

Public pumps out ideas at air district meetings

BY SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 27, 2006

If one man gets his way, valley air regulators would construct a massive pollution-cleaning machine modeled after the Ionic Breeze indoor air purifier.

That was one idea pitched Wednesday to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which asked for all air-cleansing ideas at town hall meetings in Bakersfield and Delano. Beyond the Ionic Breeze, locals suggested the district launch tree-planting initiatives, restrict lawn mower use on bad-air days and take a stand against new off-road vehicle parks and other potentially polluting projects.

They also lamented the southern valley's poor public transportation.

But the 80 people who turned out for the Bakersfield meeting seemed at least equally interested in critiquing the district's past work -- both to praise and blast it -- as it was in offering ideas that could help the district solve its smog and soot problems.

"Clearly the district is making tremendous progress," said Thomas Umenhofer, who advises the Western States Petroleum Association on air quality issues.

He suggested the district work more closely with local governments to prevent sprawl, and he supported the district's attempts to allow businesses to offset unavoidable emissions by paying for them to be reduced elsewhere.

Oil industry emissions have gone down by more than 99 percent since the early 1990s, according to the district. The district also touted its record of having cut 57 percent of pollution from stationary sources, which are the emissions under its control.

Those numbers failed to impress several speakers, who said the district could net more emissions than it has. They criticized the district's recent dairy rule, which they said fails to yield meaningful reductions in emissions.

Lawyers for Earthjustice and the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment pointed out that state and federal agencies are projected to significantly slash pollution from mobile sources by 2015, while increased smog-forming volatile organic compound pollution from dairy cows and other sources is projected to cause a net increase in that kind of stationary emission by 2015. That's according to the district's own data.

"There is more that can be done at the district level," said Paul Cort, a staff attorney with Earthjustice in Oakland. "It's not going to help us to continue to pass the buck."

Cort's comments reflected the "elitist mentality in the Bay Area and Sacramento," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's top administrator.

Most stationary sources of pollution have been squeezed to the limit, he said. Even if they all disappeared tomorrow the district wouldn't meet its 2013 deadline to comply with the new federal smog standard, he said. If the valley is to come close to this ambitious deadline, the district will need reductions from all quarters -- cars, trucks, farms, factories and households, he said.

Air quality meeting

Tracy Press, Wednesday, July 26, 2006

A meeting called by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will discuss air quality from 9 a.m. to noon Friday at the district's office, 4800 Enterprise Way, in Modesto, and from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. that same day at 555 E. Weber Ave., in Stockton.

For information: 559-230-6000.

Dairy cows drop in heat

By Seth Nidever, Sentinel Reporter

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, July 27, 2006

HANFORD - Bert Wilgenburg has seen his share of dead cows.

But last week was different.

Twenty animals on his 2,200-head Flint Avenue dairy expired last week. In a normal summer week, there would be only two.

"This is the worst I've ever experienced," he said.

Wilgenburg's pain is being felt across the San Joaquin Valley as a stretch of searing hot weather takes its toll on livestock and humans alike.

Ten straight days of 100-plus degree temperatures in California have killed as many as 50 people, according to the Associated Press.

The relentless heat has taken a far greater toll on livestock.

Chemical Waste Management Inc. received 1,000 tons of dairy carcasses over the weekend at its Kettleman Hills landfill site, said Bob Henry, director of operations at the site.

Henry called the amount "unprecedented."

The facility is licensed to take in carcasses but doesn't normally do so because rendering plants - facilities that process the dead animals for use in such diverse products as pet food and soap - usually do the job.

But Kings County Emergency Services Director Joe Neves said Tuesday that the plants are unable to handle the avalanche of cow bodies triggered by the current heat wave.

That leaves carcasses accumulating on dairies and at a processing site run by Baker Commodities on Hanford-Armona Road southeast of Hanford.

Henry received emergency clearance Thursday from Neves to keep the Kettleman Hills facility open extra hours to take in the bodies.

The Kings County Health Department is also allowing the landfill to temporarily receive liquid waste. The heat has decomposed many carcasses into near liquid form.

Neves said a "cascade of failures" has overwhelmed processing sites. Neves said approximately 1,500 carcasses piled up at the Baker plant before Chem Waste accepted them Saturday and Sunday.

The Baker plant skins and quarters animals from Tulare and Kings counties and sends them for final processing to a facility in Kerman, Neves said.

Dennis Luckey, a Los Angeles-based spokesman for Baker Commodities, said he could not confirm the 1,500 carcass figure.

Neves said the Hanford plant normally processes 1,100 to 1,200 cows a week but was faced with 2,200 last week.

Luckey, citing "proprietary reasons," declined to confirm those numbers.

He said there's "no way" the plant can handle "the volume that's present at this time."

Luckey estimated the company is facing double the number of dead cows it normally does.

He said the business wouldn't accept more carcasses in a day than it can process.

Wilgenburg, who is on Baker's regular pick up route, said the company hasn't come to his dairy in days.

So, on Monday, he buried "five or six" dead cows on his property.

Dead cow volume sparks change

Supervisors across the Valley ratify emergency measures so that farmers can bury animals on their own property.

By Dennis Pollock / The Fresno Bee

Also in the Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, July 26, 2006

San Joaquin Valley farmers can bury dead cows - felled by record-high temperatures - on their property under emergency measures ratified Tuesday by supervisors in some California counties.

Normally, state law requires that dead animals be taken to rendering plants for disposal.

Counties with emergency declarations include Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Merced and Stanislaus. Others that may take that step include Madera, Kern and San Joaquin counties.

Multiple state agencies over the weekend set the stage for taking such unusual measures because the only two rendering plants that serve the region have been overcome by the number of animals - most of them dairy cows - that have died because of high temperatures and humidity in recent days.

Other disposal options permitted under the emergency declarations include taking the animals to a landfill or composting them, a process of natural decomposition in which materials are added to encourage decay and reduce odors.

Officials expect the emergency measures will be suspended if animal deaths decline along with temperatures.

Baker Commodities, which operates a rendering plant in Kerman - one of two accepting complete carcasses - has cut back on the number of animals it will pick up, said Dennis Luckey, executive vice president.

"We are only servicing a small number of accounts at this time. We will only pick up what we can process so that we can avoid having to handle it a second time," Luckey said.

Officials could not be reached at Darling International Inc., the region's only other plant at Crows Landing near Turlock, to talk of the policies at that facility.

Baker has trucked some dead animals to Kettleman Hills and the Chemical Waste Management landfill site there, under the emergency declaration. Luckey declined to quantify the amount of cattle remains processed by his plant but said cows appear to be dying at "twice what you would have in a normal July."

Dairy advisers and others said the rate of deaths has increased since last week when temperatures moved into record territory. Debora Bacon, University of California dairy adviser for Tulare County, which is the No. 1 dairy county in the nation, said she talked with six dairy operators Tuesday, and five said, "It's way above average - about double since last Thursday."

She said some Tulare County dairy operators are burying their animals.

In December 2005, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District estimated the number of dairy animals at 2.63million Valley-wide. It's believed that number has grown since then.

The emergency animal disposal measures were first developed and approved by the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Food and Agriculture in 2004.

Steve Lyle, a CDFA spokesman, said the measures were developed as a precaution should the state encounter losses from agri-terrorism or from diseases such as foot-and-mouth.

Representatives of CDFA, Cal-EPA and other agencies took part in a conference call Friday to discuss the options after recent problems that plagued the Kerman plant, including a fire and mechanical breakdown. The plant is currently running, with occasional breaks for maintenance.

Lyle said CDFA does not keep a tally of the number of cows that die each year. UC advisers also said they know of no statistics on mortality, and Gary Kunkel, Tulare County's agricultural commissioner, said his office doesn't keep numbers.

"It's normal to have deaths in cattle," Kunkel said, "typically between 5% and 9% of a herd in a whole year." Not all deaths are heat-related.

Kunkel said dairy operators in California "typically can't bury or compost cows."

On the Cal-EPA Web site, www.calepa.ca.gov/disaster/animals, is a statement on disposal rules and links to information on composting.

Since Thursday, about 10 Valley dairies have composted their dead animals with the help of Frank Thomas, a composting and manure consultant in Fresno County.

Thomas said he offered his help to the dairy operators at no cost after hearing about the rendering plant emergency.

"In the last few days, some guys have lost up to two cows a day," he said.

Thomas said composting generates heat that kills harmful bacteria and is considered a safe way of disposal in other parts of the country.

Kunkel said Tulare County does not have a lined landfill that could accommodate the dead animals. In Fresno County, some animals were disposed of at the American Avenue Landfill near Kerman between July 8 and 11.

But that landfill now has only the capacity to deal with the trash it regularly handles, said Marion Miller, resources manager for the county's Department of Public Works.

Bob Vandergon, Fresno County assistant agricultural commissioner, said the rendering plants remain the preferred means of disposal, followed in order by going to a landfill, composting and burial.

Lyle said dairy operators also need to take into account restrictions by the state's Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Rules state that composted animals must not be transported off-site, and burial should not be close to ground and surface water, including domestic wells.

Ground-water contamination can be an issue for unlined landfills "with this quantity of animals," said Lanny Cavecilla, a spokesman for the California Integrated Waste Management Board.

Kings County Agriculture Commissioner Tim Niswander said the overflow of dead livestock in his county is being sent to the Kettleman City landfill just west of Interstate 5.

Baker Commodities also operates a facility in Hanford that removes hides from animals that are taken to its rendering plant in Kerman.

"But the whole thing has just gotten backed up," Niswander said. "And there is no place to put these animals."

The problem is no better in Stanislaus County, where Agricultural Commissioner Dennis Gudgel said carcasses also are being sent to an area landfill to alleviate the backup.

"We have one [rendering] facility here, when we used to have two," Gudgel said.

Stanislaus County received a waiver from the California Integrated Waste Management Board earlier to deal with its dead poultry. The county is the second-leading poultry producer in the state.

More perish from heat

Record-setting temperatures cause 13 Stanislaus County deaths, 56 across the state

By CHRIS TOGNERI - BEE STAFF WRITER

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, July 26, 2006

The death toll from a record-shattering heat wave rose Tuesday to 13 in Stanislaus County, with two more deaths listed as probably heat-related, officials said.

Statewide, 56 people have died since July 16. More people have died due to heat in Stanislaus County than anywhere else.

"This is a painful day for our county," said Dr. John Walker, county public health officer, at a news conference Tuesday afternoon.

At the coroner's facilities in Modesto, the air was heavy with the stench of dead bodies Tuesday afternoon.

Deputy Coroner Kristi Herr said the county morgue has been at capacity - 16 bodies - since Saturday, the first of three-straight days the mercury rose to 111.

Tuesday's high in Modesto of 108 broke another record for the date.

To make room for bodies, coroner's officials have worked with local funeral homes to remove bodies as quickly as possible.

"We're doing whatever it takes to work with the facilities we have at this time," Herr said.

The body count could climb to 15 today, Herr said: Two bodies found Tuesday - one in Modesto and one in Turlock - were awaiting examination Tuesday night and were listed as "probable" heat-related deaths.

The second-highest death toll in the state was in Fresno County, where 11 people have died in the heat wave, officials said.

The stubborn heat wave marks the first time in 57 years that Northern and Southern California - an area stretching about 800 miles north to south - have experienced simultaneous, extended heat waves, state Undersecretary for Energy Affairs Joe Desmond said.

"This is a historic heat wave," he said, calling conditions "extreme."

In Stanislaus County, officials declared the heat wave a local emergency Monday at 9:30 p.m., marking the first time in "distant memory" - at least 30 years - the county had issued a heat-related proclamation of emergency, county spokesman David Jones said.

A combination of factors has contributed to the mounting deaths here, officials said.

Above-average humidity and uncommonly high overnight lows in the mid-to high 80s have proven deadly, officials said.

"Our bodies can take five or six hours of this nonsense, but they can't take 48 straight hours of it," Modesto Fire Chief Jim Miguel said at Tuesday's news conference.

Poor air quality also is to blame, Walker said. Stanislaus County has experienced several poor air quality days this month, and the Del Puerto Canyon Fire sent heavy smoke into the area for several days in mid-July, he said. Those factors may have left locals already susceptible to extreme heat - the elderly and the sickly - even more vulnerable.

The victims in Stanislaus County ranged in age from 51 to 86, officials said. Many were reclusive and were found in homes with no working air conditioners, officials said.

Temperatures inside the homes of the dead have consistently been 100 to 120 degrees, officials said. On one victim, Herr recorded a core body temperature of 111, she said.

To help residents cope with the searing heat, officials opened several "cooling centers" Tuesday for people who are "medically fragile or elderly" and have no access to air conditioning, officials said.

By 6 p.m., more than 180 people had come to the cooling centers in Modesto, Riverbank and Oakdale, according to Jim Money, director of emergency services for Stanislaus Red Cross. Nurses were present, but no one who arrived needed serious medical care, Money said. The centers will be open again today.

The heat wave shows few signs of easing significantly, with temperatures forecast near or above 100 through the weekend.

Officials urged residents to avoid the heat, especially during the hottest part of the day, and to drink plenty of fluids. Walker said residents should check regularly on neighbors, especially if they are elderly or require special medical assistance.

Miguel also cautioned locals against wasting water. "We have seen tremendous late afternoon usage," he said, which has resulted in water pressure problems. "That could be a critical issue for fire suppression," he said.

In other heat-related news:

Ten patients at Kindred Hospital in Modesto, a long-term care facility, were moved to area hospitals as a precaution after rooms on the upper floors became uncomfortably warm, Battalion Chief Tom Brennan said.

Portable air conditioning units were brought in Tuesday to cool the building, Brennan said. No nursing home patients have been affected by the heat wave, Walker said.

About 900 tons of dead cattle were dumped into the Fink Road landfill in western Stanislaus County on Tuesday. More than 1,400 dairy cows have died in the county, as have hundreds of thousands of chickens and turkeys, officials said.

San Joaquin County authorities determined a 54-year-old man died from heat-related causes Sunday after working on his car in front of his Stockton home, sheriff's Deputy Les Garcia said.

Coroners also are looking at heat as a factor in a death Tuesday morning of a 52-year-old woman and the death Sunday of a 90-year-old man, both in Stockton.

An Atwater man may have died from heat-related complications, Atwater's fire chief said Tuesday. Ed Banks said firefighters discovered a 63-year-old man, whom he would not identify, dead about 5 a.m. Tuesday in his house.

A pathologist determined heat was not the primary cause of death for a 79-year-old woman from Beverly Healthcare Center who died Sunday in Stockton.

State officials issued their third Stage 1 power emergency alert since Saturday, calling on consumers to voluntarily curb electricity use to avoid rolling blackouts - the periodic shutdowns that plagued the state in 2000 and 2001.

The Modesto Irrigation District set another power record with a peak of 697 megawatts. The previous record of 692 megawatts was set Monday.

The Turlock Irrigation District's peak load was 607.1 megawatts Tuesday, lower than the record of 612.1 set Monday.

Stanislaus County went seven years without declaring a state of emergency - until this year, when leaders have issued three. The first came in April, when flood water invaded a mobile home park near Newman.

Tuesday, supervisors officially ratified a pair of heat-

related emergency proclamations county Chief Executive Officer Rick Robinson issued Monday. One established airconditioned cooling centers at which people can beat the heat during the day.

"It starts with our elderly, our medically fragile, our people who may not be able to call out for help," said Stanislaus County Fire Warden Gary Hinshaw.

The other officially allows cattle and poultry owners to dispose of carcasses at the county's West Side Fink Road Landfill, because rendering plants can't handle all the animals dying in the heat wave. Both items were approved on 5-0 votes.

The county's last emergency declaration before this year came in 1999, when lightning near Westley ignited a huge tire pile, spewing thick smoke before special crews extinguished it five weeks later. In 1997, supervisors declared an emergency when the Tuolumne River flooded parts of Modesto.

Spare the Air Day becomes habit-forming

Transit wasn't free yet ridership still increased on Monday trips

by Erik Nelson

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, July 26, 2006

They came, they paid, they rode.

On the summer's ninth Spare the Air Day, with public money for free transit exhausted last Friday, the Bay Area Rapid Transit system got 20,000 more paying customers Monday to help ease the area's heat-induced smog.

"That really is overwhelmingly phenomenal," said Luna Salaver, spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "Having six free fare days really put Spare the Air in the minds of a lot of people, people who hadn't really correlated air quality with transportation choices."

The 6.2-percent ridership increase over what would normally be expected was seen by officials as a sign that the program had, in part, succeeded.

Giving riders a free taste of transit was one of the goals of the program, which cost the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the air district \$13.6 million and paid for six days of free transit with 26 operators of subway, bus, ferry and light rail lines.

Other transit agencies, which are much slower than BART to generate ridership figures, are expected to report their Monday ridership in the coming days and weeks.

Golden Gate Ferry, which saw its Sausalito and Larkspur ferry lines mobbed on free days by as many as five times their normal number of passengers, recorded Monday morning increases of 66 percent and 13 percent, respectively, said Mary Currie, spokeswoman for Golden Gate Bridge and Transit Authority.

"We still gained some ridership, even though people were having to pay, however we don't know if it's going to stick," Currie said.

The ferries run by the city of Alameda also saw an increase Monday morning of about 17 percent over normal ridership to 381 passengers, said ferry services manager Earnest Sanchez.

The free transit program, which was only needed for one day during 2005's relatively mild summer, had originally sought to pay for three days spread out between June 1 and Oct. 13, but those three days were used up by June 26.

The two agencies approved three more days, but they were quickly gobbled up last week. More hot weather, which helps cook up smog when combined with stagnant air, high pressure, car exhaust and other pollutants, prompted the air district to declare July 17, 20 and 21 as free-transit days.

The transportation commission, which meets today, is expected to discuss the program, but is not expected to propose adding more money to the program. With six full days of serving up free transit to a major metropolitan area, the program is believed to be the largest free-transit program in the nation.

High gas cost drives many to Amtrak

By Scott Jason

The Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, July 27, 2006

There's a little less elbow room on Amtrak trains leaving Merced.

The San Joaquin Valley train line, which runs from Bakersfield to Sacramento, has seen sharp ridership increases and posted a record number of passengers for June, said Amtrak spokeswoman Vernae Graham.

The increase is because of more people living in the Central Valley and high gas prices, she said.

In June, 73,759 passengers rode the San Joaquin train, which is a 6 percent increase from last year, Graham said.

Specific June ridership numbers by station were not available.

However, an Amtrak report showed that Merced to Sacramento passenger traffic had a 57 percent increase in May 2006 compared with May 2005.

In addition, there was a 12 percent decrease in overall Merced ridership -- northbound and southbound -- in May.

Graham said the reduction in riders could be caused by construction on railroad tracks and because Highway 140 to Yosemite National Park closed in late April after a major rockslide.

More Central Valley residents who commute, gas prices and concern for air pollution are increasing the number of riders in the area, Graham said.

"It's a better option," Graham said. "You can get work done on the train and not have to worry about traffic. It's hassle-free travel."

The train arriving in Sacramento drops riders off downtown, which is in walking distance of the Capitol, as well as other government offices, she said.

Oakland resident Donna Loewen rode the Amtrak train Wednesday morning to Merced to pick up her nephew. It's a once-a-month trip she's made for about 20 years.

During the past few months, she's noticed an increase in riders.

"Maybe it's the gas prices and not having to deal with the stress of the road," she said.

Loewen, who doesn't own a car, sometimes reads on the train or takes a nap. With more riders, some of the train cars get noisy, but she said she just moves to another one.

"Sometimes you can't get the rest you want," she said.

Loewen's trip to Merced costs about \$66 round-trip.

"It's kind of pricey, but my sister doesn't have to drive," she said.

Jim Newhoff, a member of the advocacy group Transportation Involves Everyone, takes Amtrak to all the San Joaquin Valley Rail Committee meetings. The committee includes county supervisors from the areas in the San Joaquin rail line.

He said he's logged about 12,000 miles during the past six years.

During the last meeting, installing a crossover at the Merced station was discussed. The project would allow for more than one train at a time to stop at the station. Occasionally, trains back up and block some city streets, he said.

"That inconveniences a lot of people during rush hour," Newhoff said.

As the summer progresses, the number of riders will continue to grow, he said.

"It's a trend you are going to see with this hot weather and the price of gas," he said. "It's a comfortable way to get somewhere."

Actor Begley Jr. to be in Stockton in support of global warming movie

Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, July 27, 2006

Want to know how global warming affects California and talk to actor Ed Begley Jr.?

The public will have a chance to do both at the world premiere of "California: On the Front Lines of Global Warming," a short documentary, today at the University of the Pacific Geosciences Building in Stockton.

Begley and Union of Concerned Scientists California Director Jason Mark will be on hand to answer questions about the film, which was produced by the Union and details stories of global warming.

"San Joaquin County, the fifth largest agricultural county in the U.S., should be aware of the stinging realities of global warming in our own backyards, which include the threat of decreasing air and water quality and increasing levee vulnerability," said Laura Rademacher, a geosciences professor at the University of the Pacific.

The details of Assembly Bill 32, the first cap on global warming emissions in the nation, will also be discussed.

Participants will also write personal messages on "global cooling" fans, which will be delivered to California legislators.

"If we fail to work toward the reduction of global-warming emissions, we will face rapid and potentially crippling changes that will affect our community," Rademacher said.

"Parties for the Planet" will screen the documentary in 67 households, churches and public meeting places from throughout the area.

As an actor, Begley is known for his role as a doctor on the television hit series "St. Elsewhere," and films such as "She-Devil" and "Best in Show," but he's also a longtime environmental activist.

Report Faults EPA on Clean Air Regulation

By John Heilprin, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and Washington Post, Wednesday, July 26, 2006

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- The government is failing to reduce health risks from toxic air pollution as required by law, congressional investigators said Wednesday.

The Environmental Protection Agency has not met 30 percent of the Clean Air Act's requirements and regularly misses deadlines, they said.

EPA scientists issued their own report Wednesday, saying the agency should consider tightening its national health-based standards for smog-forming ozone to a level similar to California's, though not as restrictive as what the Swiss-based World Health Organization recommends. They said the risks of asthma and other respiratory ailments are greater than previously believed. EPA is under court order to propose a decision on this by next March.

The Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, said the EPA largely has failed to regulate air pollutants from small sources, including dry cleaners and trucks. The GAO report said the EPA has not yet met 239 of the law's requirements; of those the agency did fulfill, only 12 were met on time.

"EPA has not reduced human health risks from air toxics to the extent and in the time frames envisioned in the Act," according to the report by the investigative arm of Congress.

The report was requested by nine senators - six Democrats, two Republicans and one independent - and six Democratic members of the House.

Separately, a panel set up by the U.S., Canada and Mexico reported Wednesday that pollution in North America fell by 15 percent from 1998 to 2003.

In 2003, the latest year for which figures were available, the total amount of pollution released or transferred elsewhere in North America was 3.3 million tons.

The top 10 chemicals emitted in the three nations were hydrochloric acid, methanol, sulfuric acid, hydrogen fluoride, toluene, styrene, xylenes, n-hexane, methyl ethyl ketone and carbon disulfide.

Some, such as toluene and xylenes, come from mobile sources, open burning or asphalt paving; hydrochloric acid and other chemicals come from coal-fired electric utilities.

Sen. James Jeffords, a Vermont independent, and some Democrats said the GAO report shows the EPA is allowing people to be unlawfully exposed to health risks such as cancer, reproductive damage and birth defects.

"This report confirms that EPA has abdicated its responsibility to protect our citizens from dangerous, cancer-causing pollutants," Jeffords said.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., said the report shows that "virtually all Americans face an increased risk of cancer from breathing toxic air pollution, yet EPA refuses to carry out the Clean Air Act's mandates, leaving everyone exposed to unnecessary cancer risks."

Agency officials said the EPA and the Bush administration are making progress. By next year, the EPA said, emissions of toxic air will have dropped by 57 percent from 1990 levels due to new standards affecting dozens of types of industrial facilities.

"Environmental progress is similar to a relay race with each administration passing the baton to the next," EPA spokeswoman Jessica Emond said. "The Bush administration completed one leg of the race, while accelerating environmental progress for future generations."

Green issues are big for Schwarzenegger Governor leading Angelides about 4 to 3 in new poll

By John Wildermuth, political writer
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, July 27, 2006

Air pollution, global warming and other environmental woes are becoming increasingly important to California voters and they're backing Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as the man to deal with those problems, a new poll shows.

Schwarzenegger has a strong 43 percent to 30 percent lead over Democratic state Treasurer Phil Angelides among likely voters in the Public Policy Institute of California survey released today and 85 percent of those same voters say a candidate's position on the environment will be either very important or somewhat important when they vote for governor in November.

"This is a pretty unusual finding, since Democratic candidates traditionally have the upper hand when it comes to environmental issues," said Mark Baldassare, director of the non-partisan poll.

The numbers are especially disheartening for Angelides, who drew most of the major environmental endorsements during his primary battle with state Controller Steve Westly and has pledged to be "the greenest governor in California's history."

But Schwarzenegger has scrambled to build his own path on environmental questions, breaking publicly with President Bush on issues like global warming, offshore drilling and road building in wilderness areas.

The governor's positions have struck a chord with Californians. Among likely voters, 44 percent like the job Schwarzenegger is doing on the environment, up from a 32 percent approval rating a year ago; 36 percent disapprove.

Even more surprising, Schwarzenegger's backers are even greener than Angelides' supporters. Seventy-eight percent of those planning to vote for the governor's re-election say that his position on the environment is at least somewhat important, compared to 67 percent of Democratic backers who feel the same way.

"Schwarzenegger has absolutely changed voters' perceptions," Baldassare said. "The perception of his leadership is very different from what it was a year ago and even from what it was after last November's special election."

The governor also has managed to separate himself from Bush, a fellow Republican who remains hugely unpopular in the state. Only 36 percent of likely voters are pleased with the job Bush is doing as president, and 61 percent are unhappy with his performance. The president's numbers are even worse on the environment, where just 28 percent of likely voters like the job he's doing.

By contrast, 49 percent of likely voters are happy with the way Schwarzenegger is handling his job, up from 34 percent last July and 36 percent in May 2006.

"The numbers show that voters don't believe Schwarzenegger and Bush are twins," Baldassare said. "It makes it difficult for Angelides to convince voters that one Republican is the same as another."

The poll also shows Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein with a 42 percent to 21 percent lead over Republican Dick Mountjoy, a former state senator from Monrovia. But there is surprising support for Green candidate Todd Chretien and Libertarian Michael Metti, each with 5 percent of the vote, and Don Grundmann of the American Independent Party, with 4 percent. More than a fifth of the voters are undecided.

The poll was based on a telephone survey of 2,501 California residents, including 1,225 likely voters, taken between July 5 and July 18. The sampling error for the sample of likely voters is plus or minus 3 percent.

Increase in transit use on free-fare days

By Rachel Gordon, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, July 27, 2006

Regional transportation officials reported Wednesday that preliminary data revealed ridership on Bay Area buses, trains and ferries increased an average 15 percent during this year's six free-fare days aimed at reducing smog.

That means an estimated 222,700 people rode public transit each of those days as part of the Spare the Air Program sponsored by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Twenty-six transit agencies participated in the program in which passengers ride free on specially designated days when the region's air-pollution levels were projected to be particularly high.

Officials designated June 22, 23 and 26 and July 17, 20 and 21 as free-fare days. Despite the efforts, federal air-pollution levels were exceeded in several Bay Area locations on four of the six days. Still, air district officials speculated that the conditions would have been worse had people not been lured out of their cars and onto transit.

The sponsoring agencies spent \$14 million this year to reimburse the transit agencies for lost fare-box revenue. "I'm afraid that taps us out for the year," Steve Heminger, executive director of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, told his governing board Wednesday.

Some commissioners broached the idea of earmarking additional funds to extend the program, but no action was taken. Heminger said a more thorough evaluation of the free-transit program will be completed in the fall.

EPA Air Toxics Program Failing to Reduce Human Health Risks, Not Meeting Congressional Requirements

Aire Libre, Washington DC/California Chronicle, Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, July 26, 2006

Washington, D.C. - A report issued today by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) air toxics program is failing to reduce public health risks from cancer-causing toxic air pollution as the Clean Air Act requires. The report, titled, "EPA Should Improve Management of Its Air Toxics Program" was requested by Reps. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), Hilda L. Solis (D-CA) and others to assess EPA's progress in implementing the air toxics program.

The GAO found that over the past 15 years the air toxics program has failed to meet the Clean Air Act's deadlines for addressing this threat. EPA has completed less than 4 percent of the Act's air toxics requirements on time, completed 67 percent of the requirements late, and has failed to complete nearly 30 percent of the Act's requirements, leaving many pollution sources uncontrolled. The GAO stated "As a result of the limited progress in implementing these requirements, EPA has not reduced human health risks from air toxics to the extent and in the time frames envisioned in the act."

"We in Congress who voted for these deadlines expected better from EPA; the American people deserved better," said Congressman Dingell, Ranking Member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. "And the Bush Administration's chronic underfunding of environmental priorities means that progress will continue to be limited."

"Almost every American has been touched by the scourge of cancer, but the Bush Administration is pandering to polluting industries instead of cracking down on toxic emissions," said Congressman Waxman, Ranking Member of the Committee on Government Reform. "Virtually all Americans face an increased risk of cancer from breathing toxic air pollution, yet EPA refuses to carry out the Clean Air Act's mandates, leaving everyone exposed to unnecessary cancer risks."

"The Bush Administration's decision to make reduction of air toxics a 'low priority' is a slap in the face to the ninety-five percent of Americans who are at risk of cancer as a result of exposure to these pollutants, and a direct affront to those already suffering from poor health," said Congresswoman Solis, Member of

the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "I urge the Bush Administration to correct this situation immediately, for the sake of everyone's health."

The GAO also found that:

- The air toxics program is a low priority for EPA.
- EPA may be underestimating the total risk to public health from toxic air pollution, and particularly from certain high impact facilities.
- Most unmet Clean Air Act requirements would limit emissions from small stationary and mobile sources - which account for the majority of toxic air pollution.
- EPA has failed to review and update the list of regulated toxic air pollutants despite evidence that potentially harmful chemicals remain unregulated.

Air toxics, such as benzene, chlorine, and asbestos, contribute to a number of health problems, including cancer, damage to reproductive functions and birth defects. They are emitted by large stationary sources such as industrial facilities, small stationary sources such as dry cleaners, and mobile sources (such as trucks) and the fuels they run on. Sixteen years after Congress passed these provisions, EPA still has failed to control significant sources of toxic air pollution.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Thursday, July 27, 2006:](#)

Air board eager for ideas to cut valley's pollution

When cars line up at not-so-fast food drive-through windows, idling for 10 or 15 minutes before the tasty treats are delivered to their drivers, think about how much carbon dioxide, greenhouse gases and other pollutants they're spewing into the air. Shouldn't we close drive-through windows or at least limit the number of cars that can be in them?

Maybe, maybe not - we'll explore that momentarily. The purpose of bringing it up is to get people thinking about how we can reduce air pollution in our valley. Hopefully, you'll have more and better ideas.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will have two town-hall meetings Friday to explain the problems in reducing air pollution, to collect ideas for solutions and to start formulating a plan.

By 2013, the valley's air pollution must be cut in half or we will face federal sanctions. While such a cut appears daunting, it can be done. Through the efforts of almond farmers and others, the valley has cut the amount of PM-10 (particles of dust and ash in the air) to acceptable levels. That is a remarkable achievement.

Now, the district is concentrating on much smaller particles and gases that can create smog. Reducing these particles and emissions could be much tougher, because the only immediate solution involves huge reductions in vehicle and engine emissions. "We might have to reduce as much as 60 percent of our (emissions)," Rick McVaigh of the air district told The Fresno Bee.

The district has essentially no say in regulating those emissions; that power lies at the state and federal levels. So here's a suggestion: Help make the federal government accountable for adopting and enforcing much higher fuel-efficiency standards for all autos and trucks. Such pressure could come from lobbying or it could require a lawsuit. Whatever it takes.

The district has other ideas, but needs more. That's where the public comes in; residents are invited to make suggestions.

Now, about those cars queuing up at food, coffee or bank drive-ups. Studies have shown that modern auto engines can idle for six minutes before they emit the pollution equal to one restart - meaning using drive-throughs can reduce pollution in some instances. Other studies have shown that the average car takes 1½ to 2 minutes to get through the drive-through line. Simple math says that if there are four or more cars in the drive-through, you're adding to the problem by not parking and going inside.

So why can't the air district work with local jurisdictions to restrict drive-through lanes so no more than three cars can enter?

Just an idea. You might have a better one. Bring it to one of the town-hall meetings.

We all contribute to the valley's foul air; we all must help clean it up.

[Stockton Record Editorial, Wednesday, July 26, 2006](#)

Taking the heat

California hasn't melted down, because then-Gov. Gray Davis made wise energy choices five years ago

An unprecedented and unrelenting succession of triple-digit temperatures has smothered most of Northern California for 11 days as of today, fouling the air, dulling the senses and causing some deaths.

By Tuesday afternoon, more than 50 people had died from heat-related causes in California - five in San Joaquin County.

The worst appears to be over - for now. Forecasts call for a gradual cooling trend this week.

Monday wasn't the hottest day - 113 vs. Saturday's record-breaking 115 in Stockton - but it made the heaviest demands on the state's power grid.

As temperatures climbed, California Independent System Operator technicians declared Stage 1 and Stage 2 emergencies.

Rolling blackouts never occurred, despite record-breaking electricity demand that topped 50,000 megawatts. That was 15 percent higher than last summer's peak demand and 26 percent higher than any-thing experienced during the 2000-01 energy crisis.

The previous record was 49,036 megawatts, set Friday.

Former Gov. Gray Davis should get some of the credit for the system's success.

Five summers ago, he looked like a self-centered bungler mishandling California's power emergency.

Now he looks like a leader with foresight. Davis took plenty of heat in 2001 when he signed very expensive long-term contracts guaranteeing energy supplies for the state. So far so good.

Despite searing heat, California residents didn't experience widespread problems this year as they did five years ago.

"We have more than enough supply to meet demand," said Brian Swanson, a spokesman for Pacific Gas and Electric Co. "The main call for conservation isn't a supply issue, but relieving the strain on the system."

The brutal heat did cause power outages and sporadic blackouts. But they were isolated, small and short-term - more the result of localized equipment failures than a shortage of electricity.

Davis did what had to be done.

Now, energy isn't being purchased on the spot market and there's no Enron playing greedy games with the system.

Instead, there are a smooth, steady source and a stronger infrastructure for delivery.

There is still reason for concern. More power plants need to be built, especially as housing growth continues in the Central Valley, where high summer heat is the norm.

The state's reserves should be higher, and some energy experts have warned that power supplies will be strained more severely in the event of a "100-year heat wave."

If this wasn't a 100-year event, what would one be like?

The Record criticized the former governor in 2001, as did many others. Energy deals Davis arranged were costly and still are being paid for. At least, the power is there.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger owes him double. When Davis was recalled in 2003, it was in large part because of his handling of the energy crisis. That's how Schwarz-enegger became governor.

This week, he's watched and worried while the power grid held up and energy supplies flowed despite extraordinary heat and demand.

Schwarzenegger has benefited from the deals Davis made to increase and stabilize the flow of energy. So have we.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, July 27, 2006:](#)

Global warming's cause is clear

The Bee editorial about global warming ("We worry about wine, but about water, too," July 17) nicely illustrated regional impacts. Nothing like letting home folks know they won't escape untouched. Not only will grapevines wither, but increasing heat will melt the Sierra snowpack much too soon. Then annual droughts will never end.

The Bee appropriately endorses more reservoirs and water conservation. But it is off base in stating "scientists disagree on what is causing the change." This simplification ignores the predominance of experts who recognize the prime danger is carbon-dioxide buildup from burning fossil fuel. Detractors include oil-company-financed scientists and the corporation-biased Wall Street Journal, as well as some statisticians (not climatologists) who were commissioned by conservative Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas. He is another politician who proclaims as "junk science" research not fitting the Bush agenda.

Statistics can be bent in any direction, but to imply the cause has not been identified only contributes to apathy and inaction, and that means disaster.

We need information on solutions. For example, to reduce gas dependency and smog can we start with a ban on gas-powered lawn blowers and mowers? What is the current research on reservoirs? The media must educate us about the "inconvenient truth" of imminent global ecological and economic crises.

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