

Air Resources Board to help truckers meet pollution rules

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, March 26, 2009

State officials on Wednesday announced details of one piece of a \$1 billion assistance package to help truckers comply with new air pollution regulations for heavy-duty diesel trucks.

The state Air Resources Board will provide \$48 million to an existing small business loan-guarantee program administered by the California Pollution Control Finance Authority. That backing will leverage about \$350 million in loans for small trucking firms that don't meet most banks' underwriting standards, according to a statement from state Treasurer Bill Lockyer, who chairs the authority.

The funding is authorized under the current state budget.

Loans and grants to fund the truck retrofits and replacements are expected to total roughly \$1 billion, the most ever provided by the state for compliance with a vehicle regulation.

In addition to the loan guarantee program, the air board will soon offer \$14 million in vouchers of up to \$35,000 to partially cover the cost of replacing trucks made in 1993 or earlier. Additional funds are pending.

The package will offset only a portion of the total cost of complying with the regulations, though. Exhaust filters and new engines required by the rules will cost truckers \$5.5 billion over the next 14 years, according to air board estimates.

The air board approved the new pollution standards in December. The regulations roll out gradually, with smaller operators given more time to comply. By 2014, all trucks must have soot filters. By 2023, all trucks must have clean-burning engines built no earlier than 2010.

Staffers expect the rules to prevent 9,400 premature deaths in California over the next 16 years, in addition to reducing cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses. The state is under a federal mandate to improve air quality, and heavy-duty diesel trucks are the largest source of key air pollutants.

There are roughly 400,000 large trucks registered in California. The regulations do not apply to diesel pickups.

Smog: There's more than the air out there

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Thursday, March 26, 2009

In the world of natural resources -- air, water, mountains, flatlands -- the buzz is about water right now. It's the third year of drought. All eyes are on the Sierra snowpack.

My beat coverage takes me to a lot of issues besides air. So even though I am confined to air quality in this space, I can't help watching the other issues.

For instance, the April 1 snow survey is coming up quickly. The 2005 photo above was taken at Wishon Reservoir from a helicopter on the way to a snow survey.

This year, the survey will confirm what we all know. The runoff this spring and summer will be down, and west-side farmers will likely get zero federal water from Northern California.

In Yosemite National Park -- another natural resource -- officials are talking about updating the earthquake standards at the venerable Ahwahnee Hotel. And the big waterfall shows will be starting in the next few weeks as the weather warms up.

Congress just passed legislation authorizing the restoration of the San Joaquin River, a water bank in Madera County and the Krebs Wilderness in the Sierra.

Back to air quality, the first ozone violations have happened in South Coast. The Valley's air isn't making headlines right now. That's OK. There's plenty of other stuff going on.

Smog: Air rules in your home and garden

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Wed., March 25, 2009

They've regulated fireplaces and water heaters. What's next? Lawn mowers and barbecues?

Well, it's not quite to the barbecue stage yet, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will get those mowers by 2011.

The EPA is requiring a 35% reduction in new lawn and garden equipment -- the equivalent of removing one of every five cars and trucks on the road.

Personally, I just replaced a 30-year-old Briggs and Stratton engine on my mower. I have a more-efficient Honda engine now. But it won't be as efficient as the new engines. Maybe I'll replace it before its 30th birthday, if I'm still around.

Some folks are advocating reel mowers. Really, they're the ones you push. They're quiet. They're cheaper. They're simpler. And how about a good workout, mowing the lawn?

Richmond settles lawsuit over Honda project

By Katherine Tam, West County Times

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Thursday, March 26, 2009

Richmond city leaders have reached a settlement agreement with a resident who filed a lawsuit to stop American Honda Motor Co. from moving at least 145,000 cars through the port each year.

Under the settlement, resident Fred Arm will withdraw his lawsuit, and the city will agree to prepare a port-wide clean-air action plan in two years and implement it with the help of a local advisory board and air-quality experts, City Attorney Scott Dickey said. In addition, the city is preparing another clean-air action plan specifically for the Honda project.

Auto Warehousing Co., which is leading the project, will cover \$130,000 in Arm's attorney fees, Dickey said.

The agreement, which the City Council approved Tuesday night, is slated to be finalized today.

Dickey and Bradley Brownlow, Arm's attorney, said they are "pleased" with the agreement. Brownlow added that the air impacts were his client's primary concern.

The Honda project, approved in November, more than doubles the number of cars that will move through the port and is projected to create 200 jobs and boost revenue by \$87.5 million over 15 years. City officials left open the option of extending the contract by 10 years. Crews plan to build a new rail yard at the Point Potrero Marine Terminal to load imported cars directly onto trains bound for the sales market.

Critics of the project had questioned whether enough measures were in place to reduce pollution. They also worried that trains ferrying imported cars would disrupt traffic at intersections and train horns tooting at night would disturb people.

Arm filed his lawsuit in December in Contra Costa Superior Court, saying officials failed to study the full environmental effects before signing off on the deal. Specifically, officials did not adequately analyze air emissions, traffic, noise and other effects, and did not factor in the maximum capacity of the loading tracks.

Operations from the Honda deal will generate a net 1,491 pounds of nitrogen oxides a day, surpassing the state standard of 80 pounds, according to the EIR. Nitrogen oxides emissions contribute to smog, which can irritate lungs, and are "significant and unavoidable," the report found.

Project officials said models they use measure nitrogen oxide levels from 24 miles away, so most of the emissions will be beyond Richmond, said Bill Robbins with Auto Warehousing Co.

SoCal city sued over NFL stadium plan

By Jacob Adelman, Associated Press Writer

In the SF Chronicle, NY Times, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, March 26, 2009

LOS ANGELES—The city of Walnut filed a lawsuit Wednesday to stop the proposed construction of a pro football stadium to lure an NFL team back to the Los Angeles area.

The lawsuit filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court accuses the neighboring city of Industry of approving the stadium without sufficiently reviewing its environmental impact.

Neighboring cities "would realize significant traffic impact, noise, air and light pollution and other impacts that would jeopardize the health, safety and welfare of its residents," officials in Walnut, an affluent, suburban city, said in a prepared statement.

Majestic Realty Co., the developer of the \$800 million venue, initially proposed a complex of shops, offices and industrial buildings on the 600-acre site about 15 miles east of Los Angeles.

When Majestic changed its plan in April, Walnut and other critics asked the developer for a new environmental impact report to account for the expected surge in traffic on game days, as well as increased noise and air pollution.

The developer argued that filing a new report was expensive and unnecessary and instead submitted a supplement to its original study, which the Industry City Council approved last month.

The lawsuit seeks to have the approvals reversed and to force planners to do a new environmental impact report.

Industry City Manager Kevin Radecki did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Majestic managing partner John Semcken said the legal challenge would not stop the plan.

"If they think we're going to stop working on football because of little old Walnut, they've got another think coming," he said, declining to elaborate on the company's strategy for challenging the suit.

Semcken also would not comment on possible efforts to attract a team to play at the stadium but said the lawsuit wouldn't necessarily keep the company from starting talks with interested owners.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy did not immediately respond to an e-mail seeking comment on the possibility that Majestic might contact teams.

Semcken has said Majestic previously agreed to wait until the stadium plan was fully approved before talking to teams.

The company has identified at least eight franchises, including the Oakland Raiders, Buffalo Bills and Minnesota Vikings, as possible targets for relocation.

Nearby Diamond Bar has also threatened to sue over the stadium. Semcken said the company was likely to reach an agreement that would head off a lawsuit by Diamond Bar.

Diamond Bar City Manager Jim DeStefano did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Windy forecast prompts Vegas dust, fire advisories

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Thursday, March 26, 2009

LAS VEGAS—Authorities in Las Vegas have issued a dust advisory and a fire weather watch for Thursday, when forecasts call for high winds and low humidity.

The National Weather Service says strong north winds are expected after a fast-moving storm sweeps through the region Thursday morning and afternoon.

Clark County air quality and environmental management officials are advising residents and construction site operators that winds might kick up blowing dust until Thursday evening.

The weather service says the watch area includes the Colorado River valley and southern Mohave County, Ariz., south of Interstate 40.

Sustained winds of 20 to 30 mph are expected, with gusts between 40 and 50 mph.

Global warming giving nuclear new claim to clean

By MARC LEVY - AP Business Writer

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, March 26, 2009

MIDDLETOWN, Pa. -- The nation's worst nuclear power plant accident was unfolding on Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island when an industry economist took the rostrum at a nearby business luncheon.

It did not go well.

Those in the standing-room-only crowd listened to economist Doug Biden's thoughts about cheap, reliable nuclear power, but Biden could not calm their nerves or answer their pointed questions: Should they join the tens of thousands of people fleeing south-central Pennsylvania? Should they let their children drink local milk?

Three decades later, fears of an atomic catastrophe have been largely supplanted by fears about global warming, easing nuclear energy into the same sentence as wind and solar power. Dogged by price spikes and an environmental assault on carbon dioxide emissions, fossil fuels are the new clean-energy pariah.

"There's a lot of support for nuclear now, and most of that support is borne out of a concern for the desire to have emissions-free energy sources," said Biden, who still advocates for power companies as the president of Electric Power Generation Association in Pennsylvania.

Policymakers in numerous states are warming to nuclear power, even in states where the facilities are banned. Nuclear reactors generate one-fifth of the nation's power. Some see nuclear as a stable, homegrown energy source in light of last year's oil price spikes. Others see it as a way to meet carbon-reduction goals.

Public interest is emerging, too: A Gallup Poll released in recent days shows 59 percent favor the use of nuclear power, the highest percentage since Gallup first asked the question in 1994.

If the U.S. nuclear industry is hitting a new high point, Saturday marks the anniversary of its low point. Thirty years ago, the partial meltdown of Three Mile Island's Unit 2 put the perils and shortcomings of nuclear power under the world's microscope.

No one was seriously injured in the accident, in which a small amount of radiation was released into the air above the Susquehanna River island 12 miles south of Harrisburg. Studies of area residents have not conclusively linked higher rates of cancer to radiation exposure.

Since then, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has not granted one license for a nuclear power plant. The industry says it has made major safety advances, but huge obstacles remain.

It takes years to license and build a reactor. Construction costs billions of dollars. The nation has no long-term storage site for the 2,000 tons of radioactive waste being produced annually by the 104 reactors operating in 31 states.

While some environmental groups grudgingly accept nuclear power as part of the energy landscape, others continue to oppose it. Counting waste costs and government subsidies makes nuclear no more effective than a combination of efficiency measures, desert solar stations, wind power and geothermal energy, they say.

Last month, President Barack Obama called for a cap on greenhouse gas emissions that would almost certainly raise the cost to operate coal- and gas-fired plants. It was another arrow in the quiver of nuclear power advocates who argue that there is no other reliable source of power that is free of greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon dioxide.

In the last two years, 26 applications for new reactors been submitted to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which expects to issue a license no earlier than 2011. No such application was filed in the 28 years following the Three Mile Island accident.

In red states and blue states, public officials are paving the way for new reactors to call their states home. Even lawmakers in fossil fuel-rich Oklahoma, are advancing a bill that would effectively lift a moratorium on nuclear power.

"It makes sense to at least have other options out there," Oklahoma House Speaker Chris Benge said.

Republican Charlie Crist of Florida and Democrats Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania and Martin O'Malley of Maryland, governors who get high marks from environmental groups, all support proposals for new reactors in their states.

"By no means is (nuclear power) the sole answer to our energy problems, but I think it actually has a definitive place in the whole array of things we need to do to reach our goals of producing enough to meet demand," Rendell said.

In the past year, the Florida Public Service Commission has approved four new reactors, including two at a proposed Progress Energy Inc. plant along central Florida's Gulf Coast.

Bill Johnson, chief executive of the Raleigh, N.C.-based utility, said the proposal met two important criteria for public acceptance: It dovetailed with Crist's anti-global warming agenda and the desire for reasonably priced power.

Down the Susquehanna River from Rendell's office in the Pennsylvania Capitol, the destroyed Three Mile Island Unit 2 remains sealed.

Its core was shipped away years ago and what is left inside the containment building remains highly radioactive.

Next to it is Three Mile Island's Unit 1, now owned by Exelon Corp. and still churning out electricity. Three Mile Island would even make a fine place to build another reactor - were it not for the memory of the 1979 accident, perhaps.

"I think politically that would be difficult," Biden said.

Lawsuit by a father in Indiana targets polluters

By CHARLES WILSON - Associated Press Writer

SF Chronicle, NY Times, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Thursday, March 26, 2009

INDIANAPOLIS -- Ron Kurth, who grew up in Gary and worked in the steel mills, raised his family in the region near the outskirts of Chicago. He always wondered about the smoke and smog that overcast the Lake Michigan shoreline.

"It's just a horrible atmosphere," he said.

Kurth, who has a 16-year-old daughter attending school in the Lake County city of Crown Point, decided someone ought to do something about the pollution. On Wednesday, he did.

He filed a lawsuit on behalf of his daughter against 11 northwest Indiana industries, including U.S. Steel and ArcelorMittal, claiming the air pollution they emit from their smokestacks endangers the long-term health of Lake County children. The lawsuit seeks class action status on behalf of thousands of the county's schoolchildren.

The complaint cites a study that appeared in USA Today earlier this year that reported children in the heavily industrialized county are exposed to higher levels of airborne toxins than elsewhere in the United States, based on EPA data on air quality outside 127,800 schools nationwide.

Four schools in East Chicago -- Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, East Chicago Lighthouse, and Eugene Field Elementary School - ranked in the study's first percentile, among the most polluted air.

The suit contends that children in the region are more likely to develop cancer or other long-term illnesses that can be caused by exposure to cadmium, lead and other airborne toxins found in the area.

"A child, running and playing can take in as much as 50 percent more air through their lungs than an adult doing the same activity," lead attorney Steve Berman of Seattle-based law firm Hagens Berman Sobol Shapiro said in a statement. "We have no way of knowing the long-term effects of these contaminants.

"Air they breathe today could cause asthma or lung cancer 10 years down the line."

The suit seeks unspecified damages and asks the court to order a medical monitoring program to help protect children's health at the defendants' expense.

Attorney Beth A. Fegan said the 11 defendants were selected based on the study by USA Today and three universities and on Environmental Protection Agency reports.

U.S. Steel spokeswoman Erin DiPietro said the company had not been served with any court papers and does not comment on pending litigation. The Associated Press left a phone message seeking comment Wednesday from an ArcelorMittal spokesman.

Kurth, who retired from the Lake County Police Department after 33 years, has two sons and another daughter who attended local schools. He said he grew tired after seeing and reading about pollution for years with no one seeming to do anything.

"You look at all this smoke and smog," he said in a phone interview, "and it could be such a beautiful area and yet we're hampered by this stuff."

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Thursday, March 26, 2009:](#)

Editorial: Trade war over trucks? No way

Buried in last year's overdue federal spending bill was a provision that could start an altogether unnecessary trade war with Mexico – with big effects on California.

Fifteen years ago, the United States pledged in the North American Free Trade Agreement to allow the free flow of commerce with Canada and Mexico.

A big hangup has continued to be long-haul trucking between the United States and Mexico. Before NAFTA, Mexican trucks could cross the border, but the cargo had to be offloaded and sit around until a U.S. driver and truck could pick it up – a cumbersome, time-consuming process that cost a lot of money. NAFTA was supposed to change that.

But the Teamsters union complained that Mexican trucks didn't meet U.S. safety standards. So cross-border trucking that was supposed to begin with California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas in 1995 was delayed until stringent safety and security programs could be established.

Those safety and security measures are now in place – and a successful 18-month pilot program with 100 Mexican carriers and 1,000 trucks has shown that they work. Trucks and drivers from Mexico must meet U.S. safety requirements. They pay the same fuel taxes and registration fees as U.S. truckers. They must be insured by a U.S.-licensed insurance company. The trucks have been manufactured to meet both U.S. and Mexican emissions standards.

The drivers must have a valid commercial driver's license, understand and respond in English, and undergo drug and alcohol testing.

The trucks are inspected first in Mexico. When they reach the border, they undergo additional inspections and license checks. They are fitted with GPS monitoring devices that track their location every 30 minutes. The result: The safety record of these trucks, according to an independent evaluation commissioned by the U.S. Department of Transportation, is "better than that of the U.S. trucking fleet."

But now Congress has pulled the plug on the whole thing – banning Mexican truck traffic in the United States in violation of our NAFTA treaty obligations. In retaliation, Mexico has imposed punitive tariffs on \$2.4 billion worth of American goods.

Mexico is California's largest trading partner; California agriculture is especially hard-hit. The state's fruit and vegetable growers face stiff tariffs on exports to Mexico. For example, fresh grapes face a 45 percent tariff. California wines will be hit, too.

And if this first round of retaliatory tariffs doesn't work, Mexico plans to add more products to the list. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has written a letter to California's congressional delegation, urging them not to allow safety "to serve as a smoke screen for protectionist measures." Is House Speaker Nancy Pelosi paying attention? Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer?

President Barack Obama needs to persuade Congress to reverse the cross-border trucking ban immediately. Our economic problems are deep enough without adding protectionist trade wars to them.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., March 25, 2009](#)

Get help from Big Oil

I read in The Bee March 20 about how some gas stations in California can't get financing to install enhanced vapor recovery systems.

Their plight is understandable in these difficult economic times, with credit markets still frozen. My question is, why don't the big oil companies step up to the plate and help these little guys out?

They may not have gasoline contracts with all of these stations, but at least the ones they do have deserve their help. They don't necessarily need to give them the money to comply with this valuable law, but they could make loans available to them. Or they could co-sign the loans to guarantee repayment.

The oil companies are sitting on billions of dollars of recent profits. Surely they could be enticed to help out these small businesses. And help California get rid of 10 tons of toxic fumes every day.

I believe it is their civic and moral obligation to help. And it could even be a public relations bonanza for them, which they surely need.

Gerald McCutcheon, Sanger

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, March 26, 2009:](#)

Letter: Response to letter

Editor: In response to Sen. Dave Cox, R-Fair Oaks, in his letter to the editor "Ease state mandate" of Tuesday.

There have been extensions previous to the California Air Resources Board standards. CARB has notified all gas station operators in California more than three years ago that there would not be any more extensions.

There have been numerous financial institutions offering to loan money to operators to make these upgrades. The independent operators have been too greedy in trying to sell more gallons at a little less margin instead of reinvesting in their facilities.

Now they want to cry, "We can't afford it," while the rest of us play by the rules. Remember, just because you sell a major branded gasoline does not mean you're not a small businessman.

Also, what about the jobs you would lose from the contractors and workers who make the upgrades.

BRUCE PEARSON, Merced

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a new effort by Sen. Diane Feinstein to preserve all or part of the Mojave Dessert by declaring it a national monument due to fragile desert ecosystems which could be damaged or destroyed by large-scale solar projects. For more information on this clips, contact Maricela Velasquez \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Bloquean proyecto de energía alternativa en el desierto de Mohave

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, March 26, 2009

Una senadora demócrata de California, Diane Feinstein propuso prohibir que la industria estadounidense utilice al desierto de Mohave para proyectos de generación de energía alternativa. Asegura que el desierto debe conservarse como monumento nacional, libre de todo proyecto ajeno a su naturaleza. La iniciativa, inusual para una legisladora demócrata suspendería programas de generación de energía solar y eólica o de vientos, de varias empresas que abastecen de electricidad al sur de California. Los planes reducirían la necesidad de generar energía con métodos contaminantes del aire. El departamento federal de uso de tierras informó que revisa unos 130 proyectos de los que al menos 19 se ubican en esa zona desértica de California.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the true cost of coal. Greenpeace is asking that the price of coal include health and environmental expenses. For more information on this clips, contact Maricela Velasquez (559) 230-5849.

El precio del carbón

Greenpeace pide que el precio del carbón incluya costes salud y medioambiente

EFE

La Opinión, Thursday, March 26, 2009

YAKARTA, Indonesia (EFE).- El grupo ecologista Greenpeace criticó hoy en Yakarta que el precio del carbón, la energía fósil más barata y contaminante, no incluya sus perniciosos costes sobre la salud humana y el medio ambiente.

En el lanzamiento de un informe titulado "El verdadero coste del carbón", el colectivo denunció que el precio de este mineral en el mercado no tiene en cuenta las enfermedades respiratorias que provoca su extracción, los accidentes mineros, la lluvia ácida, la contaminación atmosférica ni el cambio climático.

El documento, realizado en colaboración con una asociación de organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) locales denominada Coalición Anti Carbón, detalla los costes reales del uso del carbón como fuente de energía.

Greenpeace urgió a Indonesia a paralizar la construcción de centrales térmicas y la ampliación de las instalaciones ya existentes.

El Ejecutivo indonesio tiene previsto construir 35 centrales térmicas en los próximos dos años que aportarán 10 mil megavatios más a la red eléctrica nacional, que sufre frecuentes cortes.

Como alternativa, Greenpeace propone el uso de energías renovables, menos agresivas con el medio ambiente.

"Indonesia puede tener los recursos de carbón más abundantes de la región, pero también tiene enormes reservas de energía geotérmica, eólica y solar", explicó en un comunicado Arif Fiyanto, especialista en cambio climático de Greenpeace.

Fiyanto añadió que estas fuentes de energía "encajan mucho mejor con las necesidades del archipiélago" indonesio que la "centralizada y contaminante" generación de energía a través de combustibles fósiles, que defiende el Ministerio de Energía del país.

Indonesia es el tercer país emisor de gases que provocan el efecto invernadero, por detrás de China y Estados Unidos.