

District's 'Spare the Air' campaign kicks off Tuesday

by Michael Mooney

Modesto Bee, Monday, June 6, 2005

Summer is in the air.

Unfortunately, so is ozone, a key component of health-threatening smog that invades the Northern San Joaquin Valley every summer as temperatures climb.

In response, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will launch its ninth "Spare the Air" campaign Tuesday.

More than 700 businesses in the region that includes Stanislaus, Merced, Tuolumne and San Joaquin counties are expected to participate in the voluntary program.

"We've consistently gotten a lot of participation from valley companies, and every year, we sign on more employers to the program," said Jaime Holt, public information administrator for the air district. "We're very pleased with the response we've gotten."

During the course of a summer — between June and September — the air district typically forecasts 20 to 45 Spare the Air days, Holt said in a prepared statement, depending upon location and when air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

When a Spare the Air day is forecast, e-mail or fax notifications are sent to employers who have registered with the program.

The employers, in turn, notify employees and encourage them to adopt air-friendly behaviors that help reduce ozone levels.

Despite years of air-quality improvement, air district spokesman Anthony Presto said, the Central Valley air basin remains one of the nation's worst for summertime smog.

Children living in the Northern San Joaquin Valley pay a particularly high price for the region's inability to clear its air.

In April, an American Lung Association study found that children living in the valley have:
Diminished lung capacity.

Increased susceptibility to asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases.

The loss of months or even years from expected life spans.

The study listed Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties, along with Fresno and Kern, as having the worst air in the nation for smog and particle pollution.

Presto said participation in the Spare the Air program is free. He said the district provides businesses with brochures, notification posters and incentive items.

Additionally, Spare the Air status is updated daily, by county, on the district's toll-free phoneline:800-SMOG-INFO (766-4463).

For more information on how to Spare the Air or become an employer partner, go to www.valleyair.org or call 559-230-5853.

Long Beach at Crossroads Over Plans for LNG Plant

By Deborah Schoch, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Monday, June 6, 2005

Long Beach must have seemed the perfect location for a liquefied natural gas terminal when Mitsubishi Corp. unfurled its plans more than two years ago for the \$450-million project.

This is not a city that shies from the ugly realities of energy production. Oil pumps still bob in the Los Cerritos marshes, and those palm-dotted islands offshore are really poorly disguised oil derricks.

But despite this port city's reputation as pro-industry, the proposed LNG terminal has set off a furious debate over safety.

Under pressure from a coalition of LNG critics, the City Council will consider Tuesday whether to cut off talks with a Mitsubishi subsidiary, a move that could doom the terminal.

Slow to react, Long Beach now joins many other towns, from rural Maine to Oregon, where fierce

community opposition has ignited as more than 40 terminals have been proposed along the nation's coasts. With domestic supplies of the gas that fuels stoves, heaters and power plants on the decline, the industry is increasingly looking to import it.

At the center of the debate in Long Beach and nationwide are concerns that an accident or terrorist attack at an urban LNG facility could puncture a massive tanker or storage tank and create a conflagration.

But LNG supporters counter that cities in Europe and Asia have imported liquefied gas for decades without a major release or terminal fire, and they call the current fears overblown.

Tom Giles, who is spearheading the Long Beach project for Tokyo-based Mitsubishi, said many federal and state agencies are scrutinizing safety plans for the proposed terminal.

"No other LNG terminal in the world has ever been looked at more closely," said Giles, executive vice president of Sound Energy Solutions, the Mitsubishi subsidiary developing the project with ConocoPhillips.

Some Long Beach residents are questioning the wisdom of building the terminal at the Los Angeles-Long Beach seaport complex, the nation's busiest, less than two miles from the city's refurbished downtown. A recent federal report stoked their worries, concluding that a tanker fire caused by terrorists could inflict second-degree burns within 30 seconds on people a mile away.

"That politicians at any level of government could consider putting this much risk so close to such dense population is unforgivable," said Bry Myown, a Long Beach LNG critic and neighborhood activist.

She and other critics say they are dubious of how thoroughly federal agencies will scrutinize the project in view of the Bush administration's strong support for increasing LNG imports.

They point out that when a California agency, the state Public Utilities Commission, attempted last year to review the Long Beach proposal, federal officials objected, claiming that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has final say in approving onshore LNG terminals.

As mayors and governors in some regions - notably New England - have declared war on onshore terminals in urban areas, Long Beach's elected officials have been slow to take a stand. The mayor postponed a vote last week, saying the council needed more information, irritating scores of opponents at the meeting.

Much of the City Council's hesitation stems from the city's historic roots in the oil industry, the port, the military and defense work. In the last two decades, however, oil revenues have ebbed, the Navy has left town and the aerospace industry has collapsed.

In response, Long Beach has built up tourism, expanded its port and redeveloped its downtown, drawing young couples to its tree-shaded neighborhoods and Craftsman bungalows.

But employment remains a hot-button issue. Trade unions, which have considerable sway, support the LNG plant because of the estimated 1,000 construction jobs it could bring to town.

Long Beach, in fact, is a city torn between two identities. It remains a big-shouldered industrial center, unbothered by the towering port cranes and steaming refineries on the horizon. Yet with its rebuilt downtown and spiffed-up waterfront, it is also evolving into a more urbane city, dependent on tourism and white-collar jobs.

The LNG debate has exposed the tensions between those identities.

The specter of a terrorist attack on a terminal tank filled with 160,000 cubic meters of liquefied gas has mobilized many neighborhood groups.

Industry officials say the terminal would be closely guarded, and the Coast Guard would escort tankers in and out of the port.

But public concern about LNG safety has mounted in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and an explosion at an Algerian LNG facility last year that killed 27 people and injured scores of others.

A recent report from Sandia National Laboratories, an Energy Department research center, concluded that current laws and safeguards could prevent accidental LNG spills but that protecting it against a terrorist attack would be harder. And Richard A. Clarke, a former White House counterterrorism expert, concluded last month that terrorists could relatively easily attack an urban facility with a high risk of "catastrophic damage."

That scenario stirs worry and anger even among the Coffee Bean-and-Trader Joe's crowd in the tony neighborhoods of Belmont Shore and Bixby Knolls, far north and east of the proposed plant site.

Notably, one of the councilmen most critical of the proposal is Frank Colonna, who runs a real estate firm in Belmont Shore and often has voted pro-business and pro-port.

"We have a downtown that's thriving and continuing to grow, and I'm very concerned that this could cast a pall over that," Colonna said, "and I'm very concerned about the risk to the population."

For decades, Long Beach has done heavy lifting for the region by transporting its imports and pumping its fuel, Colonna added. "We sacrificed our shoreline. We sacrificed our water quality, our air and transportation," he said. "It's time to draw a line."

Colonna and two colleagues plan to introduce a motion Tuesday to end negotiations with Mitsubishi over the pipeline to the terminal and over gas sales to the city-owned utility. The nine-member council cannot shut down the terminal plan. That power rests with the port's five commissioners. But a council vote to end talks would send a powerful message to the commissioners to halt the project.

LNG supporters contend that the council should reserve judgment until state and federal environmental studies are completed in late summer or early fall. Only then will city residents know exactly what risks, if any, the terminal would pose, Giles said. "Who's going to get hurt waiting for the data? Nobody."

Mitsubishi has had extensive talks with the Coast Guard and fire officials about security precautions, said Sound Energy Solutions spokesman Jeffrey Adler. "The goal is to make this secure and safe, absolutely," he said.

Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga wants the council to wait for the studies; for that reason, she plans to introduce a motion with Councilman Val Lerch on Tuesday.

Her district includes lower-income areas near the port in western Long Beach, where air pollution from diesel-fueled ships and trucks has been blamed for respiratory illnesses, including asthma.

Reyes Uranga said she was intrigued by the prospect of LNG as a cleaner-burning vehicle fuel. "The hysteria has gotten a little out of control in terms of the safety issue," she said. "Right now, the relief we need is from diesel emissions. We can't breathe." She said she also likes the possibility of hundreds of high-paying construction jobs.

But others on the council say the potential risks are too great.

"The jobs are here for three years, and the residents are here for 33 years and we have to look at the bigger picture," said Councilwoman Rae Gabelich.

At a recent City Council meeting, about 170 critics and supporters spilled out of the council chambers, standing in stairwells and in the lobby.

"I'm all for people working, but I think this particular facility is too dangerous," said resident Ellen Butler, 60, a retired teacher.

Sewnet Mamo, a public health doctoral student and 10-year Long Beach resident, added, "Any accident could happen. And nowadays, with terrorist attacks, we're very vulnerable."

But the LNG terminal has its defenders, including Dave San Jose, 64, a lifelong Long Beach resident. "It needs to go somewhere, somehow. I can't think of a better location to put it," San Jose said. "I don't think it's any more dangerous than refineries."

The debate mirrored others that have erupted in coastal cities on the East and West coasts in the last two years, as interest has grown in importing natural gas in liquid form from overseas.

LNG is natural gas, primarily methane, that shrinks dramatically in volume when chilled so that it can be carried by tanker from gas fields in countries that include Algeria, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia.

More than 40 terminals worldwide are operating today. But there are only five import terminals on the U.S. East and Gulf coasts and none on the West Coast.

Now, four terminals have been proposed for the California coast alone - the onshore Long Beach plant, two off the Ventura County coast and one off the coast of Camp Pendleton in northern San Diego County.

The Long Beach proposal attracted virtually no public attention in May 2003, when the city-owned port gave Mitsubishi exclusive rights for three years to pursue the project.

Plans call for a terminal with the capacity to handle nearly 5 million tons of LNG per year. Tankers the length of three football fields would arrive every three days, delivering LNG to be stored in two 160,000-cubic-meter tanks and then "re-gasified" and moved inland by pipeline.

To sell their project, Mitsubishi representatives have met with more than 200 groups and individuals in Long Beach over the last six months, Giles said, "and the longer you talk about it, the more comfortable they get."

He said he was mystified about why the City Council would want to end talks now. "Don't the people of Long Beach," he asked, "have a right to cleaner air and cheaper gas?"

But LNG critic Bill Powers, who works with an organization called Border Power Plants Working Group, said the port is "a terrible place" for a terminal, adding, "Sticking an LNG facility in Long Beach Harbor presumes that nothing will ever go wrong."

Garbage rates to increase

Sewer rate will also increase by 10 percent

By Julie Fernandez, Staff writer

Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, June 4, 2005

Garbage rates for city residents will increase to \$17 a month beginning July 1.

The Tulare Board of Public Utilities unanimously agreed Thursday to increase the monthly rate \$1 a year for the next three years. The city's commercial customers will be seeing an equivalent 6 percent increase in each of the years.

Customers will also see a \$2.02 hike in the sewer portion of their utility bill, a 10 percent increase that the board previously approved.

The three-year plan for the garbage fund was designed to cover a \$433,700 deficit in the current fiscal year's budget and raise additional revenues to pay anticipated increases in recycling, fuel and alley cleanup costs, Public Works Director Lew Nelson said.

The cost of natural gas fuel alone is expected to increase 40 percent in the 2005-06 fiscal year that begins July 1, Nelson said. Despite the hefty hike, the cost is still less than diesel, he added.

Vice Chairman Ron Quinn asked if the additional revenues will cover the cost of establishing a new pickup route to serve new developments and the county islands that are slated to become part of the city within the next year.

"With the increase we can purchase another garbage truck in three years," Nelson said.

Residents in newly annexed county islands will not get city garbage services for five years because of an existing contract with Western Waste Management, he also said.

In other business, commissioners adopted a \$30.85 million public utilities budget for the 2005-06 year.

The budget includes: \$6.75 million for water, \$5.19 million for solid waste and street sweeping, and \$18.9 million for sewer and wastewater treatment.

[In an attempt to help clean the air by reducing the amount of particulates, the city will strive to sweep residential streets every two weeks instead of three weeks](#), City Manager Kevin Northcraft said in his budget message.

U.K. Vows Environmentally Friendly G-8

By EMILY WINTER, Associated Press Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, June 4, 2005

LONDON, United Kingdom (AP) -- World leaders gathering for a summit of the G-8 group of wealthy nations in Scotland next month will do so without contributing to global warming, Britain's government promised Sunday.

The government said it would ensure the July 6-8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, is environmentally friendly by donating 50,000 pounds (US\$90,000) to projects that will keep as much carbon dioxide out of the air as the leaders put in. Many scientists blame emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, for helping increasing global temperatures.

The money will cover emissions from all the meetings Britain is hosting as part of its yearlong chairmanship of the G-8, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said.

A spokesman for the department denied the effort was an attempt to head off the environmental campaigners who have been a feature of recent G-8 summits and said it was an earnest attempt to reach carbon emissions targets.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has made fighting global warming and poverty in Africa the centerpiece of the G-8's agenda this year, and Blair hopes to reach deals in both areas at the summit.

The government said the year's G-8 meetings will emit 4,000 tons of carbon dioxide gas emissions, about as much as 800 homes create in a year. The pollution will come from officials' air travel, local ground transportation and hotel stays.

Britain hired the group Energy for Sustainable Development to come up with that estimate and said it would be updated.

The environmental projects the government is helping fund include one to reduce the pollution created by poor people's homes in Cape Town, South Africa. The homes will get solar water heaters, ceiling insulation and energy efficient light bulbs.

Energy for Sustainable Development said the measures would prevent 5,600 tons of carbon dioxide from being emitted each year.

The government said it will encourage recycling at the summit hotel, serve attendees "fair trade" food whose producers get good prices and make sure meeting delegates travel in clean-fuel vehicles.

Catherine Pearce, of the group Friends of the Earth, applauded the effort but said it was more important for the government to make sure Britain meets its goals for increasing the use of energy from environmentally friendly sources.

Full text of the 2005 Urban Environmental Accords

The Associated Press

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, June 5, 2005

These are the urban environmental accords that mayors from around the world signed Sunday in San Francisco:

Energy

Action 1: Adopt and implement a policy to increase the use of renewable energy to meet ten percent of the city's peak electric load within seven years.

Action 2: Adopt and implement a policy to reduce the city's peak electric load by ten percent within seven years through energy efficiency, shifting the timing of energy demands, and conservation measures.

Action 3: Adopt a citywide greenhouse gas reduction plan that reduces the jurisdictions emissions by twenty-five percent by 2030, and which includes a system for accounting and auditing greenhouse gas emissions. Waste Reduction

Action 4: Establish a policy to achieve zero waste to landfills and incinerators by 2040.

Action 5: Adopt a citywide law that reduces the use of a disposable, toxic, or nonrenewable product category by at least fifty percent in seven years.

Action 6: Implement "user-friendly" recycling and composting programs, with the goal of reducing by twenty percent per capita solid waste disposal to landfill and incineration in seven years.

Urban Design

Action 7: Adopt a policy that mandates a green building rating system standard that applies to all new municipal buildings.

Action 8: Adopt urban planning principles and practices that advance higher density, mixed use, walkable, bikeable and disabled-accessible neighborhoods which coordinate land use and transportation with open space systems for recreation and ecological reconstruction.

Action 9: Adopt a policy or implement a program that creates environmentally beneficial jobs in slums and/or low-income neighborhoods.

Urban Nature

Action 10: Ensure that there is an accessible public park or recreational open space within half-a-kilometer of every city resident by 2015.

Action 11: Conduct an inventory of existing canopy coverage in your city; and, then establish a goal based on ecological and community considerations to plant and maintain canopy coverage in not less than fifty percent of all available sidewalk planting sites.

Action 12: Pass legislation that protects critical habitat corridors and other key habitat characteristics (e.g. water features, food-bearing plants, shelter for wildlife, use of native species, etc.) from unsustainable development.

Transportation

Action 13: Develop and implement a policy which expands affordable public transportation coverage to within half-a-kilometer of all city residents in ten years.

Action 14: Pass a law or implement a program that eliminates leaded gasoline (where it is still used); phases down sulfur levels in diesel and gasoline fuels, concurrent with using advanced emission controls on all buses, taxis, and public fleets to reduce particulate matter and smog-forming emissions from those fleets by fifty percent in seven years.

Action 15: Implement a policy to reduce the percentage of commute trips by single occupancy vehicles by ten percent in seven years.

Environmental Health

Action 16: Every year, identify one product, chemical, or compound that is used within the city that represents the greatest risk to human health and adopt a law and provide incentives to reduce or eliminate its use by the municipal government.

Action 17: Promote the public health and environmental benefits of supporting locally grown organic foods. Ensure that twenty percent of all city facilities (including schools) serve locally grown and organic food within seven years.

Action 18: Establish an Air Quality Index (AQI) to measure the level of air pollution and set the goal of reducing by ten percent in seven years the number of days categorized in the AQI range as "unhealthy" or "hazardous."

Water

Action 19: Develop policies to increase adequate access to safe drinking water, aiming at access for all by 2015. For cities with potable water consumption greater than 100 liters per capita per day, adopt and implement policies to reduce consumption by ten percent by 2015.

Action 20: Protect the ecological integrity of the city's primary drinking water sources (i.e., aquifers, rivers, lakes, wetlands and associated ecosystems).

Action 21: Adopt municipal wastewater management guidelines and reduce the volume of untreated wastewater discharges by 10 percent in seven years through the expanded use of recycled water and the implementation of a sustainable urban watershed planning process that includes participants of all affected communities and is based on sound economic, social, and environmental principles.

Big or little: These tanks stand up to extremes

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, June 5, 2005

If you need a fuel tank that won't freeze in Antarctica or explode in a Mojave Desert summer, you may need to place an order with Bakersfield Tank Co., a 25-year-old manufacturing company with new owners and a new location. Last August, Gary L. Hays and his daughter, Allison Fanucchi, acquired the company, which had been doing business on Patton Way, from Paul Nixon. Also included in the transaction was companion company Bakersfield Protective Coating and Sandblasting.

The business opened Aug. 16 at 1500 S. Union Ave. on a 121/2-acre industrial site with 50,000 square feet under roof. "We hope to to exceed \$10 million in sales this (calendar) year," Hays said.

Hays is a former partner in Tiger Tanks on Edison Highway, where Fanucchi had the title of president. Tiger Tanks continues to operate at the same location.

Bakersfield Tank and the coating company have a staff of 73, including four engineers. Bill Stanley, who had been a part of the previous ownership, now is manager of Bakersfield Protective Coating and Sandblasting.

What might be the Bakersfield firm's "tallest" project to date is a pair of 110-foot steel exhaust towers for a gas-fired power plant near Modesto. Daniel Galvez, sales engineer, says they are the tallest tanks in the San Joaquin Valley. He adds that the height is needed to disperse the sound of the operation above general activity in the area. These are not hollow steel tubes but state-of-the-art [air pollution filters](#) that meet state Air Resources Agency requirements. He likens the rotating cylinders inside to a catalytic converter.

The 17-foot diameter tanks are assembled at the Bakersfield Tank plant in six-foot sections. Then they are pieced together in 55-foot units and trucked to the site. Galvez explains it is more efficient to haul the long sections to the site than to piece them together in short sections there. The company operates its own trucks and the trip to Modesto takes two days, with pilot cars and two CHP escorts.

Those fuel tanks for Antarctica are insulated with a 5-inch interior lining of concrete coated to accommodate fuel. Hays said they range in capacity from 25,000 to 60,000 gallons. The client is Raytheon.

Bakersfield Tank has a history of supplying tanks to Antarctica. In 1990 it filled an order for delivery of fuel tanks to Antarctica for the U.S. Navy.

The company provides custom tanks for a variety of uses. For instance, one order was for a special tank for Sterling Insectary Inc. of Shafter, a scientific firm that supplies pest-fighting insects to the farm industry.

Brad Fenwick, manager of engineering and quality control, said the company designs, manufactures or repairs more than 70 different vessels. It serves large industry from dairies to petroleum and chemical firms.

One patented product gaining in popularity is the Enviro-Vault, an above-ground dispensing fuel tank that is being ordered by companies with fleet operations, farms, remote businesses and outlying service stations. In the last 16 months, the tank company has delivered Enviro-Vaults to 15 California Highway Patrol stations. The tanks can range in capacity from 250 to 30,000 gallons. They can be used to dispense gasoline and diesel fuel. Some are used for fuel storage for standby power generation or waste oil storage.

Hays says that with the increasing leaks in underground tanks, regulatory agencies are more tolerant of above-ground sites. The tanks are fire-rated, ballistic- and impact-resistant and have built-in earthquake restraints. Among clients is the NASA operation at Dryden Flight Center.

Not every product is a tank. AccuFlow, a petroleum metering device, is mounted on skids and is stationed at a well head where it can monitor the quantity of oil coming out of wells.

"We have over 70 craftsmen," Fenwick says, "and we can take a project from concept to completion with a resistance of up to 3,000 psi."

Visitors to Bakersfield Tank will see Enviro-Vaults, antarctic tanks, a batch plant, a sand silo and tons of steel in various stages of use. The company buys raw steel from Southern California suppliers and rolls, cuts and bends it into whatever form it needs.

Hays estimates the company has \$4 million in equipment and \$1 million in supplies on site.

Shannon L. Lowe, an engineer, said the entire staff contributes ideas. Another engineer is Russ Wilson, a mechanical engineer specializing in engineered products.

Hays, who will be 63 in July, owned Kawasaki of Bakersfield before he and partner Bob Bimat founded Tiger Tanks in 1998. He is a Bakersfield native and a graduate of East Bakersfield High School. He had a brief career as a Santa Fe Railway fireman in Needles and Seligman, Ariz. He also served three years in the Navy.

Fanucchi, 32, is company controller. She graduated from Shafter High School and earned a degree in business from Cal State Bakersfield. She is married to farmer Mark Fanucchi, partner in Tri-Fanucchi Farms, which grows Gold Ribbon potatoes and a variety of other field crops ranging from melons and carrots to cotton.

Extension of Ethanol Credit Draws Fire Critics Say Flexible-Fuel Provision Boosts Oil Consumption

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Monday, June 6, 2005

A little-noticed provision in the House energy bill provides a key concession to major automakers, allowing them to take credit for producing vehicles that run on ethanol even if owners are using regular gas.

The measure, which makes it easier for manufacturers to meet federal fuel economy requirements, underscores the problems lawmakers encounter when trying to promote alternative fuels. While U.S. officials have been trying to spur a broad market for "flexible-fuel vehicles" that can run on gas or an ethanol blend, some studies suggest that this policy has increased domestic oil consumption over the past decade.

The flexible-fuel credit, which is set to expire in 2008, would be extended for six years under language adopted by the House on April 21. It allows car makers to get credit for fuel economy for flexible-fuel vehicles even if owners never use anything but gas.

The Natural Resources News Service, a nonpartisan organization that focuses on environmental issues, provided the bill language to The Washington Post.

Senators are weighing whether to include the measure in the energy bill that will reach the floor later this month.

Rep. Joe Barton (R-Tex.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said in a statement that the credit reflected a "balanced approach" to energy consumption that "will help alleviate our reliance on foreign oil and achieve a cleaner environment."

But environmentalists such as David Friedman, research director for the clean vehicles program of the Union of Concerned Scientists, countered that, since its inception in 1993, the flexible-fuel credit has allowed manufacturers to avoid \$1.6 billion in federal fines and U.S. gasoline consumption to increase by 4 billion gallons.

"We have no problem with the automakers getting credit for the alternative fuels actually used in vehicles, because that's a good thing," Friedman said. "This pretends that they're selling hybrids when they're selling gas guzzlers."

In 2002, a National Academy of Sciences study concluded that the flexible-fuel credit "has had, if any, a negative effect on fuel economy, petroleum consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and cost. These vehicles seldom use any fuel other than gasoline, yet enable automakers to increase their production of less fuel-efficient vehicles."

However, the program remains popular on Capitol Hill with both Democrats and Republicans, particularly those from car- and ethanol-producing states. Gloria Bergquist, spokeswoman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said the policy addressed the "chicken and egg problem" of how to make renewable fuels more accessible to consumers.

"The refiners say they're not going to produce clean fuels until there's autos to use them, and the automakers say, well, we need the clean fuels if we're going to manufacture these clean vehicles," Bergquist said in an interview.

Under current law, companies that produce flexible-fuel vehicles get credit for meeting fuel standards as if car owners drive half the time with an 85 percent ethanol fuel blend. This rarely happens. According to federal officials, drivers use a blend less than 1 percent of the time, and less than 0.2 percent of U.S. gas stations sell the appropriate fuel.

But auto companies still reap the benefits as if drivers were exercising the blend option. In 2004, Ford sold more than 240,000 six-cylinder Ford Explorers, 87 percent of which were dual-fuel vehicles. That meant the company got credit for the sport-utility fleet averaging nearly 31 miles per gallon, while it actually averaged closer to 20 miles per gallon.

"It's a special-interest provision that benefits the automobile manufacturers, based on a pretense," said Rep. Henry A. Waxman (Calif.), who, with other energy committee Democrats, tried unsuccessfully to strip the provision from the energy bill.

Some U.S. manufacturers are trying to educate customers about using alternative fuels. General Motors Corp. funded a mailing to Sioux Falls, S.D., residents informing them that a local ethanol producer, VeraSun Energy, had installed 35 ethanol gas pumps in the city.

But most flexible-fuel vehicle drivers remain unaware that they can switch from gas. In a recent survey of owners in South Dakota, VeraSun found that 68 percent did not know they could use ethanol in their vehicles.

"We have a lack of awareness," said Doug Durante, executive director of the Bethesda-based Clean Fuels Development Coalition. But he predicted that ethanol sales were on the verge of taking off. "This is a very slow start, but it's a steady market. I just think it's the future."

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, June 6, 2005:](#)

'Be very alarmed'

As a respiratory therapist, I was appalled to read recent comments by officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Planning director Dave Mitchell stated "the health emergency might be overstated." Board member and Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley feels "we should be in celebration." Outrageous.

If this is the attitude prevalent among the district's board and staff, we should be very alarmed. Apparently, key decision-makers at our Valley's most important public health agency are ignorant or uncaring.

One in three families in the Valley has a member who suffers from a respiratory ailment. Five of the most polluted counties in the United States are right here. More than 1,200 Valley residents die prematurely every year from particulate pollution.

Before Supervisor Worthley pops the champagne, I invite him to visit my hospital's asthma clinic and see the face of suffering. Mr. Mitchell should come along and learn firsthand from our patients that their pain cannot be "overstated."

This "health" agency poses a danger to us all, and it's critically important we support a bill to reform it, SB 999, and add medical experts to the board. I urge readers to call their state Assembly member today.

Cal Crane, Madera

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, June 5, 2005:](#)

'Fairness issue'

I hope everyone will take a hard look at the North Fork Rancheria's proposal to build a casino on Highway 99 north of Madera. Like all California Indian tribes, the North Fork Rancheria is entitled to generate revenue by building and operating a casino, but they (and their Las Vegas casino backers) should not be allowed to do so in a location where they have no historical or genealogical ties.

Other Indian tribes in the Valley have played by the rules and constructed casinos on their tribal land, but now they are faced with economic ruin by the proposed casino.

In addition to the fairness issue, the casino will generate even more traffic, traffic deaths and air pollution on the already crowded and polluted Highway 99 corridor. The California Legislature can put a stop to this, so I ask readers to please consider contacting their elected officials.

David Lighthall, Fresno

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Saturday, June 4, 2005:](#)

Fix the classrooms

In researching indoor air pollution, there is one substance that really worries me. Asbestos is a big-time problem at my high school. The students have been told that many of the classrooms still contain asbestos in the ceilings, yet very little has been done to fix this problem.

We students go to class every day with the possibility of inhaling deadly substances into our lungs. Throughout the year, our school has gone through many upgrading projects, such as repainting and updating the bathrooms.

Why are we spending so much money on making high school campuses look good? Students spend half of their adolescent life in a classroom, so shouldn't we be more worried about their health? The updating and remodeling projects are needed, but with the health of students at stake, those in charge should start spending our money more wisely.

Trent Diedrich

Bullard High School, Fresno

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, Saturday, June 4, 2005](#)

Fallacious logic'

Just when I think women are gaining some much deserved ground in this country, along comes a letter like Don Craib's [May 29], which asserted that American politics have gone downhill since "they started letting a lot of females into the 'good ol' boys' club on Capitol Hill."

If we follow Mr. Craib's almost comically fallacious logic, I guess we could blame every social problem on women, from air pollution (they let women drive, thereby doubling the amount of pollutants in the air) to education (they let girls attend school, thus distracting the boys). High gas prices must be our fault, too.

I would remind Mr. Craib that "they" are the citizens of the United States, and no one "let women into" Capitol Hill. Women are freely elected, just like the "good ol' boys."

To blame the handful of women on Capitol Hill (less than 16% of Congress is female) for today's political climate is as ridiculous as it is sexist. I'm surprised that Mr. Craib believes our female politicians have that much influence.

Paula Haug, Fresno

[Modesto Bee, Monday, June 6, 2006, Editorial](#)

Lend valley a hand to halt those hazy summer days

Are you glad to see it's summer again?

We're not. We'd prefer not to be able to see that it's summer at all. The air in the San Joaquin Valley can get murky and thick during the summer months.

It's bad enough that it gets so hot, but the fact that we sometimes lose sight of the mountain ranges to the east and west is dismaying.

Yep, we can see that it's summer.

What can we do about it?

The Valley Air District is glad you asked. You can "Spare the Air." That's the name of the voluntary summer program that for eight years has asked people to help fight air pollution. It officially resumes Tuesday and ends in September.

When the district declares a "Spare the Air Day," people are asked to car-pool, set aside internal-combustion engines (lawn mower, leaf blower, pumps) and not take any unnecessary vehicle trips.

Depending on where you live in the San Joaquin Valley, there can be up to 30 Spare the Air days. But last year was good in Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. We had only three Spare the Air alerts, and Merced County had only five. By contrast, Fresno had 11, Tulare 15 and Kern County an incredible 27.

"Last year was a really good year," said the air district's Jaime Holt. "And we've had a really good winter and a really good spring, too. We're hoping this is a trend that will continue. The efforts that people are making, both personal and industry efforts, are making a difference."

That's precisely why it's important to continue with those efforts.

When a Spare the Air Day is forecast, the air district will alert employers and the media.

Employers will tell their workers and the media will tell everyone else that they should reduce smog-producing activities.

The district also updates air-quality status daily, by county, on a hotline (800-766-4463) and on its Web site: www.valleyair.org.

Hopefully, if we can keep up our trend of improved air quality, we truly will be happy to see summer arrive.

Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, June 6, 2005

Help our air, join Rideshare

The recent article, "Bad air costs," serves to remind Kern County residents about actual lost dollars resulting from asthma-related school absences. Costly problem? Indeed, far beyond the scope of the article.

How do we place a value on the long-term health and leadership ability of Kern's children? They are inheriting a legacy of poor air quality combined with a generally apathetic public response.

I strongly urge you to consider being part of a solution that can positively impact the health and well-being of our children: Rideshare.

Specifically, try car pooling, van pooling, riding a bicycle, walking or using public transit. One local agency that can provide more information on the benefits of these alternatives modes of transportation is Kern Rideshare: (661) 832-7433. By helping to reduce vehicle emissions, you can positively impact the health of local children and reduce your out-of-pocket commuting expenses.

-- BETH HUDSON, Tehachapi