

## **Pentagon seeks more waivers on rules Military says security impeded by pollution, hazardous waste laws**

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

in the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, May 11, 2005

Washington -- Defense Department officials hope to use an upcoming defense authorization bill to expand the military's exemptions from several environmental and public health regulations, arguing the restrictions infringe on national security.

The Pentagon has drafted provisions that would free it from specified air pollution and hazardous waste laws, provisions the House and Senate Armed Services Committee could take up this week as part of broader legislation giving the military spending authority.

Defense Department spokesman Glenn Flood emphasized that "this is not the first time" the military has sought waivers from long-standing environmental rules.

"The bottom line is we're not looking for any blanket exemptions on any of these," Flood said. "What we're looking for is some flexibility, if you will, so training will not be hindered."

Environmentalists, joined by congressional Democrats and state and local officials, have launched an aggressive campaign to defeat the Pentagon's plan. They argue that the military -- which the government ranks as the nation's biggest polluter -- should meet its existing legal obligations. The Defense Department accounts for more than 10 percent of the country's top priority Superfund cleanup sites and generated 16.5 million pounds of toxic waste in 2002, according to government estimates.

The proposed legislation represents President Bush's latest effort to exempt the military from federal laws protecting wildlife habitat and other ecosystems. Since 2001, the military has won exemptions from parts of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Craig Manson, assistant secretary of the interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, said the changes had allowed Pentagon planners to manage their bases more efficiently because they no longer have to consult with U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials over critical wildlife habitat on military bases. The military has invoked the waiver "dozens of times" since Congress amended the Endangered Species Act in 2003, said a Fish and Wildlife spokesman.

It remains unclear whether Congress will approve the Defense Department's request. Aides to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees said Tuesday they could not comment until the two panels begin work on the legislation later this week.

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Wednesday, May 11, 2005:](#)

### **Put in your two cents**

#### **Public workshops are designed to gain input from Kern residents about transportation needs**

Fed up with traffic jams, potholes and freeways that deadend at a shopping center? Well, you get a chance to put in your two cents worth at one of numerous workshops through June throughout the county.

The Kern Council of Governments wants your opinions at these workshops about transit needs in the county. The agency is an association of city and county governments created to address regional transportation issues. Its member agencies include the county and 11 incorporated cities within Kern County.

The first workshop was Monday night at Casa Loma School and the second is scheduled for tonight at the Arvin Veterans Hall at 414 Fourth St. A third workshop will be held Thursday at Centennial High School cafeteria, 8601 Hageman Road, with another scheduled next Monday at Liberty High School cafeteria on Jewetta Avenue.

All workshops are from 6-8 p.m. Ron Brummett, executive director of KernCOG, said some 27 workshops are scheduled through May and June. Then staff will compile a draft report for publication early next year, putting together all the suggestions discussed at the workshops and proposing a detailed road map for Kern transportation projects.

Brummett said the workshops are held every other year and have two goals. The first is to gather input for the long-range regional transportation plan called Destination 2030. The second is to receive public comment on short-range road and transit needs.

KernCOG's burning questions at the forums are: How should we spend our transportation tax dollars? New freeways? More buses? Wider roads? More bike lanes? Improve what roads? Where are the worst traffic problems?

Also on the workshops' agenda this year is discussion on a proposal from the Kern County Citizens for Quality Transportation. The group is considering placing on the November 2006 ballot the question of whether Kern voters want to increase the sales tax by one-half cent to finance roadway projects. It would be known as the Safe Roads Transportation measure.

Brummett said one of the pertinent questions raised at the early workshops is why local revenue generated by gas taxes is spent on state highways within the county. The reason, he said, is that 75 percent of all vehicles traveling on state roads in Kern are driven by Kern residents. This compares to 95 percent of vehicles on county roads being driven by Kern residents.

Everyone seems to have a complaint about potholes or congested roads. The KernCOG workshops are a good vehicle to air your views and suggestions.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Wednesday, May 11, 2005](#)

### **Time to ease gridlock is before it starts**

By ROBERT PRICE, Californian staff columnist

At first glance, it looks like good news. Bakersfield's traffic congestion wasn't any worse in 2003 than it was in 2002, according to the Texas Transportation Institute's 2005 urban mobility report, released this week.

The analysis of 85 metropolitan areas found that Bakersfield drivers endured an average of seven hours of delay over the course of the year, the same as the year before and only two hours more than in 1993.

But the experience of other cities demands consideration. In 1982, drivers in five metro areas were delayed at least 20 hours a year; these days drivers in 51 locales are affected that seriously. Among the Bakersfield-sized cities fighting that sort of chronic bottlenecking: Charleston, S.C.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; and Birmingham, Ala.

Those cities share something else: rapid growth. But none of them are expanding faster than Bakersfield, the most rapidly growing city in California.

The report's authors note that medium-sized cities are 10 to 15 years behind the big cities in terms of traffic congestion -- which happens to roughly equal the time it takes to complete congestion-busting transportation projects.

In other words, we can start planning for new asphalt now or be prepared for aggravating, money-wasting, air-polluting gridlock in a decade or so.

Fresno did. That area's annual per-person congestion time actually dropped from 15 hours in 2002 to 13 hours the following year.

Ron Peterson of the Fresno Council of Governments believes the easing of traffic congestion is directly related to the rollout of commuter-route improvements paid for by Measure C, the half-cent sales tax increase OK'd by Fresno County voters in 1987. Most of the improvements were unveiled in 1999-2000, and drivers gradually changed their habits.

"It's like an old dog sniffing down the same old trail," Peterson said. "Eventually people figure it out, and that's what we saw in the (2003) statistics."

Which brings us to Kern County's Safe Roads Measure, aka the half-cent sales tax proposal heading for the November 2006 ballot. Kern County is the largest California county never to have passed such a measure.

The Kern Council of Governments is hosting workshops to identify the most-needed transportation projects in the county over the next quarter century -- paid for by both existing sources and the \$1 billion we can expect from the measure's passage.

Workshops are set for 6 p.m. at the Arvin Veterans Hall tonight and the Centennial High School cafeteria Thursday night. A complete schedule is at [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org).

**We could just walk:** If our roads get bad enough we can just start lacing up our shoes and hoofing it to work. That would go against our grain in a big way, however, based on the way Prevention magazine ranks Bakersfield on its list of "walking cities."

Nationally, Bakersfield is 70th among medium-sized cities -- dead last in that population category -- based on the number of people who walk for fitness, backpack, own dogs and walk to work or use public transportation, among other measuring sticks. Gulp.

**So much for happy feet:** More than one reader wondered how Bakersfield could have landed so near the top of the "happiest cities" list put forth recently by Men's Health magazine (and noted here on April 27) when we get fair-to-poor scores in everything from bad-air days to unemployment rate to parks-to-people ratio. Good question; the Men's Health rating was based solely on antidepressant sales, suicide rates and reported instances of depression.

Let's try to sort out these contradictory databases on our walks.

[Visalia Times-Delta commentary, Tuesday, May 10, 2005:](#)

## **Valley population needs to wake from the growing nightmare**

By David Lombardi

Just a few years ago, when officials of the Packwood Creek development in south Visalia promoted their future megalithic shopping center as a place in which shoppers would enjoy a comfortable, Mediterranean-type atmosphere, I was giddy with anticipation.

Visalia residents would finally be able to enjoy what had previously been available only in Los Angeles, the Bay Area or the Central Coast. What could be better than a heavenly mixture of restaurants and electronics outlets?

Living in the Central Valley, I should have known better than to let my hopes soar. Simply put, the Packwood Creek "Power Center" is no more than a gigantic parking lot.

Sadly, the Packwood Creek fiasco is a perfect example of what growth in the Central Valley has become - chaotic sprawl. It gnaws away at our agricultural backbone and makes life in the Valley a little less livable every day.

The new shopping center is a completely uninventive circle of far-apart buildings. You have to walk several hundred yards to get from one location to another and, in the blistering heat of the Valley summer, many shoppers nearly melt on their way across the simmering pavement.

What happened to the "Mediterranean" walkways? Try to find the skinny path through the sea of cars.

I am not anti-growth. In fact, growth is a good phenomenon, and a necessary one. But good growth is critical. We can't just continue to build away at our convenience.

The economy of the Valley, the "food basket of the world," is built around agriculture. We can't afford to chew up farmland with parking lots the size of Texas.

The saddest part is that the Packwood Creek project had so much potential. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, architects have been able to turn centers with the very same retailers into works of art.

Here, the "Power Center" has done nothing but encourage more traffic [and pollution in what is, air-wise, already one of the worst areas in the world.](#)

Environmentalists shouldn't blame farmers' pesticides for the alarming rise in pollution. They should blame agriculture's No. 1 enemy: thoughtless, unplanned growth that can be so easily avoided.

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