

Power plant plan comes before public

by Jennifer Wadsworth/ TP staff

Tracy Press, Thursday, September 24, 2009

The public will soon get a chance to see the site of a small power plant slated for construction on a swath of unused agricultural land about 2½ miles west of Mountain House.

The bus will leave at 4 p.m. on Oct. 1 from the Byron-Bethany Irrigation District office for anyone interested in touring the site of the proposed 200-megawatt Mariposa Energy Center.

A public hearing will take place at 5 p.m. that same evening after the site tour.

Those interested have until Thursday to make reservations through the California Energy Commission.

The electricity center will be a four-turbine plant and sit about 7 miles northwest of Tracy and 7 miles east of Livermore at the intersection of Bruns and Kelso roads.

The land plant would inhabit is on the very eastern edge of Alameda County. But with the prevailing winds blowing east into the San Joaquin Valley air basin, the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) and residents of the area have a say in the project.

The 10-acre parcel eyed by the power company sits on a larger, 160-acre area known as the Lee Property.

At full capacity, Mariposa could power up to 200,000 homes, according to the California Independent System Operator, which runs the state electrical grid. A megawatt supplies energy to roughly 750 to 1,000 homes, the agency said.

However, according to Mariposa officials, the plant is designed to be more of a “peaker” facility — one that can power up and off easily to meet changing levels of demand — and will likely run at far less than peak capacity.

The plant's parent company already has a 10-year contract in place to supply the proposed plant's electricity to Pacific Gas and Electric Co.

Building Mariposa would require installing a new 580-foot natural gas pipeline and another 1.8-mile pipe to supply water to the plant from the nearby Byron-Bethany Irrigation District.

The energy commission permit was filed to build Mariposa on June 15, which means construction is about three years away, according to state regulators.

Energy officials this summer began a yearlong review of the company's plans, a review that will include several public hearings like the one scheduled for the first week of October.

Mariposa is one of four power plants proposed for the area west of Tracy. GWF Energy also plants to expand its just-west-of-Tracy 169-megawatt peaker plant into a full-time energy center that could power more than 300,000 homes.

Also, two more companies have applied for permission to build a couple 1,000-plus-megawatt power plants around the same area a couple miles west of Mountain House.

For information about the Mariposa project, check out the latest documents associated with the case on the energy commission Web site at www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/mariposa.

At a glance

WHAT: Public site visit and information hearing on proposed power plant, the Mariposa Energy Project

WHEN: Bus leaves at 4 p.m. Oct. 1; hearing begins at 5 p.m. that day after site visit

WHERE: Meet at Byron Bethany Irrigation District, 7995 Bruns Road, in Byron

INFO: To reserve a spot, call the California Energy Commission at 800-822-6228

Meet the Candidate: Chris Vierra, Ceres City Council

Modesto Bee, Thursday, September 24, 2009

The following is a questionnaire sent out by The Bee to candidates for the November 2009 election. Candidates supplied the answers, and they are being published in their unedited form.

What is your full, legal name?

Chris Todd Vierra

What name do you prefer be used in print?

Chris Vierra

What office do you seek?

Ceres City Council

What is the primary reason you are running for this office?

The primary reason I am running for office is I want to continue what I started 6 years ago when I became a Ceres City Councilmember. My family has lived in Ceres nearly 100 years and I truly care about the community. I want to continue to make Ceres a special place to live, work and raise a family.

What will be your single most important priority if you get elected?

My single most important priority is Public Safety. We must keep our community safe from gangs, drugs and parolee violators.

What sets you apart from the other candidates?

I am a degreed Mechanical Engineer who is licensed by the State of California as a registered Civil Engineer. I understand public infrastructure, financing and CEQA issues. I believe this background is vital to local government and sets me apart from the other candidates.

Where do you work and what is your job title? (If retired, list position before retirement)

I work at Stantec Consulting and my job title is Managing Principal.

What date were you born and where?

July 12, 1966 in Modesto, CA

What is your spouse's name, if any?

Kelly A. Vierra

What are the names and ages of your children, if any?

Katie Vierra (Daughter) – Age 14; Ryan Vierra (Son) – Age 12

Please list the schools and colleges you attended, the degrees you attained and when.

California State University San Luis Obispo – Degree: Mechanical Engineering (BSME) Modesto Junior College – Degree: Engineering (AS Degree)

Have you ever held an elected or appointed public office? (Include dates and office title)

- Ceres City Councilmember (2003 – Current)
- [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Governing Board Chairman](#) (2007 - Current)
- StanCOG Representative (City of Ceres) -

Have you run before for an elected public office? (Include dates and exact office title)

Ceres City Council – November 2005

Approximately how much money do you expect to spend on your campaign?

Approximately \$ 15,000

Have you ever been convicted or charged with a crime other than a minor traffic violation?

If so, please explain and include dates and locations.

No, I have never been convicted or charged with a crime.

Have you or a business you owned or had principal interest in ever filed bankruptcy? If so, please include dates and the location the bankruptcy was filed.

No, I have not filed for bankruptcy or been involved with a business that has filed for bankruptcy.

Wal-Mart distribution center: Fewer people attend special meeting ahead of Monday vote

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, September 24, 2009

Merced's need for jobs took center stage Wednesday as residents debated whether allowing a Wal-Mart distribution center to be built would be the wisest way to boost the area's fledgling economy.

The City Council is faced with approving or denying a 1.2-million-square-foot distribution center Wal-Mart wants to build in the southeast part of the city.

Supporters say the choice should be clear. They point to the county's unemployment rate of nearly 20 percent and Wal-Mart's pledge to create 1,200 jobs, 900 of which will be full-time.

"Wal-Mart jobs are the perfect stepping stone for our residents to improve their lives," Atwater resident Steve Ewing told the council.

Opponents remain skeptical about how many of the jobs will be given to local residents as people from all over the Valley may try to secure positions at the center. They note the environmental review shows there will be unavoidable impacts to the air quality and believe the company's trucks will clog up the roads.

Kyle Stockard, co-chair of the Stop Wal-Mart Action Team, said the distribution center will also lead to more supercenters "filled with junk made in China."

"Everything's Wal-Mart all the time," he said, quoting a Merle Haggard song. "No more mom and pop. No more five and dime."

About 150 people turned out for the meeting, though the crowd thinned slightly around 9 p.m. The turnout was less than what many people were anticipating. The city had two overflow areas set aside in case there were scores of people.

Forces against Wal-Mart dominated the beginning of three-hour meeting, which was dedicated to hearing from the public. Only project opponents spoke during the first hour. The rest of the meeting was a mix, though there were more supporters.

Fifteen people spoke in favor of the distribution center. Seventeen people spoke against the distribution center. Four of them were from outside Merced County.

The long line of opponents who turned in their request-to-speak-cards on Monday seemed to be in response to the hearing before the Planning Commission, when proponents commanded the first half of the meeting and opponents spoke later in the evening as people grew tired.

The seven-member council remained quiet and listened. They'll deliberate on the project Monday and likely cast the deciding vote. Opponents have already made it clear they'll file a lawsuit if the center moves forward.

The threats were troubling for local Wal-Mart worker Linda Lee-Peoples, who praised her jobs benefits and wants more people to gain employment.

"Merced needs a face-lift," she said. "You know what a face-lift does? It makes you look a whole lot better."

She was disappointed that opponents haven't offered any tangible alternatives. "What are you bringing to the table?" she asked. "Nothing but a lot of words."

John Grant said the council must think about the city's grandchildren, who will be harmed by more air pollution. He said 16 percent of Valley children have asthma. He lamented commerce taking precedence over the environment.

"This is not an economic issue," he said. "It's a moral issue. It's an ethical issue."

More residents will have a chance to speak from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday. The meeting will continue into the afternoon if everyone hasn't had a chance to address the council.

Merced area ranchers get help in green ways

By Carol Reiter

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, September 24, 2009

Farmers and ranchers who want to be good land stewards can get a little monetary help from Uncle Sam.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is offering a program called the Conservation Stewardship Program. It will pay ag producers to adopt conservation activities on their land.

"The program was designed to reward people for conservation activities that they are already undertaking, and encourage them to do even more," said Malia Hildebrandt, the district conservationist for the NRCS.

The program is part of the new 2008 farm bill, Hildebrandt said, but not too many people have taken advantage of it yet.

"We're hoping to get more growers signing up," she said.

The program is only open until Sept. 30, but Hildebrandt said there will be more programs in the coming months.

Growers who choose to put their land into the program will get money from the government, ranging from \$5 to \$10 an acre for rangeland up to \$22 an acre for cropland.

Ways that growers can qualify for the program are many, according to Dwayne Howard, branch chief of the stewardship programs for the NRCS.

"There are 81 different enhancements that are considered conservation activity," Howard said.

One example is an owner of an orchard who puts his land in the program. "They can put in a hedgerow and a cover crop that would provide habitat for beneficial insects, which would decrease their spraying," Hildebrandt said.

The program allows more than 12 million acres to be in the program, and growers are held to earning no more than \$40,000 a year.

"What growers get will depend on how many people sign up, and how much money we get for it," Hildebrandt said.

Lands that are qualified for the program include cropland, rangeland and pasture. Tribal land and non-industrial forest land are also covered by the program, but Hildebrandt said those don't apply to Merced.

"We are encouraging people to sign up for the program," Hildebrandt said. "California has air and water quality issues, and this program can help with those problems."

Duke, FPL to switch to hybrid, electric vehicles

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, September 24, 2009

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Two of the nation's largest power generators said Thursday that they plan to begin switching their company cars and trucks to plug-in hybrid vehicles or all-electric vehicles starting Jan. 1 to help cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The commitment by Charlotte, N.C.-based Duke Energy and Juno Beach, Fla.-based FPL Group Inc. represents more than 10,000 vehicles and potential revenue of \$600 million or more for manufacturers.

The goal is that by 2020, 100 percent of all new fleet vehicles will be plug-in electric vehicles or plug-in hybrid vehicles.

The companies say plug-in cars will reduce carbon emissions by up to 70 percent - 100 percent if a vehicle is charged by zero-carbon renewable energy sources - and lower fuel costs by 80 percent.

They say it also will help jump start the market for these vehicles.

"We should work together. We benefit the same way," FPL Vice President Chris Bennett said.

He said electric vehicles will provide lower-cost transportation and move the country away from dependency on foreign oil.

The companies made the announcement during the annual meeting of Clinton Global Initiative, started by former President Bill Clinton that brings together the public and private sector to discuss solutions to problems in four areas - climate change, poverty, global health and education.

Duke has 4 million electric customers in five states and FPL is the parent of Florida Power & Light, which has 4.5 million customers in Florida.

Duke shares were up 7 cents to \$15.79 in trading Thursday morning. FPL shares rose 3 cents to \$53.90.

A new crop of eco-warriors take to their own streets

Along the I-710 corridor, where cargo-carrying trucks and trains spew diesel pollution around the clock, grass-roots groups are persuading residents to act and making clean air a priority.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, Sept. 24, 2009

It is 8:30 a.m. on a Sunday. Along streets of grimy stucco bungalows with bougainvillea, American flags and "Beware of Dog" signs on chain-link fences, a couple of residents are hosing down lawns.

It ought to be quiet, but it's not.

Behind the garden walls of Astor Avenue, there's a chugging and a hissing and a clanking and a squeaking. Two yellow locomotives, hooked to cars piled high with metal containers, idle on the

track of the Union Pacific. Their stacks spew gray plumes of smoke.

"We call this cancer alley," said Angelo Logan, who grew up on the city of Commerce street. "And we're fed up."

Logan, 42, is part of a new generation of urban, blue-collar environmentalists. The son of a janitor and the youngest of five children, he dropped out of school in 10th grade and went to work as a maintenance mechanic in an aerospace factory.

Now he is executive director of East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, with a paid staff of four and 200 members who join for \$5 a year. They recruit door-to-door in Commerce, Bell Gardens, Montebello and East Los Angeles, where more than three-quarters of residents are working-class Latinos.

East Yard operates from a storefront on Commerce's Atlantic Avenue, a street lined with cheap motels and fast-food joints. It has no celebrities on its board, no publicity staff churning out press releases, no in-house attorneys to go toe-to-toe with \$500-an-hour corporate law firms.

But in California, where Latinos, African Americans and Asians now collectively outnumber non-Hispanic whites, political power is shifting. Here especially, but also across the country, mainstream foundations, which had long supported environmental groups led by white lawyers and policy wonks, have begun to channel grants to community organizations run by Latinos and blacks who see clean air and water as civil rights.

In the Southland, these environmental justice activists, as they are called, wage war in the dense corridor that runs from the massive ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach through neighborhoods that line the 710 Freeway -- Wilmington, Carson, Compton, Huntington Park, Commerce-- and on through Riverside and San Bernardino counties, with their vast distribution warehouses.

"There are no buffer zones," said Gilbert Estrada, a teacher who co-founded the East Yard group with Logan. "We are the buffer zones."

Each year, pollution from ships, trucks and trains that move goods through the region contributes to an estimated 2,100 early deaths, 190,000 sick days for workers, and 360,000 school absences, according to the California Air Resources Board.

At a recent East Yard barbecue in Commerce's Bristow Park, hand-painted signs read "Salud Sí, Diesel No" -- Health Yes, Diesel No -- as a band played Mexican rancheras and trucks roared by on Interstate 5. Between a kids' finger-painting pavilion and a card table stacked with petitions, Logan, a soft-spoken man with a tidy beard, was working the hamburger line.

"We're having a demonstration on the 25th," he told Pepe Martinez, 44, a metal fabricator. "We're trying to stop the idling in the rail yards. Do you think you could come support us?"

Martinez said he would try. "I know people who live next to the yards," he added. The railroads "never turn those engines off, ever."

Logan headed for a banner-making table, where he showed Angel Armenta, an 11-year-old in a "Star Wars" T-shirt, how to smear black paint on a skull stencil. Logan drew two railroad-crossing signs for eyes, and showed the boy how to staple the banner to a stick. "Would you like to carry this at the demonstration?" he asked.

Armenta nodded vigorously.

Last year, 40% of the containerized cargo entering the United States flowed through the San Pedro Bay ports. That's \$335 billion worth of goods, much of it from China and other Pacific Rim nations

to be shipped over the Rockies.

Despite the current recession, the ports expect traffic to triple in coming decades -- a scenario that Logan calls "frightening." Like Lilliputians tying down Gulliver, community groups want to block a massive rail yard expansion and a new yard that city officials say will be the greenest ever built. And they are battling a plan to add eight to 10 lanes to the 710 Freeway.

Railroad officials say diesel emissions from their trains will drop by two-thirds by 2020 due to new regulations -- an assertion that Logan disputes.

Commerce is home to about 12,000 people and four rail yards, including BNSF Railway's Hobart facility, the world's busiest "intermodal" yard, which transfers 1.2 million containers a year between trucks and trains. Giant cranes stand in rows like sentinels. Tall poles bristle with flood lights. Blue chassis are piled three-high near a maintenance yard where engines are tested at high-throttle.

"There's stadium lighting, and so much noise and vibration 24/7 that people suffer sleep deprivation and hypertension," Logan said on a recent tour of the neighborhood. "People worry the stucco's shaking off their houses."

In his red Prius ("I had to stop driving a clunker"), he swung by a battery plant that spews out lead particles, an incinerator served by 150 trash trucks a day, a pesticide distributor, chrome platers, auto body shops.

"It's not just one issue," he said. "All these things are bombarding us. . . . These neighborhoods are targets because there isn't a base of people demanding a clean environment."

In Bandini Park, big rigs on the freeway thundered past the basketball court, drowning out conversation. Logan pointed to the home of a volunteer whose funeral he recently attended. "She was ill, but she would always come to testify," he said. "Folks who never smoked a day come down with lung cancer, throat cancer."

Logan, who dresses in shirt sleeves and sneakers, is no firebrand. He speaks in an even, almost flat tone. He admits to frustration with "professionalized environmentalists" and air pollution bureaucracy.

"My trade is as a mechanic," he said. "It's fixing things. We're community people. We're practical. Enough talk. Let's take action."

His activism, he said, grew out of the influence of a Mexican American grandmother, who talked to him about social justice, and an Irish American grandfather, who took part in a mine workers strike.

As a young man, Logan joined a union, and eventually became an organizer for a statewide group, Communities for a Better Environment.

Eight years ago, he ran into an old friend at a sweatshop protest in a Glendale mall: Gilbert Estrada was working on a master's thesis on highway building through East L.A.'s Mexican neighborhoods. They traded tales of aching chests from air pollution, of chemical spills that sparked evacuations in elementary school, and of playing around 55-gallon drums marked with skulls and crossbones.

Logan told him, "I want to start an environmental justice group."

Soon they were passing out fliers. At first, Logan worked odd jobs as a handyman and financed East Yard activities out of his own pocket. "We were literally working out of the trunks of our cars," Estrada recalled.

It took more than a year to get their first grant, a small sum from the L.A.-based Liberty Hill

Foundation. It allowed them to buy a computer.

East Yard now gets money from a dozen philanthropies, including the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Annenberg Foundation. Its budget tops \$400,000 a year.

Logan has also forged alliances with national groups, recently joining as co-plaintiff a Natural Resources Defense Council lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency. "Angelo is politically savvy," says NRDC attorney David Pettit. "People listen to him."

One city official, who asked not to be named, put it more bluntly: "The combination of the race card and NIMBYism is pretty potent."

Logan shrugs off the accusation. "NIMBYism is complicated," he said. "We're not interested in just saying 'Don't do it here.' We are saying, 'Don't do it in other oversaturated communities either.' "

At a recent community meeting, Logan held up a map of concentric circles showing cancer risk from rail yards. "I grew up here," he told the group. "Diesel soot is the No. 1 carcinogen. The dark circle has the highest level of cancer. That's where we are."

But Logan maintains cordial relations with adversaries. "Angelo is not dogmatic," said Kirk Marckwald, the railroads' Sacramento lobbyist who has sat across the table from Logan. "He honestly reviews technical complexities."

If Logan spends time these days strategizing, grant-writing and lobbying, it is partly because he can leave street-level duties to the loquacious Isella Ramirez, East Yard's 24-year-old lead organizer. Ramirez grew up in Commerce, where, she said, "The 5:30 train was my alarm clock."

She didn't think about pollution until she went to Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., on scholarship. "The word 'environmental' turned me off," she said. "You look at the sky. You think, 'It's fine.' Then I got to college and said, 'Oh, so this is what a blue sky looks like!'"

Wearing a short denim skirt and tights, a tattoo of a dragon-fly peeking out from her tank top, Ramirez marched from door to door on a hot afternoon last month. "Buenos días," she greeted a woman who opened the door a crack, with a suspicious look.

Ramirez launched into rapid-fire talking points in fluent Spanish. "We are the East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice . . . stop the idling near schools and homes . . . these yards are killing us . . . asthma . . . cancer . . . you can sign here . . ."

The woman signed her name. A train rumbled by, loaded with containers stamped "China Shipping."

"Allí van," the woman said -- "There they go" -- lifting her chin in a quick, contemptuous gesture.

On the corner of Noakes Street, Ana Godoy opened the gate to a yard filled with red and green play sets. This time, Ramirez's pitch was in English as she said that the state is considering rules to stop trains from idling.

Godoy's house is a soccer ball's kick away from where the 710, with an average of 50,000 truck trips a day, vaults the Union Pacific rail yard. Her two children, ages 2 and 4, have asthma. Her brother lives next door, with a teenage son who developed asthma after they moved here from Downey.

The trains "park here and let this crap out," she said. She keeps her windows closed. Amid the vibrations of trucks and trains, "we can't even feel the earthquakes."

Meanwhile, Logan slogs through meetings with local mayors, engineers and state policymakers on the intricacies of pollution regulations. He sits on a half-dozen official committees. He pops up to Sacramento on a regular basis.

Recently, a port official told him flatly, "What poor people want is jobs."

But Logan mused, "I don't know if he knows what it's like to be poor. Or to be poor and sick. If you don't have your health, what do you have? The construction jobs are temporary. The permanent jobs are minimal."

Back when he was a factory worker, Logan thought environmentalism was "about saving the whales."

Now he defines it in terms of local victories: stopping the expansion of a rail yard in Bell, a hazardous-waste plant in Commerce, or even saving the neighborhood's old ficus trees from being razed.

More broadly, he credits environmental justice groups with "changing the mentality. Before we got engaged, people weren't saying, 'Let's make this the cleanest, greenest city.' That came about because people in power had to respond to the anger."

Nonetheless, Logan admits to feeling "overwhelmed" most of the time. "We're up against huge forces. The railroads, the shippers, the Wal-Marts, companies with money and lobbyists and PR firms."

As for moving where the air might be cleaner, the working-class families can't afford it, Logan said. "And they feel: 'Why should we move? Why can't industry be a good neighbor?'"

"I don't think we'll ever get back to a point where it's pristine. But this is home."

Master Gardener: Should you start practicing sustainable gardening? Find out

Dorothy M. Downing, Master Gardener

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Sept. 24, 2009

Sustainable gardening is a landscape that thrives with a minimum input of water, labor, fertilizer and pesticides. We discussed soil and plant selection last week.

Mulching

What is mulch? Mulching is the act of piling "things" on the soil surface. The "things" can be organic (bark chips, nut shells, rice hulls, grass clippings, straw, cardboard, newspaper, coconut fiber or compost). "Things" can also be inorganic (crushed rock, pebbles, or plastic).

Why should we bother to mulch? Plants seem to grow without it. There are several reasons. The first is to stop weeds from sprouting and competing with the new little flowers that you just planted. Anytime you mix the soil up you may bring dormant weed seeds to the surface where they can sprout. Adding a 2-4 inch layer of mulch makes it harder for the weeds to find the light of day and grow.

Next, mulching covers the soil so that it is protected from the sun and wind and will not dry out as fast. Mulch regulates the soil moisture, which is important to new roots, especially on small plants from six-packs or flats. Mulch helps keep water in the soil and available to the plant, rather than evaporating into the air. This reduces the need to water as frequently. It also helps to moderate the soil temperature extremes, prevents the formation of a crust on the soil, reduces dust and makes for a finished look to the planted areas.

Another thing organic mulch does is break down and “feed” the soil. Organic mulches eventually decompose and if we rototill them into the ground, we are then “amending” the soil.

Mixing organic mulches or compost into the soil provides nutrients to the soil, which can help reduce or eliminate the need for additional fertilizers.

Composting

Compost is yard waste or manure that has been allowed to partially decompose so that it can be used as a soil amendment or plant mulch. Usually compost is mixed into the soil to improve drainage, water-holding capacity, and nutrient status of the soil, which serves as a food source for beneficial microorganisms and plant roots.

Another kind of composting is vermiculture, or composting with worms.

Earthworms contribute significantly to soil health as they burrow through the soil and feed on organic matter and microorganisms.

As earthworms feed, smaller fragments of organic matter are mineralized by microorganisms inside their gut and, upon excretion, become readily available to plants.

Earthworms continually excrete these castings throughout the soil.

The castings rapidly stabilize and become resistant to chemical and physical degradation. This benefits overall soil structure by helping to prevent compaction.

The castings also help in serving as storage units for nutrients such as carbon and nitrogen.

Watering

Sustainable gardening uses water and other limited resources in moderation.

Fescue lawns can use three times more water as drought-tolerant species, so just reducing the size of your lawn will conserve water. Some people are eliminating lawns entirely, which makes good sense when lawns are only used for aesthetic purposes.

We Californians chronically overwater our landscapes.

To determine how much water your lawn really needs, use the water calculator developed by the University of California found at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF/MAINTAIN/irrsched.html.

Lawn tools

Grass lawns need frequent maintenance to look their best. Gas-powered lawn mowers, edgers and blowers produce high amounts of noise and greenhouse gases, which contribute to noise and [air pollution](#).

Replacing grass lawns with native wildflowers, bushes and trees provides the food, shelter, and cover that help to maintain healthy, natural ecosystems and reduces time and labor spent on the lawn.

Be sure to use low-volume irrigation where feasible, such as drip and micro sprinkler.

Use a “smart” controller that utilizes weather or soil information to determine how much water to apply.

The goals are to use less water and to prevent runoff water from leaving your irrigated area and moving into the storm water system.

When you do water, make sure that the plants can benefit. Run your system long and slow to saturate the soil just past the root zone.

Then don’t water again until the top several inches of the soil are dry.

Pest management

IPM is an ecosystem-based strategy to manage pests in an environmentally responsible manner. It means selecting plants that are pest resistant, understanding the lifecycle of the pest and monitoring pest populations before over-reacting.

It means using harsh chemicals as a last resort, and being careful not to kill beneficial insects in the process.

Strategies to reduce pests include biological control (such as a lady beetle to reduce aphid populations), cultural control (providing better air circulation to eliminate powdery mildew on roses) and, last, chemical control.

Pesticides should be used only after all other methods of control have failed.

Chemical control should start with the least toxic and most environmentally safe products first, such as insecticidal soaps, baking soda and horticultural oils.

Avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides because they kill the good insects along with the bad.

Check out the Pest Notes for information about specific weeds, insects and diseases.

Visit the Master Gardeners Web site, www.mastergardeners.org and click on UC Gardening and Pest Information.

So are you ready to start sustainable landscaping?

Dorothy M. Downing is a University of California Master Gardener. This column appears Thursdays. To contact the Tulare-Kings Master Gardener Program, phone 685-3309, Ext. 225, e-mail cetulare@ucdavis.edu or write to 4437 S. Laspina, Suite B, Tulare, CA, 93274.

Obama wants worldwide end of fossil fuel subsidies

By Seth Borenstein, AP Science Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, September 23, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- President Barack Obama is calling on the world to end massive government subsidies that encourage the use of fossil fuels blamed for global warming.

The president, who is set to host the G-20 economic summit opening Thursday in Pittsburgh, will propose a gradual elimination, with the time frame to be determined, according to White House officials.

"Later this week, I will work with my colleagues at the G-20 to phase out fossil fuel subsidies so that we can better address our climate challenge," Obama said Tuesday at the United Nations global warming summit.

Mike Froman, Obama's national security adviser for economic affairs, said the main value of the proposal would be if it were multilateral. He declined to say if Obama was willing to go it alone and try to eliminate such subsidies just in the United States.

Many countries, including the United States, provide tax breaks and direct payments to help produce and use oil, coal, natural gas and other fuels that spew carbon dioxide, the chief greenhouse gas. Eliminating those would provide "a significant down payment" toward the U.S. goal of cutting fossil fuel emissions in half by 2050, Froman said.

The costs of these subsidies are estimated in the tens of billions of dollars annually worldwide. In the U.S. alone, the federal government gave \$72 billion in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry between 2002 and 2008, according to a study by the Environmental Law Institute.

The subsidies encourage the burning of fuel that leads to global warming and other pollution, Froman said. Eliminating the subsidies would help slow global warming, reduce health problems

from pollution, make the United States more energy-independent and foster economic growth, he said.

Fossil fuel industry officials said the idea did not make sense and would hurt U.S. energy security. Environmentalists cheered the idea as a constructive use of free markets.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said in a report last week that removing fossil fuel subsidies could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 10 percent in 2050. OECD is a Paris-based international organization with 30 democratic countries as members, including the United States and most of Europe.

"Removing environmentally harmful subsidies to energy consumption and production would be an important first step," OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurria said. "It would also improve economic efficiency. For instance, the budgetary savings could be used to reduce other distorting taxes or to alleviate poverty in a more targeted and efficient way."

The biggest energy subsidies in non-OECD countries are in China, India, Brazil and Russia, according to the OECD. Twenty of the largest non-OECD countries spend more than \$400 million in fossil fuel subsidies that could be spent elsewhere, Froman said.

In 2008, countries that subsidized fossil fuels increased their consumption by one million barrels of oil, while those that didn't reduced their consumption by about 1.5 million barrels, Froman said.

In the U.S. the biggest fossil fuel subsidies are tax breaks, the foreign tax credit and the credit for production of nonconventional fuels that add up to \$29.4 billion over six years, according to the Environmental Law Institute report.

"We found that there is significantly higher subsidies of fossil fuels than of renewables" even though fossil fuel firms are more established, said study author John Pendergrass. "Some of it is going to companies making record profits."

While big oil companies make large profits, most American oil and natural gas producers are small and independent, said Jeff Eshelman, spokesman for the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

Eliminating subsidies "would be a direct hit on small independent businesses right away, the ones that are really providing America with its energy."

Eshelman said small producers tap 90 percent of U.S. wells, but that only translates to about 20 percent of oil Americans use.

Ending the subsidies could hurt development of crucial technology, such as carbon sequestration from coal plants, that is needed to fight global warming, said Frank Maisano, a Washington spokesman for coal utilities, oil refineries and wind developers. He said it also could hurt fuels that are homegrown.

Administration officials said Obama's proposal would not affect subsidies for climate friendly development, like carbon sequestration from coal plants.

But Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, a Washington environmental group, said there is "no greater cause of climate change than fossil fuels. There's no greater cause of that than artificial subsidies. It's a great idea to eliminate those subsidies and let the marketplace work."

UN offsets climate summit's carbon footprint

By Slobodan Lekic - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, September 23, 2009

UNITED NATIONS -- Striving to underscore the importance of efforts to reduce global emissions, a team of U.N. officials figured out the amount of carbon dioxide generated by a daylong climate conference - about 450 tons - and purchased offsets to neutralize its carbon footprint.

The summit on Tuesday drew more than 50 presidents, 35 prime ministers and many environment ministers.

The largest single factor in the calculation was the amount of emissions generated by air travel for all the delegations, said Janos Pasztor, director of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's climate change support team. By contrast, other elements accounted for a fraction of the overall air miles total.

"We calculated in advance the amount of emissions the summit would cause, based on the number of heads of state traveling to New York, emissions from their motorcades, police escorts and other elements," Pasztor said.

The offset was achieved by directing funding to a power project in rural India that converts cast off agricultural products such as corn husks and stalks into electricity, Pasztor said. The plant in rural Andhra Pradesh significantly contributes to reducing carbon emissions in India, one of the world's largest emitters of dangerous greenhouse gases.

The initiative to achieve a carbon-neutral summit is part of a wider move by Ban Ki-moon two years ago to turn the entire U.N. system toward carbon neutrality.

All U.N. agencies have initiated activities to determine and limit their negative impact on the environment. Although the world body as a whole has a long way to go to become carbon-neutral, it is looking into buying offsets such as the one in Andhra Pradesh to counter its emissions.

Ban opened the gathering on Tuesday with an appeal to leaders to set aside national interests and think about the future of the planet - and included a rebuke for their foot-dragging thus far.

The U.N. conference and the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh this week are believed to be an attempt to pressure wealthier nations into adopting a global climate treaty during a pivotal conference in December in Copenhagen, Denmark. The treaty would also tie in financing for poorer nations to burn less coal and preserve their forests.

[L.A. Times news blog, Wed., Sept. 23, 2009](#)

Will California crack down on rail-yard pollution?

By Margot Roosevelt

Will California crack down on toxic pollution from rail yards? Community and public health groups are planning a demonstration at Friday's Air Resources Board in Diamond Bar to demand that the state enact tough regulations on the California's 18 rail yards.

Trucks, trains and cargo-handling equipment spewing diesel emissions in the yards have caused high cancer risks, according to recent studies.

Southern California authorities passed anti-idling rules on locomotives three years ago, but Union Pacific Railway and BNSF Railway got them overturned in court.

Railroads contend that state and local authorities have little power over them because they are part of the federally regulated interstate commerce system. They have signed voluntary agreements to reduce their pollution in California.

But community groups such as the Commerce-based East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice want the state to subsidize the purchase of cleaner locomotives and enact strict anti-idling rules. Rail yard gates, where trucks idle in long lines, should be relocated away from schools and homes, they say.

The Air Resources Board will examine detailed options at its meeting and hear testimony from the public and the railroads.

Environmental justice groups are battling pollution not just from rail yards but from the massive goods movement activities at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, which handle 40% of the nation's containerized imports.