

Focus on Ag

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Saturday, November 11, 2006

Operators of large dairies can learn about new air-quality rules at free workshops this month. Under the rules, adopted by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, dairies with 1,000 or more milking cows must apply for permits and submit management plans by Dec. 15. The rules aim to control volatile organic compounds, a smog ingredient that can come from manure, feed and other dairy sources. Workshops will be 10 a.m. to noon or 2 to 4 p.m. Tuesday in Harvest Hall at the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center, 3800 Cornucopia Way, off Crows Landing Road west of Ceres; 10 a.m. to noon or 2 to 4p.m. Nov. 29 at Stevinson Hall, 2962 Lander Ave., Stevinson; and 10 a.m. to noon Nov. 30 at the Stockton office of the University of California Cooperative Extension, 420 S. Wilson Way. 866-662-3727.

New fireplaces to go up in smoke

By Chris Bowman - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Sunday, November 12, 2006

The crackling fire that warms so many hearts and homes this time of year is coming under regulation for the first time in Sacramento County.

The move is the result of tougher government limits on air pollutants linked to heart attacks and childhood asthma.

Come next fall, builders no longer will be allowed to install open fireplaces, and the sale of wood stoves without EPA-certified emission controls will be banned.

Locally elected officials governing Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District recently adopted the rules to meet tougher federal and state limits on particle pollution -- breathable specks in smoke, dust and vehicle exhausts.

The limits are based on scientists' estimates on asthma attacks, lung cancer and deaths attributable to the particles. The more they've studied the microscopic bits, the more they've increased estimates of their effects.

The worrisome trend has em-boldened regulators to target the beloved fireplace.

"It's incumbent upon us to protect people's health when we have this compelling -- and, to me, surprising -- knowledge that these particles can impact otherwise healthy people," said Larry Greene, executive officer of the Sacramento air district.

Mary Maret, 38, who considers herself healthy, said she gets headaches from the chimney smoke in her Fair Oaks neighborhood. The smoke also drifts into her health club, upsetting her exercise routine, she said.

"It was so obvious to me that something had to be done, even if it's a small step," Maret said.

The board approved the new regulation -- Rule 417 -- at its Oct. 26 meeting by 8-2, with county Supervisors Don Nottoli and Roberta MacGlashan opposing.

MacGlashan, who represents Fair Oaks, was unavailable for comment Thursday and Friday.

Nottoli, who represents much of the county's rural population south of Elk Grove and in the Delta, said the fireplace ban is too sweeping, especially in rural areas where chimney smoke has more room to disperse.

"To say we are no longer going to allow the traditional fireplace to be constructed in Sacramento County is very sudden," he said.

His rural constituents, however, have plenty of company elsewhere in California where particulate pollution is an issue.

The air district in the predominantly agricultural San Joaquin Valley already bans uncertified wood-burning stoves and fireplace inserts -- and then some: Wood burning other than for cooking is prohibited in any device on days predicted to have high levels of particle pollution.

Yolo, Solano, Butte, Glenn, Yuba, Sutter and Shasta counties have restrictions similar to Sacramento's as do portions of Placer County, including Truckee.

Particle pollution peaks under the same conditions that produce fog: cold temperatures, stagnant air and an inversion layer that forms at night when a blanket of warm air traps the cooler air at ground level. The thermal ceiling in the winter can form within a few hundred feet of the ground, air district officials said.

"In the wintertime, you can have particulate levels crank up very quickly, after just four or five neighbors light their fireplaces," Greene said. "We have heard from many people who try to take walks in their neighborhood, and they don't because they just can't stand the smoke."

Sacramento County generally met federal standards for particulate matter until the federal EPA tightened the daily standard for "fine" particle pollution earlier this year from 65 to 35 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

Wood smoke accounts for about 44 percent of the fine particle pollution in the county, the balance coming mostly from vehicle exhausts and cooking stoves, according to the air district.

Fine particle pollution are aerosols of liquid droplets and specks of soot or smoke with diameters of 2.5 micrometers or smaller -- less than 1/30th the diameter of the average human hair, according to the EPA.

That means they can slip past the body's defenses, lodge in the lungs and even pass into the bloodstream. Those with heart or lung disease are especially at risk, studies have shown.

Deaths linked to particle pollution in Sacramento County averaged 22 a day during the 1999-2002 study, according to the findings published last year in the scientific journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*. Scientists with the California Air Resources Board, University of California, Davis, and UC San Francisco conducted the research.

Air district officials compare the crackdown on residential wood smoke to the banning of cigarette smoking in bars, restaurants and other public places.

"We lived with smoking for centuries and decided that was not good for people," Greene said

The county's new wood-burning rule, which takes effect next Oct. 26, is not expected to make any immediate noticeable improvement in air quality: a projected 5 percent reduction in the 1,718 tons of wood smoke annually, district officials said.

Chris Caron, a vice president of Duraflame Inc. of Stockton, called the wood-burning restrictions a "feel-good measure" that will not yield any significant pollution reduction for many years.

A more effective but tougher approach would be to ban uncontrolled wood burning on days predicted to have high levels of particle pollution, along with consumer education on low-emission alternatives, Caron said.

Maret said she expected a chorus of opposition at the public hearing.

"People think it's a nice, wintertime smell and such a pleasant experience to have a cat curled at the hearth and the crackling fire," Maret said. "I understand that."

As it turned out, the air board heard no objections from the audience.

Wal-Mart proposal hits snag with state

Agencies want further air, traffic studies on proposed distribution center

By Leslie Albrecht

Merced Sun-Star

Nov. 10, 2006

Two state agencies have asked Wal-Mart to take a closer look at how a 1.2 million-square-foot distribution center it wants to build in Merced would affect air quality and traffic.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the California Department of Transportation want the environmental impact report to include more details on how diesel trucks driving in and out of the center would impact the health of nearby residents and traffic on adjacent roads.

"The project is large enough and it may generate significant enough air emissions that it would have an adverse effect on air quality in the San Joaquin Valley," air district representative Jaime Holt said.

The City Council approved adding the new studies to the environmental impact report at its Monday meeting. City-hired consultants EDAW, Inc. have been working on the report since June.

The Air Pollution Control District requested that the environmental impact report now include what's called a human health risk assessment.

The assessment will analyze whether diesel exhaust from the distribution center would pose a cancer risk to people who live or attend school nearby.

The air district also asked that the environmental impact report list specific suggestions on how the Wal-Mart distribution center could lessen its impacts on air quality.

The suggestions include planting trees to shade paved areas and encouraging employees to carpool to work.

Caltrans asked for a more detailed traffic analysis that will study whether new traffic signals would be needed at two nearby intersections.

It also will look at whether intersections near the proposed distribution center are big enough to accommodate trucks making turns.

The extra analysis will add \$38,695 to the environmental report's \$344,655 price tag. Wal-Mart will pay for the entire cost of the report.

The new studies also will add a few extra months to the report's expected completion date.

It's now likely to be finished in March 2007, the city's Planning Manager Kim Espinosa said.

When the report is complete, the public will have 45 days to submit written comments. EDAW must respond to all of the comments in writing.

The environmental impact report will not make a recommendation on whether to approve the distribution center.

It's meant to provide neutral information to the Planning Commission and City Council before they vote on the project, Espinosa said.

The distribution center would operate 24 hours a day, with approximately 450 trucks driving in and out each day. When complete, it would employ approximately 600 full-time workers.

The distribution center would cover an area the size of 250 football fields bound by Childs Avenue to the north, Gerard Avenue to the south, Tower Road to the east and a property line 1,300 feet east of the Doane Hartley lateral canal to the west.

Trucks targeted in clean-air drive

Bond funds may boost a plan by the Long Beach and L.A. ports to replace older diesels, but more money is needed. Who will pay? It's still a bit hazy.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer

November 12, 2006

Around the corner they rumbled, hundreds of aging tractor-trailers gunning to get another load into Terminal S at the Port of Long Beach. But on a recent weekday, air brakes hissed as drivers were pulled over by air pollution enforcement crews.

The short-haul diesel trucks, which ferry cargo between the docks, rail yards and area warehouses, are one tiny leg in the global journey of goods between Asia and the United States.

Their drivers are among the lowest-paid workers at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach — the nation's busiest, which handle \$360 billion in annual trade. Officials say the trucks are a leading cause of deadly pollution at the ports and need to go.

"Residents around here call this the diesel death zone," said California Air Resources Board spokesman Jerry Martin.

Tuesday's approval by voters of Proposition 1B, combined with an aggressive clean-air plan due to be voted on by local officials this month, could help replace more than 16,000 trucks with new ones within five years. Indeed, within 20 years, many short-haul trucks could be replaced by conveyor belts, electric "maglev" — magnetic levitation — trains and other "clean" technology.

"That is the long-term goal, to shovel the cargo with new technology," said Paul Johansen, assistant director of environmental management at the Port of Los Angeles.

Jose Gonzales, 60, a Carson resident originally from Mexico, stood by his 1989 engine as inspectors went under the hood. He paid \$10,000 for the dingy beige tractor with a rickety trailer. Asked if he would like to replace his truck, which could cost as much as \$180,000, he said there was no way he could afford it. At first he didn't understand when asked if he would accept a new truck financed with public dollars or private fees, then replied, "In a heartbeat."

Gonzales said he knows clean air is important. He put nearly \$300 into repairs after being cited for air violations earlier in the month, a big expense on weekly wages of \$1,000. "The mechanic told me everything is outstanding now," he said.

"Hardly," said the inspector, taking readings on a portable "smoke meter" stuck into the innards of the exhaust pipe. Gonzales' truck did pass, but it is still emitting 34% more soot than a new truck.

The push to replace the trucks is part of the struggle to clean up stubbornly dirty Southland air while the amount of goods shipped through the ports skyrockets.

Local trucks are only one piece of the problem, and the easiest to pick on, some say.

"It's inherently unfair to target this sector.... The independent harbor truckers are seen as low-hanging fruit. They can't organize, they can't push back," said Ezra Finkin, legislative director for the Waterfront Coalition, a Washington, D.C.-based group of big-box retailers, including Wal-Mart, and other cargo importers. Environmental and labor groups recently formed an alliance to help the drivers.

"The problem is that if you give a poor truck driver a clean truck, he needs to be able to afford maintaining it," said Melissa Lin Perrella, staff attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council's Santa Monica office. "Only through improving the wages can you ensure that a clean truck is going to stay clean for the long run."

The ports' clean-air action plan draft, released Monday, proposed charging "polluter pays" impact fees to help pay for the new trucks. It said the fees should be assessed not on drivers but "as close as possible" to the firms that own the cargo.

Not surprisingly, cargo owners disagree. Finkin said the plan was a poor one, and that "if California thinks they have an air pollution problem," the state should pass laws to tax long-haul corporate trucking companies.

Lin Perrella, of the natural resources council, said it was disappointing that cargo owners "would take a position that seems to deny the pollution and public health impacts caused from goods movement.... The problem is undeniable."

She said imposing clean-air fees would add "pennies to the cost of a VCR and about half a penny on the cost of a Barbie to the consumer."

Studies have estimated that 2,400 people die annually statewide because of chronic diesel exhaust exposure, many along transportation corridors.

Freight locomotives also emit diesel exhaust, and international marine vessels cause more than half of all port-related air pollution. Rail and marine officials say they are voluntarily making improvements, but they claim interstate and international immunity from California air pollution laws.

Port officials say they can win changes from marine shippers and some rail companies through lease negotiations. State officials said they need stronger federal laws.

At one point, three truck inspectors turned and pointed at a locomotive on tracks just across the road belching thick black smoke. "Look at that!" they shouted in frustration before turning to the next semi lined up at the curb.

Port officials want to replace all trucks built before 1993 and retrofit those built between 1993 and 2003, at a cost of about \$1.8 billion. They say a 2005 survey found about 16,800 trucks that would qualify. The ports have pledged \$200 million, and the South Coast Air Quality Management District has allocated \$48 million. That local money could help in winning a large chunk of the \$1 billion that Proposition 1B designates for reducing emissions from cargo movement, because state officials often require matching funds.

"We told them we'd take the whole \$800 million" left after the ports' \$200-million pledge, said Johansen, of the Los Angeles port. But local officials face stiff competition statewide for the funds, from Oakland, Sacramento and others.

California air board Deputy Executive Officer Mike Scheible said state environmental officials agree that replacing Southland port trucks is "a top priority," but added that his staff had found about 12,000 trucks there needed help, not 16,800.

He said many could be retrofitted with new filters at lesser cost.

The ports are examining several ways of getting new, cleaner trucks to drivers, including lease-to-buy programs or low-interest loans. Officials pointed to a smaller program administered by a regional nonprofit organization using state motor license fees that has helped 500 drivers buy new trucks.

Several truckers said they had not heard of the program, and one air board inspector said the convoluted application process was "brutal."

Port officials said they would issue fliers and use other means to get out the word on any future

program.

"Our intent isn't putting anybody out of business," said Port of Long Beach spokesman Art Wong. "Our intent is to replace the dirty trucks."

Emissions

Port officials want to replace more than 16,000 aging short-haul trucks, just one source of air pollution there.

Particulate emissions from diesel engines, by source

Ocean-going vessels: 59%

Cargo-handling equipment: 14%

Harbor craft: 11%

Short-haul trucks: 10%

Locomotives: 6%

Source: Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, 2001-02

State's ports line up for new bond money

Port of Oakland plans to ask for at least \$600 million to improve existing rail yard

By Paul T. Rosynsky, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, November 13, 2006

OAKLAND — Unified in their quest to win voter approval of a \$20 billion transportation bond, the state's major ports will now battle each other in hopes of winning the funds they need.

From Long Beach to Oakland, the state's ports already have a slew projects lined up that they hope will qualify for funding.

Although the bond measure calls for the state to spend \$20 billion for transportation improvements, the money is earmarked for certain segments of the transportation sector from public transportation to security.

While port representatives say some of their projects might be able to qualify for funding from the different segments, only \$3.2 billion is earmarked directly for goods movement and air quality.

"We are going to have a big fight on our hands," said Randy Rentschler, legislative director for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "It's going to be competitive, it is going to be tough but I'm grateful to have the problem."

Of the \$3.2 billion, the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have said they will seek at least \$1.7 billion. The Port of Oakland believes it will ask for at least \$600 million, although representatives refused to state a firm number. Nevertheless, that leaves less than \$1 billion for the roughly 10 smaller ports that dot the California coast.

"We do think it will be stiff competition," said Libby Schaaf, director of public affairs for the Port of Oakland. "But we believe we have very compelling projects."

Oakland's most expensive project will be construction of a new rail yard on the former Oakland Army Base.

The project will encompass almost all of the roughly 162 acres the port now owns on the former Oakland Army Base. It will allow for the swift movement of containers from ship to rail and increase the port's rail capacity to 1.7 million containers a year from its current 640,000 containers.

In addition to building the yard, the port wants to electrify it. Instead of having diesel engines and yard equipment moving containers through the complex, the port wants everything to run by non-polluting electric motors.

Oakland will also seek funding to improve rail connections between the port and Martinez, replace and widen the 7th Street tunnel and create the California Interregional Rail Intermodal System.

The system would allow the port to run a rail shuttle between Oakland and the Central Valley, a location where many distribution centers are being constructed.

Funds for the system would be used to improve rail access and build rail yards.

The program is needed, port officials say, to help reduce traffic congestion in the Bay Area. Instead of having hundreds of trucks hauling containers full of fruit to the Port of Oakland and other materials back to the Central Valley, a train can pull hundreds of containers all at once.

Meanwhile, in Southern California, the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have teamed up in hopes of ensuring they will get funding.

Like Oakland, most of their requests will be focused on rail.

The ports want to bring rail closer to the docks and eliminate some rail street crossings in and around the ports.

"(We) will trust that statewide, the most critical and important projects get the funding they deserve," said Theresa Adams-Lopez, spokesperson for the Port of Los Angeles. "It's hard to tell what will be funded at this point because we haven't seen the criteria and/or weighting yet."

Turning Toughened Rules Into an Advantage

By FELICITY BARRINGER

N.Y. Times, Friday, November 10, 2006

COLUMBUS, Ind. — Executives at Cummins Inc. did not expect their blessings to come in disguise, particularly when they were disguised as government regulations.

So, when engineers at Cummins, a diesel engine maker, first saw the suggested new federal clean-air standards for their engines in the early 1990s, they argued that the standards would be impossible to meet.

After the standards became official in 2000, Cummins sued, and industry insiders started placing bets on whether the company would be one of the few to meet the technical challenges — and survive.

But in October, when the Environmental Protection Agency needed a place to trumpet the success of the standards, it came here, to Cummins's headquarters. A day after the E.P.A. event, Cummins followed with more good news, announcing that it would invest \$250 million to revive a partly idled plant and hire 600 workers to build state-of-the-art light duty diesel engines.

What had changed at Cummins, and at other diesel engine manufacturers, was not just that they had learned to adapt to tougher environmental regulations. Instead, the new, cleaner engines have become a point of pride.

"Cummins is the Mark Twain of the engine business," said Mike Osega, the publisher of the trade magazine Diesel Progress. "Their demise has been predicted by everyone in the last 20 years. But they keep getting better."

Indeed, Cummins, along with companies like Caterpillar, has led an unexpected industry revival. "Columbus, Peoria, these were all supposed to become ghost towns," Mr. Osega added. "But this whole industry has prospered. Cummins is a microcosm of what the industry is going through."

The main market in the United States for diesel engines remains trucks and heavy equipment for construction, mining and off-road transportation, like locomotive engines. But new engines, with pollution-control technology, open the way for more diesel-powered light trucks and sport utility vehicles.

Diesel engines, the muscle T-shirts of the automotive world, may be the new black.

Much of the clatter of the old diesel engines is gone. Pickup is improved. Light-duty diesel engines can get 30 percent more miles to the gallon than their gasoline counterparts. Almost half the cars sold in Europe in 2005 were diesel-powered. And the new generation of diesel engines, compliant with the standards that take effect on Jan. 1, may eventually compete with hybrids for the energy-conscious consumer in the United States.

Cummins's revived local factory, for instance, will make light-duty engines for as-yet-unspecified new Chrysler vehicles — probably light trucks, maybe sport utility vehicles. The engine manufacturers lobbied heavily for the petroleum refiners to reduce the sulfur in diesel fuel. Without much cleaner fuel, the engine manufacturers argued, the essential pollution control devices would not work and the new standards could not be achieved.

Thanks in part to the diesel engine makers' arguments, the E.P.A. mandated that the sulfur content of diesel fuel be cut to 15 parts per million from 500. Sulfur is a major factor in stopping the cleansing action of pollution-control equipment like catalytic converters. A result is the formation of microscopic soot, which can penetrate deep into lungs and cause serious illness. This tiny soot, or particulate matter, is the deadliest air pollutant regulated by the federal government.

As John C. Wall, Cummins's vice president and chief technical officer, explained: "People are always asking what are the limits of diesel combustion? The answer is it depends on what day you ask, because we've got a lot of people working hard to move those limits and we've done that over time."

Cummins has tailored its designs and manufacturing processes to incorporate the E.P.A.'s mandates into all its machines. The company offers truckers engines with pollution-reducing parts that are part of the Cummins family, not proprietary components from other manufacturers.

Asked about the devices that treat the exhaust once it has left the engine, Christina M. Vujovich, Cummins's vice president for marketing and environmental policy, said: "We didn't want to take on after-treatment just because it was sexy to do. We only wanted to take it on because it provided additional value to customers."

Mr. Wall, the Cummins vice president, said that the company did not want to get in the position where it might be blamed for a problem caused by another manufacturer's components. "You really like to have all that in your control," he said, "so that you're not at the mercy of someone else not turning up with their part of the costume."

Analysts are divided on the wisdom of this strategy, some sharing the belief that one-stop shopping is a virtue, others arguing that the company, by limiting the suppliers of engine components, could be cutting itself off from technological advances that might emerge elsewhere.

Ms. Vujovich said the company's extensive contacts in engineering schools ensure access to emerging technologies.

Pleasing the E.P.A. with an integrated, fuel-efficient, low-emissions engine is not the point of the exercise for Cummins or its big rival, Caterpillar, of Peoria, Ill., which is heavily marketing the environmental and performance attributes of its Acert engines. Rusty Dunn, a Caterpillar

spokesman, wrote in an e-mail message, "We've invested heavily in what we believe is a very competitive, clean diesel technology."

Mr. Wall of Cummins said: "As we remind our engineers, the E.P.A. has never bought a single engine from Cummins. This is really about how do you create customer value." Environmentalists have long embraced the notion that environmental rules can create competitive advantage, but it has not been well received in most boardrooms — except, perhaps, companies like Corning and Engelhard, which have made huge profits on emissions-control technologies.

In most company annual reports, environmental regulations routinely are labeled "risks." But more and more, they are hard-wired into business strategy as well.

For instance, a smaller but fast-growing part of Cummins business is its components segment. It specializes in emissions-related engine parts like filtration systems, fuel systems, turbochargers that regulate the amount of air going into the engine and emissions-reducing technologies.

The research budget for these businesses has grown by 45 percent, to about \$57 million this year from about \$39 million in 2004, the company reports. Such expenses reflect the high priority given this segment, though they also held down margins on earnings before interest and taxes, which dropped to 4.5 percent in 2005 from 6.7 percent in 2003, even as sales rose 50 percent to \$2 billion.

In 1998, the E.P.A. wrung a stringent settlement from the industry. It got the largest civil penalty in environmental enforcement to date, \$83.4 million, and made seven major manufacturers reprogram devices that disabled emissions controls when the engines became hot in traffic — what the E.P.A. called "defeat devices."

Cummins's overall sales, like those in the rest of the industry, have boomed for three years. Industry analysts say this is a product of a mini business cycle for the diesel industry: with regulatory deadlines approaching, customers are motivated to buy the last of the old trucks to delay as long as possible the purchase of new ones with emissions controls that can add as much as \$7,000 to \$10,000 to the price of a \$100,000 truck.

As Mr. Osega wrote in June, "The '07 truck regs have spawned a long steady pre-buy." He went on, "This, and a robust economy, has driven truck and truck engine sales to historical highs."

Profits and stock prices followed. Caterpillar, with a market capitalization of \$40 billion, is nearly six times the size of Cummins. But Cummins has surged faster. Its net income reached \$550 million in 2005, up tenfold from \$54 million in 2003. Caterpillar's sales in the same period rose fourfold, to \$2.85 billion from \$798 million in 2003.

But that cycle is peaking. "Engine manufacturers and truck people are earning record profits," said David Bluestein, an industry analyst with UBS Warburg. "Early next year, it's going to come to a screeching halt."

[On Oct. 20, Caterpillar reported record results but cut its earnings forecast for 2007. The company's stock closed at \$59.20 Thursday, up slightly from a year ago, but down from last June, when it broke \$80. Cummins's shares are up 29 percent for the year, though they have fallen 14.7 percent in recent weeks. They closed at \$118.77 Thursday.]

But Ms. Vujovich and Mr. Wall said that Cummins's other businesses, like engines for power generators, combined with its ability to keep up with the new requirements in the United States and Europe, which take effect in about a year, will help cushion the expected decline in the basic truck business. And they think they have a competitive advantage going forward.

Ivan Feinseth, an industry analyst with Matrix USA, agrees. "They have the resources to comply," Mr. Feinseth said, "and they have low-emission engines to start with."

Striking a Legal Blow for Cleaner Air

By David Scharfenburg

N. Y Times, Saturday, November 11, 2006

Hartsdale, N.Y. - PATIENCE, humility and a disdain for the pink flamingo may be the keys to a well-kempt lawn. But in some towns, a good set of earplugs is also required.

The roar of leaf blowers is ubiquitous in suburbia. And over the last 30 years, scores of cities and towns have moved to muffle them — adopting restrictions or outright bans, particularly in the summer, when they are deemed less than necessary.

In Greenwich, Conn., landscapers can use just one machine per property from Memorial Day to Labor Day. In Montclair, N.J., leaf blowers are banned in the summer and winter.

Until recently, the restrictions have been more about curbing noise than cutting hydrocarbon emissions. But now, in Westchester County, officials are taking an environmentally driven approach.

Andrew J. Spano, the county executive, has introduced legislation that would require county officials and home improvement contractors operating in Westchester to replace their old leaf blowers with newer, cleaner models by Jan. 1, 2009.

The average gas-powered leaf blower produces as much pollution in an hour as the typical passenger vehicle during 2,000 miles of travel, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. And Westchester officials said the Spano measure would slash local emissions by 10 tons per year.

The bill is the latest effort in a series of small-bore initiatives intended to improve Westchester's environmental record. In recent years, the county has purchased hybrid vehicles and installed high-efficiency lighting in its buildings. And last month, Mr. Spano announced the formation of a global warming task force, charged with crafting a 10-year greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan.

"I don't think I can solve global warming," said Mr. Spano, a Democrat, in a recent interview. "I just think we can demonstrate, by our actions, what local government can do." George Oros, a Republican who is minority leader in the Westchester County Board of Legislators, said he supported efforts to curb global warming. But he questioned Mr. Spano's priorities.

"I wish we had a panel on how to reduce property taxes before we worry about global warming," he said.

The county executive's leaf blower initiative is not entirely unprecedented. In February and March, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, a pollution control agency with jurisdiction over Orange County, Calif., and large parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, sold 1,500 low-emissions leaf blowers at a reduced price to landscapers who turned in older, dirtier models. The district plans a similar exchange next year.

Joseph Tinelli, president of the New York State Turf and Landscape Association, said he favored the development of low-emissions leaf blowers. But Mr. Tinelli, who is also president of a Yonkers-based landscaping business, said contractors should not have to pay for the newer, cleaner models.

"I think the onus of responsibility lies between the feds and the manufacturers," he said. "Why, as contractors, do we have to throw out our machines?"

Mr. Tinelli acknowledged, however, that most landscapers replace their leaf blowers every two or three years anyway. And Mr. Spano said a phase-in provision of the bill, requiring contractors to replace half their leaf blowers by 2008 and the rest by 2009, should cushion the blow. He said leaf blowers, including the newer models, cost about \$500.

If the bill passes, county officials will start spot-checking contractors' work sites to verify compliance in 2009. Violators could face fines of \$1,000 or revocations of their licenses to operate.

Wal-Mart goes 'green'

The world's largest retailer reports on its big experiment in environmental awareness, an endeavor that could burnish its image and sales.

By Abigail Goldman, Times Staff Writer
November 13, 2006

AURORA, COLO. -- Wind turbines, rows of tall windows, a 200-foot-long dimpled-metal wall and shiny rooftop solar panels are just hints of what's to come.

Here, next to a busy freeway in suburban Denver, is tomorrow's Wal-Mart today. And it's getting a lot of attention.

For the last year, this experimental Wal-Mart Supercenter has been testing ways to be more environmentally sensitive in everything it does.

What works here won't stay in Aurora. The world's largest retailer wants ideas it can use in all of its more than 6,600 stores around the globe.

"The goal has never been to build demonstration stores," said Andy Ruben, who heads the company's environmental efforts. "The experimental stores are successful when the learnings get applied to all stores."

And the changes are likely to spread beyond Bentonville, Ark.-based Wal-Mart Stores Inc. "It's transformational," said Charles Lockwood, an environmental real estate consultant in Los Angeles, whose article "Building the Green Way" appeared in June's Harvard Business Review. "By their size, they're forcing manufacturers to come up with more earth-friendly, energy-efficient products, which then become the industry norm."

Wal-Mart is releasing a progress report today on its Colorado experiment in advance of this week's international conference here on "green" building. One of the meeting's highlights: a tour of the Aurora store.

Despite the company's efforts, not every harried customer is aware of what Wal-Mart is doing.

"I know about the wind air thing out there because you can see it when you drive in, but not anything else," said Lori Eastwood, a 48-year-old mother who drives 45 minutes once a month to shop at the Aurora store.

But if Wal-Mart has its way, that will change too.

As the company's environmentally conscious changes roll out to its other stores, Wal-Mart figures it has 130 million opportunities every week — each time a shopper walks through its doors — to encourage people to make money-saving, earth-friendly choices in their own homes and lives.

What's more, the findings from Colorado and a predecessor experimental store in McKinney, Texas, offer strategies for burnishing Wal-Mart's image and winning over skeptics in places such as Los Angeles.

"It cuts operating expense and it can be a spectacular success with shoppers," said Burt P. Flickinger III, managing director of retail consulting firm Strategic Resources Inc. "This can be the beachhead they use to rebuild consumer, community and political confidence."

Wal-Mart's sustainability efforts, unlike some of its other initiatives, also have won the company something more elusive: approval from critics and others not predisposed to Wal-Mart fandom.

A recent New York gala dinner hosted by movie producers Bob and Harvey Weinstein honored Wal-Mart Chief Executive H. Lee Scott Jr. for "his commitment to environmental sustainability." Co-hosts included talk-show star Charlie Rose, NBC Universal CEO Bob Wright, MTV creator Robert Pittman and investment banker Steven Rattner.

The company's folksy image has taken a beating over the last 18 months, with critics lambasting Wal-Mart for its wage and benefit policies.

At the same time, the retailer's once-mighty sales machine has faltered; the company last month posted nearly flat sales, its worst showing in six years.

Wal-Mart, which last year had sales of \$312 billion, has said it will grow its way out of the slump in part by attracting more-affluent shoppers and expanding to in new areas including Chicago and cities along the East and West coasts.

By turning to conservationism, which many urban and wealthier shoppers find attractive, Wal-Mart may have found a way to kill several birds with one environmentally friendly stone.

But Wal-Mart says that's not why it's going green. Above all, the retailer says, its earth-friendly initiatives will save the company and its customers money, which goes to the heart of the Wal-Mart business model.

Just inside the Aurora store's entryways, giant walls herald "The Aurora Experiment." Pamphlets offer maps and descriptions of the projects and lists of the renewable materials used to make flooring, fixtures, counters and benches.

A TV monitor offers real-time displays of energy used and saved in different tests throughout the store.

On a cloudy Thursday morning last week, on the store's first anniversary, solar panels were generating 16.7 kilowatts of power in the middle of the day. That's roughly 10% of their capacity and enough to power four or five houses.

Not all the experiments are ready for export to other stores. Wind turbines have short-circuited. Wal-Mart is still monitoring the use of Using recycled cooking and motor oil in heating. And the wild-looking field of native prairie plantings, which require little water, is not an aesthetic all cities would appreciate.

But as the nation's largest private purchaser of electricity, with an annual power bill of \$1 billion, Wal-Mart says the successful experiments make the duds worthwhile.

In one test, Wal-Mart took items typically displayed in open cold cases — such as lunch meats, cheeses, biscuit dough and eggs — and put them in enclosed, freezer-like units, cutting that area's energy bill 70%.

"Just like closing the door on the refrigerator at your house," said Charles Zimmerman, Wal-Mart's vice president of prototypes and new formats.

That experiment was worth exporting, Wal-Mart said. The enclosed refrigerators next will appear in six new "high-efficiency" stores that the company said would be a bridge between the lab stores and the chain's future prototype.

Highly efficient lights for refrigerators and freezers did even better. The light-emitting-diode fixtures use 50% less energy than the traditional fluorescent lights, can be turned on and off and last four times as long as the current bulbs, about as long as the refrigerator cases themselves.

And just like at your house, all new Wal-Mart stores will have freezer lights that shut off. That test came from engineers taking a large white motion detector intended for security lights and jury-rigging it onto a freezer unit in Aurora.

By dimming the lights when no customers were around, those freezers used only 37% as much energy as the ones that always had their lights on. So the company asked General Electric Co., which is making the retailer's LED fixtures, to make enough lights and sensors for 500 stores.

Even some of Wal-Mart's most committed critics find it hard to criticize the company's environmental efforts and even harder to find fault with the green stores.

"We're encouraged by Wal-Mart's new environmental initiatives because they could, if implemented, change the way American businesses approach environmental sustainability," said Nu Wexler, of the union-backed Wal-Mart Watch.

The first change is likely to come in the retail sector. Wal-Mart has given presentations and tours of its experiments to competitors such as Target Corp., Costco Wholesale Corp. and Food Lion in hopes of winning converts and driving prices down on the new technology, Zimmerman said.

Last fall Wal-Mart's Scott gave a speech to employees in which he said the company would spend \$500 million annually to reach specific environmental goals.

They included increasing the efficiency of Wal-Mart's 7,000 trucks by 25% in the following three years and doubling it in 10; cutting greenhouse gas emissions at stores and distribution centers by 20% in seven years, cutting solid waste from domestic stores by 25% in the ensuing three years and rewarding suppliers that joined the cause.

Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, declined to work with Wal-Mart on environmental matters because the company wouldn't agree also to talk about labor, healthcare and other issues.

Nonetheless, Pope said that after examining Wal-Mart's initiatives, he was convinced the company was making a sincere and significant commitment, even if he was skeptical that some goals could be reached.

"None of this is 'greenstanding,' " said Pope, who also serves on Wal-Mart Watch's board. "Their metrics are impressive; they're not modest.

"They deserve the chance to show that their business model is compatible with high standards, not just low prices."

Friends of the Earth, another environmental group that isn't working with Wal-Mart, is more circumspect.

"There is a broader picture that needs to be considered," said the group's international director, David Waskow.

Part of the problem is that Wal-Mart donates money to politicians whom activists call anti-environment, the group said. It also questions whether the company is taking enough responsibility for its polluting suppliers.

But the president of the environmental group Ceres, which works with companies to improve their environmental practices, said she had to give credit where credit was due.

"We can't say this one doesn't deserve credit because they don't come with the right spirit," said Mindy Lubin, a regional director for the Environmental Protection Agency during the Clinton administration.

"That may be the case, it may not," she added. "But you can't deny real change and progress and goals, and how much can be accomplished by a company the size of Wal-Mart."

Here are some of the "green" experiments Wal-Mart tested at its Colorado and Texas stores.

Energy efficiency

- Light-emitting diodes used in exterior signs and in the store
- Evaporative cooling installed in the Colorado store uses water sprayed into the air stream to cool the air as it evaporates.
- A portion of the heating for the stores uses recovered cooking and motor oil. Heat recovered from the refrigeration racks also is used.
- New refrigeration display cases have doors that reduce air infiltration, reducing electricity demand.

Solar power

- Solar has not met expectations.

Wind power

- Wind turbines also have performed below expectations.

Water conservation

- Since April, the Texas store has used 85% less water for irrigation thanks to the use of native, drought-tolerant plants in landscaping and drip irrigation.
- Waterless urinals were installed in the men's restrooms. The urinals were designed to save one to three gallons of water per use.
- Pervious pavement and/or concrete were used at both stores to assist with draining water from the parking lots. This pavement allows water to percolate through the pavement system and into the groundwater system.

Waste

- Spoiled items from the produce, deli, meat and dairy departments are sent out for composting. The compost is then sold at Wal-Mart's stores.

Building materials

- Recycled pavement was used, including some from the demolition of Stapleton International Airport.
- Ternary concrete was used. This material mixes traditional concrete with industrial byproducts including fly ash (results from burning coal for electricity) and slag (a byproduct of steel manufacturing).
- Recycled rubber sidewalks are warping and fading in the sun.
- Countertops were made with recycled glass and concrete. Bamboo was made into woodwork and flooring. While the flooring is holding up well, the cabinets and fixtures are not.

Source: Wal-Mart Stores

[Hanford Sentinel, Editorial, Sunday, Nov. 12, 2006:](#)

Our view: We're taking recycling to a whole new level

Just when we thought our election coverage was over, something happened in political news that really moved us.

Among the national stories streaming across our news wires, we found out that a restaurant in South Carolina is offering a free appetizer to anyone who cleans up campaign clutter and brings in a sign.

"Just think of those leftover campaign signs as oversized, roadside gift certificates," said Sticky Fingers co-owner Jeff Goldstein.

This seems like a great idea.

We have recently reported on the possibility of Hanford establishing a curbside recycling program. In keeping with the spirit of recycling our waste, we decided to share some of our thoughts about what might be done with the campaign signs left over from this year's election:

- Firewood. But first you'd better check with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to see if it's a "burn day."
- Pooper-scoopers to clean up after Fido. Many of these signs are already covered in mud, so what's the harm in using them to pick up after your doggy?
- Dust pans. They will be put to good use. Heaven knows there's never a shortage of dust in our area.
- Birdcage liners. (You can save your leftover newspaper for something else.)
- Window shades. Maybe "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" will ask for your decorating advice.
- Large origami animals for the front yard. They're sure to give the plaster gnomes a run for their money.
- Turn them around and use them to advertise your garage sale.
- Door mats. (Again, many of them are already covered in mud anyway.)

We are certain our more inventive readers will be able to come up with an infinite number of ways to recycle the signs.

But we hope this gets you started. Enjoy.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Sunday, November 12, 2006](#)

Editorial: Arnold's agenda?

Shift from at-large to district voting spells end for Jennings, Young and Hernandez

One of the nifty tricks that Arnold Schwarzenegger performed in his re-election campaign was handily winning the election with no real agenda for a second term.

Following the advice of his campaign handlers, Schwarzenegger presented no detailed "action plans" for reform, as he did when he first ran for office. Instead, he opted for a thematic campaign that effectively calmed and comforted the electorate, much like a warm bowl of chicken soup.

It was a good strategy for winning, and for the governor and his master handler, Susan Kennedy, it reduces the opportunity for anyone to pore over his campaign promises and hold him accountable. Yet unless we are mistaken (is there a body double?) the same Schwarzenegger who was elected in the 2003 recall has now won re-election. That means he still has many holdover campaign promises that deserve attention.

While running in 2003, Schwarzenegger promised to prohibit lawmakers, the governor and lieutenant governor from raising campaign cash while the state budget was under consideration. "Sacramento," he said, "is a revolving door of spending the people's money and taking the lobbyists' money." We are still waiting for Schwarzenegger to act on this promise.

Also in 2003, Schwarzenegger pledged he would create an ["infill incentives package"](#) to redevelop urban areas, encourage smarter development and curtail sprawl. We still are waiting for Schwarzenegger to make smart growth a meaningful part of his policy agenda.

Schwarzenegger also promised in his first campaign to provide health insurance to every child in California. The governor says health insurance will be a priority of his second term. Details? We can't wait.

Schwarzenegger has rightly received credit for his environmental positions, but even here he has unmet promises. One was to "cut [air pollution](#) statewide by up to 50 percent and significantly reduce California's dependence on foreign oil before the end of the decade." We look forward to seeing how Schwarzenegger will accomplish these goals. A hike in the gas tax might help, but the governor doesn't want to touch the "T" word.

In the last year, Schwarzenegger has moved from confrontation to facilitation with lawmakers, which has been good both for him and the state. But there are many issues where he will need to confront Democrats and their powerful constituencies. He needs to resurrect his concern over unsustainable pension and health care obligations to public employees. He'll need to play tough with the prison guards over corrections reform and a new contract.

And then there's the budget: How will he close the gap between spending and revenues? We look forward to the full menu. Chicken soup only goes so far.

[Commentary in the Merced Sun-Star, Nov. 11, 2006](#)

Pet Talk: Rush Limbaugh, racing and Rover

By Dr. Jon Klingborg

These days, I spend a fair amount of time worrying about the effects of pollution on pets (and ourselves.) Pollution does affect animals. Cats increase in their asthma symptoms and dogs show more allergies as the air quality declines.

Recognizing this, two environmental health researchers propose using pets as "sentinels" for air pollution. In other words, they want pets to be the "canary in the coalmine." When the proverbial canary in the coalmine dies, it means that it is time for the people to get out of the mine -- obviously, these researchers weren't pet lovers.

As our area grows, we are bound to have an increase in pollution and its negative health effects on animals and people. Of course, more pollution and more traffic are inevitable, but that is not an acceptable reason to deliberately add more pollution and more traffic.

One project that has received a lot of positive attention is the addition of a world class raceway just north of the former air force base. The environmental impact report for the raceway gives us a glimpse as to the future problems that our area will face as the number of cars and people increase.

Unfortunately, the environmental impact report failed to add the pollution generated by the raceway's half-a-million yearly visitors to the current pollution, and then add that up over the next 10 or 20 years.

A few years ago, Rush Limbaugh observed that we shouldn't worry about teenagers who smoke, after all he said, "when was the last time you heard about a teenager dying of lung cancer." Rush was joking, of course -- he understands that it takes years of breathing cigarette smoke before lung cancer develops.

Air pollution is similar to smoking; the harm is slow and difficult to measure. However, the harm does add up. Every time we look out the window, we can see harmful pollution adding up. Remember when you could easily see the mountains on either side of us? Our valley has become a soup bowl of smog.

In the past, studies on smog have often been conducted in southern California, because this has been the smog capital of the United States.

These days, the San Joaquin Valley is quickly surpassing the Los Angeles Area for worst air in the nation. Soon, we can be the center for air pollution, ozone, and asthma research; isn't that great.

It is time that our elected leaders take off their smog-colored glasses and start to think about the future implication of today's decisions. Thomas Jefferson said "The care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government."

You've undoubtedly heard that the city of Merced is the fifth worst in the nation in terms of ozone pollution, and that the county is seventh worst for ozone and particulate matter pollution. You've heard that the county's grade for ozone pollution is an F, our 24-hour Particle Pollution grade is an F, and our annual Particle Pollution grade is an F.

What do straight F's mean? According to numerous university studies, those straight F's translate into a possible decrease in our overall life expectancy by up to 3 years.

Straight F's mean more elderly people in the hospital, more children whose lives are affected by asthma, and an increased rate in infant mortality. Heart disease, diabetes, bronchitis: The list goes on and on, because the effects of air pollution are well documented.

Do we really want to find out what happens when our air gets below an F grade?

Merced wants to be more than a gateway, and maybe it should strive to be more than a raceway. The Merced County Planning Commission was indifferent to the significant and unavoidable pollution impacts of the raceway; I'm sure the Board of Supervisors will make the best decision for the health and well-being of the people and pets in our county.

Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today." That's some honesty we can all live with.

Dr. Jon Klingborg is a Merced veterinarian and is associated with Valley Animal Hospital. His e-mail is askdrjon@pacbell.net

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, November 12, 2006](#)

Motorsports park will pollute air

Since I began teaching 24 years ago, I have seen the number of students with asthma skyrocket. It is currently 25 percent. A motorsports park proposed at the old Castle Air Force Base in Atwater will attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, which will make valley air quantifiably dirtier.

It is not possible to have a motorsports park without degrading our local air quality. There are more than 30 "significant and unavoidable" impacts listed in the final environmental impact report that are not mitigated, including air, water and traffic.

Proponents emphasize the dollars, jobs and entertainment value that this project will bring. But it isn't that simple. I am asking you to look at the health and well-being of our children.

The Merced Board of Supervisors will have a public hearing on this issue Tuesday at 10a.m. You can send comments to the board at 2222 M St., Merced 95340.

ANNETTE ALLSUP, Merced