ciudad.

El ingeniero Eguren destacó que el proceso realizado por el PAU-20 supone un costo de 20 soles (seis dólares) al día, pero añadió que este gasto no va a ser asumido por los ciudadanos, sino por las empresas que deseen colaborar en esta iniciativa con un aporte económico y que ya han confirmado su participación.

Además, los responsables del proyecto tienen como próximo objetivo instalar cien purificadores en las zonas de Lima y del Puerto del Callao con más tránsito de personas, vehículos y contaminación aérea.

"Queremos instalar cuatrocientos aparatos en un plazo de cuatro años, que brindarán aire purificado a ocho millones de personas cada día", aseguraron en un comunicado los coordinadores de la iniciativa.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses for the second time, EPA's environmental law contradicts itself. The new administration will take into account when making decisions the opinions of scientists, communities and state government along with potential ecological impacts.](#)

Contradican por segunda ocasión ley ambiental de la administración pasada

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, February 13, 2009

El secretario del Interior, Ken Salazar extendió por 180 días o seis meses el periodo de consultas públicas de la administración del presidente, Barack Obama, para evaluar la conveniencia de volver a realizar perforaciones marítimas en busca de petróleo.

El gobierno del ex presidente, George Bush impulsó exactamente el último día de su gestión una aprobación a ese tipo de búsqueda, en una acción que el nuevo secretario considera apresurada.

La nueva administración tomará en cuenta las opiniones de científicos, de comunidades y gobiernos de los estados, así como potenciales impactos ecológicos antes de tomar decisiones.

Es la segunda medida que contradice en medio ambiente decisiones de la anterior administración. El presidente Obama ordenó poco después de tomar el cargo que la Agencia de Protección Ambiental (EPA) revise permisos para que los estados pongan en práctica sus propias leyes ambientales.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses taking care of our air prolongs lives. US residents now live 5 months longer than before thanks to a series of measures against air pollution.](#)

Cuidar el aire prolonga la vida

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, February 12, 2009

Los estadounidenses viven ahora unos cinco meses más que antes gracias a una serie de medidas activas contra la contaminación del aire, determinó un estudio que publica hoy el Journal de Medicina de Nueva Inglaterra.

El doctor, Joel Kaufman, de la Universidad de Washington, quien participó en el estudio, dijo que al analizar la contaminación del aire en las últimas décadas en 51 ciudades del país, se

descubrió que esos cinco meses de mayor longevidad son promedio, pero hay sitios donde la expectativa de vida se prolonga unos diez meses por cuidar el aire.

El análisis, que contó con presupuesto del gobierno federal "demuestra que nuestros esfuerzos e inversión por controlar como país la contaminación son compensados", dijo Kaufman.