

Fresnans try to clear path for electric vehicles

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau

In the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2010

They are inexpensive, clean and reach a top speed of 25 mph. In other words, a golf cart on steroids.

The official name is "neighborhood electric vehicles" -- and supporters say they are a perfect match for Fresno.

"We've got flat topography and fairly high gas prices and pretty bad air," said Jeff Roberts, a vice president at Granville Homes, which is pushing the idea because it promotes the cars in its private Copper River Ranch development in north Fresno. "I think in the Valley it's a good fit."

One problem: The cars are prohibited on streets with speed limits of more than 35 mph.

So Roberts has persuaded the city of Fresno to seek permission from the state to develop a neighborhood electric vehicle plan that would clear the way for special lanes, signs and other upgrades required to allow the mini-cars on more city streets.

The City Council unanimously passed a resolution last year supporting the idea, and Assembly Member Mike Villines this month introduced legislation to make it happen. Only a handful of cities in the state now have the authorization.

"This is cutting-edge. We'll be the largest city and the first city in the Central Valley to do this," said Villines, R-Clovis, whose Assembly Bill 1781 still requires Senate and Assembly approval.

Granville's Copper River Ranch development has about five miles of lanes for neighborhood electric vehicles, or NEVs, with plans to triple that figure.

Roberts said he envisions the city adding special lanes on surrounding public streets, so residents can use the cars for quick trips to the store.

City Engineer Scott Mozier said Fresno also might target the neighborhood near Fig Garden Golf Club and possibly even downtown. But changes will come slowly, he warned. "The city does not have the funding to go out and widen streets to accommodate NEVs."

More likely, officials would find ways to add the lanes on streets that have extra space, he said. The cars would not mingle with regular traffic.

Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer said there are some safety concerns because the cars are not built to withstand high-speed collisions with normal cars. But he generally supports the proposal if it's implemented on a limited basis.

"I think there's a way to do it and at the same time keep motorists safe," he said. "It just requires some creativity."

NEVs must meet federal performance standards and are equipped with safety features such as seat belts, turn signal lamps and parking brakes. The cars plug into a regular wall outlet and reach speeds of 20 mph to 25 mph. Chrysler's latest GEM models can run up to 30 miles on a single charge, according to the company's Web site.

At Fresno retailer Central Valley Golf & Utility Vehicles, officials recently applied for a license to sell NEVs to meet growing demand. The store plans to sell Club Car brand cars for between \$8,000 and \$11,000, said company president Lew Solomon. Part of the demand is the result of federal stimulus legislation, which created a tax credit of up to \$2,500 for low-speed electric vehicles.

Among California cities, the NEV leader is Lincoln in Placer County. The cars were originally a hit with retirees but younger families are now using them, said Mayor Tom Cosgrove.

State lawmakers cleared the city to create NEV plans in a 2004 bill that also extended the authority to nearby Rocklin. Lincoln, population 40,060, is now home to about 7 miles of NEV lanes, and about 700 residents own the cars, Cosgrove said.

"They're a little bit more convenient than driving a conventional automobile, and people kind of like the pace," he said.

Power plant on the path to approval

by Eric Firpo/ TP staff

Tracy Press, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010

A plan to turn a part-time power plant into one that runs most of the time has a preliminary OK from state regulators, and air pollution officials say the plant's owner long ago worked to cut emissions to offset the fact that the converted plant could put as much as 53 times more smog over the skies of Tracy.

A two-person subcommittee of the California Energy Commission voted last Thursday to approve the permit for the Tracy Peaker Plant, which sits about half a mile from city limits on Schulte Road west of town. On March 24, the full commission is expected to vote on the permit, and GWF Energy spokesman Riley Jones seems confident his company will get the go-ahead it needs to rebuild the plant.

"We complied with all the requirements and addressed all the concerns, so it was not a surprise" when the subcommittee approved its permit, Jones said.

The plant was granted a permit in 2003 to run 8,000 hours a year, but GWF has turned on its turbines only about 100 hours per year since then.

That made no difference to regulators, however, who still made GWF offset pollution as though the plant ran at 8,000 hours per year. That limit will remain if the plant is converted. Jones said the new plant will probably run between 5,000 and 7,000 hours a year.

The power company has had to buy pollution credits from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the agency that regulates air quality in a basin that runs from San Joaquin County to Bakersfield.

Credits can be created when a company that has a permit to pollute goes out of business, for instance, or if a company installs better technology to cut its emissions but still has a permit to pollute at a higher level.

Those rights to pollute are then held by the air district, which sells them to companies like GWF that need to offset pollution of their own, according to the air district's Dave Warner. Money generated from the sale of credits is used by the district to cut pollution in various ways, such as converting buses from diesel to natural gas.

The air district often makes companies buy 1½ pounds of credits for every pound of pollution they generate, Warner said.

In addition to pollution credits, the air district's board OK'd an extra \$319,000 that GWF will pay so the district can cut smog in and around Tracy.

The most cost-effective pollution cuts, Warner said, are to convert irrigation pumps from internal combustion engines to electric motors.

GWF plans to make the peaker plant one that cranks out 325 megawatts, which is enough electricity to power about 325,000 homes.

It will run much more efficiently than the peaker plant does now, Jones and regulators say, and will be able to produce power with more than 60 percent less smog and greenhouse gases per megawatt generated.

But because it's only a part-time plant, it produces little pollution at the moment. The energy commission says the peaker plant spews about 3,400 pounds of smog a year, but under its permit, it could produce as much as 180,000 pounds of smog and more than 1 million metric tons of greenhouse gases, which the air district has no jurisdiction to regulate.

"It's a big jump, but not as unusual as you might think," Warner said.

Using computer models, the air district can show where the pollution from the converted plant will go, Warner said, and it determined that "there's no health risk from a change in operation" of the peaker plant.

State regulators want to make sure new plants are efficient and comply with environmental regulations, said Michele Demetras, energy commission spokeswoman.

At the same time, the commission wants plants to produce power affordably for users while making it attractive for companies to build them.

The company's peaker plant permit runs through 2013, and GWF expects to shut down the plant two years early to get to work on its conversion, Jones said.

From 2003 to 2008, the company donated \$50,000 a year to Tracy charities, but it upped that to \$55,000 two years ago, including four \$2,500 scholarships for high school seniors.

"We want to not pay lip service, but to actually become a good corporate member of any community in which we're located," Jones said.

Chevron, environmentalists must wait for ruling on Richmond refinery project

By Katherine Tam

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO — Chevron and their environmentalist critics on Tuesday finally got their day in state appellate court, duking it out over whether the oil company's plan to replace old equipment at its Richmond refinery could increase pollution and harm public health.

The wait for a ruling could be as long as three months.

"By talking in generalities, they misled the public," Will Rostov, the attorney representing a trio of environmental groups, argued in the state Court of Appeal in San Francisco. "The question is will it be heavier (crude oil) and will that result in more pollution?"

Chevron defended its plan during the hourlong hearing and insisted the project's environmental impact report is clear on what kind of crude would be refined.

"It's not a failure-to-disclose case," said Ronald Van Buskirk, attorney for Chevron.

Dozens of people who have followed the case closely packed the gallery: local environmental activists, labor unions eager for construction jobs, refinery representatives and staff members from the state Attorney General's Office. The crowd was larger than typical in this courtroom.

The parties now await a ruling, which Judge Ignazio Ruvolo said would take up to 90 days.

Construction on Chevron's project to replace its power plant, hydrogen plant and reformer has been at a standstill since July, when a Contra Costa County Superior Court judge found the project's environmental report unclear, especially on the issue of what crudes would be processed. Chevron is appealing.

Negotiations aimed at avoiding a prolonged legal battle have hit a wall. A settlement appears elusive, despite persistent prodding from state lawmakers, the Attorney General's Office and labor unions.

Ruvolo asked Tuesday about the likelihood of a settlement within 60 days; Van Buskirk said it would be difficult, adding that the parties are still far apart.

After the hearing, locals milled about outside the courtroom speculating on how soon a ruling might come.

Greg Feere, chief executive officer of the Contra Costa Building and Construction Trades Council, hopes the parties will return to the table and reach a middle ground. About 1,250 were laid off when the project stopped under the July court order, he said.

"There is no other job to send them to. After so long, you run out of health benefits," Feere said. "There's a lot of frustration, a lot of anger, a lot scared about what kind of future lies ahead. We would love to see things settled."

The project was to employ 3,000 in construction jobs at its peak, Feere said, and fuel 7,000 secondary jobs ranging from materials vendors to payroll clerks.

There is no reason Richmond can't have both jobs and environmental guarantees, project opponents say.

"I would hope Chevron realizes that we're not interested in closing Chevron down," said Richmond resident Ken Davis, who said he has respiratory problems in the morning.

"Chevron has caused some conditions that make it difficult for us to live. Let's deal with mitigation."

Chevron argues that it meets some of the toughest environmental limits. The refinery has reduced emissions of criteria pollutants by 70 percent since the 1970s, spokesman Brent Tippen said.

During Tuesday's court hearing, the parties also addressed whether developing a plan to deal with greenhouse gases later is legal and whether the project's environmental impact report should have analyzed Praxair's proposal to construct a 22-mile underground hydrogen pipeline stretching from the Chevron refinery to plants in Martinez and possibly Rodeo.

Proposed rules could make smog check less expensive and time-consuming for most motorists

By Paul Rogers

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010

Millions of California motorists could soon be saying so long to the iconic tailpipe test. Quicker and cheaper smog checks are being considered under a proposal unveiled Tuesday by state regulators.

Hoping to take advantage of newer technology and to correct shortcomings — even fraud — that are letting a significant number of polluting cars remain on the street, the California Air Resources Board and the state Bureau of Automotive Repair want to make the most far-reaching changes to the smog check program in at least a decade.

Under the measure, any California motorist with a 1996 or newer vehicle would no longer be required to pass a tailpipe emissions test or a treadmill test. Instead, every two years when the vehicle is due for a smog inspection, a technician would hook up a meter to a port under the dashboard and download data from the vehicle's computerized onboard diagnostic system.

Such computerized systems have been required by the federal government for all new cars since 1996; they use dashboard lights to alert drivers to a wide range of problems. They also record data that show whether a car's pollution-control systems are working properly.

"This will assist consumers and help to clean up our air," said Sherry Mehl, chief of the state Bureau of Automotive Repair.

Already, 22 states, including Nevada, use the system, called "OBD II," for smog checks instead of measuring actual emissions from tailpipes.

Tuesday's proposal is included in a bill, AB 2289, by Assemblyman Mike Eng, D-Monterey Park. For it to become law, it must be approved by the Legislature.

About three-quarters of the passenger vehicles in California are 1996 or newer, and they account for only one-quarter of the pollution from vehicles, according to air board statistics.

Currently, a smog check can take 20 minutes and cost about \$50. Under the proposed new rules, it should take half as long and cost half as much for motorists with 1996 and newer vehicles, said Dennis DeCota, executive director of the California Service Station and Automotive Repair Association, in Santa Rosa.

"I think it is a good thing. The consumer already has paid for the technology when they bought the car. All we have to do is make sure those components are working properly," DeCota said. "For most people, this will be less costly and less inconvenient."

Vehicles older than 1996 still would have to undergo tailpipe or treadmill tests. But the state would limit the number of stations that can perform such tests, only allowing those it deems are doing a thorough job under a newly created ranking system.

The proposed changes came about after a state audit released Tuesday showed major flaws in the smog check program.

According to the study, the California Highway Patrol pulled over more than 6,000 older vehicles in Southern California, and they were given roadside tailpipe tests between 2003 and 2006. In all, 19 percent of the pre-1996 vehicles were found to be pumping out more smog than state law allows despite having passed smog checks within one year.

Worse, 49 percent of the pre-1996 vehicles that initially failed smog check a year earlier — but then passed after getting fixed — were emitting in excess of state standards.

Although normal wear and tear played some role, that wasn't the whole story, the audit found.

"Many of the vehicles that initially failed during the previous Smog Check cycle either were not actually repaired or were repaired only temporarily," concluded the report, written by Sierra Research, of Sacramento.

"The new system will create more revenue for people fixing cars and should eliminate fly-by-night repair shops," said Tom Cackette, chief deputy executive officer of the air board. He acknowledged that people with older cars may pay more in repairs.

State law requires most motorists, unless they have low incomes, to pay up to \$450 to repair their vehicle to pass smog check.

DeCota, of the service station owners group, said he resents the implication that many of the 7,000 businesses in California that do smog checks are committing fraud. The flaws are in the program's rules, he said. Often, if a car needs major engine work to pass, and the owner can't afford it, it can be made to pass with small fixes like new spark plugs. But those emissions gains quickly go away, he noted.

"They sat on this study and didn't release it for three years because it shows the program isn't working well," DeCota said. "That's embarrassing for the Schwarzenegger administration."

Under current state law, passenger cars and trucks must be inspected every two years and pass state emissions tests, except when they are six years old or newer. Vehicles older than 1975 also are exempt from smog tests.

Air board officials estimate that if the new rules take effect, smog would drop by 70 tons a day beyond the 400 tons the smog check program already prevents.

NEW SMOG CHECKS

The new system, already in use in 22 other states, would download data from the vehicle's computerized onboard diagnostic system.

The new check should take half as long and cost half as much for motorists with 1996 and newer vehicles.

Vehicles older than 1996 still would have to undergo tailpipe or treadmill tests.

Radical smog check overhaul proposed

By Reed Fujii, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010

In a major revamp of California's Smog Check program, regulators want to rely on readings from the onboard computers in 1996 and newer vehicles and forgo the current tailpipe emissions test.

Older models known to be heavy polluters would be directed to the most highly rated testing stations.

The changes would save consumers time and money while further reducing smog-producing emissions, officials of the state Air Resources Board and Bureau of Automotive Repair said Tuesday.

Representatives of smog shops, however, criticized the proposed legislation as overly vague and said the change might pass cars that actually violate smog standards.

"We can reduce the cost of inspections to consumers," said Tom Cackette, the air board's chief deputy executive, during a morning teleconference. "We can get more emissions reductions."

Besides setting new test procedures, the legislation would increase fines for improper inspections; allow the state to contract with franchise-like chains of independently owned Smog Check stations; evaluate test stations using roadside vehicle checks; and encourage development of technician training programs.

Cackette said the improvements could reduce vehicle emissions by up to 70 tons a day statewide, quite an improvement on a Smog Check program that is credited with removing 400 tons of pollutants from California's air each day.

"We don't need the exhaust test to determine what the status of the emissions of the car is," he said. With 1996 and new cars accounting for three of four vehicles now on the road, Cackette said, "We'll get just as good of an inspection. ... It will happen faster."

But the new technology may not be entirely reliable, said Pete Campas, a technician at Abbetter Smog in Lodi.

He often checks both the onboard computer and the tailpipe exhaust, and sometimes the results don't jibe.

"Everything would be OK electronically, but the emissions could be wrong," he said. "I think the best thing is to check the emissions to make sure they stay below the required standards."

Susan Ward, executive director of the California Emissions Testing Industries Association, said the onboard diagnostic systems in 1996 to 1999 model vehicles are unreliable.

She also criticized the legislation, drafted by state regulators and carried by Assemblyman Mike Eng, D-Monterey Park, as being too vague, leaving vital details to be set through a follow-on regulatory process.

"It sounds really promising, but you can't say, because you can't get the information to evaluate," Ward said.

That makes the future uncertain for the state's 7,000 small-business owners and 15,000 technicians involved in the Smog Check industry, especially the 2,000 or so test-only shops represented by Ward's association.

At this point, you don't need more regulatory uncertainty; you don't need any more legislative uncertainty," she said.

Another industry representative, however, generally welcomed the change.

"There are opportunities here," said Dennis DeCota, executive director of the California Service Station and Automotive Repair Association. "There are opportunities to help consumers as well as the industry."

While agreeing that onboard diagnostics in pre-2000 vehicles are problematic, newer systems are very reliable, he said.

The current Smog Check system needs reform, DeCota said.

"Right now, we operate under, quite frankly, a lot of ambiguity," he said. "It has to be modernized."

Turf grass not always a 'green' thing, study shows UC Irvine research finds that the greenhouse gases absorbed by lawn can be more than offset by Earth-unfriendly maintenance practices.

By Margot Roosevelt. Staff writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2010

Green is good, right?

Not necessarily when it comes to lawns, according to a new study by UC Irvine researchers.

For the first time, scientists compared the amount of greenhouse gases absorbed by ornamental turf grass to the amount emitted in the irrigation, fertilizing and mowing of the same plots. It turns out keeping a lawn is not good for Mother Earth.

In four parks near Irvine, researchers calculated that emissions were similar to or greater than the amount of carbon dioxide removed from the air through photosynthesis -- a finding relevant to policymakers seeking to control the gases that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to climate change.

"Green spaces may be good to have," said geochemist Amy Townsend-Small, the lead researcher in the paper published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*. "But they shouldn't be automatically counted as sequestering carbon."

The paper is particularly timely, she added, because governments are calculating their carbon footprints and discussing whether parkland could offset other sources of emissions, such as refineries, power plants and automobiles.

Turf grass, covering an estimated 1.9% of the United States, is the most commonly irrigated crop and increasingly in demand in urban areas.

Townsend-Small and colleague Claudia Czimczik measured the carbon content of the parks' soil and compared that with emissions from producing fertilizer, mowing with gasoline-powered equipment and pumping water to irrigate the plots. The water was recycled; but if it were fresh water transported from distant rivers, as is much of Southern California's water, emissions would be higher, Townsend-Small said.

They also factored in the nitrous oxide released from soil after fertilization. Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide, which is released by fossil fuel combustion.

California has no regulations to control turf grass, but the study "shows the importance of full life-cycle analysis for greenhouse gases," said Mary Nichols, head of the California Air Resources Board, which is charged with reducing the state's carbon footprint. Research is underway, she said, to develop varieties of grass that need less mowing and use less water.

Southern Californians, Townsend-Small said, could reduce the carbon footprint of their lawns by using rakes rather than leaf-blowers and hand mowers rather than gasoline-powered equipment.

"About 40% of the drinking water we import at great financial and environmental expense is used for," said Paula Daniels, a Los Angeles Department of Public Works commissioner. "This study hopefully will motivate more of us to make changes in our landscapes."

UN weather meeting agrees to refine climate data

By Jim Gomez and Frank Jordans - Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010

GENEVA -- World weather agencies have agreed to collect more precise temperature data to improve climate change science, officials said Wednesday, as U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged environment ministers to reject efforts by skeptics to derail a global climate deal.

Britain's Met Office proposed that climate scientists around the world undertake the "grand challenge" of measuring land surface temperatures as often as several times a day, and allow independent scrutiny of the data - a move that would go some way toward answering demands by skeptics for access to the raw figures used to predict climate change.

"This effort will ensure that the datasets are completely robust and that all methods are transparent," the Met Office said. The agency added that "any such analysis does not undermine the existing independent datasets that all reflect a warming trend."

The proposal was approved in principle by some 150 delegates meeting under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization this week in Antalya, Turkey. It comes after e-mails stolen from a British university and several mistakes made in a 2007 report issued by the U.N.-affiliated Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change prompted public debate over the reliability of climate change predictions.

Skeptics claim scientists have secretly manipulated climate data and suppressed contrary views - allegations that have been denied by researchers and the climate change panel.

Nevertheless, the Met Office said current measurements were "fundamentally ill-conditioned to answer 21st century questions such as how extremes are changing and therefore what adaptation and mitigation decisions should be taken."

Ban Ki-moon urged environment ministers meeting in Bali, Indonesia, on Wednesday to reject attempts by skeptics to undermine efforts to forge a climate change deal, saying global warming poses "a clear and present danger."

In a message read by a U.N. official, Ban referred to the controversy over the 2007 climate panel report that drew widespread criticism and calls for the panel's chairman, Rajendra Pachauri, to resign.

The report's conclusion that Himalayan glaciers would melt by 2035 turned out to be incorrect, an error that bolstered arguments from climate skeptics that fears of global warming are overblown.

A U.N. conference in Copenhagen in December failed to achieve a binding deal on curbing greenhouse gas emissions. But Ban said it was important that the conference set a target of keeping keep global temperatures from rising, and established a program of climate aid to poorer nations.

"To maintain the momentum, I urge you to reject last-ditch attempts by climate skeptics to derail your negotiations by exaggerating shortcomings in the ... report," Ban said at the start of an annual U.N. meeting of environmental officials from 130 countries on the Indonesian resort island of Bali.

"Tell the world that you unanimously agree that climate change is a clear and present danger," Ban said.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said his country will hold an informal meeting of all environmental ministers and officials in Bali on Friday to discuss how to reach a binding treaty in Cancun later this year on greenhouse gas reductions.

A U.N. study issued Tuesday said countries will have to significantly increase their pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the catastrophic effects of climate change.

Sixty nations - including China, the United States and the 27-member European Union - met a Jan. 31 deadline to submit pledges to the U.N. for reducing greenhouse gases as part of a voluntary plan to roll back emissions. Together the countries produce 78 percent of the world's greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels.

Countries set a target in Copenhagen of keeping the Earth's average temperature from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above the levels that existed before nations began industrializing in the late 18th century.

Scientists believe global emissions must be cut in half by mid-century to avoid the melting of glaciers and ice caps, the flooding of low-lying coastal cities and islands, and worsening droughts in Africa and elsewhere.

[Tracy Press, Commentary, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010:](#)

Living Green: Where would your dot go?

by Christina Frankel, For the Tracy Press

There are many different shades to the color green. As a child, coloring would have included the Crayola green, a very respectable middle-of-the-road, darker green. When people discuss green as a movement, most picture a lighter green, more like that of Kermit the Frog, or the color of new grass. Well, Tracy is embarking on an Emerald City status, evoking images of a crystal green from the Wizard of Oz.

When it comes to sustainability, it's not the intensity of the color of green that matters, but the commitment behind the color. Last week, Tracy residents had the opportunity to rate the color of their green with dots, signifying which sustainability measure Tracy should focus on. The event was the one and only public workshop in the process that the city has evolved to: Drafting a sustainability action plan — or SAP — to gain the city an Emerald status.

The city's commitment toward sustainability has been slow to evolve. Although progress had already started by late 2008, the city got a kick in the pants last year: The Center for Biological Diversity sent Tracy a letter, commenting on our general plan update and its ineffectual ability to deal with sprawl as required by Assembly Bill 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. Since the city of Stockton had already been sued for its "business as usual" sprawl general plan, the writing was on the wall that change was necessary.

To craft a direction, originally the city had plans for multi-day community sustainability charette with interactive public input. When the economy tanked, the city scraped the charette in favor of a state-run fledgling program called the Emerald Cities project. Boosted by help from federal stimulus money, the process has the promise to be more than just public talking points.

The core of the Emerald status is the creation of a citywide sustainability action plan. For business owners out there, a SAP is like a mission statement and business plan rolled into one. It's putting in writing a commitment to sustainability, and as "action" implies, includes the steps on how to get there.

And there is a target. The city proposes that we will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions — or GHG — by 29 percent by 2020.

The first step toward a goal is to establish where you are. For that, Tracy had to calculate its baseline GHG. That part of the study was completed in December 2009.

The news wasn't all that shocking: Tracyites spend most of their time in a car, with 63 percent of our community GHG coming from transportation.

Like all over-indulgences, it's hard to stop bad habits cold-turkey. To make change work, sustainable reduction needed to be attacked in various areas.

Last week, the city presented 41 emission-reduction strategies and another 44 non-quantified measures defining ways we can reduce our GHG.

For those in the room, 10 sticky dots were handed out. The premise was simple: Stick the dots on those strategies that were a priority. Although I jokingly asked for more, 10 is all we got.

Not counting officials and staff, there weren't even enough people in attendance to give half of the measures one dot, let alone a priority. For myself, with the opinion the city is languishing behind in sustainability, 10 priorities seemed a discouraging small step. But a step it is, in the right direction, though if it is with enough commitment has yet to be seen.

For a change: Recycle. Recycle. Recycle. If we recycled 75 percent of our waste, we could save a whopping 14 percent of our expenditure of local GHG emissions.

To make a difference: Reduce your car trips. Walk. Bike. Take the bus.

To take a stand: Rate the color of your green: Visit EmeraldTracy.org and download the sustainability measures. Let Kimberly Matlock know where your dots would go. Contact her at 831-6430 or at kimberly.matlock@ci.tracy.ca.us. Let your voice be counted.

Christina D.B. Frankel is a 20-year Tracy resident, architect and mother of three. Her column, Living Green, runs twice-monthly in the Tracy Press. She can be reached at cdfrankel@sbcglobal.net.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010:](#)

Obama's nuclear option

McClatchy-Tribune News Service

The following editorial appeared in the Dallas Morning News on Tuesday, Feb. 23:

At last, a nuclear energy breakthrough.

It's impossible to overestimate the importance of President Barack Obama's plan to finance the construction of two nuclear reactors, the nation's first in three decades. Regardless of the political risks of alienating the anti-nuke wing of his party, the move is the best effort in years to jump-start the nation's long-stalled nuclear power industry.

Obama called for a "new generation of clean, nuclear plants" in his State of the Union address last month and is backing it up with \$8.3 billion in conditional loan guarantees to a power company consortium in Georgia and more dollars in his proposed 2011 budget for nuclear energy.

Nuclear power in the United States has languished as the result of exaggerated fears of meltdowns, waste disposal controversies and financial concerns. As a supporter of nuclear energy, this newspaper hopes the industry will now have the confidence to make the \$6 billion to \$8 billion investment required to construct a nuclear reactor without worrying that the federal government will pull the financial rug from beneath it, as happened after Three Mile Island in 1979.

The president's decision wisely acknowledges that nuclear power is the most practical way for this country to reduce reliance on dirty fossil fuels and to confront the issues posed by climate change. Solar and wind power will be part of the solution, but those alternatives can't match nuclear energy when it comes to steady and massive electricity production.

For example, even though there hasn't been a new U.S. plant since the 1970s, the nation still gets more than 20 percent of its electricity from the 104 nuclear power plants still in operation. Those plants also generate about 75 percent of all clean energy produced in the U.S., far more than wind and solar combined. And unlike coal, the nation's main source of electricity, nuclear plants don't emit carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases.

Regions like Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, which face serious air-quality challenges, could benefit from the expansion of nuclear power in Texas.

The best-case scenario is that the Georgia plant will be approved within two years, construction completed within eight years and that other utilities with pending applications will move forward with less financial, regulatory and political uncertainty.

Public qualms about nuclear power have eased since Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and "The China Syndrome" stoked fear. Modern nuclear reactors are far safer, and many environmental groups now favor nuclear power as a way to escape the fossil-fuel trap that currently compromises the nation's national and economic security.

Without nuclear power, a national clean-energy policy is largely window dressing. The opportunity is here to show that the United States can build clean, safe and efficient nuclear plants.

Now let's do it.