

State releases first draft 'cap and trade' plan to cut greenhouse gases

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

The California Air Resources Board on Tuesday released a preliminary version of its first-in-the-nation "cap and trade" plan to cut greenhouse-gas emissions.

Tens of billions of dollars will be at stake as the board fills in the details of the program over the next year.

The plan is scheduled to take effect in 2012. Air board staff members are counting on it to deliver at least a fifth of the emissions cuts required by 2020 under Assembly Bill 32, the state's climate change law. In later years, regulators hope, it will be the state's main tool for driving emissions levels even lower.

But key aspects of the cap and trade plan remain uncertain, with the agency yet to resolve many major issues. Two of the biggest:

- Whether the state should give away emissions allowances for free or auction them off, and what the air board would do with any money it collects.
- Whether polluters would be allowed to buy out-of-state and international carbon "offsets" instead of directly cutting their own emissions.

While the air board is now preparing a blizzard of other emissions-cutting regulations, the cap and trade program is likely to be the most closely watched. Federal proposals to cut greenhouse emissions are relying heavily on similar carbon-market strategies.

"Ultimately, what California is doing is important for setting an example of best practice," said Michael Wara, an emissions-trading expert and law professor at Stanford University.

The California program will be the first in the world to cover motor fuels, Wara said. And the state will also have to figure out how to make California's emissions market compatible with plans for a Western regional market and possible federal programs.

Under the cap and trade system, the state would issue annual permits, or allowances, to entities responsible for large volumes of greenhouse gases, from power plant operators to gasoline and diesel suppliers. The total supply of permits would ratchet down over time, giving polluters two options: cut their own emissions or buy allowances from other companies that have made cuts and thus have permits to sell.

The air board estimates that by 2020 the annual value of the state's carbon allowances would be between \$20 and \$60 a ton, making the total carbon market worth between \$7 billion and \$22 billion a year.

Environmental groups generally favor auctioning most or all of the allowances that are issued each year. The auction would generate revenue that the state could use, for instance, to fund investments in emissions-cutting technology. The money might also fund tax breaks for consumers and businesses that would face higher electricity and fuel prices as energy suppliers pass on the expense of the carbon permits.

Business groups generally argue that the permits should be given away to emitting industries in order to reduce the expense of complying with the program.

A third option some economists suggest would be for the state to give the permits as a sort of grant to electricity consumers, industries – like the cement sector – that use large amounts of energy, or even local governments. The recipients could then sell the permits to emitters, raising money to offset increased energy costs.

An air board economic advisory panel is expected to issue a report early next year with recommendations on how the allowances should be issued and how the state should spend any revenues.

Economists say allowing polluters to buy carbon offsets – generated by potentially far-off emissions-cutting projects – would lower the market price of carbon in a cap and trade system. For that reason, industry groups want free access to the global offset market.

The air board has tentatively proposed letting polluters use offsets to meet about half of their emissions-reduction obligations under the program.

Environmental and public-health groups are generally skeptical about offsets. The credits are difficult to verify, they say, and delay in-state innovation and investment in emissions-cutting technology.

The air board has already held 21 public meetings on the cap and trade regulations; the next is scheduled for Dec. 14. The agency's governing board is scheduled to approve a final version of the plan as soon as October 2010.

State proposes trading program to cut emissions

Companies could buy and sell allowances under plan to reduce pollutants 15%.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

California officials on Tuesday issued the nation's first blueprint for a broad-based cap-and-trade plan, an innovative and controversial effort to use market forces to control global warming.

The ambitious program would cap most of the state's greenhouse gases, including those from more than 600 power plants, refineries, cement plants and other big factories. It would allow companies to buy and sell emission allowances among themselves to reach an overall goal of cutting planet-warming pollutants 15% below today's levels by 2020.

The state's action comes as Congress wrestles with a cap-and-trade bill for planet-heating emissions. Legislation passed by the House is stalled in the Senate.

"California is first out of the box," California Air Resources Board Chairman Mary Nichols said.

Regulators estimated that California's program could cost industry as much as \$8 billion a year by 2020 if carbon trades at its current price on the European market of \$20 per ton. European nations have operated a cap-and-trade program for the last five years.

But industry groups warned that the state's push to control greenhouse gases could cost more than twice as much, and burden consumers with more expensive electricity, gas, housing and consumer goods.

The measure is a signature issue for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has pushed for flexible market-based solutions to environmental problems. He praised the proposal as a way to "drive innovation and generate green jobs."

The 135-page rule, designed with input from national academic, industry and environmental experts at 21 public workshops this year, is likely to influence the shape of eventual federal regulations.

But the current draft leaves several controversial elements unresolved: how many emission allowances to auction off, rather than give away for free, and how to spend the revenue.

Those issues are being debated by a committee of experts headed by Stanford economist Lawrence Goulder, which is to report to the air board early next year.

Environmental groups are divided over the virtues of carbon trading, with groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council supporting a market approach and others charging that it lets industries off the hook, especially in highly polluted areas such as Los Angeles.

Greg Karras, senior scientist for Communities for a Better Environment, which has filed a suit to block the cap-and-trade option, called it "institutionalized environmental justice," adding that it

would encourage "the most entrenched polluters, including oil," to continue emitting toxics and smog-forming pollutants, which are associated with carbon emissions.

California's push comes amid growing alarm over the likely effects of global warming on the state, the nation and the planet. Sierra Nevada snowpacks are diminishing, sparking drought and water shortages. Central Valley orchards are suffering declines, and the habitats of local animals and birds are changing.

In a report last April, "Indicators of Climate Change in California," the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment found that the state's higher temperatures, rising sea levels and increasing wildfires are consistent with climate changes occurring globally.

The state's proposed cap-and-trade program would take effect beginning in 2012, complementing other rules adopted under AB32, the state's , to limit carbon dioxide from automobile tailpipes and the carbon content of fuels. The law requires greenhouse gases to drop to 1990 levels by 2020.

Nichols called the cap-and-trade draft a "milestone . . . to address our state's contributions to climate change, as the eighth-largest economy in the world." And she pointedly contrasted it with the upcoming gathering of 190 nations in Copenhagen next month "for another conference at which no international treaty will be signed."

But the plan could face further court challenges. "Serious legal questions about the Air Resources Board's right to conduct an auction and spend the revenue have not been settled," warned the AB32 Implementation Group, an industry coalition.

Environmentalists want all permits to be auctioned, with the money spent on clean energy projects and on communities heavily affected by air pollution. Industry prefers that most allowances be given out for free. And the California Legislature, short on funds, may weigh in.

One controversial provision would allow industries to purchase "offsets," such as contributing to the [http://](#) preservation of a forest or the capture of methane from a landfill, to meet 49% of their obligations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Companies prize offsets as an alternative to installing often-expensive pollution controls, or, in the case of utilities, to building solar and wind farms to replace fossil fuel plants.

But Bill Magavern, California director for the Sierra Club, warned that the draft rule "allows polluters far too liberal use of offsets to buy their way out of reducing their emissions."

Six other Western states and four Canadian provinces have joined with California in a [http://](#) Western Climate Initiative with an eye toward linking in a regional cap-and-trade program.

Meanwhile, if a federal bill passes, California's program, along with a cap-and-trade program in the northeastern U.S. that covers only power plants, would probably merge with a national program. But Nichols said the state could be free to require more emissions cuts in some cases.

Air district issues burn restriction reminder

By Chris Treadway

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has issued a reminder that restrictions on wood burning are in effect through Feb. 28.

The regulations mean no burning is allowed when a Spare the Air alert has been issued; violators face a fine after the first infraction. The rules are intended to curtail wintertime air pollution, to which wood smoke is the largest contributor and constitutes a health hazard, the district says.

The district will declare a Spare the Air alert when air pollution is forecast to reach unhealthy levels. During an alert, the use of wood-burning devices — including fireplaces, pellet stoves, wood stoves and outdoor fire pits — is forbidden.

Air district air-quality forecasts are made by 2 p.m. daily and remain in place for 24 hours. First-time violators will receive a warning. The fine for a second violation is \$400 and increases with subsequent infractions.

Wood smoke contains particulate matter and carbon monoxide, as well as toxins such as dioxin, which is linked to increased cancer rates in adults. The district says that wood smoke from the Bay Area's 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves contributes about one-third of the harmful particulate pollution in the air.

Residents can check Spare the Air status before they burn by visiting www.baaqmd.gov or www.sparetheair.org, calling 877-4-NO-BURN or signing up for e-mail alerts at www.sparetheair.org or phone alerts at 800-430-1515.

Studies: Fighting global warming reduces diseases

By Seth Borenstein - AP Science Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Washington Post and other papers, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Cutting global warming pollution would not only make the planet healthier, it would make people healthier too, newly released studies say.

Slashing carbon dioxide emissions could save millions of lives, mostly by reducing preventable deaths from heart and lung diseases, the studies show. They were published in a special issue of The Lancet British medical journal, released Wednesday.

The calculations of lives saved were based on computer models that looked at pollution-caused illnesses in certain cities. The figures are also based on the world making dramatic changes in daily life that may at first seem too hard and costly to do, researchers conceded.

Cutting carbon dioxide emissions would also reduce other types of air pollution, especially tiny particles that lodge in the lungs and cause direct health damage, doctors said. Other benefits could come from encouraging more exercise and less meat consumption, to improve heart health, researchers said.

"Reducing greenhouse gases not only helps save the planet in the long term, but it's going to improve our health virtually immediately," said Christopher Portier, associate director of the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. That agency helped fund the studies along with the Wellcome Trust and several other international public health groups.

"It's not 50 years from now, it's now," Portier said.

Instead of looking at the health ills caused by future global warming, as past studies have done, this research looks at the immediate benefits of doing something about the problem.

And for places like the United States, those advantages of reduced heart and lung diseases are bigger than the specific future health damage from worsening warming, Portier said.

Some of the benefits would only come from dramatic - and what could be considered unlikely - changes in everyday life, such as more bicycling and walking and reduced meat consumption. Other proposals studied are more concrete and achievable, such as eliminating cook stoves that burn dung, charcoal, wood and other polluting fuels in India and the rest of the developing world. All are part of a number of proposals examined by researchers that are aimed at cutting global greenhouse gas emissions, mostly from the burning of fossil fuels, by 50 percent by 2050.

"Here are ways you can attack major health problems at the same time as dealing with climate change," said lead author Dr. Paul Wilkinson, an environmental epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The individual studies came up with numbers of premature deaths prevented or extra years of life added for certain locales, but they could not be added up to one overall number of lives saved worldwide, Wilkinson said. Still, he added, "the numbers would be substantial, would certainly be in the millions."

For example, switching to low-polluting cars in London and Delhi, India, would save 160 lost years of life in London and nearly 1,700 in Delhi for every million residents, one study found. But if people also drove less and walked or biked more, those extra saved years would soar to more than 7,300 years in London and 12,500 years in Delhi because of less heart disease.

Another study found that reducing - though not eliminating - meat consumption would decrease heart disease roughly 15 percent in England and in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Meat consumption is a global warming issue because large livestock farms emit large amounts of the potent greenhouse gas methane.

Sometimes climate change efforts could add to health problems, such as certain home energy efficiency improvements that might seal houses so much that they add to deaths from radon and secondhand smoke exposure, Wilkinson said. But those are offset by other health benefits, he added.

Outside scientists praised the studies and said the research was sound.

"The science is really excellent; the modeling is quite good," said Dr. Paul Epstein of the Harvard School of Medicine's Center for Health and the Global Environment. "It really takes the whole field a step farther."

However, Portier and Wilkinson concede that getting people to eat less meat and to exercise more would be tough to achieve.

"We really have to change our lifestyles," said Portier, who is eating less meat and hopes to soon bicycle more. "I can't help but hope that we can."

EPA proposes sulfur dioxide limits for first time since 1971

By Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers

Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The Environmental Protection Agency is continuing its crackdown on coal pollution with a new plan to cut sulfur dioxide - a move that would clean up the air for millions of Americans and bring some relief to people who suffer from asthma and other respiratory diseases.

The new rule, which was proposed this month, would be the first time since 1971 that the EPA has tightened controls on sulfur dioxide to protect the public health.

"This would be an important step to ensure the health of the American public," said Dr. Alan H. Lockwood, a professor of neurology and nuclear medicine at the University of Buffalo. "Tens of thousands of Americans die each year from inhaling pollutants from coal burning."

By targeting coal pollutants, the EPA is cleaning up the fuel that generates half the electricity generated in the U.S. Earlier, after a series of court orders, the EPA said it would require power plants to eliminate mercury pollutants. Now, the public and industry officials will be able to comment on the sulfur dioxide proposal. A public hearing is set for Atlanta in January.

In making its case for tougher regulations, the EPA's science advisers said research over the past 35 years shows that current regulations didn't protect public health enough, and the estimated health benefits would greatly outweigh new costs to industry.

Sulfur dioxide is emitted by coal-fired power plants and industries. Fossil fuel combustion at power plants produces 66 percent of the sulfur dioxide in the air, the EPA reported. Most of the rest is from burning fossil fuels for industry, but smaller amounts of the pollutant also are released from other industrial processes, such as extracting metal from ore, and the use of high-sulfur fuels by locomotives, ships and non-road equipment.

Sulfur dioxide in the atmosphere converts into fine particle pollution that penetrates the lungs and can cause or worsen lung diseases. Exposure to the pollutant even for a short time can make it hard for people with asthma to breathe when they're active outdoors. The scientific reports also

show that children and adults over 65 and people with heart or lung disease are at the greatest risk.

The old rules set limits for sulfur dioxide as averages measured over 24-hour and one-year periods. The new, more protective rule would require one-hour measurements. As a result, short-term spikes of the pollutant above a new limit - between 50 and 100 parts per billion over one hour - no longer would be acceptable.

The EPA also proposed more monitoring and better ways to alert the public about short-term high levels of sulfur dioxide. The new rules will become final by June 2.

The EPA estimated that if the rule were put in place with the strongest limits the agency is recommending, the benefits in 2020 would include 4,700 to 12,000 fewer premature deaths a year and 3.6 million fewer cases of worsened asthma. It also calculated that the costs of \$1.8 billion to \$6.8 billion would be greatly outweighed by the health benefits from such things as fewer emergency room visits or lost days of work.

Lockwood of the University of Buffalo is the lead author of a new report by Physicians for Social Responsibility that looks at the health impacts of coal from mining and transportation to burning it and handling post-combustion waste.

The report, released on Nov. 18, examines peer-reviewed scientific reports on the harm from all forms of coal pollution to the lungs, heart and nervous system. The report also listed dangers to human health from climate change, including deaths in more frequent heat waves and the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.

Obama to outline US climate goals at Copenhagen

By Julie Pace - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama will attend a widely anticipated global climate summit in Copenhagen next month to spell out the U.S. goal for curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

The president will take part in the conference on Dec. 9 before heading to Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. The White House announcement Wednesday ends heavy speculation about whether the president would go.

White House adviser Mike Froman said Obama made the decision to travel to Denmark "to give momentum to the negotiations there."

The president will lay out his goals for reducing the United States' carbon dioxide emissions, pledging to cut heat-trapping pollution by about 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020. That target reflects the still-unfinished climate legislation on Capitol Hill.

A House-passed bill would slash heat-trapping pollution somewhere in the range of 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020. A Senate bill seeks a 20 percent reduction over the next decade, but that number is likely to come down to win the votes of moderate Democrats.

The European Union has urged the United States, as well as China, to deliver greenhouse gas emission targets at the summit, saying their delays were hindering global efforts to curb climate change.

The conference had originally been intended to produce a new global climate change treaty on limiting emissions of greenhouse gases that would replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. However, hopes for a legally binding agreement have dimmed lately, with leaders saying the summit is more likely to produce a template for future action to cut emissions blamed for global warming.

At least 65 world leaders will attend the summit, but unlike Obama, most are expected to attend the final days of the Dec. 7-18 conference.

Yvo de Boer, U.N. climate treaty chief, told reporters in Bonn Wednesday, "I think it's critical that President Obama attend the climate change summit in Copenhagen. The world is very much

looking to the United States to come forward with an emission reduction target and contribute to financial support to help developing countries."

While Obama himself tried to tamp down expectations during his eight-day trip to Asia earlier this month, he also called on world leaders to come to an agreement that has "immediate operational effect" and is not just a political declaration.

The administration has indicated for nearly a year that it would eventually come up with specific targets for quick reductions in pollution that causes global warming, as part of international negotiations.

This will be Obama's second trip to Denmark this year. He made short trip to Copenhagen on Oct. 2 to make a vain pitch for 2016 Summer Olympics in Chicago during a meeting of the International Olympic Committee.

Obama to attend climate talks in Copenhagen

By Michael D. Shear and Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writers
Washington Post, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

President Obama will travel to Copenhagen in December to help kick off the global climate talks despite the conference's failure to secure a binding worldwide treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

An administration official said Obama will travel to the Danish capital Dec. 9, one day before he visits nearby Oslo to officially accept the Nobel Peace Prize.

There had been doubts about whether the president would attend the climate change conference. He had said for weeks that he would go only if his presence would help produce a meaningful result.

During Obama's recent trip to Asia, global leaders acknowledged publicly what had been clear for months: that there was not the consensus to produce a treaty next month.

But officials in many countries also pledged to reach an interim agreement that would not be legally binding on the countries, but would set targets for emission reductions and be a step toward a treaty.

The United States has yet to announce the targets it will seek to meet, but administration officials this week said they would announce those soon, saying they would be broadly consistent with climate change legislation moving through Congress.

An administration official said Obama will meet with other world leaders in Copenhagen and will help "move the process forward" during his one-day visit to the conference, which is scheduled to take place from Dec. 7 to Dec. 18.

Environmentalists welcomed the announcement, but cautioned that Obama shouldn't expect that his mere presence at the talks would be enough to ensure a successful outcome.

"Obviously, we are glad that President Obama will be in Copenhagen in the early part of the climate summit. It's important that his words during this important moment convey that the United States intends to make climate change a legislative priority, not simply a rhetorical one," said Keya Chatterjee, climate director for the World Wildlife Fund.

But, she said, Obama "must also be willing to return to Copenhagen with the rest of the world's leaders during the final stages of the negotiations" if necessary -- a commitment that the White House has not made.

"To make good on any promises made in Copenhagen," Chatterjee added, "the President should put the full weight of the White House behind Senate passage of a climate bill in the first part of 2010."

At Copenhagen climate talks, Obama will promise 17% drop in greenhouse gases

A White House official says the president will commit to that target for the U.S. He will speak at the summit Dec. 9.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer
L.A. Times, Wed., Nov. 25, 2009

Reporting from Washington - President Obama will attend the international climate negotiations in Copenhagen next month, according to a senior administration official, a sign of the president's increasing confidence that the talks will yield a meaningful agreement to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

The White House also will announce today that the United States will commit, in the talks, to reduce its emissions of the heat-trapping gases scientists blame for global warming "in the range of" 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, the official said. That's the target set out in the climate bill the House passed in June.

The president will address negotiators on Dec. 9, just after the opening of the two-week summit, on his way to pick up the Nobel Peace Prize in nearby Sweden. His speech will come ahead of planned visits by prominent heads of state from Europe and around the world.

White House officials said the decision to attend came after productive climate discussions between Obama and the heads of China and India, two developing nations whose participation is seen as critical to any successful effort to negotiate an agreement.

Those discussions left the president optimistic that his presence in Copenhagen could seal a meaningful - though not legally binding - climate deal, meeting the standard that Obama previously set for his attendance at the summit, the officials said.

Environmentalists have pushed for Obama's attendance to add heft to the Copenhagen meeting, which was originally intended to produce a new climate deal to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Several nations key to the talks, including the United States and China, have conceded in recent weeks that negotiations have proceeded too slowly to produce a legally binding treaty in Copenhagen. Instead, those nations are now aiming for a sort of executive summary of a future treaty to be completed next year; that summary would nevertheless include critical issues such as emissions reduction pledges for individual nations.

Obama has stressed the importance of the talks. In public speeches and private meetings with world leaders, he has repeatedly pledged U.S. action to curb global warming, in contrast to eight years of reluctance under the Bush Administration.

But he wavered on whether to attend in person, even as leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown committed to go.

Obama's attendance carries political risks at home, where his energy and climate bill has bogged down in the Senate behind health care. Republicans in particular are mindful of Obama's trip to Copenhagen earlier this year, when he lobbied unsuccessfully for Chicago's bid to host the 2016 Summer Olympics.

His absence at the talks could have brought serious repercussions abroad, where many nations are already blaming the dim prospects for a legally binding treaty in Copenhagen on the United States' failure to adopt emissions limits.

An interview with Al Gore

By Craig Welch - The Seattle Times
In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

SEATTLE -- Former Vice President Al Gore was in Seattle recently to speak at Town Hall and promote his new book, "Our Choice: Creating a Green Future." He sat down briefly with The Seattle Times.

Q. The U.S. Senate is still fighting over reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) and other emissions that contribute to global warming. President Obama recently admitted an international accord was unlikely during a December climate summit in Copenhagen. What's your assessment?

A. "Is it frustrating to see them scale back expectations for Copenhagen? Yes, of course, but this problem is so difficult it's not surprising that we have to take a couple of runs at it. And the current state of the U.S. Senate, in its struggles to pass anything that has the characteristics of reform, makes it unfortunately not surprising that it's difficult to get the votes put together. The good news is it has passed the House. The president is committed to progress and the progress in other nations has been very impressive.

"Don't forget, the Environmental Protection Agency just enacted a binding rule that requires CO2 reductions whether legislation passes or not. All major CO2 emitters will have to publicly report their emissions. ...

"I'll admit that I look for causes of optimism, but the good news is I find a lot of it."

Q. Some supporters of greenhouse-gas reductions are disappointed with Obama. What do you think?

A. "Within the first month after taking office, he adopted a package of green stimulus measures that jump-started the planning and construction of a supergrid, led to renewed activity in solar, wind, enhanced geothermal. He's now pushing hard on an aggressive buildings efficiency program - both retrofits and standards for new buildings. His approach to Copenhagen was hobbled by the inability to get legislation out of the Senate, because after the last 10 years the world community understandably needs to see that the U.S. is actually going to change its laws. And the health-care battle dragged on far longer than anyone thought it would."

Q. Was it a mistake to take up health care?

A. "Well, it was a judgment call. The truth is we need both climate legislation and health reform and a new president has a maximum mandate at the beginning of his term. Would I like to see the No. 1 priority be climate? Yes. But the very fact that he has made it one of his top three priorities is welcome."

Q. Do you think whatever climate legislation the Senate passes will work?

A. "I'm one who believes that the House legislation, though much weaker than I would have wanted, nevertheless begins the process of powerful change that I think would prove to be unstoppable. And if the Senate legislation ends up as good ... it will be criticized as too weak, but it will be a very important step forward. The truth is, once the business community and the political community sees this process under way, they'll find - as they've always found in these pollution reduction efforts - that it's cheaper and easier than the naysayers say."

A recent Pew Research Center poll suggests the public is less likely than a few years ago to believe global warming is a problem. What do you make of that?

A. "There's a seeming paradox in the polls if you take them all together over the last 10 years. When you ask people how important this issue is, how real is it, should we do something about it, big majorities always say yes, it's real, it's manmade, we've got to do something about it. But then, when you turn it to one side and give people a list of 20 problems and ask them to rank them in priority order, climate has usually come out in the bottom quartile. And I think one of the reasons for that is something I address (in a chapter in his new book) about the way we think about climate change.

"It's unprecedented in its scope, in its magnitude, in its seriousness, but in other ways as well. Because its unfolding manifestations play out on a global scale, it masquerades as an abstraction. And because the length of time between the cause and the consequence is stretched

out over a longer period than we're used to dealing with viscerally, it requires a different kind of approach."

Winds blow ash from burn areas in LA area

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, November 24, 2009

LOS ANGELES—Ash and dust from areas burned by recent wildfires is being blown across Los Angeles County by gusty Santa Ana winds.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District says ash fell Tuesday in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, north and east of downtown Los Angeles.

The AQMD says particles haven't reached unhealthy levels yet but urges people to minimize exposure.

The agency says that everyone, but especially those with heart or lung disease, older adults and children should limit outdoor activities in places where ash and dust is seen in the air.

A vast area of the Angeles National Forest north and east of Los Angeles was denuded this past summer by the Station Fire, the largest in Los Angeles County history. Other areas were burned by smaller fires.

Wyoming won't try to block park snowmobile plan

By Ben Neary, Associated Press Writer

in the Washington Post, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

Cheyenne, Wyo. (AP) -- With less than a month to go before snowmobile season roars to life again in Yellowstone National Park, litigation continues to swirl over a new federal cap on the maximum daily number of machines.

Wyoming Attorney General Bruce Salzburg said Tuesday the state doesn't plan to seek an injunction against a new Park Service rule that limits the number of snowmobiles entering Yellowstone this winter and next to less than half what had allowed in recent years.

The Park Service issued a temporary rule on Friday limiting snowmobiles to 318 a day at Yellowstone starting next month and continuing through the next winter season. The agency had allowed up to 720 snowmobiles a day into the park over the past five winters but actual use has been far less.

The U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver on Tuesday dismissed a separate legal challenge in which Wyoming and various snowmobile groups had tried to block the Park Service from imposing the new snowmobile limits.

Wyoming had asked the appeals court to allow U.S. District Judge Clarence Brimmer of Cheyenne to rule whether the 318-machine cap violated the judge's earlier court order. However, the appeals court ruled that the issue became pointless when the Park Service issued its final rule on Friday.

The state and many tourist towns on Yellowstone's borders say snowmobile travel into the park is an important for winter tourism and that cuts are hurting the local economy.

Wyoming filed a new federal lawsuit against the new rule the day it was issued. However, Salzburg said Tuesday the state won't seek a court order to block the new rule before the Yellowstone winter season starts Dec. 15.

"The outfitters up in that area already are planning for that limit," Salzburg said Tuesday of the 315 daily cap. "It would be very difficult for us to support an injunction because we can't demonstrate irreparable harm."

Al Nash, spokesman for Yellowstone, said last week that the agency imposed the temporary plan as a way to continue to provide public access to the park while working on a new long-term plan.

Environmental groups have pushed for decades to limit snowmobile use in Yellowstone, saying the machines [increase air pollution](#), disturb wildlife and cause too much noise.

The National Parks Conservation Association filed papers on Tuesday seeking to intervene in the federal lawsuit that the state of Wyoming filed last week.

"Yellowstone deserves the highest level of protection to ensure the preservation of its environment and wildlife," said Patricia Dowd, Yellowstone program manager with the NPCA.

James F. Davis, deputy Park County Attorney, said Tuesday that the county plans to file its own lawsuit challenging the 318 snowmobile cap.

"The reduction and limitations on snowmobile use at our entrances over the years had a major effect on the winter economy in Cody," Davis said. "Obviously, it's our belief that continuing numbers as they are is continuing to have an effect on the economy."

EPA, group look to settle lawsuit over Utah rules

By Associated Press

In the S.F.Chronicle and other papers, Wed., Nov. 25, 2009

DENVER (AP) -- An environmental group and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are seeking to settle a lawsuit aimed at getting Utah to change its air pollution regulations. WildEarth Guardians filed a lawsuit in September challenging Utah's rules, specifically a provision that the group says lets facilities exceed emissions limits when pollution-control equipment breaks down.

The group wants the EPA to tell the state the provision doesn't comply with the federal Clean Air Act.

In documents filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Denver, the group and EPA propose resolving the lawsuit by having the EPA rule by sometime in 2011 whether Utah needs to revise its rules.

The EPA also would pay nearly \$4,600 to settle the group's claim for costs and attorneys' fees.

[Stockton Record Editorial, Wednesday, November 25, 2009](#)

With state, get it in writing

It was a puzzling, but not altogether unexpected, reaction local officials received Friday from federal prison health care receiver J. Clark Kelso.

Stockton, San Joaquin County and the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce earlier in the week had sued Kelso and state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations officials to make sure the state and Kelso made good on their vows to see that adverse affects from a huge prison project the state plans are mitigated.

Local officials said Thursday they would put their suit into hibernation for 30 days at a time while they worked with prisons officials on mitigation measures. There is fear from some here that the 1,734-bed prison hospital, a mental health facility and a prison re-entry facility, among other things, will seriously draw down on the limited pool of health care and correctional workers here, strain municipal services and add to [air pollution](#).

"We're saying, 'Let's sit down and try to work this out without going through the litigation process,'" said Stockton attorney Steve Herum.

Kelso, who last year sued Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in an attempt to force the state to pay billions for a series of six prison hospitals he wanted to build, was hearing none of it from Herum.

"The county's, city's and chamber's belated attempt now to offer a tolling agreement is a day late and a dollar short," said Kelso spokesman Luis Patino in a prepared statement.

When Kelso met with The Record's editorial board earlier this month, he said he regretted having sued the governor because it delayed by a year reaching a workable settlement with state corrections officials. His suit, Kelso said, only made the governor dig in his heels. Now it's Kelso's turn to dig in his heels

"If we can (work out a deal), that's terrific," said Herum of the suit. "If not, we have confidence in our legal position inasmuch as we filed our lawsuit."

We have confidence, too, that despite assurances from Kelso and the state, local officials better be prepared for a siege. Kelso is under federal court orders to improve health care for prison inmates.

The state-Kelso proposal will go forward. It's up to local officials to use the suit to make the prison projects benefit this county as much as possible and to harm it as little as possible.

By his comments Friday, Kelso made it clear the negotiations will be tough. Get any agreement in writing. A promise and a handshake aren't good enough.

[Turlock Journal, Guest Commentary, Wednesday, November 25, 2009](#)

Break the glass, douse the flames

By Dr. E. Kirsten Peters

As everyone who watches the evening news knows, in the western United States wildfires and forest fires are common enough in the late summer. Young people work diligently on fire-crews here in the West, fighting one of nature's great forces. Out-of-control blazes in our National Forests are all but an annual event, with only the number and intensity of the fires varying from year to year.

Wildfires in grasslands often last just a couple of hours or days, and forest fires in trees are generally measured in days to weeks. In other words, all such fires are relatively short-lived. And that, as my young friends would say, is a "clear positive."

A clear negative must be acknowledged for another type of uncontrolled fire, a kind that burns year round, not just for a season — and, in fact, generally blazes for decades. These are the fires geologists know best, and it's time that others learned about them.

The fires I have in mind are made of burning coal. Such unwanted coal fires rage or smolder in the United States, South Africa, Australia, China, India, and beyond. They are burning in huge volumes in rural China and blazing in a district of India to such a great extent the flames from some surface coal fires are over 20 feet high. Here in the U.S. they are burning in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Colorado, and Wyoming as you read these words.

People with little experience of coal may think it should be a simple matter to put out a coal blaze. Buckets of water, some would guess, should quench the flames, like water on a charcoal grill. But, in fact, coal can burn very hot (when oxygen is available at the surface) or smolder slowly (when little air is around under the surface). And once a major coal seam is ignited underground or near the surface of the Earth, it's quite difficult to control. Putting out a significant coal blaze by hand is almost impossible.

The public might also be surprised to learn the total effect of these unwanted coal fires. Carbon dioxide production from unwanted coal fires around the world is enormous. And because coal underground burns incompletely to a variety of gases, there are also other greenhouse gases beyond carbon dioxide that are at issue, such as methane and carbon monoxide.

According to one technical paper from the Department of Energy I've been studying lately, about 2 percent of all annual industrial global emissions of carbon dioxide come as a byproduct of unwanted coal fires in China alone. In other words, coal fires in China — which are legion

because their mines are often hand-dug into near-surface coal seams, a practice going back to antiquity – are adding a couple of percent to our total global production of carbon dioxide from industrial sources like powerplants and auto engines.

But I'm not picking on China. We've got coal fires burning here in America including one near Laurel Run, Pennsylvania that's burned since 1915. And perhaps you've heard the story of a hamlet called Centralia that's also located in coal country in Pennsylvania?

Centralia is basically unlivable today because of a coal blaze. The Earth itself in the town is hot, the air is tainted with smoke and toxic gasses, and the ground itself collapses from time to time. It has these characteristics because, when the town's landfill trash was burned off in 1962, it lit a coal seam just under the trash pit. From that day to this one, the fire has been burning.

At the end of the first Gulf War, the reader may remember that Saddam Hussein's forces left Kuwait's oilfields ablaze when they retreated to Iraq. It was said at the time that putting out the oilfield fires would take many years. But in fact, due to the work of an American company and the best technology of the day, most of the fires were out within months.

Coal fires pose some different problems than oil-fires, but it's time we turned up our sleeves to address the blazes that we most likely can douse. We would be helping the folks living near the fires today, as well as our posterity tomorrow.

— Dr. E. Kirsten Peters is a native of the rural Northwest, but was trained as a geologist at Princeton and Harvard. A library of past Rock Doc columns is available at www.rockdoc.wsu.edu. This column is a service of the College of Sciences at Washington State University.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2009:](#)

Transportation plans

This is regarding the Nov. 20 letter, "Pedestrian safety issue has income component." It is true that Bakersfield has a built environment that is auto centric. This urban design has consequences on the social equity of the community. Lower-income individuals are forced to spend a higher proportion of income for transportation when the automobile is the dominant transportation mode.

A community which is designed for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use offers a much more affordable transportation choice to its citizens. Bakersfield is moving into the 21st century and plans for the future with its general plan update. The update will certainly require new development to be more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

This will require a change in the street standards as they now exist. The new standards will need to comply with new state laws SB 375 and the Complete Streets Act. As the planners and transportation engineers work out the details of a built environment that is not based solely on automobile movement, we will begin to solve many of the problems which we now face, including but not limited to [air quality](#), traffic congestion, obesity and social equity.

The solutions will need to be incorporated into the existing urban fabric. Much of what has been built needs to be modified. Funding choices will have to be made.

We look forward to working with the city of Bakersfield and the county of Kern to redefine how they provide safe, comfortable, healthy transportation choices to all of its citizens.

Robert E. Smith, Bike Bakersfield

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, November 24, 2009](#)

Use fireplaces judiciously

The weather is cooler. Citizens are burning wood in their fireplaces. When there is little or no wind, the smoke from the fireplaces hangs in the air and eventually works its way inside every home in the community.

Wood smoke is a carcinogen. Prolonged exposure causes lung cancer and may be linked to breast and colon cancers. Smoke also causes eye irritation.

Ninety percent of the heat generated in a fireplace does not benefit the home. Colder air is drawn from outside into rooms away from the fireplace as heated air goes up and out the chimney. Wood stoves may generate more heat, but they also create smoke.

Use of the fireplace increases the risk of chimney fire. If you have a wood shake roof or trees near your home, make sure embers cannot escape your chimney or end up in your trash bin.

If you buy wood, you probably aren't saving money over the cost of operating a space heater.

Use your fireplace judiciously -- like when the power is out -- and not when the air is stagnant. Please show consideration for the health of your neighbors.

Bruce R. Frohman, Modesto

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