

Don't roast chestnuts on an open fire

Officials urge people to avoid wood burning as unusually stagnant conditions keep pollution from dispersing

Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2006

Without cooperation from residents, officials are warning that the air quality in the San Joaquin Valley could substantially deteriorate over the holiday weekend.

According to the Valley Air District, weather conditions are expected to be more stagnant than usual over the Christmas weekend, which would make it difficult for pollution to disperse.

Residential wood burning can contribute up to a third of harmful matter into the air, so air officials are asking residents to check the air quality before lighting up.

On days when the air quality forecast is unhealthy, residential wood burning is prohibited.

"We realize that Christmas is typically the holiday when a cozy fire is particularly welcoming," said Tom Jordan of the Air District.

"However, when the air is stagnant, the pollution from those fires pools in neighborhoods and is especially harmful to human health. We're asking people to take their own health, as well as their neighbors', into consideration when they think about building a fire this weekend."

The Air District issues its daily air-quality forecast and wood-burning status each afternoon at 4:30 p.m. It's available in English and Spanish toll-free at 1-800-766-4463 or on the Web at <http://www.valleyair.org>

If wood burning is allowed, residents are urged to burn as cleanly as possible by using natural gas or propane devices, wood inserts and stoves manufactured after July 1990, pellet-fueled heaters, or manufactured fire logs in an open fireplace.

Mandatory and voluntary wood-burning restrictions do not apply to natural gas or propane devices; homes in which wood burning is the sole source of heat, homes and businesses located at elevations higher than 3,000 feet and homes and businesses where natural gas service is not available.

For assistance, contact the Air District at (209) 557-6440.

Wood-Burning Forecast

Tracy Press, Saturday, 23 December 2006

Air quality is forecast to be good or moderate. Wood-burning restrictions are not in place. To keep air pollution levels low, do your part by not lighting a fire at your home. If you must burn wood, please take steps to burn cleaner. Restrictions apply to wood-burning heaters and fireplaces.

For information: 800-766-4463 or www.valleyair.org.

Polluters may soon report less

Public can access large EPA database

By *Alex Breitler* - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Friday, December 22, 2006

STOCKTON - It may soon become more difficult to learn how much pollution spews from smokestacks into our skies or pours from pipes into our waterways.

For two decades, the Environmental Protection Agency has kept a public database tracking roughly 650 chemicals released from factories, power plants and other businesses across the country.

About 40 San Joaquin County facilities are on the list; in 2004, the most recent year for which statistics are available, these facilities reported more than 480,000 pounds of chemicals released to land, air and water. That ranked in the top one-third of California counties.

Top 10 polluters

The San Joaquin Valley's top polluters according to the 2004 Toxics Release Inventory:

1. Chemical Waste Management Inc., Kettleman City: 12.2 million pounds
2. Clean Harbors Buttonwillow LLC, Buttonwillow: 2.1 million pounds
3. Hilmar Cheese Co., Hilmar: 872,000 pounds
4. Posdef Power Co., a power plant at the Port of Stockton: 221,000 pounds
5. J.G. Boswell Co. Oil Mill, Corcoran: 199,000 pounds
6. Spreckels Sugar Co., Mendota: 189,000 pounds
7. Delano Growers Grape Products, Delano: 174,000 pounds
8. Florestone Products Co., Madera: 127,000 pounds
9. Certainteed Corp., Chowchilla: 97,000 pounds
10. Fineline Industries Inc., Merced: 92,000 pounds

For other pollution data, visit the TRI Web site at www.epa.gov/tri.

- Source: Environmental Protection Agency

Under a rule finalized this week, some polluters will be able to submit less emissions data to the Environmental Protection Agency. The rule allows some companies to use "short forms" for reporting purposes if they eliminate releases of certain toxic chemicals and release no more than 2,000 pounds of emissions; in the past, that threshold has been 500 pounds.

Burdened businesses now have an incentive to cut waste in order to use the shorter form, the EPA says.

"The rule is making a good program better," said spokeswoman Jessica Emond. "Cleaner businesses result in a cleaner, healthier environment."

But environmental watchdog groups say the rule essentially allows thousands of companies - including about 200 in California - to fly under the radar.

"EPA is substituting a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy for a program that works to protect public health," said Moira Chapin, a San Francisco-based field organizer for the conservation group Environment California.

Deadly chemical releases in the early 1980s spurred the advent of the Toxics Release Inventory. The database reports only how much of each chemical is discharged; it doesn't evaluate whether those discharges are dangerous to human health, nor whether facilities are out of compliance with the law.

Last year, the EPA proposed cutting back TRI reporting from every year to every other year. The agency recently dropped that idea but went forward with a plan changing the reporting threshold.

Critics aren't buying the feds' rationale that companies will be encouraged to pollute less.

"If a facility no longer has to report, there is no incentive for them to make any reductions," said Tom Natan, research director for the National Environmental Trust in Washington, D.C. "We'd never know."

Delta environmentalist Bill Jennings frequently uses the database, although he says it's not the pollution bible.

"It gives you an impression on where we're going, which direction we're going in," he said. "It can inform people in a given neighborhood about what's happening."

"I think information on release of pollutants ought to be in the public arena."

About a half-dozen facilities in San Joaquin County may be allowed to submit less data under the new EPA rule, according to a study by Natan's group.

One of those companies is Lathrop foam product manufacturer Carpenter Co. The yearly TRI reports have indeed been a lot of work, said plant manager Denny Bryant, but they are required if his company wants to obtain permits.

Many companies may hesitate to release such information because of the proprietary nature of private industry, Bryant said.

"We really want to make sure we live within the legal bounds of any federal, state or local requirement," he said. "We all have to live and breathe in the same area. All those things are important to us."

Group gets funds to cut air pollution

Chronicle Staff

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2006

The Oakland-based Pacific Institute has been given a \$178,675 grant from the federal government to help the group cut residents' exposure to air pollutants.

Swati Prakash, director of the institute's Community Strategies for Sustainability and Justice Program, said the money would help the group reduce pollution from diesel trucks. The group works with air regulators, truckers and the Port of Oakland to cut pollution related to the movement of goods.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gave the money as part of its Community Action for a Renewed Environment program.

Judges say EPA rules not ample

By John Heilprin, ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the Contra Costa Times and Modesto Bee, Sunday, Dec. 24; Washington Post, Saturday, Dec. 23; San Diego Union Tribune and SF Chronicle, Friday, Dec. 22, 2006; and other papers

WASHINGTON - A federal appeals court on Friday struck down the Bush administration's strategy for reducing smog, which affects the health of more than half the nation's population, mostly those prone to asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

The Environmental Protection Agency rules for forcing state cleanups of smog don't meet Clean Air Act requirements, a three-judge panel ruled in a suit brought by a Southern California clean-air agency, environmental groups and some mid-Atlantic and Eastern states downwind of others states' smog.

Circuit Judge Judith Rogers, writing for the panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, said the "EPA has failed to heed the restrictions on its discretion set forth in the Act." The court ordered the agency to come up with a new enforcement plan.

Smog is produced by nitrogen oxides reacting with other chemicals to create ground-level ozone, particularly in the summer when the sun is hottest and brightest. Other major sources of the pollution are motor vehicle exhaust, gas vapors and chemical solvents.

In the stratosphere, ozone occurs naturally and is a beneficial shield against harmful ultraviolet rays.

The EPA in 2004 issued new smog standards requiring 474 counties with about 159 million people living in them to reduce pollution of smog-causing ozone and improve the air enough to meet federal health standards within three to 17 years.

The appeals court panel said that was too long. It also said the agency was allowing "backsliding" by states when it should have been directing them to order new emission controls on industrial plants, more public transportation, tougher vehicle inspection programs or cleaner-burning gasoline. States that fail to meet the standards risk losing federal highway dollars under the law.

Tougher standards for ground-level ozone and fine soot were ordered by the Clinton administration in 1997 after it determined that levels set in 1979 didn't adequately protect children, the elderly and people with respiratory ailments. The Supreme Court in 2001 upheld the tougher standards after they were challenged by industry.

EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said Friday that the agency will review the panel's decision to determine whether it will ask the full appeals court to rehear the case. "EPA is committed to ensuring our nation's ozone air quality standards are implemented to protect public health and the environment," she said.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who in January becomes chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said she was pleased the court had "seen through EPA's transparent attempts to weaken" the clean air law. She promised the Democratic Congress would closely monitor the agency as it comes up with a new plan for reducing smog.

Plaintiffs in the suit were California's South Coast Air Quality Management, the American Lung Association, Environmental Defense, the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the District of Columbia and the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New York and Pennsylvania.

State's smog controls upheld

Federal court strikes down EPA move to dilute Clinton-era rules.

By Chris Bowman - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2006

California won two major victories Friday in an ongoing battle with the Bush administration to preserve the state's strongest-in-the-nation smog controls.

A federal appeals court struck down an attempt by the Environmental Protection Agency to loosen national rules limiting smog-forming emissions from vehicles and industry.

The ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia affirms California's authority to enforce certain pollution controls on businesses.

The action also effectively prevents businesses in states with weaker and less costly local pollution controls from gaining a competitive business advantage over California businesses, according to Southern California air regulators.

In a separate decision Friday, the EPA approved California regulatory changes designed to vastly increase the number of gasoline-electric hybrid vehicles and super-low-polluting gasoline models offered for sale in the state.

Together, the EPA approval and the federal court ruling help keep California programs for cleaning up unhealthy air on track, said Jerry Martin, spokesman for the state Air Resources Board, which adopted the nation's first mandate for nonpolluting vehicles in 1990.

"This clearly is a victory for the breathers," Martin said late Friday upon learning of the court decision. The three-judge appellate panel ruled in a lawsuit brought by the Los Angeles-area South Coast Air Quality Management District, environmental groups and some Eastern and mid-Atlantic states.

The suit alleged that the Bush administration EPA in 2004 violated the federal Clean Air Act in implementing a tougher national ozone limit that the Clinton administration adopted in 1997.

In replacing the weaker standard, Clinton's EPA determined it nonetheless would continue to enforce the earlier limit while businesses worked to attain the stricter ozone standard.

Bush's EPA, however, decided to abandon enforcement of the older standard altogether.

That amounted to a violation of the "anti-backsliding" provisions of the Clean Air Act, the South Coast regulators argued.

The appellate court agreed and nullified the 2004 decision.

Writing for the circuit panel, Judge Judith Rogers states: "EPA is required by statute to keep in place measures intended to constrain ozone levels -- even the ones that apply to outdated standards -- in order to prevent backsliding."

Ozone, a gaseous byproduct of sun-cooked tailpipe and industry emissions, is an ingredient of smog that inflames airways.

This ground-level ozone, a chronic summertime pollutant in the Sacramento, Fresno and Los Angeles metropolitan areas, can cause and aggravate asthma, worsen other respiratory diseases and may permanently reduce lung function in children raised in smoggy areas, many health studies show.

Under the stronger air quality standard, state and local regulators are required to sample over eight-hour periods instead of only one hour.

Scientific findings in the previous 20 years repeatedly showed that prolonged exposure to moderately high ozone can do more lasting damage to the respiratory and immune systems than repeated exposure to brief spikes.

The Bush administration's wholesale revocation of the one-hour standard let industries nationwide off the hook, said Barbara Baird, a lawyer with the South Coast air district.

"The EPA needed to keep in effect the same controls until the one-hour ozone standard had been achieved," Baird said Friday.

To help fill the regulatory void, the California Legislature reinstated the regional air districts' authority to impose the best available pollution controls on businesses undergoing major overhaul or expansion.

Most other states, however, have not followed California's lead, potentially putting the state's businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

"Today's decision means other states that otherwise would have rolled back pollution enforcement won't be able to do so," Baird said.

What's New

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, Dec. 26, 2006

Clean air advocates are cheering an EPA decision that will allow California to regulate small engines under 25 horsepower. Seven percent of mobile emissions come from small engines in the state from sources like lawnmowers. Senator Dianne Feinstein hailed the news noting that four small engine manufacturers say that they could build the cleaner engines.

David Albers, attorney for the Etchegaray dairies near Allensworth says he expects approval from the Tulare County Board of Supervisors when they meet Tuesday. The public hearing that drew a large crowd of opponents from the Bay Area is now closed allowing the board to sound off on why they think the dairy project may be a good idea for this land despite objections by opponents that include officials with the state park at Allensworth. Albers says he "is intrigued" by the idea that the state park offered at the last meeting to buy out Mr. Etchegaray's development rights for the dairy to protect the park. But that is a process that could take some time, he says. "We're not going to build the dairy right away," says Albers, noting they must go through the air district permitting process. That process is likely to include anaerobic digestion that would decrease pollution emissions from the dairy. One supervisor told the Voice he is likely to vote for the project in part because manure will help improve the alkaline soil in the area around Allensworth. Opponents point to flies and smells hurting attendance at the state park but county staff points out the park actually gets limited visitation.

Shuttles feel strain of growing ridership

Survey shows LINKS free service is No. 2 way employees get to work in San Leandro

By Martin Ricard, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2006

SAN LEANDRO - LINKS, the free shuttle system that takes West San Leandro employees to and from work and BART, has seen astronomical growth since it started five years ago.

Daily ridership has nearly doubled and total rides topped more than 20,000 last month, according to an annual report recently published by the West San Leandro Shuttle Business Improvement District.

But along with the increase in ridership comes growing pains.

The assessment district, which charges a fee to businesses to help fund the shuttle system, now is facing challenges accommodating the widely used system, said Executive Director Gordon Galvan. And, while West San Leandro businesses will continue paying for the LINKS service until at least 2009, the district will have to start looking for more outside grants to fully fund the service beyond 2007.

"It's accomplishing all its goals," Galvan said in a phone interview. "The system is being taxed and it's near capacity. That's the challenge: How do we continue to accommodate this growing ridership?"

Since LINKS was created in 2001, the system has seen a steady increase in ridership. A third-party study surveying major companies that use the service concluded that LINKS was the No. 2 way employees get to work in San Leandro, but that many people still didn't know LINKS exists.

The large increase also has resulted in occasional delays, forcing the assessment district to re-evaluate whether to add larger shuttles and possibly more fixed stops along the LINKS route in the coming years.

The district didn't receive another grant for next year from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, one of its major funding sources. This means the district will have until the next budget is approved in June to apply for more grants.

Currently, about 385 businesses in West San Leandro pay a base rate of \$25 each, plus an additional \$10.88 per employee annually. With those fees, the assessment district generates about \$137,500 a year, which is 40 percent of the shuttle's overall budget.

"It's kind of a year-to-year type of deal," said Luke Sims, the city's business development director. "It makes it difficult to plan ahead, and we know that, so we do the best we can."

Sims added, however, that whatever happens next year, businesses will not have to pay more than what they currently do.

Much of last year's controversy over the city's spending on LINKS has died down. But one opponent said that most of the employees in West San Leandro don't use the shuttle service, yet businesses still pay for it. He contends that ridership numbers are inflated because most mainly use the service to go either to the Davis Street Family Resource Center or shop around town.

"It's really just another social service program being financed by businesses," said Bob Tucknott, owner of Tucknott Electric. The company has since moved from San Leandro to Pleasanton.

Jerry Scales, a longtime LINKS driver, disagreed. Scales said that a majority of the shuttle's riders work in West San Leandro. Only about a third, most of whom live in the neighborhood, use it for other purposes, he said.

But, he added, something more should be done because the increased ridership has put a strain on shuttles, forcing drivers to sometimes leave passengers behind.

Still, Scales said, people appreciate it and, in his eyes, LINKS is here to stay.

"We're out here for the people," he said. "If people didn't like it, they'd put us out of business."

Bay Area: Car-share capital of the world

Many are putting off buying vehicles with alternative rental service

By Kiley Russell, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Dec. 25, 2006

For more than six years, Scott Benbow and his family have put off buying a car.

Living as they do in San Francisco's Castro neighborhood, just minutes from a well-traveled Muni line, it's perhaps no surprise that the Benbows and their 2-year-old son can navigate through most days without a personal vehicle.

But what about weekly trips to the grocery store, weekend excursions to the wine country or evenings out - activities that can be difficult without wheels?

For these things, the Benbows, along with a growing number of environmentally conscious urbanites, plunk down between \$10 and \$30 every month to enlist the services of a car-share company.

"Our primary mode (of transportation) is walking or Muni," Benbow said. "With City CarShare being the next most frequent."

Three alternative automobile rental companies, City CarShare, Zipcar and Flexcar, have gained toe-holds in the region over the past several years, making the Bay Area the world's most crowded car share market, said Daniel Shifrin, regional vice president of Zipcar.

For an hourly or daily rental charge - and in some cases a monthly membership fee and a per-mile charge - customers can use cars, SUVs and pickup trucks that they neither own nor bear the responsibility to maintain or insure.

The programs are well designed for urban commuters who only need to drive a couple of days a week or for people who only need a car to run errands or take road trips.

Vehicles are reserved over the phone or on Web, and members, armed with key cards, simply stroll down to the nearest car and hop in. The cars are parked in neighborhoods and public lots all over San Francisco and the East Bay.

The Bay Area region's first entrant, City CarShare, was founded by a group of social activists hoping to reduce air pollution, traffic congestion and other social ills by encouraging people to abandon car ownership in favor of car sharing.

The nonprofit company rolled out a fleet of green Volkswagen Beetles in 2001. It has since added Mini Coopers, Toyota hybrids and light trucks to its inventory and now more than 6,000 members share 165 vehicles in San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley.

"We are helping to save somewhere around 20,000 vehicle miles driven on Bay Area roads each day. Two-thirds of our members either sell a car or ... don't buy a car," said CEO Rick Hutchinson. "That has a pretty important environmental impact."

In the United States, between 12 and 68 percent of car sharers postpone or avoid buying a car. Also, every car sharing vehicle on the road accounts for six to 23 cars taken off the personally owned vehicle roster in this country and Canada, according to an April paper published by University of California, Berkeley's Partnership for Advanced Transit and Highways, a research group.

Reduced ownership leads to between 8 percent and 80 percent fewer vehicle miles traveled per car sharer, according to the paper, "Carsharing in North America," based on a survey of 26 of the 28 companies in the United States and Canada in 2005.

"I think many people were skeptical," said lead author Susan Shaheen, who studies transportation and the environment. "But objective study after objective study started to document ... vehicle miles traveled reductions and the (reduction) in the number of personal vehicles sold."

Still, data from the companies is varied and inconsistent - apparent in the wide range of statistics - and often derived from limited samples, so it's difficult to accurately quantify car sharing's effects, Shaheen said.

Also, many studies were done with "early adopters," people who were the first to jump on the car-sharing bandwagon.

"Early adopters might be more environmental, so perhaps they don't drive the car as much because they're concerned about putting miles on the road," Shaheen said.

The industry is quick to point out that people can save money by car sharing, which for most people is probably the most powerful motivation to limit driving.

People pay from \$700 to \$1,000 a month on average to own and operate a car, according to AAA.

Shaheen's research shows that, depending on location, people using a car sharing service will save money by keeping mileage within the range of 6,000 to 10,000 miles per year.

Zipcar member Victoria Everman has never owned a car. She was drawn by the company's eco-friendly reputation, but the money she saved by avoiding a car purchase sealed the deal.

"I'm 22. I don't make much money and I can't afford a car," Everman said. "Especially in this city."

She spends no more than \$100 a month to use Zipcar once or twice a week to run errands round the city.

"I always rent one on Saturday morning," Everman said. "I go to the farmers market and Rainbow Grocery. I literally zip all around the city and get a whole bunch of stuff done."

Add convenience and good customer service, and even those without deep environmental convictions can be lured into the car sharing fold. Also, the industry is starting to woo universities and corporations, and of course the next challenge is to adapt the car sharing model for the nation's vast, auto-centric suburbs.

"In an environment where you buy pizza by the slice and music by the song, surely cars by the hour isn't that far of a stretch," said Flexcar CEO Mark Norman.

California takes on greenhouse gases, passes new laws

Statutes on the environment usher in the New Year in California.

Steve Lawrence/Associated Press

Tracy Press, Monday, Dec. 25, 2006

SACRAMENTO - California will expand its campaign against greenhouse gases and global warming when several landmark laws take effect with the new year.

It also will boost its minimum wage, implement a prescription drug discount program, give or restore rights to tenants, domestic partners and pets, and give many youngsters an early taste of one of life's little travails - a trip to the dentist.

Those are just some of the changes contained in hundreds of new state laws.

The biggest is legislation by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, that will make California the first state in the nation to limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, oil refineries and other industries.

The measure will require the state Air Resources Board by July 1 to begin implementing a program to reduce the emissions 25 percent by 2020. Nunez hopes the legislation will start a trend.

"We need to do something to stop global warming," he said. "The fact that California took the initiative the way it did ... is a good indicator that it's time for the rest of the country to start to follow California's lead."

Another law will prohibit the state's utilities from signing long-term contracts with electricity suppliers unless their power plants comply with greenhouse gas emission limits adopted by the California Energy Commission.

That legislation, by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, is intended to force coal-fired power plants in western states to install cleaner technologies if they want to sell power to California.

A third new statute, by Perata and Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, will require utilities to step up their efforts to replace fossil fuels with cleaner renewable sources such as solar, wind and geothermal. It will force utilities to get at least 20 percent of their power from renewables by 2010 instead of the old deadline of 2017.

Those new laws follow 2002 legislation that requires the Air Resources Board to limit greenhouse gases from autos. Enforcement of that measure is being held up by a lawsuit filed by a group of automakers and dealers. The air board also needs a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to implement it.

Representatives of the California Chamber of Commerce and California Manufacturers & Technology Association say they know of no plans to sue to try to block the Nunez legislation from taking effect.

"At this point, the manufacturers and trade associations are focused on the proper implementation of (the bill)," said Gino DiCaro, a spokesman for the Manufacturers & Technology Association. "That's going to take a long time to work out."

California's roughly 1.4 million minimum wage earners will get their first raise in five years Monday.

The state's minimum wage, now \$6.75 an hour, will climb to \$7.50, tying California with Massachusetts for the fourth highest minimum wage in the country behind those in Washington, Oregon and Connecticut.

A second increase boosting the wage to \$8 will take effect Jan. 1, 2008.

EPA allows fuel cells in Calif zero-emission vehicle program

By STEVE LAWRENCE, Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2006

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cleared the way for automakers to produce hydrogen-powered fuel cell cars to meet zero-emission vehicle requirements in California and 10 other states, officials said Friday.

The EPA approved regulation amendments adopted by the California Air Resources Board in 2003 that allow manufacturers to produce fuel cells as an alternative to the battery-powered cars and light trucks previously required by the state.

Since then 10 other states - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington - have adopted the same rules.

"This waiver simply reflects the prominence of fuel cells," said John Millett, an EPA spokesman. "Fuel cells have really taken off."

California initially adopted its regulations in 1990, requiring by 2003 that 10 percent of the new cars sold in the state by major manufacturers be zero-emission vehicles.

The rules have been modified several times since then. Currently, they call for 2 percent of the six biggest automakers' new cars to be zero-emission vehicles, 2 percent to be gasoline-electric hybrids and 6 percent to be super-low-polluting gasoline-powered vehicles known as PZEV's.

The hybrid and PZEV requirements, which some smaller companies must also meet, kicked in in 2005.

The 2 percent requirement for fuel cell or battery-powered cars starts in 2009 with a ramp up period that will require the industry to market at least 2,500 of the vehicles nationwide over the first three years of the program and larger numbers in subsequent years, said Jerry Martin, an ARB spokesman.

California officials expect credits earned by the car companies by producing zero-emission vehicles before 2009 to fill out the rest of the 2 percent requirement during the first few years of the program, Martin added.

The programs allows manufacturers to produce either battery-powered or fuel-cell vehicles, which use hydrogen and oxygen to run an electric motor. But Martins said he doubts that companies will opt for battery-powered cars.

"Battery technology has been moving forward and batteries are still zero-emission technology, but the car companies have made it very clear that fuel cells are the technology of the future," he said.

A spokesman for General Motors, Dave Barthmuss, said fuel cell vehicles were "very viable to be a portion of any automakers' compliance strategy."

"A lot of milestones are being met and a lot of progress is really being made" in developing the vehicles, he added.

General Motors plans to put 100 fuel-cell vehicles on the road next year as a demonstration project, he said.

But Barthmuss also said the ARB should be willing to review its requirements so they stay in line with the "pace of technology."

Jennifer Moore, a spokeswoman for Ford Motor Co., said there is still a lot of uncertainty about fuel-cell vehicles and that her company agrees with a U.S. Department of Energy forecast that predicts the vehicles won't be available in large numbers before 2015.

"There are a lot of challenges that remain ahead for fuel-cell vehicles, everything from infrastructure to cost to range," she said. "In terms of when they're going to be commercially viable, it's pretty difficult to say at this point."

The Buzz on Business

Modesto Bee, Monday, December 26, 2006

HYDROGEN-POWERED CARS GET GREEN LIGHT: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cleared the way for automakers to produce hydrogen-powered fuel cell cars to meet zero-emission vehicle requirements in 11 states, officials said Friday. The EPA approved regulation amendments adopted by the California Air Resources Board in 2003 that allow manufacturers to produce fuel cells as an alternative to the battery-powered cars and light trucks previously required by the state. Since then, 10 other states - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington - have adopted the same rules.

Schwarzenegger Remakes Himself as Environmentalist

Governor Challenges GOP on Global Warming

By John Pomfret, Washington Post Staff Writer
Saturday, Dec. 23, 2006

SACRAMENTO -- Arnold Schwarzenegger is not the type of guy you would necessarily associate with tree hugging. When he bought a Hummer in the early 1990s, it kicked off a nationwide craze for the gas-guzzling behemoths. His lighter-fluid-doused action flicks and protein-packed chest bespoke more of American excess than environmentalism, more violence than vegan.

But as governor of California, Schwarzenegger has engaged in a savvy makeover, befitting a Hollywood star. He retooled one of his four Hummers to run on alternative fuels and is quickly fashioning himself into one of the most aggressively pro-environment governors in a state known for leading the nation on that issue.

This year he signed the nation's first environmental law of its kind, committing the state to lowering its greenhouse gas production to 1990 levels by 2020 and setting up an international program that provides manufacturers with incentives to lower carbon emissions, which is supposed to begin by 2012. He has vowed to fight any attempt to drill for oil off California's coast.

And now Schwarzenegger, a Republican, wants to use his star power to turn global warming into an issue in the 2008 presidential election. "There is a whole new movement because of the change of people sent to Washington," Schwarzenegger said in an interview this week, referring to the Democratic Party's impending takeover of Congress. "We want to put the spotlight on this issue in America. It has to become a debate in the presidential election. It has to become an issue."

Schwarzenegger's relationship with the Bush administration and the conservative wing of the Republican Party has been rocky. He has clashed with Bush over stem cell research (Schwarzenegger favors, Bush opposes), dispatching the National Guard to do border enforcement (Bush ordered, Schwarzenegger opposed) and legalizing the purchase of prescription drugs from Canada (Bush opposes, Schwarzenegger favors).

But no other issue divides the governor and the president as much as global warming. Schwarzenegger's embrace of the issue is clearly a gambit on the part of a politician with big ambitions. Analysts say he could run for the Senate in 2010. He cannot run for president because he was not born in the United States.

Schwarzenegger made no bones about his exasperation with the Bush administration's refusal to allow California to become the first state in the nation to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles. A request in 2005 for that authority has received no response from the Environmental Protection Agency. The question of whether the EPA -- or other agencies -- should regulate greenhouse gases is being considered by the Supreme Court.

"We are going to find a way to do it, no matter what anyone says," Schwarzenegger said. ". . . We have to make moves that protect the health of the people. That's our number one priority.

"We don't want Washington to tell us when we are allowed to be healthy or when we should get cancer," he continued. "We don't want people to die because pollution causes certain illnesses and cancers and so on."

Schwarzenegger argued that in a "Nixon goes to China" way he is uniquely poised to lead on the environmental front. Calling himself a "sane Republican," he said his pro-business philosophy and fiscal conservatism shield him from accusations of being "the tree hugger, the crazy guy out there who wants to live on the moon and talk about the spirits and all this holistic stuff."

"With me they can't do it, because my whole history is different," he said, puffing thoughtfully on a fat cigar in his smoking tent in a courtyard of the state Capitol. "It's unexpected, so therefore you have a better chance to have an impact. . . . All those businesses would never have a better guy than me."

Schwarzenegger asserted that his embrace of the issue has helped prompt other Republicans to change their tune on the environment. Republican presidential hopefuls have reached out to Schwarzenegger's team to talk about global warming, an aide noted.

While other states are also far out ahead of the federal government on global warming, California is the place to lead the country on green issues, he contended. This state "is really in a unique position because we have such an impact on the world," he said.

"You go back to bodybuilding," he added, musing about his roots. "We promoted bodybuilding here, but it went all over the world, and now in every town, no matter where you go in the Middle East or Africa or China, everybody is working out, lifting weights, in the garage, at home or in the bedroom, pulling out equipment from under the bed."

This year he signed the nation's first environmental law of its kind, committing the state to lowering its greenhouse gas production to 1990 levels by 2020 and setting up an international program that provides manufacturers with incentives to lower carbon emissions, which is supposed to begin by 2012. He has vowed to fight any attempt to drill for oil off California's coast.

And now Schwarzenegger, a Republican, wants to use his star power to turn global warming into an issue in the 2008 presidential election. "There is a whole new movement because of the change of people sent to Washington," Schwarzenegger said in an interview this week, referring to the Democratic Party's impending takeover of Congress. "We want to put the spotlight on this issue in America. It has to become a debate in the presidential election. It has to become an issue."

Schwarzenegger's relationship with the Bush administration and the conservative wing of the Republican Party has been rocky. He has clashed with Bush over stem cell research (Schwarzenegger favors, Bush opposes), dispatching the National Guard to do border enforcement (Bush ordered, Schwarzenegger opposed) and legalizing the purchase of prescription drugs from Canada (Bush opposes, Schwarzenegger favors).

But no other issue divides the governor and the president as much as global warming. Schwarzenegger's embrace of the issue is clearly a gambit on the part of a politician with big ambitions. Analysts say he could run for the Senate in 2010. He cannot run for president because he was not born in the United States.

Schwarzenegger made no bones about his exasperation with the Bush administration's refusal to allow California to become the first state in the nation to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles. A request in 2005 for that authority has received no response from the Environmental Protection Agency. The question of whether the EPA -- or other agencies -- should regulate greenhouse gases is being considered by the Supreme Court.

"We are going to find a way to do it, no matter what anyone says," Schwarzenegger said. ". . . We have to make moves that protect the health of the people. That's our number one priority.

"We don't want Washington to tell us when we are allowed to be healthy or when we should get cancer," he continued. "We don't want people to die because pollution causes certain illnesses and cancers and so on."

Schwarzenegger argued that in a "Nixon goes to China" way he is uniquely poised to lead on the environmental front. Calling himself a "sane Republican," he said his pro-business philosophy and fiscal conservatism shield him from accusations of being "the tree hugger, the crazy guy out there who wants to live on the moon and talk about the spirits and all this holistic stuff."

"With me they can't do it, because my whole history is different," he said, puffing thoughtfully on a fat cigar in his smoking tent in a courtyard of the state Capitol. "It's unexpected, so therefore you have a better chance to have an impact. . . . All those businesses would never have a better guy than me."

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California's two senators, Democrats [Barbara Boxer](http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/b000711/) and [Dianne Feinstein](http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/f000062/), have told officials in Sacramento that they intend to model federal legislation on California's greenhouse gas legislation. Schwarzenegger said he is ready to go to Washington to testify on the issue.

Schwarzenegger also contended that bold American action on global warming -- a makeover that parallels his own -- could do much to improve the nation's international image.

"The war has dragged us down. There's no reason to get political, that's just the way it is," he said. "But you can balance it by being a great leader in the environment."

"The more America shows leadership in that area," he said, "the more we will be loved for that as much as they love us for our hamburgers and for our jeans and for our movies and for our music."

Environmental groups, rarely inclined to support a Republican, have grudgingly given Schwarzenegger decent marks. "Schwarzenegger has really taken the lead on greenhouse gases, more so than almost any American politician," said Frank O'Donnell, president of D.C.-based Clean Air Watch. "His state is the leading edge of many of our problems, but it's also the leading edge of many of their solutions."

In California, Schwarzenegger's pro-environmental position is part of a bipartisan tradition; even Ronald Reagan was known as pro-environment during his years in the statehouse. Since the 1960s, the state, bedeviled by the worst air quality in the United States, has led the nation in tackling pollutants. In 1961, it required the first automotive emissions control technology in the nation, and its regulations continue to be the toughest in the country.

California's standards have helped give birth in the United States to hybrid cars, efficient refrigerators and air conditioners, and the catalytic converter, which, because of California's leadership, will soon be installed on lawn mowers and other equipment using two-stroke engines.

The federal Air Quality Act of 1967 granted California a waiver to set and enforce its own emissions standards for new vehicles. Based on that waiver, California asked the federal government to allow it to begin limiting greenhouse gases from cars. California's status on this front gives it further claim to an environmental leadership role, Schwarzenegger said.

To be sure, there were -- and still are -- huge fights over emissions and, more broadly, coastal preservation. California is home to [Richard W. Pombo](http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/p000419/) (R), a congressman who almost succeeded in weakening the Endangered Species Act before he was defeated in November.

Nonetheless, the state's tough regulations have resulted in improvements. Schwarzenegger recalled that, when he first moved to California, his workouts on Muscle Beach in Venice left him with teary eyes.

"They were just burning all the time, and now I've never felt that again. It's just gone. That is unbelievable progress," he said. "It's all because of the Clean Air Act and the catalytic converter. All those kind of things that were done in the '70s which everyone fought about and said that business would go down and everyone was going to move from California and the world was going to be flat again and all this drama.

And look what happened? The whole world is doing it."

Because California has embraced conservation like no other big state, its per capita consumption of energy has remained flat over 30 years, while the rest of the country's has increased by 50 percent. And total vehicle emissions of nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons have fallen more than 20 percent in 15 years, even though miles driven by state motorists are up by more than 20 percent.

Noting that Silicon Valley investors are devoting billions of dollars to green technology, Schwarzenegger predicted that a new era is dawning for business. He enthused about a recent trip to the Los Angeles Auto Show, where he test-drove an electric race car that went from 0 to 60 mph in 4.1 seconds. "A battery? I mean that's extraordinary. That's faster than a turbo Porsche," he said.

"All of this is going to be a whole new phenomenon," he said, "where people who are smart and entrepreneurial will not fight it but will get into it."

Doctors lobby to save youth health study

Pediatricians hope new Congress will restore funding for ambitious project tracking children from birth to 21

By Judith Graham, CHICAGO TRIBUNE

In the Contra Costa Times, Monday, Dec. 25, 2006

CHICAGO - In private conversations across the country this holiday break, pediatricians are buttonholing their congressmen and making a heart-felt plea: Save the National Children's Study.

This is the latest attempt to rescue the most important study of children's health and the environment in the United States.

Hundreds of scientists have helped plan the project since 2000. The scope is enormous: Researchers are set to track 100,000 children from birth to age 21, collecting genetic material and blood samples and recording kids' exposure to everything from pesticides to chemicals and air pollution.

Enrollment activities were scheduled to begin in 2007.

But earlier this year, President Bush's proposed budget called for terminating the \$2.7 billion study instead of allocating the \$69 million requested for fiscal 2007.

"The issue is really an issue of prioritization" of limited research funds, Elias Zerhouni, director of the National Institutes of Health, told a Senate hearing in May.

The administration's move provoked an outcry and the House and Senate appropriations committees responded by affirming strong support.

But neither committee set aside new funding for the National Children's Study, leaving the project's future in limbo.

"We're preparing to respond to both directives -- to shut down the study if Congress accepts the president's budget or to continue it if more money can be found," said Dr. Peter Scheidt, the project's director.

Now, a new push is on to convince the new, Democratic-controlled Congress that the study needs to go forward and that new funding should be allocated.

"To pull back now, after so much work has already been done, would deliver a chilling message that our children's health simply isn't a high priority for this nation," said Dr. David Schonfeld, who sits on the study's federal advisory committee.

"Yes, this project represents a major investment, but it's an investment that promises to yield great dividends in the future," added Schonfeld, who directs the division of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

The payoff will come from understanding how children's physical and social environments -- from the water they drink to the homes they live in and the video games they play -- interact with their genetic make-ups and affect the onset of disease.

With chronic conditions such as asthma, autism, diabetes and obesity on the rise in youngsters and definitive scientific explanations lacking, "this work is absolutely critical," said Dr. Edward Clark, chairman of the department of pediatrics at the University of Utah School of Medicine.

Salt Lake City is one of seven initial sites chosen for the project.

Even a 1 percent reduction in the incidence of chronic diseases could yield enormous benefits -- as much as \$6 billion a year, according to some estimates. This would allow the study to recoup its costs many times over.

But those returns lie 10 to 30 years or more down the road, while Congress faces enormous current budget pressures, aggravated by the cost of the war in Iraq and mounting deficits.

Given the many things on Democrats' 2007 health care agenda -- restoring funding for stem cell research, giving the government the ability to negotiate prices for drugs purchased through Medicare and expanding health insurance coverage for children -- renewed financial support for the children's study can't be taken for granted.

Stagnant funding for the National Institutes of Health after years of steady increases complicates the situation by heightening competition for grants and making researchers reluctant to see funds diverted to such a large, expensive project.

"Having cranked up their research engines and recruited many promising young scientists, many institutions now find that NIH money is no longer available to the extent they had expected," said Dr. Myron Genel, a professor of pediatrics at Yale School of Medicine. "And that's created some controversy with regard to this project."

Under a recommendation from the House Appropriations Committee, money for the National Children's Study would come out of the already stretched budget of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

The Senate Appropriations Committee proposed that funds come from money managed by the NIH director's office.

But Genel argued that neither option is acceptable and that what is really needed is a new appropriation by Congress.

"It's hard to fathom why we can give lip service to how much we care about children, and then decide not to put up the money when it comes down to trying to get answers about fundamental questions related to their health," he said.

Genel and others point to the enormous benefits of the Framingham Heart Study, a similarly ambitious project launched just after World War II to investigate heart disease and stroke in the U.S.

Over decades, that study elucidated the role of cholesterol, hypertension and cigarette smoking in these conditions, and helped give rise to prevention strategies that reduced cardiovascular disease in men by 50 percent.

"We need the same kind of science, the same kind of information, to enable us to develop a blueprint for controlling chronic diseases that have their origins in childhood," said Dr. Philip Landrigan, chairman of the department of community medicine at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, December 26, 2006:](#)

Growing pains

Population growth poses some difficult questions for Valley.

The central San Joaquin Valley continues to grow at a rate faster than the state as a whole. That raises serious public policy concerns that we need to be addressing now, or we run the risk of being overcome by the tide of newcomers to the region.

All five of the region's counties rank among the top 15 in California when it comes to population growth. Madera County grew at the fastest rate - 2.8% - while Tulare and Fresno counties registered growth of 2.4% and 2%, respectively. Fresno County's population is just short of 1 million now, and the five-county region is nearing 2 million.

All those new arrivals come with needs, and that puts increased demands on the entire spectrum of public services, from roads and schools to law enforcement. Many cities and counties already struggle to meet demands for those services; how are they going to manage the higher demand?

One interesting fact that emerged in the state estimates released last week is this: While Fresno County's population grows, its work force shrinks. There are several possible explanations, and some of them are not very comforting.

It may be, for instance, that more people are retiring than joining the work force. That's to be expected, to some extent, as the baby boom generation edges into retirement. But it may also be the case that the number of workers who've just given up on hopes of finding a job - so-called "discouraged workers" - is going up.

The Valley also has a higher birth rate than the state as a whole. That poses the possibility that our population will be simultaneously growing at either end - the very young and the elderly. Those are the two groups that, typically, require the highest level of public services.

Where's the money going to come from to provide those services? We have to find the answer to that question.

If we don't, we face a bleak future. Imagine the landscape if the warning of Fresno County Administrative Officer Bart Bohn comes to pass: an endless grid of Herndon Avenues up and down the Valley.

Traffic congestion, badly crowded schools, an overburdened health care system, bad air quality, diminishing supplies of water, increased crime, the best and brightest of the next generation fleeing as fast as they can - that doesn't sound like much of a future. The time for answers is now.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2006:](#)

Newscast from the future:

California a Third World state

By TOM ORVIS

Sept. 12, 2020

MODESTO - The last acre of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley was paved over today for housing and industry. California, which once qualified as the sixth-richest country in the world, has been relegated to Third World status with 55 million residents.

For the 20th consecutive year, the San Joaquin Valley achieved extreme nonattainment status, failing to meet the eight-hour ozone air quality standards set by the federal Clean Air Act.

Officials said they were confused and surprised that as agriculture vanished, air pollution problems actually worsened.

Local air officials were able to regulate agriculture, but unable to regulate mobile sources, such as cars, trucks and trains. They were being held responsible for all air problems, when their jurisdiction only accounts for 33percent of the problem.

The area formerly known as the delta is now a dry and weeded wasteland, along with the new Delta Salt Flats near Vernalis.

In 2015, Southern California and Southern Nevada water interests purchased the water rights of delta property owners to provide water for golf courses and swimming pools. Delta property owners said they had no choice but to sell the water because state regulations no longer allowed farming of their land.

California is now experiencing severe flooding even with average annual rainfall in the San Joaquin Valley down from the historic average of 14 inches per year to 10 inches per year. The flooding occurs because there is so little soil to absorb the water and the paved surfaces are sending storm runoff to the ocean. Oil, gas and copper from vehicle brakepads have been the leading cause of waterway pollution since 2010.

Flooding has been exacerbated by the removal of dams up and down the Sierra. Shasta Dam was the last removed, in 2019, due to lawsuits by the Free the Rivers Coalition challenging the restricted public access policies.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals deemed this restricted access unconstitutional and the U.S. Supreme Court concurred. As a result, the California Aqueduct and the Delta-Mendota Canal have been replaced with 12 pipes, each 20feet in diameter, running from north of Sacramento to Bakersfield along Interstate 99.

Water is only allowed into the delta and out to the ocean during a major storm. The striped bass and many other delta water species have vanished. Only water outlets for cities are allowed along the pipeline, and they are metered at a rate of \$20,000 per acre foot. Groundwater pumping is no longer allowed. The average valley homeowner pays \$500 a month for water.

The United States also has continued a trend started in 2005 as a net food importer. Currently, the United States imports 60 percent of its food supply, and officials worry about daily outbreaks of food-borne illness.

"We can't regulate the food coming in because we would not be able to feed ourselves without that supply," said an anonymous health department official. "Our forefathers said that a nation that could not feed itself could not defend itself. How prophetic!"

Former farmers have had their land confiscated by the state, which paid 1990 prices. Farmers had argued that the land was their retirement investment and the livelihood of their heirs, but the state used eminent domain to declare a public emergency - the land was needed for houses and stores.

Pension obligations bankrupted the state general fund, meaning California is only paying retirees and has no current state employees.

Now, from Mars ...

Orvis, who works for the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau Federation, served as a visiting editor for The Bee earlier this year. Write him at columns@modbee.com.

[Washington Post, Commentary, Monday, Dec. 25, 2006:](#)

Losing to the Greens

By Robert D. Novak

"I've never seen industry so deathly afraid of the current politics surrounding climate change policy," a Bush administration environmental official told me. With good reason. As Democrats take control of Congress, once-firm opposition to the green lobby's campaign of imposing carbon emission controls is weak.

Panicky captains of industry have themselves largely to blame for failing to respond to the environmentalists' well-financed propaganda operation. One government official says "industry appears utterly helpless and utterly clueless as to how to respond." But the Bush administration itself is a house divided with support for greens and severe carbon regulation inside the Energy Department, reaching up to the secretary himself.

None of this necessarily means climate change will become law during the next two years, with President Bush wielding his veto pen if any bill escapes the Senate's gridlock. Rep. John Dingell of Michigan, reassuming chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee after a dozen years' absence, will try

to protect the automotive industry from draconian regulation. But over the long term, industry is losing to the greens.

The stakes are immense, as shown by the impact of the bill to implement the Kyoto proposal co-sponsored by Sen. John McCain, front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, and Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, the favorite Democrat of many Republicans. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that this measure would reduce gross domestic product by \$776 billion annually, raise gasoline prices 40 cents a gallon, raise natural gas prices 46 percent and cut coal production by nearly 60 percent. Charles River Associates, business consultants, predicts that it would kill 600,000 jobs.

Yet, Jonathan Lash of the World Resources Institute said last week that McCain-Lieberman does not go far enough in reducing carbon emissions. Green extremists would prefer the severe legislation proposed by Sen. Barbara Boxer, the new chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee.

According to industry sources, Dingell has privately advised auto industry lobbyists to prepare for the worst. House Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi is making carbon emission legislation a priority, and Dingell has warned Detroit that she expects him to move a bill through his committee. He will do his best to modify legislation, but he is obliged to follow Pelosi's wishes and cannot play Horatio at the bridge.

The same dilemma faces Rep. Rick Boucher, a staunch ally of the coal industry who will become chairman of the Energy and Commerce subcommittee on energy and air quality. He must balance Pelosi's desires with the interests of the coal counties in his southwest Virginia district.

Staunch foes of carbon regulation remain in the administration, headed by Chairman James L. Connaughton of the Council on Environmental Quality. But the Energy Department's top executive strata have gone green.

Since moving from deputy treasury secretary to energy secretary nearly two years ago, business executive and financier Samuel W. Bodman has kept a low profile. In a rare public utterance on global warming Oct. 5, 2005, he said an "increasing level of certainty" about global warming fueled by carbon dioxide "is real" and "a matter we take seriously." In private meetings, he has expressed dissatisfaction with administration policy. Bodman's undersecretary, former Senate staffer David K. Garman, has shocked industry lobbyists with his criticism of the president's views.

In the background is a pending Supreme Court decision on what the Clean Air Act requires or permits the Environmental Protection Agency to do about greenhouse gas emissions. Even if the court says the authority is merely discretionary, McCain or any Democratic president would then crack down on industry if nothing is passed before the 2008 election.

Ultimate salvation from U.S. self-destructive behavior may come from the real world. Most European Union countries, suffering higher energy costs and constraints on growth imposed by the Kyoto pact, cannot meet that treaty's requirements for emission levels. Furthermore, China is on pace to exceed U.S. emissions by 2010, meaning that unilateral U.S. carbon controls will have little impact on global emissions while driving American jobs to China.

This downside of Speaker Pelosi's green determination ought to resonate in union halls and coalfields of Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. However, American industrialists, while wringing their hands, are not making their case.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2006:](#)

Racing toward more pollution

Regarding "Thanks for supporting a fast cause" (Dec. 15, Letters): While you get to watch really fast, expensive cars make left turns all day, eat \$8 hot dogs and drink \$10 beers, the rest of the valley's residents will be trying to come up with ideas on how to clean the smog and litter your cute racetrack will leave behind.

Allergies? Who cares? Carcinogens? Never mind. It's safe to assume that you're not concerned with the health of your family, friends or the future of our community (or world). Ignorance is bliss, isn't it?

HOLLY MASTERS-STANTON, Modesto

[Bakersfield Californian, Opinion Page, Sunday, Dec. 24, 3006:](#)

Hope for 2007: Opinion section's Sounding Board members share wishes for coming year

Wish list is long

World: Let's quit killing each other over whose view of God is correct so we can get down to the business of living the way He would want us to.

Nation: Get the federal government out of social engineering and back to civil engineering as in fixing the dam at Lake Isabella.

Convince the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that disposing Southern California sewage sludge over Kern County's groundwater should be stopped.

State: Shut down the Legislature for the next four years. Build the Peripheral Canal. Convince the California EPA that disposing Southern California sewage sludge over Kern County's groundwater should be stopped. Before the Legislature is shut down, pass a bill requiring the governor to make "Terminator 4."

Kern County/Bakersfield: Remove "planning" from developers and return it to planners. Quit planting housing tracts on prime farmland. Stop the importation of sewage sludge from outside of the county. Make a crosstown freeway that goes across town. Take the four-lane state highway that dead-ends in a parking lot and connect it to Interstate 5. Synchronize traffic lights so we don't have to stop at every stinking intersection as we drive through town. [Give us air we can breathe, instead of see.](#)

-- Tom Haslebacher of Bakersfield is a hydrologist with the Kern County Water Agency.