

Smog: Another legal loss for environmentalists

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Thursday, March 5, 2009

A federal court in San Francisco today turned thumbs down to an environmental lawsuit challenging farm dust control measures adopted by the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District. It's the second time this week that the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the district and federal officials in a suit involving particulate matter. In the earlier decision, the court ruled the Valley is in compliance with national standards for PM-10.

In today's case, Earthjustice of Oakland had argued the rule did not include all feasible measures, and that it did not have all the best available control measures.

Lawyer Paul Cort of Earthjustice said: "This week has been a bad one for Valley residents suffering from polluted air. Notwithstanding the fact that air monitors show that EPA's health-based standards for particulate matter are regularly exceeded, EPA and the District have succeeded in convincing the court that nothing more needs to be done to fix the problem. This does not mean the air is clean, as Valley residents can see with their own eyes. These decisions mean that EPA and the air district will not be required to do more to clean up dust pollution. The problem has been swept under an elaborate regulatory rug."

Seyed Sadredin of the air district said: "Once again the Valley has been vindicated by objective arbitrators. There is nothing to support Earthjustice's claims that the string of court rulings against them would lead to air quality detriments in the Valley. We have seen major improvements in Valley's air quality now affirmed by state of California, US EPA, and the legal system. Earthjustice's claims that the Valley would now roll back requirements are baseless. Valley businesses, including agriculture, are already subject to some of the toughest air regulations in the nation. Given the enormous air quality challenges that we continue to face, the District has already adopted air quality plans, which unfortunately, will add to the regulatory burden of the Valley businesses.

"I wish that Earthjustice would share in our success and give Valley businesses and residents credit for investment and sacrifices that they have made. Marginal or frivolous lawsuits waste a lot of resources that could better be spent on working together to devise cost effective solutions."

UC Merced gets gold for its green

In the Modesto Bee, Friday, March 6, 2009

A fourth building on the campus of the University of California at Merced has earned LEED "Gold" certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for excellence in environmentally responsible design, construction and operation. The 211,000- square-foot Science & Engineering Building, completed in January 2006, provides laboratories, classrooms and office space for faculty and students whose work often requires highly sophisticated equipment. Officials said the building achieves exemplary performance in water and energy usage, natural lighting, air quality, waste diversion and recycling, the use of locally supplied and-or recycled building materials and other factors evaluated under the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program. Three other UC Merced buildings — the Central Plant complex, the Leo & Dottie Kolligian Library, and the Classroom and Office Building — were awarded LEED Gold certification, while another facility, the Valley Terraces and the Yablokoff-Wallace Dining Commons earned LEED Silver.

“Anti-cow-tax” measure to be introduced

USA TODAY, Friday, March 6, 2009

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Republican Sen. John Thune says he and Democratic Sen. Charles Schumer of New York are introducing "anti-cow-tax" legislation in the U.S. Senate.

Thune says the measure, if passed, would exempt livestock from the Clean Air Act and would, in effect, eliminate the chance that cattle and other livestock will be taxed as a way to cut down on their alleged contribution to air pollution.

The Environmental Protection Agency says fees would be imposed to compensate for methane and other greenhouse gases supposedly expelled by livestock. But Thune calls that "an overreach."

Thune said the Clean Air Act was designed to target smokestacks in industrial states and not farm and ranch livestock.

State's proposed emissions rule sparks firestorm

The new standard would gauge a fuel's 'carbon intensity,' from its source to its burning.

By Margot Roosevelt

L.A. Times, Friday, March 6, 2009

California regulators Thursday issued a far-reaching proposal to slash carbon emissions from transportation fuels, setting the stage for a national battle over how to reduce the damage to the global climate from gasoline and diesel combustion.

The low-carbon fuel standard, if approved next month by the state's Air Resources Board, would be the first in the nation to restrict greenhouse gases produced by a fuel, from its source to its burning.

Eleven states are considering similar rules, and President Obama has called for a national low-carbon fuel standard as part of his initiative to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by mid-century.

Air board chairwoman Mary Nichols said the proposed rule was a "comprehensive, cradle-to-grave approach" that would spur innovation and competition in the alternative fuels market.

But some members of California's beleaguered renewable-fuels industry greeted the initiative with outrage. Tom Koehler, spokesman for Pacific Ethanol, said the proposal was "a perversion of science and a prescription for disaster."

California is the first state to pass a comprehensive law to restrict carbon dioxide and other emissions across its economy. Transportation accounts for one-third of the nation's greenhouse gas releases. Scientists say the emissions are trapping heat in the Earth's atmosphere and changing its climate, which will cause droughts, floods, water shortages and species extinctions.

The fuel standard is a key element in the state's climate plan, along with an initiative to regulate the engines and bodies of vehicles for carbon emissions. That proposal is under review by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The fuel proposal announced Thursday is projected to reduce carbon emissions by 16 million metric tons by 2020. It would result in the replacement of 20% of the fossil fuel used by California cars with cleaner alternatives by 2020, including electricity, biofuels, hydrogen and other options, the board said.

By forcing refineries, producers and importers to reduce the "carbon intensity" of their fuel by 10% by 2020, and by increasing percentages after that, the air board is taking a far different approach from the Renewable Fuels Standard that President Bush pushed through Congress in 2007.

That law required that 36 billion gallons of biofuels be sold by 2022, of which 15 billion could be ethanol derived from corn. That rule, said Daniel Sperling, an air board member and a UC Davis transportation fuel expert, spurred "a massive expansion of corn ethanol."

The corn from which ethanol is derived requires large amounts of water and petroleum-based fertilizer to produce and, according to some studies, diverts land from pastures and rain forests, which store carbon. The result is increased carbon in the atmosphere.

In its proposal, the air board seeks to quantify these so-called "indirect land use changes," a calculation that effectively assigns a high carbon intensity to corn-based ethanol in relation to other fuels.

That decision has touched off a furious debate among scientists, some of them industry-supported and others with environmental affiliations. A letter criticizing the air board's methods, released by the New Fuels Alliance, an ethanol industry group, was signed by 111 scientists, including researchers at Sandia National Laboratories and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratories.

Several missives supporting the air board's approach were signed by leading California energy academics, including UC Berkeley's Daniel Kammen and Michael O'Hare.

The push for ethanol as an alternative to imported oil spurred the construction of 172 plants in 25 states by the end of 2008. But in recent months falling oil prices has made ethanol less cost effective. More than 20 plants have closed, including five in California.

"The proposed regulation will do nothing to start them back up," said Gary Meltz of the fuels alliance. "It would be devastating nationally because . . . as goes California, so goes the nation on many environmental standards and regulations."

But environmentalists praised the rule as the only fair approach. "It's a complicated issue, but the basic principle is simple," said Patricia Monahan, a vehicles expert at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "Set a performance standard, let fuels compete in the marketplace to meet the standard, and keep politics from distorting the science. It's about reducing carbon, not picking winners or losers."

A clash over auto emission standards

California wants its own limits, saying carmakers can hit the mark. Others support a national standard.

By Jim Tankersley and Ken Bensinger
L.A. Times, Friday, March 6, 2009

Reporting from Los Angeles and Arlington, Va. -- California officials told the Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday that major automakers are already on track to meet the state's strict proposed limits on greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

But they clashed again with auto industry supporters at a daylong hearing over whether the EPA should grant California's request to allow it and 13 other states to set their own emission standards.

Automakers and dealers raised concerns over several points of California's plan and said they would welcome a nationwide standard for emission limits. California officials said they wouldn't accept any national standard that fell short of their state's.

Listening to the arguments was the Obama administration, which has expressed strong interest in crafting a national emission standard that satisfies the recession-rocked domestic auto industry and California.

The Clean Air Act allows California to seek permission to set its own air pollution standards, which the state did by passing the nation's first law regulating greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle tailpipes earlier this decade.

The state has been unable to implement the regulation because of a series of legal challenges from the auto industry and a decision by the Bush administration in late 2007 denying the state's request for a required EPA waiver.

A week into his term, President Obama ordered the EPA to reconsider that move. The EPA scheduled a hearing Thursday at its office in Arlington, Va., to solicit public comments on California's request.

California officials emphasized the dangers a warming climate poses to the state's air quality, water supply and agriculture.

"As the temperature gets hotter, many places in California become increasingly difficult places to live," said state Sen. Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills), the original author of California's tailpipe emission standards.

State officials also said they believed General Motors Corp. would meet their standards for this model year and 2010. Their opinion was based on information from the troubled automaker's recovery plan filed with the Obama administration this year.

"The technology is ready" to make more efficient cars and trucks, said Tom Cackette, the deputy executive officer of the California Air Resources Board. "The manufacturers are exceeding our expectations."

But Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), who has been a supporter of automakers, said California's regulations would handicap the industry.

"Global warming is not unique to California," he said. "And to suggest that it is actually undermines the argument that it is a global threat that knows no boundaries."

Levin and industry representatives argued for emission controls on a national level, rather than on the state level. They noted the sagging economy's effect on auto sales and said granting the California request would force automakers to comply with different standards in different states.

GM has argued against the state-by-state approach in the past. But as the troubled automaker waits for the White House to decide whether to give it \$16.6 billion in additional bailout funding, the company has taken a quieter role in the debate.

The company did not speak directly at the hearing and has been reserved in its criticism of California's proposed rule.

Deciding how to regulate emissions is "a process that we plan to be engaged in," said GM spokesman Greg Martin. "We continue to work vigorously on the new technologies and cars that will offer meaningful solutions to the nation's energy crisis."

California officials said although they would not accept a national standard lower than their state's, they too would ultimately like U.S. auto emission regulations under one policy, as is the case in the European Union and Japan.

"Our hope is that there would be a federal [standard] that we could sign onto and support," said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the Air Resources Board. "That would be the best for the world."

Obama veers from Bush's environmental course

By Traci Watson

USA TODAY, Friday, March 6, 2009

WASHINGTON — Even before George W. Bush can settle into his new house in Dallas, his legacy on the environment is being dismantled by his replacement in the White House.

In less than two months, President Obama has put on hold Bush's plans for power-plant pollution, offshore oil drilling, nuclear waste storage and endangered species.

The Obama team has rolled out policies Bush officials delayed, such as requiring higher energy efficiency from appliances.

Such moves have significant impacts and not just on the environment. They could affect electric bills, gas prices and the time it takes to build highways, dams and bridges.

For now, the decisions are winning plaudits from green groups — "swift and strong leadership," the Natural Resources Defense Council gushed last month — but experts such as Christopher McGrory Klyza of Middlebury College say the Obama team's hard work is only beginning.

The reversals undertaken "are the easiest things to move quickly on," says Klyza, co-author of a book on presidential environmental policy.

The hard work, such as filling in the details of how Obama will keep his campaign pledge to cut global warming gases 80% by 2050, lies in front of the new administration.

Christie Whitman, Bush's first chief of the Environmental Protection Agency, knows firsthand how hard that work can be, and she says it will be even harder for Obama. The time and political capital Obama will have to expend on the economic crisis will "make it much more complicated" for him to achieve his environmental and energy goals, Whitman says.

"They're hard enough anyway," she says.

Although Obama has the advantage of a Democratic-controlled Congress, party affiliation counts less than regional politics on many of the issues he wants to tackle. Democrats from heavily industrial Midwestern states, for example, are less eager to sign on to legislation to combat global warming.

"Whether they are Republicans or Democrats, they tend to be concerned about economic effects on their own states," says Reid Detchon of the non-partisan Energy Future Coalition, which promotes renewable energy.

In the budget unveiled Feb. 26 and in numerous pronouncements by Cabinet officials, the Obama administration has started to sketch out its environmental platform, but details are in short supply.

For example, the president's budget does not fund the Energy Department's plan to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

The federal government has spent more than 25 years and \$13 billion investigating a place to store highly radioactive waste.

Yucca was not likely to open until 2020, despite a 1998 deadline set by Congress for the government to take charge of nuclear waste. Obama's position could further delay finding a final resting place for the radioactive materials piling up at the nation's nuclear plants.

Some experts, such as Robert Alvarez, a top Energy Department official during the Clinton administration, want the government to pick a new site for storing the waste. Alvarez recognizes the political difficulties ahead. "Everybody will just get angry if they learn their backyard might be a candidate site," he says.

The budget assumes passage of a law to curb emissions of the gases responsible for global warming.

Obama wants Congress to pass a bill that would set a strict cap on emissions. Companies would be required to pay the government for the right to emit global warming pollutants.

The budget includes revenue of \$646 billion from 2012 to 2019 from such payments. Some of the money would pay for a middle-class income tax cut, some for research on solving global warming.

A wide spectrum of groups — from the Environmental Defense Fund to the Edison Electric Institute, which represents power plants — agree on the need to cut greenhouse-gas emissions, but there is disagreement over how to do it.

Lawmakers, who failed to pass a bill last year, will have to decide how much to cut emissions and how soon.

"This is going to be a very complex piece of legislation," says Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., who chairs a House subcommittee key to passage of a global warming bill. "In the end, politics is the art of the possible."

Plans for 2 coal-fired power plants on hold in Nev

By Scott Sonner, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, March 6, 2009

RENO, Nev.—A privately owned company has at least temporarily pulled the plug on plans to build a coal-fired power plant in White Pine County, less than a month after the state's largest utility did the same with its plans for a similar one near Ely.

White Pine Energy Associates LLC, an affiliate of LS Power based in East Brunswick, N.J., notified state regulators in a letter Thursday it was withdrawing its application to build the White Pine Energy Station.

Citing current economic conditions and "increasing regulatory uncertainties," LS Power officials said they will focus instead on completing a planned 500-mile transmission line project that will provide new access to renewable energy resources across Nevada.

"As demand for renewable energy increases we are focusing more and more of our internal resources on providing transmission solutions for both renewable project developers and load serving entities," said Paul Thessen, president of LS Power. He said they are focused on breaking ground on the transmission project this year.

White Pine Energy Associates and another LS Power affiliate, Great Basin Transmission LLC, had planned to build a 1,600-megawatt coal-fired electrical generating plant, substations and other facilities along with the transmission lines.

But the company said in the letter to the Nevada Public Utilities Commission it "does not intend to refile its application for a Utility Environmental Protection Act ("UEPA") permit with the Commission until such time as it has obtained its Class I air permit from the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection."

Environmentalists and some politicians, including U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., have opposed the coal plants for fear they would increase air pollution and contribute to global warming.

"LS Power's decision to back away from the WPES is a positive development for growing Nevada's green jobs economy," Scot Rutledge of the Nevada Conservation League said Thursday.

"The potential for job creation in energy efficiency and renewable technologies is huge in this state and we look forward to taking that next step towards getting Nevada's business sector humming again."

The commission had been scheduled to receive recommendations on whether to grant a permit for the White Pine Energy Station during technical hearings on the application beginning March 10 and at a March 8 consumer session in Ely. But those hearings have been canceled, the commission said in a statement Thursday.

Last month, NV Energy postponed plans for a 1,500-megawatt plant, citing increasing environmental and economic uncertainties.

The utility also is going forward with its plans to build new transmission lines but company president Michael Yackira said the \$5 billion coal-fired Ely Energy Center could be delayed for up to a decade or until technologies are developed to burn coal with fewer emissions or store carbon byproducts.

New Life for 'Clean Coal' Project Illinois Plant Was Abandoned by Bush; Now Its Backers Are in Power

By Kimberly Kindy, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Friday, March 6, 2009

Deep inside the economic stimulus package is a \$1 billion prize that, in five short words, shows the benefits of being in power in Washington.

The funding, for "fossil energy research and development," is likely to go to a power plant in a small Illinois town, a project whose longtime backers include a group of powerful lawmakers from the state, among them President Obama.

They were unable to prevent the "clean coal" research project known as FutureGen from being abruptly killed last year by the Bush administration, which had created it and promoted it across the world as an environmentally sound way to produce power.

But now those same Illinois legislators -- including Rahm Emanuel, now White House chief of staff, and Ray LaHood, now transportation secretary -- control the White House and hold key leadership positions in Washington, and FutureGen is on the verge of resurrection.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu said yesterday that he would support the plant with "some modifications."

"I have to say, there are many, many good things about it," Chu said after testifying before a Senate committee.

If FutureGen lived up to its promises, it would revolutionize the use of coal. On what is now 400 acres of cornfields in Mattoon, Ill., backers plan to build a commercial-size power plant that would produce 275 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 150,000 homes. Instead of releasing the resulting carbon dioxide emissions into the air as pollution, however, the plant would pump them into deep geologic formations thousands of feet below Earth's surface.

The project's goal is to test and develop affordable technology, on a commercial scale, that can remove 90 percent of emissions produced by coal plants. Chu said he thinks that the plant -- which would be built with a group of private coal and utility companies known as the FutureGen Alliance -- will move forward with some changes that have not yet been determined and will become a part of larger "portfolio" of research plants developed with other countries.

The FutureGen plant is expected to create jobs, and backers are currently pushing it as a stimulus project that could employ as many as 11,000 workers. The alliance must compete for the stimulus funds, but Chu's support adds significant momentum to the effort.

FutureGen's destiny is being decided as the debate over clean coal technology takes center stage in Washington, drawing big money in lobbying fees and campaign contributions. More than \$20 million has been spent to hire lobbying firms that have petitioned members of Congress on FutureGen and other clean coal issues, according to a Washington Post analysis. And employees of the energy companies in the FutureGen Alliance have donated \$3 million to congressional and presidential candidates.

The battle over FutureGen accelerated about a year ago when the Bush administration blocked the project hours after Mattoon was chosen over two towns in President George W. Bush's home state of Texas. The Illinois delegation responded with a bitter, bare-knuckle fight to save the plant. Without any assurance that their efforts would pay off, backers in Illinois spent tens of millions of dollars to buy land and have the project "shovel ready" -- before there was ever talk of a stimulus bill.

Senate Majority Whip Richard J. Durbin (D), who led the Illinois delegation's efforts, worked the system, blocking some Bush administration appointments and holding hearings to publicly vilify the officials who stood in his way.

"This has been my longest, most difficult battle in Congress," Durbin said.

The fight got a lot easier after Obama was elected. Within weeks, his transition team met with FutureGen's industry partners. In January, when Obama announced his plans for an economic stimulus bill, Durbin and other members of the Illinois delegation quickly crafted a \$2 billion line item to fund a "near zero-emissions power plant(s)," and Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.) placed it in the Senate version of the legislation.

Republicans in both chambers pointed out that only one shovel-ready project in the country met the criteria spelled out in the bill: the FutureGen plant in Mattoon.

"We all know what this is about. It's an earmark for a single plant," said Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), who railed against the item, securing support to keep it out of the House bill. Coburn

labeled it "pork," placing it at the top of his government-waste list, which is emblazoned with the image of a pig.

The \$2 billion in the Senate bill was zeroed out by the joint House-Senate conference committee that met to resolve differences in the chambers' two bills. In a compromise that Durbin helped craft, the final version of the legislation cut the funding to \$1 billion and specified that it go to "fossil energy research and development." The new language still described the project but deflected mounting criticism by opening the door to other proposals.

When the Bush administration moved to kill FutureGen, officials cited its cost, with estimates rising from \$1 billion to \$1.8 billion as it approached construction. They also objected to a cost-sharing arrangement with industry that required the government to pay for more than two-thirds of the project.

"The likelihood that it would fail, leaving the American people with hundreds of millions of dollars in sunk cost and none of the benefits, is not acceptable," then-Energy Secretary Samuel W. Bodman said in a Feb. 6, 2008, letter to the editor in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Bodman declined to comment for this article.

After Bush rolled out FutureGen in 2003, coal mining unions and coal states immediately started leveraging to host the plant. Among the most aggressive was Illinois. Then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) formed the FutureGen for Illinois Task Force, which included the state's entire congressional delegation. He paid D.C. lobbying giant Cassidy and Associates more than \$460,000 to help land the plant.

In July 2006, it was clear that the strategy was paying off when the FutureGen Alliance announced the four site finalists -- two in Illinois and two in Texas.

Over the coming months, Illinois further ginned up its self-promotion. The towns of Tuscola and Mattoon held a joint rally at a high school where a man dressed as Santa Claus passed out pieces of coal to cheering residents, politicians and schoolchildren.

In December 2007, the alliance announced its choice of Mattoon, a community of 17,000 people, 190 miles south of Chicago, that had the strongest local support and a geological edge: Beneath the site is a natural sandstone formation that could serve as an ideal trap to keep carbon dioxide emissions stored underground.

But in the weeks after that announcement, the Bush administration began moving behind the scenes to stop the project, even while promoting it publicly.

The reasons behind the Bush administration's decision to kill the plant are the subject of two year-long probes -- one by the Government Accountability Office and another by a congressional committee -- that will be released this month.

Internal department e-mails and memos show that Bodman directed his staff to develop an alternative plan, exploring whether to scrap the large plant and replace it with five or six smaller plants to test pieces of the same technology. The e-mails show that staff members were skeptical of the new plan, dubbed "FutureGen Plan B," which would call on the industry to pay a higher share of the cost.

"New money riding in to save the day seems unlikely," said one e-mail. Staff members described the new plan as unworkable and came up with their own name for it -- "the Frankenstein."

Incensed by what he viewed as duplicity on the part of the Bush administration, Durbin began making frequent calls to Bodman's office, records show, and quickly organized a campaign to keep the plant alive. He aligned 19 other members of Congress to join him in late December 2007, first by signing a protest letter to Bodman, then by gathering fellow lawmakers to confront the energy secretary.

The meeting in Durbin's office quickly became heated, as Bodman told lawmakers for the first time that the plant in Mattoon was dead.

"This is a meeting unlike any meeting I've been a part of. Members of Congress are literally screaming and waving their fists at the secretary," said someone in attendance, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the ongoing debate over FutureGen.

"We won this competition fair and square," Durbin said. "I told Bodman point-blank, 'We are going to keep this alive for the next president.' "

The next day, Bodman went public with his decision to replace the FutureGen project with multiple smaller plants. Obama and the rest of the Illinois delegation wrote to Bush, charging that the secretary had "misled us and the people of Illinois, creating false hope in a FutureGen project which he had no intention of funding or supporting."

The group organized three congressional hearings in the spring, challenging Bodman to explain his decision. In July, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted to protect \$134 million in funding for FutureGen in Mattoon, prohibiting the Energy Department from spending it on anything else.

Still, Bodman moved forward with Plan B, hoping to set the new plan in motion before the next administration was in place. But just four sites submitted proposals; two did not qualify and two others were incomplete, according to lawmakers and former department staffers.

Last week, Durbin and the delegation persuaded Congress to lift a freeze on \$73 million of the money set aside in July, directing Chu to use it for the project if it is revived. The same day, the delegation sent Chu a letter, arguing that the plant in Mattoon should get the stimulus money because it is "five years ahead of any comparable project. . . . We cannot further delay on this promising technology."

Clinton: US has been negligent on climate change

In the Modesto Bee Friday, March 6, 2009

BRUSSELS — U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is telling Europeans that the Bush administration neglected the problem of global climate change.

Speaking to several hundred young professionals at the European Parliament on Friday, Clinton was asked by a Belgian man what the Obama administration intended to do to address the problem and whether it sees energy security as linked to global climate change.

Clinton said the administration puts a high priority on cooperating globally to solve the climate change problem. She noted that she has appointed a special envoy to climate talks that are due to begin in December in Denmark.

And she said the United States in the past had been negligent in its responsibilities to control the emissions that cause climate change.

EPA urged to reverse Bush-era auto emission ruling

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In N.Y. Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, March 6, 2009

ARLINGTON, Va. — The head of California's air pollution agency urged federal regulators on Thursday to reverse a Bush-era decision that blocks the state from setting its own limits on greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board, told a packed Environmental Protection Agency hearing just outside Washington that if the state is unable to control the gases blamed for global warming from cars and trucks, its other air pollution problems will get worse.

Nichols was joined by environmental groups and officials from six other states in pressing the EPA to reverse its March 2008 ruling denying California the right to control heat-trapping gases from vehicle exhaust. President Barack Obama has ordered the agency to reconsider the decision, and the hearing Thursday was part of that process.

MPCA issues air quality alert in central, SW Minn.

USA TODAY, Friday, March 6, 2009

DULUTH, Minn. (AP) — The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has issued an air pollution health alert for southwest and central Minnesota that runs through the end of Friday.

Included in the alert is the Twin Cities, St. Cloud, Marshall and Brainerd. The MPCA says Duluth and Rochester are also approaching alert levels.

A temperature inversion with fog and low winds has elevated fine particle levels across the state. Sources of particle pollution include motor vehicles, power plants, residential wood burning, agricultural burning and some industrial processes. People are asked to minimize driving and vehicle idling and avoid pollution producing activities like wood burning.

The air quality is expected to stay low until a weak cold front moves into the region late Friday that should create moderate winds that disperse the pollutants.

[L.A. Times editorial, Friday, March 6, 2009:](#)

Grant California's clean-air waiver

Even in a tough economy, President Obama should reverse the Bush-era EPA's decision and allow the state to curb vehicles' greenhouse gas emissions.

A few years ago, a decision by the Environmental Protection Agency to allow California to regulate vehicle tailpipe emissions should have been a cinch. The state was proposing common-sense rules that would have simultaneously curbed greenhouse gases, boosted public health by cutting pollution, reduced the nation's reliance on foreign oil and put downward pressure on gas prices, all while improving the financial health of Detroit automakers, which persisted in making gas-guzzling cars despite changes in consumer preference.

That was then. The EPA under President Bush stalled for years, then in 2007 rejected California's request for a waiver from federal clean-air rules that would have allowed it and 13 other states to adopt the standards. Now there are wiser heads in charge of the agency, which held a hearing Thursday on the waiver as it considers reversing the last administration's decision. Meanwhile, economic conditions have changed for the worse, and the choice before the EPA is no longer an easy one. Yet granting the waiver is still the right thing to do.

California approved its tailpipe regulations in 2002, regulating emissions for cars sold in the state starting in model year 2009 and tightening them yearly until 2016, by which time greenhouse gases would have to be cut by 30%. That gave the automakers seven years to retool -- but instead of doing so, they relied on the courts and their allies in the Bush administration to kill the rules. Now that they finally may be approved, there is very little time to get ready to meet them. And the situation is worsened by the economic crisis, which has brought Chrysler and General Motors to the verge of bankruptcy.

The U.S. auto industry is unquestionably in serious trouble, but California's greenhouse gas rules won't be the straw that breaks Detroit. For one thing, automakers have finally recognized that they must clean up their vehicles for the sake of their own survival. After receiving \$13.4 billion in taxpayer bailout money, GM submitted a report to the Treasury Department explaining how it would return to financial health, and the plan calls for the company's automotive fleet to achieve an average of 38.6 miles per gallon by 2015. Experts disagree on how much that would reduce emissions, but California air regulators say it would come very close to meeting the state's standards.

California and the nation need cleaner, more fuel-efficient cars. Given that gas prices are certain to rise again when the economy improves, building such cars is in Detroit's best interest too. Granting California's clean-air waiver not only won't drag the Big Three under, it could aid their recovery.

[Guest Commentary in the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, March 6, 2009:](#)

My Word: Three largest Bay Area cities going green together

By Ron Dellums, Gavin Newsom and Chuck Reed

TODAY, THE THREE of us, the mayors of the Bay Area's largest cities, have a challenge to put before the Bay Area — its businesses, local governments and regional agencies. Join us in working together against twin threats, global climate change and a weakening economy by becoming part of the Bay Area Climate Change Collaborative.

To mark our joint commitment, we'll be putting our signatures on a contract, a blueprint for climate change action, with 10 specific and measurable goals, and a timetable for reaching them, that will put our cities — and the region — firmly on a path to environmental sustainability.

At the same time, it will help restore economic prosperity, as the innovative companies in the Bay Area continue to be world leaders in the technologies and products that will usher in a green economy.

We have set goals and will benchmark our progress toward fewer fossil fuels in transportation; more solar and other alternative sources of electricity; less trash and more recyclable material; more efficient buildings; water conservation; and a workforce trained to make it all happen.

These goals will not take us in a dramatic new direction. They don't need to. Bay Area cities, businesses and residents have been happy to step to the fore to combat global climate change.

San Jose's Green Vision is a road map to becoming the world's center of clean tech innovation and creating 25,000 green jobs. Goals include reducing per-capita energy use by 50 percent and receiving 100 percent of electrical power from clean renewable sources.

San Francisco has adopted aggressive green building standards, recycles zealously (70 percent of waste) and has converted its entire diesel vehicle fleet to biodiesel, buses and emergency vehicles included.

Oakland's Green Jobs Corps is training local residents to succeed in the new green economy and the city's Zero Waste Plan provides a framework for eliminating waste by 2020.

What makes the compact remarkable is its formal commitment to unite these efforts to take advantage of our collective wisdom and resources. The collaboration is a multiplier — enhancing coordination and achieving economies of scale.

Let's look at where we live as if from outer space. While politically the Bay Area is divided into scores of cities, on the landscape we're essentially one huge metropolis. In living, working, shopping, commuting and recreating, Bay Area residents take no particular notice of city boundaries.

The power grid, the water lines, the highways and many transit systems are the circulatory system for a single urban area. Pollution in the bay or smog in the air touches us all.

In figuring out to live lightly on the planet, we need to think as we live — as one region.

Transit and clean air are two obvious examples of regional issues. But consider what might at first seem an individual decision — buying an electric car. It's a personal choice for extraordinarily clean transportation. But electric cars have to be plugged in, and not just at home — at municipal parking garages and in office parking lots, wherever the driver needs to go in the Bay Area.

As mayors, we couldn't be doing this without private businesses such as Webcor Builders constructing green buildings, or Silver Spring Networks making the electric grid smarter. Or without nonprofits such as the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, the Bay Area Council and Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network.

We're all in this together. By signing this compact today, we're issuing a friendly challenge to one another to be the greenest city around. But it's not just us. We challenge all the other cities in the Bay Area: Let's take this path together.

Today, we roll out the green carpet encouraging each community, each city, each company in the Bay Area to join us.

Ron Dellums is the mayor of Oakland, Gavin Newsom is the mayor of San Francisco and Chuck Reed is the mayor of San Jose.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA initiated a national audience to decide if they should reverse their 1997 decision to reject California's permission to impose their own environmental regulation. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Buscan revocar ley ambiental de California

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, March 06, 2009

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) inicio ayer una audiencia nacional para decidir si revoca su decisión del 2007 de negar a California permiso para poner en vigor su propia ley ambiental. La audiencia se lleva a cabo por orden del presidente, Barack Obama. La negativa fue de la administración del ex presidente, George W. Bush. Si la EPA autoriza a California, otros 13 estados pondrían también en práctica sus propias legislaciones. La directora de la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California, Mary Nichols dijo en la referida audiencia que su estado quiere regular las emisiones de contaminación de los autos, porque de ese plan dependen otros proyectos de protección ambiental y de la salud. El gobernador Arnold Schwarzenegger agregó que la autorización equivaldría a retirar seis millones y medio de autos de las carreteras.