

## **New hydrogen plant information center open house scheduled**

Taft Midway Driller, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009

Taft, Calif. - Hydrogen Energy California will be hosting an open house Wednesday afternoon to celebrate the holiday season and the opening for the information center for its new hydrogen energy plant to be built near Tupman.

Light refreshments will be served and the event will be held in heated outdoor tents.

The information center is located in the center of Buttonwillow across the street from the Kern County Sheriff's substation.

An open house begins at 4 p.m. and at 4:30 p.m.

Jonathon Briggs, regional director for Hydrogen Energy California, will give a welcome address and overview of the project.

That will be followed by a screening of a 5-minute video on the power project.

HECA is a joint venture between RIO Tinto and BP and the plant will produce enough electricity for more than 150,000 homes [while reducing carbon emissions by 90 percent](#) compared to conventional power plants.

## **Wind farm gets supervisors' OK**

By James Burger, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009

The largest wind energy project in California's history got the go-ahead from Kern County supervisors Tuesday.

But they delayed a decision on the massive Alta-Oak Creek Mojave wind power project until late Tuesday evening to try and solve the concerns of a handful of residents in the remote mountain areas. Those people were worried about the potential dangers of the sky-scraping wind turbines.

After more than an hour of off-the-record negotiations with residents, project developer Terra-Gen Power decided to remove three turbines planned nearby.

That settled most of the objections to the project. Supervisors voted 5-0 to approve the modified project.

It was a significant step forward in a process that will likely bring thousands of megawatts of new wind energy to Kern County.

Alta-Oak Creek would bring up to 320 wind turbines to the mountains between Tehachapi and Mojave.

The 1.5 and three megawatt machines could generate up to 800 megawatts of power.

That's twice the power that the thousands of wind turbines currently installed in Tehachapi now generate.

"This would be the largest wind energy facility in California," said Lorelei Oviatt, the Kern County Planning Department Special Projects Chief.

And Kern County planners anticipate reviewing a long list of additional projects, which, if approved, would bring around 4,600 megawatts of power to Tehachapi over the next several years. Oviatt said the new wind development is critical to power California's drive to produce 20 percent of its energy from green sources.

"We are now in the position to bring online in 2010 and 2011 the important wind energy that CPUC needs to meet our goals," Oviatt said.

Randy Hoyle, vice president of Terra-Gen, touted the economic and environmental benefits of the project.

He said the air quality improvements that would be created by the project are the equivalent of taking 300,000 cars off the road.

But residents of the remote Old West Ranch area of Tehachapi were concerned about the impact on their lives. Old West Ranch resident Terry Beckett argued that the sound of the turbines near her home would be invasive. And she worried about the potential that the blades could ice up and sling chunks of ice long distances.

"With the turbines in their present location, my children play within the field of throw," Beckett said. "I don't want to kill the project. I just want my family to be safe."

Oviatt and Hoyle said the turbines have sensors that will shut them down when the blades ice up. But those assurances didn't comfort Beckett.

Brent Scheibel of Old West Ranch said the homeowners are ready to fight the case in court to protect their property.

Hoyle said Terra-Gen had already given up nine turbine sites to relieve the Old West Ranch community's concerns and needed to make sure the company could meet contractual obligations to deliver power and create a financially viable project.

"This is a tight site. There are 9,000 acres. There are construction areas. But each turbine has over 40 constraints (on its location)," he said.

Supervisors acknowledged the value of the project. But they wanted to address the concerns of the people who live among the windy hills.

So they called a break, sent Terra-Gen and project opponents to the negotiation table and took up a debate over development of a neighborhood park in Bakersfield.

When they picked up the wind project again, there was a deal. Approval of the project was unanimous.

## **County seeks state investigation of Kettleman birth defects**

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009

Concerned Kettleman City residents got what they wanted Tuesday, as Kings County leaders agreed to direct the health officer to formally ask the state to conduct an investigation into birth defects in the small farming community and prepare a report.

The vote was 4-0, with Supervisor Tony Oliveira absent.

The action comes nearly a week after Supervisor Richard Valle publicly called on county leadership to pressure the state, which been unresponsive so far, to respond to community concerns.

The issue of birth defects — raised this July by residents of this small farming town southwest of Hanford — has become the center of debate in the controversy surrounding Waste Management's plan to expand its hazardous waste landfill operation 3.5 miles from the area.

Dr. Michael Mac Lean, county health officer, said a full public health investigation like the one Kings County is requesting could take six months to two years.

Supervisors are expected to vote on Waste Management's project next Tuesday, but residents and environmental justice activists are urging decision-makers to table the action until the investigation is complete.

## **Washoe County reinstates burn ban**

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Wednesday, December 16, 2009

RENO, Nev. -- A wood burning ban has been reinstated by Washoe County health officials because of poor air quality.

Health Department air quality supervisor Duane Sikorski says air quality is considered to be in the "red" range because of a temperature inversion that traps pollutants near the valley floors.

A stage one air pollution alert was issued last Thursday and Friday. It was the first alert associated with wood burning since 1994.

Sikorski says high pressure building over the region could mean continued problems throughout the week.

The air on Tuesday was deemed unhealthy for sensitive groups and just below unhealthy for the general public.

### **Reno air quality improves; pollution alert reduced**

The Associated Press

in the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, December 16, 2009

RENO, Nev. -- The Washoe County Health Department says air quality in the Reno area has improved enough to downgrade the wood burning code to yellow.

Still, officials Wednesday were asking residents to reduce or avoid burning wood if possible.

A red code was issued last week, banning all wood burning in the Truckee Meadows. On Tuesday, officials warned air quality was again approaching the red range because of a temperature inversion that traps cold air and pollutants near the valley floors.

### **Developing nations hold the key to Copenhagen climate agreement**

**Rich nations still hold some bargaining chips, but many negotiators and observers say key decisions by poor and emerging nations will make or break any deal.**

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

L.A. Times, Wed., Dec. 16, 2009

Reporting from Copenhagen - The world's poorest and fastest-growing developing nations appear, increasingly, to hold the fate of a new climate agreement in their hands. The choice they face is, deal or no deal?

As the Copenhagen climate summit barreled into its penultimate phase Tuesday, wealthy countries ramped up pressure on emerging economies China and India, as well as African and island nations, to compromise and drop near-daily procedural tactics and protests that have slowed the negotiations.

Rich nations still hold some bargaining chips, chiefly how much money they're willing to commit to help developing countries adapt to climate change and shift their energy sources over the long term.

A collapse in negotiations would trigger a blame game in which developing nations brand the United States and the West in general as the villains. Still, many negotiators and observers here say most of the key decisions that will seal or scuttle an agreement rest with poor and emerging nations.

China and India, whose booming economies are projected to account for much of the world's emissions growth in coming decades, must decide whether they can accept the two conditions the U.S. calls fundamental to an agreement: that all nations make their carbon dioxide emissions reduction pledges clear and that they allow the world to verify that the pledges in fact are met.

Africans and island nations, for their part, must choose whether to accept greenhouse gas reductions for the developed world that are far weaker than the poor countries would like; scientists warn that the reductions proposed by wealthy nations might not be enough to spare the world's poorest nations from flood, famine and other devastating effects of climate change.

Inside the Bella Center, the venue for the negotiations, summit attendees with deep ties to the developing world diverged sharply on whether those nations would ultimately strike an agreement or walk away.

"Only a fool will tell you definitely they know what China's midnight position will be," said Peter Goldmark, who directs the climate and air program for the Environmental Defense Fund, a group that works closely with China.

Goldmark thinks China will ultimately hold its line and reject international emissions-pledge monitoring in any form, a move U.S. officials insist would kill hopes for a deal. Other groups say China, the world's largest emitter, does not want to risk blame if the talks fall through.

"They really want a deal," Keya Chatterjee, director of the U.S. climate change program for the World Wildlife Fund, said of the Chinese. "They really care what the world thinks of them."

American negotiators sided with the optimists Tuesday. "I actually think we're going to get there with China," Todd Stern, the U.S. special climate envoy, told reporters. "But you know, I don't know for sure yet."

Leaders of the Copenhagen negotiations are aiming for a framework agreement, including costs and emissions reduction commitments, that would pave the way for a new international global warming treaty to be signed later, probably next year. If major emitters don't reach agreement in Copenhagen, observers say, international talks could be set back indefinitely, along with the Obama administration's climate bill in Congress.

Some environmental groups say the United States and its allies have given developing nations ample reason to shoot down an accord, by proposing emission cuts too light to avert the worst effects of warming; by failing to provide fiscal details of a long-term climate aid package to the developing world; and, in the case of Europe and many other economic powers, by not moving aggressively to extend the Kyoto Protocol, which sets emissions reduction targets with a process that gives developing nations a strong voice. (The U.S. never ratified the Kyoto treaty, which a Copenhagen pact would replace.)

Developed nations "are trying to bully around the poorest countries in the world, who will be most impacted by climate change," said Erich Pica, president of the environmental group Friends of the Earth.

Pica's group and others also criticized wealthy countries for what they called a pressure campaign to bring developing nations on board, including President Obama's calls Monday to the prime ministers of Ethiopia and Bangladesh to enlist their help in the climate negotiations.

One of the sharpest critiques came from Desmond Tutu, the South African archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who said Tuesday in a letter to African heads of state that the emission cuts on the table would "condemn Africa to incineration and no modern development."

It appears unlikely, though, that wealthy nations will boost their carbon emission commitments significantly.

In his news conference, Stern reiterated that the Obama administration was unwilling to go beyond its pledge "in the range" of 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, which is roughly the size of the cut laid out in the climate bill the House passed last month. He also said the total reductions spurred by climate legislation, which is pending in the Senate, could still end up being much higher than 17%.

Large sums of financial aid could help bridge the gap and bring African and island-nation

delegates to an agreement, said environmentalists who spent the day talking with diplomats. "They want to find a way forward" with a financing package, said Heather Allen, an international advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Chinese officials offered similar signals in Beijing. "We still maintain that developed countries have the obligation to provide financial support," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said, adding that that was "the key condition for the success of the Copenhagen conference."

In Copenhagen, optimism reigned in the pronouncements of conference leaders as the negotiations shifted to a ministerial level. Dignitaries such as Britain's Prince Charles and former Vice President Al Gore called for action, and security workers began preparing for the arrival this week of more than 110 heads of state and government, including Obama and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

"The deal is clearly visible," Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said, "and not just any deal, but a deal that can be . . . a real turning point."

### **Climate conference emits its share of carbon**

By Michael Casey, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2009

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) -- If they fail to reach a climate deal in Copenhagen, world leaders flying in their private jets and huddling in five-star hotels will have little to show for their efforts beyond a big, fat carbon footprint.

The U.N. estimates 40,500 tons of carbon dioxide will be pumped into the atmosphere during the 12-day conference — 90 percent of it from flights. The rest comes from waste and electricity related to transport to and from the conference center and lodging in and around the Danish city.

Most of the leaders were flying either on commercial airlines or government-owned jets and Sweden was one of the few to announce plans to offset those aviation emissions — something it does routinely. Most are doing nothing to boost their green credentials and some saw no reason to treat their trip to the U.N. climate talks any differently.

"This prime minister is the last person in India or maybe even the world to do anything for effect," said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's spokesman Harish Khare. "It'll be a normal visit, like any other visit by the prime minister." Singh was scheduled to travel in a private jet to Copenhagen for security, his office said.

Those traveling on commercial flights include Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann and Finnish President Tarja Halonen.

Barack Obama is traveling on Air Force One, French President Nicolas Sarkozy in his special Airbus and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on a presidential jet nicknamed "Aerolula."

A handful of Europeans made a point of taking the train, like the environment ministers of the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Few environmentalists at the conference made an issue of the carbon footprints from more than 100 world leaders. They were more worried that governments are failing to make progress on reaching a global climate pact.

Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg — who often gives green advice to Norwegians — was criticized at home, however, for deciding to take a private jet from Oslo to Copenhagen rather

than one of the 17 shuttles that daily make the hour-long run between the two Scandinavian capitals.

"If he tells everybody to take the bus, take the train, stop wasting energy, then you'd have to expect Stoltenberg to sacrifice something too," said Oerjan Holm, vice president of the Norwegian Conservation Society.

A statement from Stoltenberg's office said he decided to travel by private jet because he wanted the "flexibility" to match the somewhat unstable schedule of the climate conference. It added that the government buys carbon credits at the end of every year to offset the prime minister's air travels.

Some activists said leaders should at least find ways to make their trip more sustainable, especially if they aren't serious about reaching a deal.

"There is an obsession by world leaders to be able to come in here with big entourages on their special airplanes, land at the airport and be driven in big limousines, with bigger entourages," said Asad Rehman, spokesman for the environmental group Friends of the Earth.

"What they should be looking at is how they could travel here with the minimal carbon impact that they can have," he said. "But also, more importantly, are they coming here to actually sign a deal and make a deal that will save both the people and the planet? If they're coming here with an empty pocket and empty promises, then they should stay at home."

Susan Burns, the chief executive officer of the Global Footprint Network, a California-based sustainability research institute, said it would be wrong to scale back negotiations over concerns about carbon emissions, especially with so much work to be done.

"They should have a Copenhagen every month until they figure this out," Burns said. "We need to spend our carbon very wisely. And getting world leaders together and locking them in a room while they get this done is one such investment, as is investing it in the economy of the future."

Climate summits, which attract thousands of delegates and are often held in far-flung or glitzy locations like Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro, are easy targets for critics.

The last big climate conference, in 2007 on the Indonesian island of Bali, blew through 47,000 tons of carbon — equal to the daily emissions of Marseilles, one of the biggest cities in France. Delegates were criticized for running their air conditioners as they chatted in beach-side villas.

This time, it's the idling limos waiting in subzero temperatures to shuttle delegates between their hotels and the conference center.

Organizers from the Danish government said they were doing everything they could to minimize the conference's carbon footprint.

They have reduced emissions 20 percent through a number of energy efficiency measures, promoted public transport, encouraged hotels to provide environmentally certified rooms and installed efficient lighting in the conference center, according to Jan-Christoph Napierski, who heads conference logistics for the Danish Foreign Ministry.

They are offsetting the rest of the emissions by investing in a program to upgrade antiquated brick kilns in Bangladesh with the help of the World Bank.

"Bangladesh is one of the countries hardest hit by climate change and there's a great need to assist the country with technology and capital contributions," said conference president Connie

Hedegaard. "In addition, the project will result in significant environmental improvements for the local community, where particle pollution from the existing old brick works is clearly visible."

### **Update: Air quality forecast and woodburning rules**

By Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, late Tuesday, December 15, 2009

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 12/15/2009: 54 Moderate (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 12/16/2009: 58 Moderate (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 12/16/2009: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/15/2009: Please burn cleanly

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/16/2009: Please burn cleanly

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Daily Air Quality Forecast

More information about the Daily Air Quality Forecast can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

More information about the Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>.

### **Most back a treaty on global warming**

By Susan Page

USA TODAY, Tuesday, December 15, 2009

WASHINGTON — A solid majority of Americans support the idea of a global treaty that would require the United States to reduce significantly greenhouse gas emissions, a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll finds, although many also express concern about the potential impact on the economy.

The results provide some encouragement for President Obama, who attends the United Nations conference on climate change in Copenhagen on Friday. By 55%-38%, those surveyed endorse a binding accord to limit the gases tied to global warming.

By a lopsided 7-1, however, Americans say the administration should put a higher priority on improving the economy than reducing global warming. And they are split on the likely economic impact of enacting new environmental and energy laws to address climate change: 42% say they will hurt the economy; 36% say they will help.

"There's a lot of public support for various climate policy approaches that diminishes as you begin to put a specific dollar figure with it," says Barry Rabe, a University of Michigan political scientist who studies public opinion on the environment. He says the findings show many Americans open to persuasion.

For instance, two in 10 say new environmental laws "definitely" will hurt the economy; one in 10 say they "definitely" will help. Two thirds are somewhere in the middle, less certain of the economic effect or saying it would have no impact at all.

Young people, those 18 to 29 years old, are by far the most supportive of a treaty, backing the idea by 66%-26%. Those over 65 are opposed by 49%-42%.

There also are geographic differences. Support is highest in the East, lowest in the South.

Battles between Democrats representing environment-conscious coastal areas and those from Rust Belt states that depend on coal have complicated White House efforts to push an energy bill through Congress. The House passed a measure in June, but it is stalled in the Senate. In

Copenhagen, world leaders who struggled to reach a binding treaty now are working toward an interim one.

Americans are divided about where to strike the balance between the economy and the environment: 46% say they worry more that the United States will take actions against global warming that cripple the U.S. economy. An additional 38% worry more that the country will not take action against global warming because of economic concerns.

The poll of 1,025 adults taken Friday-Sunday has an error margin of +/-4 percentage points.

Barack Obama started the year with a job approval rating of 64%-25% — a net positive standing by a formidable 39 percentage points.

Now, he closes the year with a rating of 49%-46%. That net positive rating of three points is his narrowest so far. The approval rating matches his record low in early October and the disapproval rating equals his record high later that month.

That is the worst standing in Gallup for any modern elected president at the end of his first year, though it's close to Ronald Reagan's 49%-41% rating in December 1981 — also a time of economic woe.

And that Nobel Peace Prize?

Americans apparently weren't swayed by the address Obama delivered in Oslo last week when he picked up the award. By 61%-35%, those surveyed say he didn't deserve it, almost precisely the same as when the prize was announced in October.

## **ExxonMobil buys natural gas producer XTO Energy for \$31B**

By Dan Reed

USA TODAY, Tuesday, December 15, 2009

FORT WORTH — ExxonMobil moved Monday to replenish its dwindling domestic energy resources and dive into the fast-growing and environmentally palatable market for natural gas by acquiring the USA's largest gas producer.

The energy industry giant said that it would buy XTO Energy by issuing about \$31 billion worth of stock to XTO shareholders. It also agreed to assume about \$10 billion of XTO's debt.

For that, ExxonMobil would get XTO's huge cache of rights to drill mostly for natural gas in the USA's most productive oil shale fields.

XTO has expertise in drilling through shale formations that previously were thought too difficult and costly. It's also the industry's leader in increasing the output of existing wells it acquires from other exploration companies.

XTO's Fort Worth offices would become the headquarters of an ExxonMobil division aimed at taking that expertise overseas. ExxonMobil is based in Irving, Texas.

Analysts say the deal, which requires XTO shareholders' approval and is expected to close in the second quarter of 2010, is significant because of ExxonMobil's diminishing domestic energy resources. Political conditions also make it harder and more expensive for U.S. oil companies such as ExxonMobil to acquire resources in other parts of the globe, they say.

"They recognize that the world is not going back to where it was five years ago," says Fadel Gheit, energy analyst at Oppenheimer Equity. "Access to resources is getting more difficult all over the world."

Michael Roberts at Prenova, an Atlanta-based consulting firm that advises corporations on energy procurement and management matters, says ExxonMobil views XTO as a "good alternative-fuel play" in response to efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Though a carbon dioxide emitter, natural gas is the cleanest-burning fossil fuel and is increasingly favored by governments trying to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Analysts say ExxonMobil's acquisition is likely to trigger similar moves by other energy giants to acquire large independent producers with involvement in the fast-growing unconventional natural-gas segment.

Credit Suisse analyst Jonathan Wolff said in a report Monday that Devon Energy of Oklahoma City is the most likely acquisition target now that XTO is off the market.

## **U.S. booth sets tone for change at climate talks**

By Brian Winter

USA TODAY, Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Within the chaos of the Copenhagen environmental summit, where negotiations among 192 countries nearly broke down Monday, there's at least one oasis of apparent calm and progress.

The U.S. booth in the conference hall — an elaborate, two-room complex with a giant, rotating computer screen shaped like the planet Earth— has been used for scientific lectures, business meetings and the announcement of several "green" initiatives by the Obama administration.

On Monday, Energy Secretary Steven Chu gave a presentation detailing how \$4.5 billion in stimulus funds were being used to create a more efficient electrical grid. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is set to announce today a deal with U.S. dairy farmers to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The U.S. presence in Copenhagen is dramatically larger than at environmental conferences under President George W. Bush, when the booth often consisted of a lone U.S. official handing out pamphlets. The Bush administration was reluctant to participate in an international pact that would exempt other nations such as China. It supported funds for technologies to lessen emissions and additional research into global warming predictions.

"I think the symbolism (of the booth) is that we're back — that the U.S. is again taking a leadership role on this issue," Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said.

Other events scheduled for this week include a presentation by Environmental Protection Agency officials on new U.S. fuel economy standards for cars; a panel discussion on how global warming could endanger U.S. national security; and a presentation by James Steele, chairman of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of Montana, on how American Indians are trying to cut emissions.

Salazar said the agenda shows that the U.S. is committed to addressing global warming regardless of whether the summit succeeds in producing a worldwide pact to limit carbon dioxide levels.

That goal appeared to be in doubt ahead of Obama's arrival in Copenhagen on Friday. Poor countries boycotted negotiations for several hours to pressure wealthier nations, including the U.S., to embrace more ambitious emissions targets.

Countries still disagree on whether developing nations such as China should be held to enforceable emissions targets.

"We have lost some time. There is no doubt about that," Canadian Environment Minister Jim Prentice said Monday.

Presenters at the U.S. booth were trying to add urgency to the talks. James Balog, a U.S. photojournalist, used the spherical computer screen to show a crowd of about 100 an animated display of the spread of black carbon — a particularly strong greenhouse gas.

Those gathered said they were impressed by the glitzy display but worried about whether it would translate into action.

"I feel relief that things have changed since Bush," said Erich Streicher, a Danish university student. "My concern is that understanding that global warming is a problem and being strong enough to do something about it are two entirely different things."

## **Obama says retrofitting houses is 'sexy'**

USA Today, Tuesday, December 15, 2009

President Obama warmed up for this afternoon's health care meeting by visiting a suburban Home Depot to tout his proposal for tax breaks to property owners who make their houses more energy efficient -- a topic he dubbed surprisingly "sexy."

"Here's what's sexy about it," Obama told employees and company officials. "Saving money."

Retrofitting homes with new doors and windows, better insulation and improved heating and cooling systems will not only reduce energy bills, Obama said. It will provide jobs for those who do the work. He called it an example of how "smart" energy policy can be a "job creator."

"What we want to do is create incentives that stimulate consumer spending, because folks buy materials from home improvement stores like this one, which then buys them from manufacturers," Obama said. "It spurs hiring because local contractors and construction workers do the installation. It saves consumers money, perhaps hundreds of dollars off their utility bills each year. And it reduces our energy consumption in the process."

Congress must sign off on Obama's calls for tax breaks.

Before his remarks, Obama toured the Home Depot in Alexandria, Va., featuring insulation and heating products with signs saying "tax credit eligible."

## **EPA detects brain-damaging toxic near school**

By Blake Morrison and Brad Heath

USA TODAY, Tuesday, December 15, 2009

WASHINGTON — Government regulators have found high levels of manganese, a dangerous metal that can affect the brain, in the air outside a school in eastern Ohio.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials cautioned Monday that the results outside LaCroft Elementary in East Liverpool, Ohio, were still preliminary. Even so, the samples — taken this summer and fall — averaged well above the level that the government considers safe for long-term exposure.

The monitoring is part of a \$2.25 million EPA effort to examine the air outside 63 schools in 22 states. The program was launched in response to a USA TODAY investigation that identified hundreds of schools across the nation where the air outside appeared to be rife with toxic industrial chemicals.

Long-term exposure to manganese can cause mental and emotional problems. Manganese often comes from metalworking factories. The EPA expects to issue more thorough reports in the next two months about what it found outside schools.

"If we find potential health concerns at any schools, our next steps may include additional monitoring," EPA spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said. Drawing conclusions about health risks from a small number of samples is ill-advised, he said.

This year, monitoring revealed elevated levels of manganese outside two other schools where the EPA monitored — one in Marietta, Ohio, and another in Vienna, W.Va. The levels found outside LaCroft Elementary in Ohio were even higher.

In nine samples at LaCroft, officials found levels of manganese that averaged almost double what the EPA considers safe for long-term exposure. One sample, taken in September, showed levels 12 times higher than that threshold. The school's principal, Linda Lindsey, said the school's 415 students are scheduled to move next year to a different building about 8 miles from the current building.

The EPA also said Monday that it is invalidating the results of some samples taken at 25 other schools. That's because regulators discovered mechanical problems with the monitoring

equipment. Tests at 24 sites will be repeated, Gilfillan said. At the other school, Spain Elementary in Detroit, the EPA plans to evaluate samples taken by Michigan regulators.

At Spain, the EPA samples showed high levels of one chemical, acrolein, which exacerbates asthma. The state readings were lower than the EPA's but showed levels that exceeded what the agency considers safe for long-term exposure.

## **Developing countries stop boycott of UN climate talks**

By Michael Casey, Associated Press

USA TODAY, Tuesday, December 15, 2009

COPENHAGEN — The European Union said Monday that poor countries have stopped their boycott of climate change negotiations and have found a solution to their dispute with rich nations.

EU environment spokesman Andreas Carlgren said informal talks at Copenhagen resolved the impasse. Developing countries, including China and India, brought the negotiations to a halt earlier Monday with their demand that rich countries offer much deeper cuts in their greenhouse gas emissions.

The move disrupted the 192-nation conference and almost forced the cancellation of formal working groups, delaying negotiators who are trying to resolve technical issues before the arrival of more than 110 world leaders later this week.

The developing nations were trying to shift the U.N. talks' agenda to focus on the responsibilities of the industrial countries to halt global warming.

The nations want to extend the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which imposed penalties on rich nations if they did not comply with its strict emissions limits but made no such binding demands on developing nations.

The boycott was largely seen as a ploy to shift the agenda to the responsibilities of the industrial countries and make emissions reductions the first item for discussion when world leaders begin arriving Tuesday.

"I don't think the talks are falling apart, but we're losing time," said Kim Carstensen, of the World Wildlife Fund. The developing countries "are making a point."

The dispute came as the conference entered its second week, and only days before more than 100 world leaders, including President Barack Obama, were scheduled to arrive in Copenhagen.

"Nothing is happening at this moment," Zia Hoque Mukta, a delegate from Bangladesh, told The Associated Press. He said developing countries had demanded that conference president Connie Hedegaard of Denmark bring the industrial nations' emissions targets to the top of the agenda before talks can resume.

Poor countries, supported by China, say Hedegaard had raised suspicion that the conference was likely to kill the Kyoto Protocol. The United States withdrew from Kyoto over concerns that it would harm the U.S. economy and that China, India and other major greenhouse gas emitters were not required to take action. China is now the world's top greenhouse gas polluter.

"We are seeing the death of the Kyoto Protocol," said Djemouai Kamel of Algeria, the head of the 50-nation Africa group.

U.N. climate chief Yvo De Boer said Hedegaard was holding informal consultations with delegates "to get things going."

It was the second time the Africans have disrupted the climate talks. At the last round of negotiations in November, the African bloc forced a one-day suspension until wealthy countries agreed to spell out what steps they will take to reduce emissions.

"They are trying to put the pressure on" before Obama and other world leaders arrive, said Gustavo Silva-Chavez, a climate change specialist with the Environmental Defense Fund. "They want to make sure that developed countries are not left off the hook."

An African delegate said developing countries decided to block the negotiations at a meeting hours before the conference was to resume. He said applause broke out every time China, India or another country supported the proposal to stall the talks.

"This is all part of the negotiating dynamic, especially as you get closer to the end game," said Jake Schmidt of the Natural Resources Defense Fund.

In Washington, the White House announced a new program drawing funds from international partners to spend \$350 million over five years to give developing nations clean energy technology to curb greenhouse gas emissions and reduce global warming.

The program will distribute solar power alternatives for homes, including sun-powered lanterns, supply cleaner equipment and appliances and work to develop renewable energy systems in the world's poorer nations.

The U.S. share of the program will amount to \$85 million, with the rest coming from Australia, Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, Energy Secretary Steven Chu said in Copenhagen.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's office said he would go to Copenhagen on Tuesday — two days earlier than planned — to try to inject momentum into the talks. His spokesman denied that Brown — facing a national election by June — was seeking any personal credit if a deal is struck.

Former Vice President Al Gore told the conference that new data suggests a 75% chance the entire Arctic polar ice cap may disappear in the summertime as soon as five to seven years from now. Gore, who won a Nobel Peace prize for his work on climate change, joined the foreign ministers of Norway and Denmark in presenting two new reports on melting Arctic ice.

Throngs of newly arrived delegates, journalists and climate activists jammed the security and accreditation lines at the conference center Monday, forcing police to shut down the nearby subway stop.

Hundreds of police kept a close watch on a protest outside Parliament, where about 3,000 climate activists were demonstrating.

More than 1,200 people were detained in weekend protests, although almost all were released after questioning. About a dozen were arraigned on preliminary charges of assaulting police officers or carrying box-cutters or other sharp objects.

There were sporadic reports of vandalism across the city overnight Monday.

Police spokesman Henrik Moeller Jakobsen said 12 cars had been set on fire, including three vehicles belonging to Danish power company Dong Energy. Vandals also smashed windows and threw red paint at the headquarters of the Danish Immigration Service. It was not immediately clear whether those attacks were related to the conference.

[Editorial: Time to drop high-speed rail in California](#)

### **MediaNews editorial**

In the Contra Costa Times Wed., Dec. 16, 2009

LAST YEAR, WHEN voters were presented with Proposition 1A, the \$9.9 billion rail bond, proponents of a high-speed rail system estimated the fare from the Bay Area to Los Angeles would be \$55. Now that the bond measure has passed, the forecast price of a ticket is \$105. The increase is not surprising given that the cost estimates for building the high-speed rail system have also risen dramatically to \$42.6 billion, which also is no surprise.

The \$55 fare was competitive with airline prices. But a \$105 ticket does not compare well with Southwest Airlines' \$59 fares from the Bay Area to Los Angeles.

The higher fares for high-speed rail also have caused state officials to lower their estimates of ridership from 55 million passengers a year to 41 million by 2035.

The latest revision of the high-speed rail's business plan predicts an annual revenue of \$2.87 billion by 2035 and insists that the system will be profitable. One has to wonder about the accuracy of rail ridership predictions and revenue projections 26 years away, when last year's estimates of ticket prices and ridership were so far off the mark.

It is becoming more apparent that predictions about construction costs, ridership, fares and revenues are highly unreliable. As the cost of construction rises, fares will go up, ridership will decrease and revenues are likely to drop below estimates.

Predictions that a rail system will be operationally profitable are little more than wishful thinking. If estimates of costs, fares and ridership are grossly inaccurate after one year in which there was virtually no inflation, how can anyone have confidence of the accuracy of forecasts 25 years from now?

The high-speed rail system was flawed from the start. California does not have population densities close to those in Japan and Europe, which have successful high-speed rail systems.

Also, California has a poor record of accomplishing large construction projects anywhere near original estimates or completion forecasts. Rail transportation funds would be far better spent on metropolitan transit systems like BART extensions to San Jose and eBART in the East Bay. Unfortunately, a majority of voters in November 2008 approved Prop. 1A, authorizing the sale of \$9 billion in bonds for high-speed rail. Backers of the rail system believe they can appeal to the federal government and private investors to attract the additional \$33.6 billion needed (by the latest estimates) to complete the project.

It is unlikely the federal government will supply a major percentage of what is needed to build the rail system. Private investors are even less likely to risk money on a project where the cost and ridership forecasts have changed so dramatically for the worse in just one year. The high-speed rail project should be put on the shelf indefinitely. It is a boondoggle that does not merit bond sales, federal stimulus money or private investment.

[In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Guest Commentary, Wednesday, December 16, 2009](#)

### **Where is our sense of sacrifice?**

By William McKenzie - The Dallas Morning News

Sometimes it helps to take a step back from the details in policy debates to consider the larger issues in play - or not in play - so we can better understand precisely what is going on in our national politics.

This hit me as I was driving back to work last week, listening to a National Public Radio report about how hard it is to get anything done on climate change. This struck me as sounding familiar, and the longer I paid attention, the more it reminded me of finding an answer to our health care riddle. And you could say the same about the challenge in Afghanistan.

In fact, you can listen to a report about any of these subjects and come away with a similar conclusion: We're having a hard time solving each puzzle because that solution, in each case, requires sacrifice. And most of us generally aren't willing to make the changes necessary to resolve big problems.

Now, I'm not talking about our soldiers or those parents working late shifts to put food on the table. They pay an extraordinary price.

But by and large, it's hard to sell sacrifice. Part of that is a function of the human condition.

We put ourselves first. We often are lazy and don't want to change. We fear the unknown.

Part of the problem also is a function of our political leadership. While both parties have some really good public servants, the political breed, on balance, doesn't like asking us to sacrifice. Doing so could make voters mad, and, heavens, those in love with their power could lose their seats at the table.

So we live in a world where we all seem to want good outcomes, but we don't want to change our ways to get them.

Take the climate change debate, which is front and center again this week in Copenhagen. The changes the world needs will require many of us to rethink our ways.

For example, the cap-and-trade system of controlling carbon dioxide emissions being considered in Congress will hit some industries hard, including the many people who work for energy firms here in Texas. We may as well be honest about that. But if we make changes now, our children inherit a more stable planet, which is the goal.

Or look at the health care debate. There is no way we can insure more people and control costs over time without changing the way medicine is practiced. The best idea is for Medicare and insurers to stop reimbursing health providers for each service and to pay doctors and hospitals for how well they care for us.

That's kind of spooky. Does this mean we won't get every test we want?

Perhaps, but we can't keep on doing medicine the same old way. Our pocketbooks can't afford it, nor can the federal budget. Unfortunately, there's not enough emphasis about this reform in the Senate's health bill, most likely because our leaders would have to ask us to change.

And then there's Afghanistan. Many Americans are getting squeamish, but we can't stabilize that distant land without grinding it out with a counter-insurgency strategy. That will take perseverance - as well as a way to finance the war so it doesn't worsen the deficit. Both will require sacrifice, but we must do it to keep Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan from becoming the spring training homes for violent extremists.

None of these problems get resolved unless we pay a price, as the Greatest Generation did for the larger good. It's a matter of acting now so we have a better world in the future.

This is a sobering topic amid the Christmas holidays swirl, but it's the unpleasant truth. And while the right policy details matter, what matters more is that our leaders ask us to give of ourselves - and that we show the will to respond.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2009:](#)

### **Next up for tea party?**

On Dec. 5, the Valley's tea party members assembled at Nees and Blackstone avenues to protest global warming (which they believe is a hoax) and have been told by their extreme right-wing leaders. The disenchanted naysayers tired and dispersed early due to watery eyes, wheezing and headaches from the poor air quality.

The bitter and cynical went home to await marching orders from their heroes on talk radio. Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity, and of course the local wannabes. I heard that the local tea party plans on joining up with rich agri-corporation leaders on water issues. Maybe together they can convince themselves we're not really in a drought.

Sean Walker, Fresno

[Editorial in the OC Register, Monday, December 14, 2009:](#)

### **Global storm brews in Copenhagen**

Copenhagen's 192-nation global warming negotiations were suspended Monday over disputes between rich and poor nations about how much each should reduce greenhouse gas emissions,

and how much money developed nations, like the U.S., should pay developing countries, like China.

The deadlock is bad news for global warming zealots, big-corporate profiteers and control-seeking governments. For everyone else, it's probably as good as the news will get from Denmark's two-week powwow, if it means no imposition of economy-sapping caps on greenhouse gas emissions.

The negotiations entered their final week "amid rancor between rich and poor nations, with a negotiating block of mostly African countries complaining that it looks like any deal will not be tough enough on major emissions producers in the developed world," the Christian Science Monitor reported Monday.

Developing nations demand developed nations reduce their emissions more than they so far have pledged. President Barack Obama, who is scheduled to arrive in Copenhagen on Friday, reportedly will promise the U.S. will cut emissions effectively only 4 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, the Boston Globe reported, quoting the World Wildlife Fund. Even so, that would require congressional approval, unless it's mandated through the Environmental Protection Agency.

But developing nations also want \$10 billion a year to start, up to \$100 billion a year in the long term, from richer nations to meet the presumed costs of mitigating and adapting to predicted climate changes. So far, some European nations have pledged a combined \$3.6 billion a year until 2012.

In a related event, the head of the Asian Development Bank said rich countries' offered funding is substantially "insufficient." Failure to reach an agreement in Copenhagen "could lead to a collapse of the carbon market," bank president Haruhiko Kuroda said. Carbon trading is the contrived means to buy and sell government-issued credits that permit companies to emit greenhouse gases under a cap-and-trade system such as operating in Europe and proposed in Congress.

Not only would it be a plus if Copenhagen fails to impose economy-damaging emission caps, it would be another plus if it means the death knell for the faux carbon trading market. The European carbon market was rocked last week by news that fraudulent trading may have accounted for up to 90 percent of all market activity in some European countries to the tune of \$7.3 billion.

Meanwhile, the purported scientific basis for imposing carbon caps and trading schemes continues under assault since the leak of thousands of e-mails and records from the U.K.'s East Anglia Climate Research Unit that suggest data was manipulated and perhaps destroyed to make global temperatures appear warmer than they are. As that evidence increasingly comes into question, it becomes clearer that global warming supporters have something else in mind than just cooling the Earth.

If global warming science has been rigged, it makes no sense to impose hundreds of billions of dollars in worldwide costs to curb emissions and to force vast transfers of wealth. Acting would only make sense for those who stand to profit from trading schemes or gain control over others.

Finally, and probably more important to a greener planet than all the hot air in Copenhagen, Exxon announced Monday it agreed to buy XTO Energy, a leading U.S. unconventional natural gas producer in a deal valued at \$31 billion. As The New York Times reported: "The acquisition extends Exxon's bet that fossil fuels will remain a critical part of the nation's energy supplies for decades to come. Natural gas is a cleaner-burning fuel than coal, with half the carbon dioxide emissions. For that reason, it is considered as a potential 'bridge fuel' on the lengthy path to a renewable, carbon-free economy."