

State grant retires polluting school buses

By Business Journal staff

(Fresno) Business Journal, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2009

Four new school buses in the Kings Canyon Unified School District will be unveiled at Orange Cove High School on Thursday, replacing older models that were found to produce excessive air pollutants.

The buses were funded by a grant through the Prop 1B Lower Emission School Bus Program administered by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The California Air Resources Board allocated \$39 million to District for the program approved by voters in 2007.

"Replacing older, dirtier school buses with today's newer models provides cleaner air to students, communities and schoolyards," said ARB Chairman Mary D. Nichols in a press release. "Credit goes to the San Joaquin Valley Air District for moving expeditiously to parlay this voter-approved state funding into on-the-ground air quality improvements in a part of the state that really needs it."

The new buses are expected to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 85 percent while also cutting down on harmful diesel particulates. The goal of the program is to replace all buses manufactured before 1977, which produce about seven tons of emissions over their lifetime compared to one ton for new models.

School districts must apply to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for funding by going to www.valleyair.org or by calling 230-5800.

Valley officials warn gusts bring poor air quality

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2009

BAKERSFIELD, Calif.—Gusty winds accompanying the storm blowing through California are being blamed for unhealthy air quality in portions of the San Joaquin Valley.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a warning on Tuesday saying blowing gusts are causing unhealthy levels of particulate pollution in Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

The valley's southern reaches have yet to see any rain from the storm, but the gusts have been kicking up dust since Tuesday morning.

Officials are urging residents with asthma and other respiratory ailments to stay indoors and limit outdoor activity.

Exposure to particulate pollution can cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis.

Storm drenches Valley; Fresno sets rain mark

First big rainfall zaps power in the Valley; Fresno breaks record.

By Pablo Lopez, Paula Lloyd and Jim Guy / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2009

The central San Joaquin Valley and the Sierra Nevada should begin drying out this morning after the first storm of the season moves on, leaving behind a mind-boggling amount of rainfall in some places.

Nearly 14 inches of rain fell in the last 24 hours in Dinkey Creek, 10 inches at Wishon Dam, 8 inches at Shaver Lake and 9.25 inches at Mariposa Grove.

"It's nuts," said Jim Dudley, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford. "It doesn't happen very often. That's a lot of rain."

Dudley said he had been watching the rainfall figures climb through the night. "It's been pretty interesting."

Other areas recording high amounts of rainfall include Yosemite Valley with 4.83 inches and Oakhurst with 4.46 inches.

Dudley said he couldn't say for sure whether the Dinkey Creek monsoon was a rainfall record, but it may well be. "It's definitely the most anybody we've been talking to has seen," he said.

On the Valley Floor, Fresno received 1.39 inches, Hanford 1.26, Merced 1.66 and Visalia 1.8. Fresno's rainfall set a record for the date; the previous high in the city was 0.88. Emergency crews worked into the night Tuesday as a powerful Pacific storm brought record rainfall to Fresno, turned power poles into matchsticks, toppled trees and created deadly road conditions.

After a long, dry summer, the first big storm of the season had many effects in the Valley: cars veered off roadways, about 29,000 Pacific Gas & Electric Co. customers lost electricity, and many residents lugget sandbags to their homes to prevent flooding.

The rainfall totals were great news for the parched region, but they come with a flash flood warning through 9 a.m. for some areas, including Rancheria Creek, Balch Camp and all locations along the North Fork of the Kings River downstream to Pine Flat Reservoir. Residents who live along streams and creeks are advised to move to higher ground.

Along with the rainfall comes clean air. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecasts good air quality throughout the region.

Elsewhere in the state, the news was even more dramatic, with flooding evacuations in the Santa Cruz Mountains and a critical power transmission line knocked out in Moss Landing.

The good news was that there could be an early ski season.

"We could be skiing by Thanksgiving or sooner," said Boomer Devaurs, marketing manager at Sierra Summit ski resort, where 2 inches of new snow fell.

The forecast calls for a 50% chance of showers in Fresno this morning, then a cloudy sky that gradually becomes sunny. The high should reach near 72 degrees, and winds could gust to as much as 23 mph.

29,000 lost power

PG&E reported about 29,000 customers lost electricity Tuesday from 75 outages scattered around Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties.

The three largest outages -- affecting a total of 23,500 customers -- were in north Fresno and Clovis, bounded roughly by the San Joaquin River and Copper, Sunnyside and Bullard avenues.

Another outage caused night classes to be canceled at the Willow International campus in northeast Fresno.

By nightfall, 26,580 customers were still without power.

PG&E officials didn't have an estimate for restoring power "because our crews are fighting the rain and the wind," spokesman J.D. Guidi said. "Our goal is to do it as quickly and safely as possible."

Ground soaked up threat of flooding

Fresno County reported few flooding problems, as dry ground soaked up much of the rain. But some trees were blown down by heavy winds, said Bob Palacios, manager of the county's road maintenance and operations division.

The storm was not severe enough to warrant distributing sandbags, said city spokesman Randy Reed, but Clovis, Merced, Visalia and other communities distributed them.

The Fresno Fire Department, however, was busy responding to a number of power-pole fires.

Dust and dirt can build up on lines during the summer. Once rain comes, it can cause electrical shorts, said city fire spokesman Gary Eberhard.

In Tulare, a power pole caught fire about 1 p.m. at Cherry Street and Merritt Avenue, causing a power outage in the neighborhood that included Tulare District Hospital. The hospital had to activate backup generators.

Meanwhile, the Kings County Fire Department reported four power-pole fires from the rain. Two occurred east of Hanford at Fargo and Avenue 8 1/2 and Grangeville and Avenue 8 1/2, causing a power outage

affecting 1,019 customers, said Southern California Edison region manager Cal Rossi. Power was restored to most customers by late afternoon, he said.

The storm is unusually strong for this time of year, partly because it has remnants from Typhoon Melor, which hit Japan this month, said James Brotherton, a Weather Service meteorologist.

Rain fell hardest in the northern part of the Valley, and in the eastern foothills and the Sierra, he said.

The snow level also dropped to around 8,000 feet Tuesday night, with Sierra Summit getting a couple of inches of new snow, Brotherton said.

At least two killed

The California Highway Patrol said heavy rain and high winds contributed to dozens of traffic accidents, including two that turned deadly.

About 2:30 p.m., a motorist ran off Auberry Road near Table Mountain Casino in the foothills of Fresno County. Another car then struck and killed someone who was trying to help out. In all, several cars got tangled up, the CHP said.

Though no rain was reported in Bakersfield, high winds kicked up dust and contributed to a pileup on Interstate 5 north of Highway 119 about 5:15 p.m. At least one person was killed, the CHP said.

Rain and a flash-flood watch will remain in effect through this morning in Mariposa, Madera, Fresno, and Tulare counties, as well as in the Sierra, from Yosemite to the Kern County line.

Mudslides could still occur, especially in areas where fire has scarred the landscape and loosened the soil, Brotherton said.

NorCal evacuations

The storm swept the state, and the main fear was that the rains would cause mud and debris to rush down hillsides made bare from the summer fire, state fire spokeswoman Colleen Baxter said.

Authorities urged evacuation of about 60 homes in the Santa Cruz Mountains town of Davenport, 50 miles south of San Francisco, where an August wildfire stripped vegetation from about 12 square miles of land.

More than 6 inches of rain fell in the Santa Cruz range, the National Weather Service said.

High winds knocked out power to more than a quarter-million Pacific Gas & Electric customers in central and northern areas, but crews had managed to restore power to more than half, said utility spokesman Joe Molica.

Gusts also knocked down a 500 kilovolt transmission line near Moss Landing at the center of the Monterey Bay coast, forcing the state's electrical grid manager to declare a power emergency.

Wind, dust choke Kern, blamed in deadly crash

By Erin Patteson, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2009

Extreme dust and whipping winds blew into Bakersfield Tuesday, impacting air quality and creating havoc on the roadways.

An incoming storm hit Bakersfield earlier than expected, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Limited visibility is believed to be a factor in a fiery, 11-vehicle crash Tuesday afternoon on the southbound lanes of Interstate 5, just north of Highway 119, that killed three people, the Kern County Fire Department reported.

Fire crews used the "Jaws of Life" to remove parts of one crushed vehicle and rescue a small child, who was in a car seat of one of the passenger vehicles.

The child was subsequently transferred to a local hospital.

A total of four big-rigs, two on fire, and seven passenger vehicles, four on fire, were involved in the incident.

Five other people were transferred to local area hospitals in stable condition.

Tuesday evening, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health cautionary statement. It stated in part: "Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections. For people with heart disease, short-term exposure to particle pollution has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmia."

"We're urging folks to stay indoors," said Scott Nester, director of planning at the air district. If people can see, smell or taste dust, they should be indoors if at all possible, Nester said.

The warning asked residents in Kings, Tulare and the valley portion of Kern counties to stay indoors and use caution through Tuesday evening.

The dust is also hurting air quality.

"We're seeing some very high measurements of PM10," Nester said. PM10 is fine particulate matter.

Dr. Tonny Tanus, a Bakersfield allergist, said people with allergies and/or asthma are at risk in dusty, windy weather.

For those with allergies, Tanus suggests staying indoors if possible and wearing a face mask if outdoors.

"I'm more worried about the asthmatics," Tanus said.

If asthmatics already take medication for their asthma, they must be certain to take it on days when the dust is especially bad, Tanus said. They too should try to stay indoors, too, but if they have to be outside, they should wear a face mask.

Tanus suggests immediately removing dust-covered clothes and showering for anybody coming home after being exposed to the dust.

"Basically, just use common sense," Tanus said.

As of Tuesday afternoon, 360,000 Pacific Gas and Electric Co. customers in California had been affected by the storm, said PG&E spokesman Denny Boyles. Approximately 150,000 customers were without power at some point, but none were in Bakersfield.

Boyles said Bakersfield had not been affected as of Tuesday afternoon because the storm was mostly impacting customers in northern California.

Bakersfield Police Department spokeswoman Mary DeGeare said there were a number of calls into the police station on Tuesday. Between noon and 4:30 p.m., there were three non-injury traffic accidents and one hit and run accident. There were four separate calls for landscaping equipment in the road in the area of Highway 178 and Fairfax Road.

There were nine traffic hazards including trees in the road, branches about to fall or already in the road and a call that the railroad crossing in the 1600 block of G Street had fallen onto the tracks.

Michael Connor, assistant street superintendent for the City of Bakersfield, said he had received about 10 calls Tuesday regarding trees that had fallen or trees in the roads. He estimated no more than 20 trees total had fallen due to the wind.

Blowing dust causes crash, closes Highway 119

Taft Midway Driller, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2009

Highway 119 was closed Tuesday after strong winds and blowing dust caused an accident between Valley Acres and Dustin Acres.

There was no word on how long the roadway would be closed.

The winds picked up dust from a plowed field on the east side of the highway, causing zero visibility at times.

Two vehicles collided in the roadway halfway between Valley West Road and Dustin Acres Road just before 1 p.m.

One woman in a car that collided with the pickup was taken to a Bakersfield hospital by ambulance. Her name and the extent of her injuries weren't immediately available.

Shortly before 2 p.m. the California Highway Patrol said it would be a "long-term closure" on Highway 119.

There was no word on when the road would be reopened.

At 1:45 p.m. Kern County Sheriff's deputies were stopping traffic at Elk Hills Road and rerouting it to the north.

The CHP's website said another officer would be sent to the Highway 43- Highway 119 intersection and one to the Tupman Road intersection.

The winds are part of a strong storm system blowing through the area.

Gusts up to 60 miles per hour are possible, the National Weather Service said.

Fire-hit residents prepare for mudslides

By Solvej Schou

O.C. Register, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

LOS ANGELES-A big Pacific storm swept into California on Tuesday with damaging winds and downpours that put one community under an evacuation advisory because of mudslide danger, while residents beneath hillsides denuded by wildfires waited warily for an overnight drenching or possible mudslides.

Orange County, too, was set for rain.

"You'll have intermittent rain through midnight, then the heavier precipitation will come, falling from midnight to 9 a.m. Wednesday," said Mark Moede, a National Weather Service forecaster. "More rain will fall in the northern part of Orange County than the southern part, due to the way the storm track is moving."

Some residents of mountain towns have been placing boulders around their houses, hoping to blunt the power of flash floods.

"We know the fires go through and do a lot of damage," Los Angeles County fire inspector Frederic Stowers said. "Within L.A. County, much of the slopes burned are going to be critical."

Authorities urged evacuation of about 60 homes in the Santa Cruz Mountains town of Davenport, 50 miles south of San Francisco, where an August wildfire stripped vegetation from 12 square miles of land.

More than six inches of rain has fallen in the Santa Cruz range, the National Weather Service said.

The storm slammed into a drought-stricken state that has become a checkerboard of wildfire scars. Flash flood watches were posted for burn areas dating to early 2008.

There was major concern in the foothill suburbs on the perimeter of the Station fire, which blackened 250 square miles of the Angeles National Forest in August and September, destroying dozens of homes and causing two deaths.

Homeowners filled sandbags and crews erected concrete barriers to channel away potential flows from denuded slopes.

Dorothy Kruegermann, 44, of La Crescenta said she had checked the dirt and rocks on the slopes and was considering options.

"We might go to in-laws tonight," she said.

Santa Barbara was also on alert.

"We've been putting boulders on my property," said hair salon owner Walter Claudio, 50, whose hillside home had been evacuated because of a summer fire. "Everyone's been really proactive the last two months, getting ready."

La Crescenta High School teacher Jim Smiley and two sons filled a van with sandbags. He said a neighbor who had been through fire and floods in 1975 advised that mud would go down their driveway and through the door.

"Based on what happened 25 years ago, we're going to have 100 sandbags," Smiley said.

The storm also dropped a half-foot of snow in the Sierra Nevada and whipped up enough dust to make air quality unhealthy in the [San Joaquin Valley](#).

Staff writer Gary Robbins contributed to this report.

Storm knocks out power; mudslides a worry

By Solvej Schou, Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

LOS ANGELES — A big Pacific storm swept into the state yesterday with damaging winds and downpours that put a Central California community under an evacuation advisory because of mudslide danger, while residents near hillsides denuded by wildfires in the south waited warily for an overnight drenching.

Also, high winds from the storm knocked down a 500 kilovolt transmission line near Moss Landing at the center of the Monterey Bay coast, forcing the state's electrical grid manager to declare a power emergency.

Authorities said loss of the line made it hard to get power from Southern California and urged the north to conserve.

The line went down in an area called Path 15, which serves as a major transmission link between the south and north. Officials said the power flow had been cut by a third.

The storm also knocked out power to more than a quarter-million Pacific Gas and Electric customers in central and northern areas, but crews had managed to restore power to more than half, said utility spokesman Joe Molica.

A key concern about the storm was that the rains would cause mud and debris to rush down hillsides made bare from the summer fire, state fire spokeswoman Colleen Baxter said.

Some residents in parts of Santa Barbara and Los Angeles counties have been placing boulders in key areas around their homes, hoping to blunt the destructive power of flash floods.

"We know the fires go through and do a lot of damage," Los Angeles County fire Inspector Frederic Stowers said. "Within L.A. County, much of the slopes burned are going to be critical."

Authorities urged evacuation of about 80 homes in the Santa Cruz Mountains town of Davenport, 50 miles south of San Francisco, where an August wildfire scorched about 12 square miles of land.

More than 6 inches of rain fell in the Santa Cruz range, the National Weather Service said.

The storm slammed into a drought-stricken state that has become a checkerboard of wildfire scars small, big and gigantic.

Flash flood watches were posted for burn areas dating back to early 2008.

Heavy rain, however, was taking its time reaching Southern California, where there was major concern in the Los Angeles foothill suburbs on the perimeter of the huge Station fire, which blackened 250 square miles of the Angeles National Forest in August and September, destroying dozens of homes and causing two deaths.

The fire stripped steep slopes of the San Gabriel Mountains that rise almost literally out of the backyards of homes, and the U.S. Geological Survey recently warned that even small storms could unleash massive flows of debris-laden water into communities.

Homeowners filled sandbags and crews erected concrete barriers to channel potential flows from denuded slopes away from properties.

The unusually strong fall storm also dropped a half-foot of snow in the Sierra Nevada and whipped up enough dust in the [San Joaquin Valley](#) to make air quality unhealthy in Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

Storm allows Cal Fire to ease burn restrictions

By Kim Minugh

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

Following cool temperatures and the region's first significant rain, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection announced Tuesday a decrease in burn restrictions in Nevada, Yuba and Placer counties.

Officials have ended its seasonal ban on residential burning, although residents still are required to obtain permits for any burning and must burn only on days permitted by the local air pollution control district, according to a Cal Fire news release.

Residents also must adhere to the following regulations, according to the release:

- A burn pile can be no larger than 4 feet in diameter.
- All flammable material and vegetation must be cleared within a 10-foot radius of the pile's outer edge.
- A water supply must be kept close by.
- An adult should be present with a shovel during the burning.
- Burning should be done only during appropriate weather conditions. For example, burning should not be conducted on windy days.

For more information about burn permit requirements, call Cal Fire at (530) 889-0111 or go to www.fire.ca.gov

EPA fines Stockton metalworks firm

By The Record

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

STOCKTON - A company that produces metal powder has been fined \$193,996 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for failing to file paperwork about its emissions.

Valimet Inc., on Sperry Road, is required to file emissions reports with the EPA because it processes a certain quantity of potentially toxic materials, including aluminum and copper.

The company failed to submit those reports from 2001 to 2005, the EPA said Tuesday.

David Oberholtzer, Valimet's director of corporate services, said actual emissions at the south Stockton plant are small.

"This was a paperwork violation, and at no time was there any threat to the community," he said.

Valimet employs about three dozen people. The company started out supplying aluminum powder to major aerospace companies for fuel in solid-fuel rocket boosters, but today it serves a variety of other markets, according to its Web site.

It produces millions of pounds of powder each year.

State changes rules after city invests \$4.1M

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

Manteca Bulletin Wed., Oct. 14, 2009

The adoption of state regulations has drastically changed the playing field forcing Manteca to rethink moves made after investing \$3.5 million in a building for police operations and \$600,000 on a co-gen plant for the wastewater treatment facility.

That is on top of more than \$12 million Manteca sewer and water ratepayers are paying because standards have changed for the treatment of both water and wastewater.

None of the expenditures, though, impacts the general fund that the city is trying to balance after a \$14 million deficit developed this year due to dropping revenues and increasing expenses plus the state swiping more than \$1 million. They do, though, underscore how frustrating and expensive it is to deal with state mandates that can change in the middle of civic undertakings.

The former Qualex film processing building consisting of 55,000 square feet at 555 Industrial Park Drive is the latest example. The city purchased it for \$3.6 million several years ago with the intent of having it take care of police headquarters space needs for the next 20 to 30 years.

They even spent money on design work. Manteca was getting ready to move forward when developers sued over the increase in the government facilities fee increase of which part was going to pay for the Qualex remodeling and retrofit that could reach \$10 million. Still, it would have been less than building a comparable building from scratch and acquiring land.

The City Council opted to put the project on hold pending the outcome of the lawsuit. Manteca prevailed in the lawsuit.

Steve Pinkerton, when he arrived at city hall in the summer of 2008 as city manager, asked for a re-evaluation of all pending projects. It was then that staff discovered the state had just changed a regulation regarding holding cells for municipal police departments.

The state was now requiring 24/7 staffing much like the county jail for new police facilities. Existing police department with holding cells that lacked around the clock staffing were grandfathered in.

It was found that it would add at least \$620,000 a year to police department operating costs effectively making a move to 555 Industrial Park Drive a major ongoing budget buster.

Since a holding cell is essential for police operations plus helps reduce the number of trips to take suspects who have been arrested to the county jail, the city has started rethinking its strategy of how to meet police headquarter needs as the city grows.

Police Chief Dave Bricker has said expansion on the Civic Center site would avoid that costly condition unless, of course the state decides to make the requirement apply to expanded police facilities.

The co-gen plant was perhaps even more frustrating.

It was estimated in October 2002 that a co-generation plant installed at Manteca's wastewater treatment plant would start saving more than \$400,000 a year in municipal power costs starting in mid-2003.

But that was before the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) threw a wrench in municipal plans after giving the city a tentative OK to burn methane gas, which has become the bane of air quality experts, instead of letting it escape into the air. The cogen plant was ready to go in May of 2003. But then rules governing co-generation plants changed after the district gave its tentative initial OK and the unit had been ordered and shipped.

The city folded its cards and putting the co-generation plant that originally cost in excess of \$600,000 up for sale. It's in perfectly good shape, has never been used, and has even been updated in a fruitless effort to meet the new standards. And it can still reduce power costs and reduce pollution at the same time. It just can't be used in California.

Manteca is now pursuing a new co-gen plant designed to hack away at the \$1.2 million PG&E bill that the city incurs each year to run the wastewater treatment plant. This time around, they aren't taking "yes" as an answer and are working as close as possible with the district before making each move.

State & federal water rules change

Existing ratepayers got hit with around \$10 million in retrofits for the wastewater treatment plant to address ammonia issues that came up after the state switched testing from native Delta fish to non-native minnows that are less than 15 days old and are highly susceptible to ammonia.

The bulk of that was covered by a state bond measure that had money built into it for Manteca for ammonia removal thanks to former State Sen. Mike Machado.

New rigid standards from the Environmental Protection Agency forced all water suppliers to reduce the level of arsenic found in well water from 50 to 10 parts per billion. There was no recognized health hazard but instead the EPA was acting on the side of caution. Arsenic is naturally occurring in water although treated surface water such as Manteca receives from the Nick DeGroot Water Treatment Plant operated by the South San Joaquin Irrigation District eliminates it.

That is why treated surface water is being blended with some wells to eliminate the need for costly retrofits. Even so, other wells are being retrofitted with treatment devices that can cost over \$1 million plus have ongoing capital costs.

In both the case of the municipal water system and wastewater treatment plant the city consistently met operating and safety standards before they were tightened.

Groups seek tougher rules on pesticide drift

By Robert Rodriguez / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2009

A coalition of advocacy groups is asking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for stronger regulations to protect children against drifting pesticides.

The groups -- including Pesticide Action Network, United Farm Workers union and California Rural Legal Assistance -- plan to file a petition with the EPA today.

The groups want to strengthen the EPA's rules for pesticide use, especially in rural communities, said Heather Pilatic, communications director for the San Francisco-based Pesticide Action Network.

"The EPA has not done enough for people in rural communities, the farmworkers and their children who are the most susceptible," Pilatic said.

The groups are asking the EPA to adopt no-spray buffer zones around homes, schools, parks and day-care centers for the most dangerous and drift-prone pesticides.

EPA officials said they will fully evaluate the new petition, and if risks of concern are identified, the agency will do what is necessary to protect the public.

Also, the EPA is reviewing its approach to determine whether stronger protections are needed on pesticide labels to protect against spray drift. The agency expects to announce its decisions on spray drift label language this year.

A 2007 study by the Pesticide Action Network found evidence of potentially harmful levels of pesticides in the air near South Woods Elementary School in Hastings, Fla.

Of the four pesticides discovered in the air, two are classified as neurotoxins.

Pilatic said the Pesticide Action Network plans to offer testimony in December during an EPA hearing on pesticide drift.

The EPA is reconsidering the criteria used to trigger an assessment of exposure from inhaling pesticides that "volatilize." Volatilization happens when a pesticide changes from a solid or liquid to a gas or vapor after being applied.

EPA releases Bush-era global warming report

Dina Cappiello, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

Washington - -- A controversial e-mail message buried by the Bush administration because of its conclusions on global warming surfaced Tuesday, nearly two years after it was first sent to the White House and never opened.

The e-mail and the 28-page document attached to it, released Tuesday by the Environmental Protection Agency, show that in December of 2007 the agency concluded that six gases linked to global warming pose dangers to public welfare, and wanted to take steps to regulate their release from automobiles and the burning of gasoline.

The document specifically cites global warming's effects on air quality, agriculture, forestry, water resources and coastal areas as endangering public welfare.

That finding was rejected by the Bush White House, which strongly opposed using the Clean Air Act to address climate change and stalled on producing a so-called "endangerment finding" that had been ordered by the Supreme Court in 2007.

As a result, the Dec. 5 e-mail sent by the agency to Susan Dudley, who headed the regulatory division at the Office of Management and Budget was never opened, according to Jason Burnett, the former EPA official that wrote it.

The Bush administration, and then EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, also refused to release the document, which is labeled "deliberative, do not distribute" to Democratic lawmakers. The White House instead allowed three senators, including Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., to review it last summer, when excerpts were released.

The Obama administration in April made a similar determination, but also concluded that greenhouse gases endanger public health. The EPA is currently drafting the first greenhouse gas standards for automobiles, and recently signaled it would attempt to reduce climate-altering pollution from refineries, factories and other large industrial sources.

In response, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Republican lawmakers have criticized the EPA's reasoning and called for a more thorough vetting of the science. An internal review by a dozen federal agencies released in May also raised questions about the EPA's conclusion, saying the agency could have been more balanced and raising questions about the difficulty in linking global warming to health effects.

The agency released the e-mail and documents after receiving requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

Adora Andy, a spokeswoman for EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, said Tuesday that the draft shows the science in 2007 was as clear as it is today.

"The conclusions reached then by the EPA scientists should have been made public and should have been considered," she said.

Hybrid Cars May Include Fake Vroom for Safety

By Jim Motovalli, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, October 13, 2009

For decades, automakers have been on a quest to make cars quieter: an auto that purrs, and glides almost silently in traffic.

They have finally succeeded. Plug-in hybrid and electric cars, it turns out, not only reduce air pollution, they cut noise pollution as well with their whisper-quiet motors. But that has created a different problem. They aren't noisy enough.

So safety experts, worried that hybrids pose a threat if pedestrians, children and others can't hear them approaching, want automakers to supply some digitally enhanced vroom. Indeed, just as cellphones have ring tones, "car tones" may not be far behind — an option for owners of electric vehicles to choose the sound their cars emit.

Working with Hollywood special-effects wizards, some hybrid auto companies have started tinkering in sound studios, rather than machine shops, to customize engine noises. The Fisker Karma, an \$87,900 plug-in hybrid expected to go on sale next year, will emit a sound — pumped out of speakers in the bumpers — that the company founder, Henrik Fisker, describes as “a cross between a starship and a Formula One car.”

Nissan is also consulting with the film industry on sounds that could be emitted by its forthcoming Leaf battery-electric vehicle, while Toyota has been working with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the National Federation of the Blind and the Society of Automotive Engineers on sounds for electric vehicles.

“One possibility is choosing your own noise,” said Nathalie Bauters, a spokeswoman for BMW’s Mini division, who added that such technology could be added to one of BMW’s electric vehicles in the future.

The notion that battery E.V.’s and plug-in hybrids might be too quiet has gained backing in Congress, among federal regulators and on the Internet. The Pedestrian Safety Enhancement Act of 2009, introduced early this year, would require a federal safety standard to protect pedestrians from ultra-quiet cars.

Karen Aldana, a spokeswoman for traffic safety agency, which is also working on the issue, said, “We’re looking at data on noise and E.V. safety, but manufacturers are starting to address it voluntarily.”

A Toyota spokesman, John Hanson, said: “I don’t know of any injuries related to this, but it is a concern. We are moving rapidly toward broader use of electrification in vehicles, and it’s a fact that these cars are very quiet and could pose a risk to unsighted people.”

A study published last year by the University of California, Riverside and financed by the National Federation of the Blind evaluated the effect of sounds emitted by hybrid and internal-combustion cars traveling at 5 miles per hour.

People listening in a lab could correctly detect a gas-powered car’s approach when it was 28 feet away, but could not hear the arrival of a hybrid operating in silent battery mode until it was only seven feet away.

Some electric-vehicle drivers have taken a low-tech approach to alerting pedestrians. When Paul Scott of Santa Monica, Calif., drives his 2002 Toyota Rav4 electric car, he often rolls down the windows along busy streets and turns up his radio so people know his virtually silent vehicle is there.

Mr. Scott, vice president of the advocacy group Plug In America, said he would prefer giving drivers control over whether the motor makes noise, unlike, say, the Fisker Karma, which will make its warning noise automatically.

“Quiet cars need to stay quiet — we worked so hard to make them that way,” he said. “It’s the driver’s responsibility not to hit somebody.”

Mr. Scott has already warmed up to the idea of a car ring tone.

“It should be a manually operated noisemaker, a button on the steering wheel triggering a recording of your choice,” he said. “It could play ‘In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida,’ or anything you like.”

Texas heavy industries worry about EPA crackdown

By John McFarland, The Associated Press

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

DALLAS — For 15 years, environmentalists have complained that state regulations have allowed the powerful oil and chemical industries to skirt Clean Air Act standards in Texas, the nation’s foremost producer of industrial air pollution.

But the Environmental Protection Agency last month scrapped several aspects of the state’s air-pollution permitting program, including “flexible” permits that have allowed about 140 plants and refineries to exceed toxic emissions limits in the short term as long as they complied to overall federal averages in the long term.

Federal regulators say the move, set to take effect next year, is designed to cut toxic emissions and bring Texas in line with the Clean Air Act. And environmental groups say it will help improve the state's ecology and the health of Texans and those living nearby.

Industry groups, however, warn that getting rid of the state program in favor of more rigid standards will hurt industries crucial to the Texas economy, and that the costs of compliance may hit consumers.

"If there is a cost associated with it, it is very likely that it could cost the consumer more," said Debbie Hastings, vice president for environmental affairs for the Texas Oil And Gas Association, whose members provide about 25 percent of the nation's gasoline supply and include industry giants including Exxon Mobil Corp. and ConocoPhillips.

It's too early to know precisely how the rules will change or how much it will cost, but there's worry in the heavy industries that billow tons of toxins but employ thousands of people and pay billions in state and local taxes. Texas has more oil refineries and chemical plants than any other state, and the permit ruling comes as Gov. Rick Perry and industry officials are railing against a climate bill pending in Congress.

Plants could be forced to spend millions of dollars to upgrade pollution control equipment. Industry groups say that in turn could jack up the prices of gas, tires, carpet, upholstery and other products that pass through Texas factories.

"The prices have to keep up with the cost of doing business," said Mike Meroney, a spokesman for Texas Chemical Council, which represents about 80 companies with 200 sites that produce the state's leading export. "Every site's different – it could be very, very costly."

States are required to enforce the Clean Air Act, but they're given some flexibility in how to do it. The EPA approved Texas' major clean-air permitting plan in 1992, and the state has since submitted more than 30 regulatory changes.

The EPA issued its ruling last month as a result of a lawsuit settlement that forced the agency to approve or disapprove aspects of the Texas permitting process, agency spokesman Dave Bary said. The EPA said no other state offered polluters such flexibility, and cited problems with the permit program's enforcement, monitoring and record keeping, among other reasons.

The EPA held its first meeting last week with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which issues the permits, to work on getting the program into compliance. The commission's executive director, Mark Vickery, said the state permit rules have helped cut down on pollution and said the agency would work with the EPA to resolve the problems. The agencies are working through a 60-day comment period before the rules become final next year.

Fadel Gheit, an analyst with Oppenheimer & Co. in New York, said the permitting problem is just one more bit of bad news for industries that are already struggling. Several major oil companies are coming off second-quarter profit declines of more than 50 percent, although the oil industry posted record gains in 2008.

"It's bad, but how bad is the question?" Gheit said. "The outlook couldn't be more grim, and yet the government finds a way to kick them when they're down."

Bary, the EPA spokesman, said there's no way to know exactly how much cleaner the air would have been under federally approved permits.

But Neil Carman, an air specialist with the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club who spent years as an industrial plant inspector with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, said he's certain ending the program will cut emissions. He said it will prove costly to the companies, but not as costly as treating long-term health problems caused by toxic emissions.

Al Armendariz, a chemical engineering professor at Southern Methodist University who is an expert on air pollution and an environmental advocate, said smaller and older facilities could face hefty costs, but major companies won't feel a thing.

"They'll say, 'Look, if we have to spend half a million dollars to re-permit, big deal.' They probably spend more than that on toiletries for those facilities," he said, noting that even multimillion-dollar expenses

would be a "one-time capital blip" for major companies. Armendariz also said he doubts industry claims that consumers could feel any pain.

The oil and gas industry provides about 190,000 Texas jobs and paid about \$10 billion in state and local taxes and royalties last year, according to the oil and gas association, which represents almost every producer and refiner in the state. The chemical industry employs about 74,000 Texans and last year paid \$1 billion in state and local taxes.

The chemical industry is the top air polluter in the state, producing about 16,000 tons of toxic emissions, according to the most recent EPA toxic release inventory in 2007. Oil ranked third, behind power plants, with about 4,500 tons.

Both groups and state regulators say flexible permits have helped, and point to reductions of cancer-causing chemical benzene and ground-level ozone levels in the Houston area that's home to the bulk of the state's oil refineries and chemical plants.

But Carman said it's silly to be content with the progress because Texas is still so polluted.

"That's like somebody going before a judge and saying, 'Your Honor, I know I've had a DWI problem, but I brought it down from 50 DWI's a year ago to 30 now,'" said Carman, who like other environmentalists has long derided the permitting process as a rubber stamp in an industry-friendly state. "That's just not enough, especially when you're talking about things that cause cancer."

Nevada regulators, company agree on mine reopening

By Sandra Chereb, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

CARSON CITY, Nev.—The owner of a Nevada gold mine cited for excessive mercury emissions has signed an agreement with state environmental regulators allowing it to resume operations, officials said Tuesday.

A consent decree filed Monday between the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and Queenstake Resources requires the company to pay a \$550,000 settlement. Queenstake is a subsidiary of Vancouver, British Columbia-based Yukon-Nevada Gold Corp.

Environmental regulators ordered Jerritt Canyon Mine near the Nevada-Idaho line closed on May 30 for failure to install equipment to control mercury air emissions. Yukon-Nevada blamed the failure on needed parts that didn't arrive in time.

The mercury emissions system was installed July 20, NDEP spokeswoman Jill Lufrano said.

"The major issues have been resolved," she said.

The decree, filed in Elko District Court, will become effective once it is approved by a judge, Lufrano said.

NDEP administrator Leo Drozdoff said agency staff will monitor activities at the mine—located 50 miles north of Elko—to ensure compliance with the agreement and environmental regulations.

The decree also requires improvements to fluid management systems, environmental audits and emission controls on process equipment.

State environmental regulators launched an investigation of the mine in December 2006 after Queenstake was cited for failing to properly maintain process equipment and air pollution control systems for mercury emissions. That led to nearly two years of on-again, off-again operations at the mine.

Mercury is a toxic metal that can damage the brain and nervous system.

Lufrano has said the new system will reduce mercury air emissions to 175 pounds per year from the 1,700 pounds reported in 2007.

Obama EPA releases Bush-era global warming finding

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

WASHINGTON—A controversial e-mail message buried by the Bush administration because of its conclusions on global warming surfaced Tuesday, nearly two years after it was first sent to the White House and never opened.

The e-mail and the 28-page document attached to it, released Tuesday by the Environmental Protection Agency, show that back in December of 2007 the agency concluded that six gases linked to global warming pose dangers to public welfare, and wanted to take steps to regulate their release from automobiles and the burning of gasoline.

The document specifically cites global warming's effects on air quality, agriculture, forestry, water resources and coastal areas as endangering public welfare.

That finding was rejected by the Bush White House, which strongly opposed using the Clean Air Act to address climate change and stalled on producing a so-called "endangerment finding" that had been ordered by the Supreme Court in 2007.

As a result, the Dec. 5 e-mail sent by the agency to Susan Dudley, who headed the regulatory division at the Office of Management and Budget was never opened, according to Jason Burnett, the former EPA official that wrote it.

The Bush administration, and then EPA administrator Stephen Johnson, also refused to release the document, which is labeled "deliberative, do not distribute" to Democratic lawmakers. The White House instead allowed three senators to review it in July 2008, when excerpts were released.

The Obama administration in April made a similar determination, but also concluded that greenhouse gases endanger public health. The EPA is currently drafting the first greenhouse gas standards for automobiles, and recently signaled it would attempt to reduce climate-altering pollution from refineries, factories and other large industrial sources.

In response, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Republican lawmakers have criticized the EPA's reasoning and called for a more thorough vetting of the science. An internal review by a dozen federal agencies released in May also raised questions about the EPA's conclusion, saying the agency could have been more balanced and raising questions about the difficulty in linking global warming to health effects.

The agency released the e-mail and documents after receiving requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

Adora Andy, a spokeswoman for EPA administrator Lisa Jackson, said Tuesday that the draft shows the science in 2007 was as clear as it is today.

"The conclusions reached then by the EPA scientists should have been made public and should have been considered," she said.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses campaign begins to support renewable energy law. "Good-bye to global warming" is a national campaign with its purpose to increase awareness of global warming and the need for the US to approve a renewable energy law. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Inician campaña para apoyar ley sobre energía renovable

La Opinión, Wednesday, October 14, 2009

MIAMI, Florida (EFE).- Una campaña nacional para aumentar la concienciación sobre el calentamiento global y la necesidad de que Estados Unidos apruebe una ley sobre energía renovable fue anunciada hoy en Miami.

La iniciativa "Adiós al calentamiento global" es de La Onda Verde del Consejo de Defensa de los Recursos Naturales (NRDC, por su sigla en inglés) y consiste en hacer un llamamiento al público para que tome acción y se involucre en el proceso para aprobar una legislación integral sobre energía renovable.

Ese marco legal posibilitaría al país reconstruir una economía fuerte, crear más empleos, liberarlo de la dependencia de combustibles fósiles y reducir el calentamiento global, según los portavoces de la campaña.

También permitirá a los Estados Unidos asistir a la Cumbre de las Naciones Unidas en Copenhague, en diciembre próximo, con una "propuesta fuerte para lograr un acuerdo más estricto sobre el límite a las emisiones contaminantes y reemplazar el Protocolo de Kioto".

Adriana Quintero, directora de La Onda Verde, dijo que el planeta está al borde una crisis climática debido a que las emisiones de carbono y otros contaminantes causan el calentamiento global e impactan el ecosistema del planeta afectando a todos.

"Muchos de estos cambios ya empezaron. Nuestro planeta está en una encrucijada. Desde el aumento del nivel del Marzo y altas temperaturas hasta eventos climatológicos más extremos y el incremento de la acidificación de los océanos, el calentamiento global por contaminación representa una seria amenaza", advirtió.

La Onda Verde es una iniciativa del NRDC diseñada para informar a la comunidad hispana sobre temas del medio ambiente.

A la campaña se unió el dueto mexicano Jesse & Joy, ganador de un premio Grammy Latino, que acompañó a Quintero en la presentación de la campaña en una escuela secundaria del condado de Miami-Dade.

La iniciativa incluye un concurso por Internet dirigido a los jóvenes para que indiquen en un texto de unos 160 caracteres qué acciones se pueden emprender para detener el calentamiento global.

El ganador sembrará un jardín junto a Jesse y Joy, y también podrá asistir a un concierto acústico como cortesía del dueto.

Durante la presentación de la campaña, Quintero y los músicos subrayaron la importancia de apoyar soluciones que incluyan la energía limpia para detener el calentamiento global y la necesidad de que los jóvenes unan sus voces a la causa.

"La gente joven heredara los resultados de las decisiones que se están tomando hoy en Estados Unidos y en el mundo. Necesitamos hablar con nuestros padres y nuestros líderes y decirles que nos importa nuestro planeta", expresó Jesse Huerta.

Enfatizó la necesidad de animarles a tomar acción ahora para evitar problemas serios con los que la gente joven seguramente tendrá que vivir en el futuro, agregó.

"Las emisiones de gases de invernadero están calentando nuestro planeta", dijo Joy Huerta. "Es nuestra responsabilidad hacer lo que podamos para cambiar esto", precisó.

El evento forma parte de una serie de foros con estudiantes, líderes comunitarios, funcionarios, empresarios, celebridades y expertos en medio ambiente que se llevará a cabo en a nivel nacional.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses nuclear energy is vital in battling climate change. The investment in cleaner technology, adoption of energy efficient measures and the capture of CO₂ emissions are three key points for World Energy Council \(CME\).](#)

La energía nuclear es vital para combatir el cambio climático

El Periodico de Mexico, Tuesday, October 13, 2009

Londres, (EFE).- El Consejo Mundial de Energía (CME) exhortó hoy a los países a aumentar la producción de energía nuclear, al considerar esta medida como una de las "cuatro patas" sobre las que debe sostenerse la lucha contra el cambio climático.

La inversión en tecnología, la adopción de medidas de eficiencia energética y la captura y el almacenamiento de CO₂ son los otros tres puntos claves para el CME, que representa a la industria energética con presencia en cerca de un centenar de países.

En la primera jornada de la cumbre "El camino hasta Copenhague. Energía y soluciones financieras para un mundo post-2012", celebrada hoy en Londres, se puso de manifiesto la necesidad de que el acuerdo

que salga de la reunión sobre el cambio climático que tendrá lugar en la capital danesa en diciembre sea "ambicioso".

"No podemos reemplazar el suficiente volumen de energía con renovables ni tampoco reducir la demanda de forma sustancial a través sólo de un cambio social. Por eso, hay que incrementar la producción de energía nuclear, a la vez que capturamos el CO₂ que generan los combustibles fósiles que todavía utilizamos", subrayó a Efe el vicepresidente del CME, el mexicano Francisco Barnés.

La postura defendida por el Consejo contrasta con la que mantiene el Gobierno español, que no se plantea la construcción de nuevas plantas -como sí están haciendo países de su entorno como el Reino Unido- y que prefiere invertir en renovables.

Barnés felicitó a España en lo que respecta a su política en materia de energía "verde" y aseguró que es "uno de los países más decididos en el desarrollo de las renovables".

El vicepresidente del CME afirmó que la política de incentivos y subvenciones del Ejecutivo español para aumentar la producción de este tipo de energía será rentable "a largo plazo".

"Los incentivos -explicó- son imprescindibles para romper barreras, aunque tienen que desaparecer a medio plazo, cuando ya se ha generado un mercado".

Sobre los efectos de la crisis económica en la lucha contra el cambio climático, el presidente del CME, el francés Pierre Gadonneix, recordó en su discurso de apertura la paradoja que supone que los países destinaran menos recursos a esta cuestión, pese a que en el último año se haya convertido en una prioridad para todos.

El sociólogo Anthony Giddens, ideólogo de la llamada "Tercera vía", recalcó durante su ponencia la necesidad de que se produzca un "cambio en el estilo de vida" occidental para combatir el cambio climático, un requisito que también apuntaron otros expertos reunidos en Londres.

"La economía global no es sostenible tal y como la conocemos", insistió Giddens.

Otro de los expertos, David King, que fue el principal asesor científico del Gobierno británico de 2000 a 2007, puso el acento en incluir en Copenhague "a los países menos desarrollados, ya que de no hacerlo el problema global no estaría resuelto".

"En Kioto (Protocolo de Kioto, 1997, para reducir los gases contaminantes) no fuimos suficientemente ambiciosos. No cometamos el mismo error ahora", indicó, por su parte, el secretario ejecutivo de la Convención de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Clima (UNFCCC, en sus siglas en inglés), Yvo de Boer.

De Boer recordó que no se puede pedir a países como China, Brasil o México que limiten sus emisiones sin que los Estados más ricos aporten fondos para mitigar los efectos de estos cambios en su economía.

Sobre la posibilidad de que China y EU -entre los dos son los responsables del 45 por ciento de las emisiones totales de dióxido de carbono- suscriban un acuerdo en Copenhague, el vicepresidente del CME se mostró cauto.

"Ahora, el Gobierno de EU es mucho más responsable sobre este tema, pero hay que recordar que los acuerdos internacionales -como el que se espera alcanzar en Copenhague- han de ser aprobados por las Cámaras, y eso ya es harina de otro costal. El Gobierno chino también es ahora más sensible al problema medioambiental", razonó.