

## **Using fireplaces discouraged today**

Modesto Bee, Monday, January 22, 2007

People in Stanislaus and Merced counties are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive people — children, older adults and those with chronic breathing problems. The "burning discouraged" advisory comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The next step is a ban on burning. On the Net:[www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## **Supply of pellets goes up in smoke**

By BEN van der MEER

Modesto Bee, Monday, January 22, 2007

Booming sales of wood-pellet stoves for home heating have led to a severe lack of pellets this winter.

Stores across the Northern San Joaquin Valley that sell pellets reported receiving a very limited supply in recent weeks.

The sacks they did get sold within hours, if not minutes.

And when temperatures dropped below freezing recently, stores reported being swamped with calls from frantic customers.

"They were just not ready for the demand," said Misty Peters, a cashier at the Orchard Supply Hardware store in Manteca, of pellet manufacturers. "We even had one person who came from San Mateo looking."

The president of a pellet manufacturing company in Idaho said a number of factors led to the shortage, which he expected to last one more month.

"The pellet stove sellers had two years of phenomenal growth," said Eric Hanson, president of Coeur d'Alene Fiber Fuel Inc. in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. "We were caught off guard completely.

"Even if we'd been able to plan for it, there still would've been a shortage."

He said wood pellet manufacturers, many in the Pacific Northwest and Canada, can't produce enough to meet demand.

They also don't have enough of a necessary ingredient: sawdust. The slowing home-building market means a drop in available sawdust from lumber mills, he said.

By one estimate, the shortage in wood pellets will be as much as 244,000 tons by the end of this year.

Hanson said the shortage was compounded when his company's factory closed in October because it lost its lease.

Coeur d'Alene Fiber Fuels produces the Atlas brand, which is sold in many valley stores.

Another plant will open next month, Hanson said, but the lengthy permit process for such projects makes it hard to open a plant quickly.

Lending institutions also are reluctant to provide financing for new factories, he added.

That means that even if this shortage eases, more are likely if wood pellet stoves remain popular, he said.

"I think everybody out there is making as much product as they possibly can," he said.

An employee who answered the phone at Idaho-based Lignetics Inc., which also sells wood pellets in the valley, said the company would not comment.

The shortage made one Modesto resident scramble a bit. Sherri Boer, 45, said her wood pellet stove is her family's only source of heat.

"When we got down to six bags, I started getting nervous," she said, adding that one bag of pellets will keep a house warm for about 20 hours. "We don't have a switch we can turn on."

She said she called a company in Idaho, then distributors in Oregon and San Francisco before finding pellets at a country store outside Woodland, near Sacramento.

Because she bought enough to last beyond the end of winter, she said, she's put a few bags up for sale on the Craigslist Web site.

"I figure there are other people who will need them like us," she said.

The search for pellets has spread to stores that sell the stoves.

Jeanette King, co-owner of Valley Fire Place Inc. in Salida, said she's gotten calls from customers, but she has no good answers for where to find the bags of pellets.

"I sympathize," she said. "It's really unfortunate."

She said the stoves sold well in the past couple of years because of fears of higher natural gas prices, among other factors.

Marta Joseph, co-owner of Stanislaus Stove & Flue in Modesto, said she's gotten three to four calls about wood pellets daily in the past week.

"Right now, I'm not sure who has any," she said. "You have to get on the phone and really check. The bottom line is you're having to purchase pellets way in the beginning of the season."

Although wood pellets burn cleaner than firewood, there is no advantage to a wood pellet stove from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's perspective.

A district official said such stoves are subject to the same restrictions on burning as other stoves are on days with poor air quality.

Despite the shortage, prices for wood pellets haven't shot up.

Peters at OSH's Manteca store said that when bags are available, the store has sold them at the regular price of about \$5, or \$250 for a ton.

Coeur d'Alene Fiber Fuel's Hanson said his price for wood pellets is usually contracted months in advance.

"It doesn't matter what someone offers me right now," he added. "I can't deliver on it."

## **Biofuel Boomtime**

### **State Decision Expected to Mean 75% Increase in Ethanol Use in California**

ValleyVoice Newspaper, Jan. 22, 2007

*San Joaquin Valley* - Pacific Ethanol plans to build a 60 million gallon ethanol plant at the Port of Stockton over the next year—the second company facility in the San Joaquin Valley besides Madera.

This week the Port of Sacramento approved an environmental impact statement and agreed to lease 30 acres to the company—continuing the boom in ethanol production in California in the next few years including a handful of start-ups in the south valley.

The news comes just after Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced in his state of the state address that by executive order requires fuel suppliers to lower the amount of carbon in their fuels to cut greenhouse gases implicated in global warming. The effort is supported by the legislature that passed AB 32 that requires a reduction of greenhouse gas emission by 25% by 2020.

“Let us use the freedom and flexibility of market to accomplish it,” said Schwarzenegger.

The new greenhouse standard should boost the production of renewable based fuels, says Pacific Ethanol's Tom Koehler including ethanol blended with gasoline and biodiesel blended with diesel fuel, he says. “This sends the right message to investors that the market for fuel like ethanol will grow.”

Indeed, Koehler has been lobbying the state ARB to allow the use of 10% ethanol blended in gasoline up from its current 5.7% limit. Koehler says the Air Resource Board is poised as soon as February or March of this year to announce a new standard (the predictive model) that will allow the higher blend.

Until the past few years California produced almost none of their own ethanol fuel. Today at a 5.7% blend, we use nearly 950 million gallons of ethanol blended in our gas tanks. Once a new 10% standard goes into effect, as it is in many other states, we will need an additional 700 million gallons of ethanol once the new standard went into effect a 75% increase according to a Pacific Ethanol document. With demand for more than 1.6 billion gallons of fuel per year and production in the state of only a tiny fraction of that on the drawing board, ethanol companies believe they can weather lower oil prices (ethanol is pegged to oil prices) and high corn costs for the next year knowing there is a government mandated demand both in California and in the US for the product.

### **California Grown**

The state is ensuring that a large portion of the supply comes from California. To cut greenhouse gas emissions with more biofuels and make sure California provides the fuel, the governor has ordered that “the state shall produce a minimum of 20 percent of its biofuels within California by 2010, 40 percent by 2020, and 75 percent by 2050” ensuring that out-of-state ethanol makers don't supplant in-state suppliers. This means valley ethanol makers have a ready market supplying the state's huge gasoline market.

Ethanol makers have been arm wrestling with the state Air Resources Board over the future of ethanol for a decade because of studies that showed that lower blends of ethanol with gasoline release carbon pollutants from older car hoses. The new predictive model will apparently approve a 10% blend for all California gasoline and the ARB is also being asked to speed up approval of E-85 stations that will allow the 85% blending of ethanol with 15% gasoline to boom across the state. Clearly the government is pushing hard on the ARB on both these issues.

Even on the valley level at the Valley Air District there has been little support for ethanol as a way to help clean the valley's air with district declining to assist the City of Tulare in a recent application for funds to build the valley's first E-85 station. Even the ARB says E-85 doesn't have any negative side effect for older car hoses that a lower blend of ethanol appear to have. But the Air District apparently doesn't see the benefit of supplanting tankfuls of gasoline with 85% ethanol that would clearly help cut air pollution from cars. Perhaps when the ARB model comes out, the Valley Air District might take a new look and there will be a place to fuel thousands of flex fuel vehicles already around the valley with other than more gasoline.

Already plants in the south valley include the pioneering facilities in Goshen and Madera as well as plans for one in Fomosa, Pixley, Keyes, Hanford and now Stockton. A Delano company has also expressed some interest in building a plant. All require shipping Midwest corn into the valley to make the fuel. The demand for corn worldwide to be used for ethanol has pushed the price of corn to near \$4 per bushel up 100% in the past year hurting the livestock industry but cheering from farmers who grow the grain. But Koehler is unapologetic. “We've had government programs to push up the price of grain for years and now we've been successful.” Koehler expects a big

spring planting by farmers of corn across the nation as a result of the huge appetite for grain corn. "Don't underestimate how much the American farmer can produce when the market signals." He expects California farmers too will plant more corn varieties.

One local grain farmer, Ralph Friend, points out dairymen have a way to adjust the amount they get for their milk in California based on input prices like corn so dairymen will be taken care of.

Pacific Ethanol also announced in recent weeks they would move their headquarters to Sacramento where "ag and government" come together, says Koehler, as well as the home of the company CEO Neil Koehler, Tom's brother. "We will continue to have a regional office in Fresno, Portland and Colorado," he says all places the company has ethanol plants in the works. This week the company announced a fifth new site in Idaho.

### **Biodiesel Too**

In a related development, State Senator Dean Florez announced seven air quality bills early this year to push the state to use more clean burning biodiesel in trucks and tractors. One bill, SB 70, would require fuel contain 20% more biodiesel in a blend with petroleum diesel which would cut greenhouse gas emissions as well as other pollution. There are some 88 plants that make the biofuel in the US now but no large scale plant in California. However, west of Fresno Nisei Farmer League and California Cotton Growers are collaborating to build a major pilot plant.

Biodiesel is a clean-burning diesel engine fuel made from domestic renewable resources such as vegetable oils, rendered animal fats, corn oil from ethanol production and virgin oils. It can be used in an existing diesel engine without any modifications, meaning it can be put into use now for immediate benefit.

"We have a real opportunity here to immediately cut the particulates we are putting into the air and into our children's lungs every time they ride a school bus, for example," Florez said, adding, "With so many promising technologies for improving air quality, cost is a real barrier, but biodiesel gets us to significant emissions reductions today using existing engines without the retrofits you would expect when you change fuel sources."

Senate Bills 70 through 76 would provide a number of tax breaks and credits to stimulate biodiesel production in California, including grants to farmers to grow the necessary crops and to researchers for the development of fueling stations to make biodiesel accessible throughout California. In addition, the measures would require the use of biodiesel in all diesel-powered school buses, public and private, in California, as well as in new state vehicles.

### **Fireplace use banned in Stanislaus today**

Modesto Bee, Sunday, January 21, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a ban on using solid fuel in fireplaces or wood stoves for Stanislaus County from midnight to midnight today, because air quality was forecast to be "unhealthy for all groups." Violations can result in fines. Fireplace use is discouraged today in San Joaquin and Merced counties.

### **Fresno County group pushes for rules for mega-dairies**

The Associated Press

In the Madera Tribune, Fri., Jan. 19 and in the Sacramento Bee, Thurs., Jan. 18, 2007

A coalition of community groups wants Fresno County to adopt stiff regulations for massive dairies that are blamed as a prime source of smog in the notoriously polluted San Joaquin Valley.

The local air district and water board currently approve dairy expansions or new facilities, but the Fresno Healthy Dairy Campaign said Wednesday it wants the county to require individual permits and environmental impact reports for each new dairy.

The informal coalition of health workers, educators and clergy formed to lobby county officials who are currently drafting rules for new and expanding dairies.

The valley has the largest concentration of dairies in California, the nation's most productive dairy state. It also has chronic air pollution problems that are partly blamed on cows and the waste they produce.

The dairy industry in Fresno County is expected to expand by tens of thousands of animals in the next five years, bringing more smog-creating gases.

## **Madera M.D. heads up Fresno-Madera medical society**

By Ramona Frances - Tribune Writer / Photographer  
The Madera Tribune, Friday, January 19, 2007

Mohammad A. Arain became the 124th president of the Fresno-Madera Medical Society and will preside over the society's first board meeting of 2007 Monday. The Madera surgeon joined the society in 1982 after opening his private practice in Madera.

Only two Madera physicians have served as president, Ray Dearborn M.D., in 1940, and Theodore Nassar M.D., in 1994.

"It is an honor to have a physician from Madera as president of the Fresno-Madera Medical Society," said Theodore Nassar M.D., also of Madera. "Dr. Arain will bring issues of relevance to Madera physicians into the society."

The society, which is comprised of 1,000 doctors, including retired doctors, and residents, selects the president-elect each year.

"It is a prestigious honor to be president of the Medical Society," Nassar said. "Arain is very level headed and will contribute much to the success of the Fresno-Madera Medical Society."

Knowing Arain for 25 years, Nassar has witnessed many service-oriented activities, both locally and worldwide, that Arain has initiated or participated in.

"Dr. Arain is a humanitarian who has attended many catastrophes in the world," Nassar said, "the tsunami in Indonesia, the earthquake in Pakistan, the hurricane in the southern gulf region of United States."

But Arain is also mindful of health-related needs at home.

"I want to see the society do more for physicians and patients," Arain said. "Jointly, we can do more health projects for the local community."

Fresno-Madera Medical Society is credited with starting the Central California Blood Bank.

"We hope to partner with other health-related organizations to function in an advisory capacity to the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#)," said Carol Rau, the society's information officer.

She said members work to further the society's mission by promoting the art and science of medicine, the care and well-being of patients, the enhancement of the public's health, and the general welfare of the medical profession. It also cooperates with organizations that have similar purposes.

Both Rau and Arain mentioned the "alliance" that improves the work of the society.

The Fresno-Madera Medical Society Alliance, supported by spouses of the society, is joining the Fresno-area Community Emergency Response Team to work on emergency preparedness and nutrition programs for school age children this year.

## **Dairies top concern of Wasco-area residents**

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Jan. 19, 2007

WASCO -- In a rare town hall-style held meeting Thursday, residents of this small, rural community had the chance to tell the federal and state air regulators their biggest concerns.

Dairies were top on the list, followed by the need for more air monitors, especially in rural areas.

"The more I hear about these dairies, the more concerned I get," said Francisco Castillo Medina, a resident of nearby Allensworth. Castillo Medina, a retired Boy Scouts of America employee, said he recently became aware of the severity of the valley's air quality problem when he learned a dairy may be built next to his house. He began researching dairies' effects on air quality on the Internet and attending meetings.

"All of the sudden I realized that we have some serious problems," he said.

During Thursday's two-hour meeting in a rented social hall, air officials gave Powerpoint presentations that explained the various layers of government that regulate air pollution. They spoke to a crowd of mostly Spanish speakers who listened through headphones to an interpreter. Those attending mainly came from Wasco, nearby Allensworth or Alpaugh.

A handful of air and environmental activists also attended the meeting.

The meeting was organized by air advocacy groups throughout the valley, like the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment and Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, who wanted residents of the valley's rural communities to have the chance to speak directly with officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Daniela Simunovic, a community organizer for the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment, called the meeting "a once in a lifetime opportunity" for the valley's rural residents to speak directly to regulators.

"Many Latino residents of these communities are on the front lines of this," she said.

Dairies were a major concern among residents and activists alike. Nearly a dozen new dairies have been recently proposed in the Wasco area, according to Simunovic.

When the audience was asked to break into groups and prioritize their concerns, all three groups listed dairies as at the top.

"Having a valley that's so polluted, how can we allow more dairies in here?" asked Tom Frantz, a Wasco teacher who heads up a group called the Association of Irrigated Residents. "We need a cap on any industry that's going to make our pollution worse."

The groups also told air officials they wanted to see more air monitors installed in rural areas like Arvin, which they said has an ozone monitor but no monitor for particulate matter pollution.

## **Sharper Image to give merchandise vouchers to settle lawsuit**

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE  
In the Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Jan. 20, 2007

Sharper Image Corp. has agreed to discount its high-tech gadgets by more than \$60 million and make several other concessions to settle a class-action lawsuit alleging the specialty retailer misled customers about the effectiveness of its air purifiers.

Under the proposed settlement disclosed Friday in a regulatory filing, Sharper Image will offer \$19 merchandise credits to each of the roughly 3.2 million consumers who have bought one of its "Ionic Breeze" purifiers since May 6, 1999.

The credits can be applied toward the purchase of other Sharper Image-branded products for a year after they're issued.

The same group of consumers also will be able to buy a grill attachment designed for the Ionic Breeze for \$7. Although Sharper Image didn't quantify how much customers could save under this offer, several different types of them were listed Friday for \$39.95 on the company's Web site.

Besides offering those discounts, Sharper Image agreed to tone down its advertising claims about the power of the Ionic Breeze and pay up to \$1.875 million in fees to the lawyers who filed the suit on behalf of Manuel Figueroa in a Miami federal court.

Figueroa said he paid several hundred dollars for an Ionic Breeze to help remove dust, pollen and other nettlesome particles from the air, only to discover the device didn't work as advertised.

Sharper Image denied the allegations, citing scientific studies validating the Ionic Breeze's effectiveness. Nevertheless, management "has concluded that it is in the best interest of Sharper Image, its shareholders, and its customers to settle this class action," according to court papers.

The ultimate cost of the settlement will hinge on how many of the eligible customer redeem the merchandise vouchers, Sharper Image said in Securities and Exchange Commission documents.

The settlement still requires court approval. Friday's filing indicated a hearing on the settlement will be held by March 1.

Because the vouchers require a purchase, the settlement could actually help Sharper Image spur more sales - an elusive goal during the last two years.

After suffering its first loss in 15 years in 2005, Sharper Image's troubles deepened in 2006 as its sales plummeted by 21 percent during the first 11 months of the fiscal year.

The slide resulted in the September ouster of Richard Thalheimer, Sharper Image's founder and longtime chief executive. A new management team led by turnaround specialist Jerry Levin is trying to salvage the 194-store chain.

Sharper Image's slide began when sales of its once-popular Ionic Breeze started to crumble after Consumer Reports derided the products as ineffective. The negative review triggered a legal fight that Sharper Image ultimately lost.

## **Toxins from Chevron refinery fire below harmful levels**

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Jan. 20, 2007

A pre-dawn fire at the region's biggest oil refinery spewed sulfur dioxide and other toxins into the air, but at levels low enough they did not harm the health of nearby residents, county officials said.

But it remained unclear what caused a leak that sparked the fire at the Chevron Richmond Refinery, Randy Sawyer, county hazardous materials programs director, said on Thursday.

Chevron released a brief report that included few new details on the Monday fire or its impacts.

The San Ramon-based company updated its initial findings of one injured worker to two. Both employees, including one with minor burns and the other with minor skin irritation, returned to work later on Monday, according to the company's report.

Richmond city Councilman Tom Butt, who lives south of the refinery, said he plans to reintroduce a law that would fine Chevron \$6,000 a minute from the time emergency sirens begin until county officials deem the area safe. A similar ordinance Butt proposed in 2002 failed.

## **Fuels to go 'low-carb'**

**UC Davis scientists are among those working to flesh out a campaign to curb greenhouse gas emissions**

By Edie Lau - Bee Staff Writer  
Sacramento Bee, Saturday, January 20, 2007

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's call this week for a "low carbon" fuel diet to lighten California's greenhouse gas load is thin on specifics.

It's up to a team of scientists at the University of California, Davis, and Berkeley to start fleshing out what will be the world's first transportation fuel standard designed to reduce the output of climate-changing carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases.

For example, the executive order issued Thursday establishes a statewide goal of shrinking the carbon footprint of California transportation fuels by at least 10 percent by 2020. But it does not say from what year that reduction should be measured.

It also leaves vague whether fuels for all forms of transportation -- jet planes, trains and ships, for instance, as well as cars and trucks -- are affected.

"What we will do is look at how to design the standard -- in other words, who do you regulate?" said Dan Sperling, director of the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies and co-leader of the fuels standard project.

"How do you rate the different fuels? What if it's made outside California versus inside California?" Sperling continued. "Once you get into the details of it, it gets complicated."

The establishment of a so-called low carbon fuel standard is a big part of the governor's push -- embodied in the Global Warming Solutions Act passed last year -- to scale back California greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

The goal is driven by concerns that climate change may prove devastating to much of the world, causing in California specifically an increased risk of killer heat waves, wildfires and flooding, a smaller snowpack and rising sea levels.

Transportation is the single biggest source of greenhouse gases in the state, accounting for nearly 41 percent of the estimated 492 million metric tons of greenhouse gases emitted in 2004. Fossil fuels tend to have high carbon content.

The coming fuels standard gives a fresh meaning to the term "low-carb diet." The new transportation menu, Sperling said, will be served cafeteria style, with multiple choices. Examples of some options:

- Reformulate gasoline with ingredients that are less carbon-intensive than conventional oil. An ethanol mix, depending on how the ethanol is derived, could lighten the carb load, for example.
- Boost the proportion of electric vehicles. An electric car recharged on the California grid produces 40 to 50 percent less greenhouse gases than a car running on standard gasoline.
- Increase refinery efficiency. The carbon footprint of fuels will be calculated based on greenhouse gases generated in the production as well as consumption of fuels, Sperling said.

Other options for getting out the carbon probably have yet to be invented, said Alex Farrell, an assistant professor in the UC Berkeley Energy and Resources Group and co-leader of the fuels project.

"There's no way to forecast how the market will really work," Farrell said. "Companies will be able to roll out technologies that they think will work for them and their customers. They're going to compete. We don't know which will be the most competitive. We don't know what strategies they'll use."

The point, Farrell said, is to support innovations that move society away from carbon-heavy fuels.

The emphasis on flexibility and freeing the market to be creative has earned the low-carbon fuels concept the support of the Western States Petroleum Association.

"We're very pleased to see ... they are not picking winners and losers, and they're certainly not mandating the path forward," said Cathy Reheis-Boyd, chief executive officer of the trade group.

The UC scientists, whose work is being funded by the Energy Foundation based in San Francisco, plan to present a draft standard in April or May to the California Air Resources Board. The agency will air the proposal for public review and board revisions.

Sperling said one question he thinks the public is most concerned about is: Will this affect fuel prices?

His answer: "I think the long-term (outcome) is that it will reduce volatility and restrain gasoline prices because there will be competition."

How much the state may shave from its greenhouse gas burden depends on how broadly the standard is applied. If all transportation were included, and the reduction were based on the state's 2004 greenhouse gas emissions, the standard could cut on the order of 20 million metric tons of climate-changing pollution -- the equivalent of taking 3.5 million cars off the road for a year.

If the standard applied only to car and truck fuels, the greenhouse gas savings is about 13 million metric tons, or the equivalent of removing 2.3 million cars for a year.

However, whether the standard actually brings about a net reduction in California greenhouse gases is an open question. That's because consumers may continue using more fuel, erasing the gains achieved by lowering the carbon content of the fuel mix.

"This is a performance standard, not a cap," Sperling said. "If we want to reduce driving, that's a whole other policy."

Nevertheless, combined with a 2002 state law -- currently tied up in court -- that sets greenhouse gas emission limits on cars sold in California beginning in 2009, the fuel standard should help bring about "a large improvement," Sperling said.

## **Farm bureau opposes race complex**

By The Associated Press

The Madera Tribune, Thursday, January 18, 2007

MERCED - The Merced County Farm Bureau board of directors voted to sue the county for approving a \$250 million racetrack complex without adequately studying environmental implications.

The county Board of Supervisors last month tentatively approved Riverside Motorsports Park's plan to build a racetrack and shops on 1,200 acres of farmland near Atwater.

"We've made it known all along that we don't believe this project has been adequately studied," farm bureau Executive Director Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo said Tuesday.

County officials contend that the project's environmental review process was properly handled.

"As we live in a litigious society, the county fully expected there to be lawsuits," said Mark Hendrickson, the county's director of governmental affairs.

Several environmental groups and businesses have threatened to sue to stop the raceway. Opponents said it would bring noise, traffic and pollution.

John Condren, the CEO of Riverside Motorsports Park, refused to comment because no lawsuit has been filed.

## **Another 'Spare the Air' advisory issued**

Carrie Sturrock, Chronicle Staff Writer  
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, January 20, 2007

BAY AREA -- With air pollution levels rising to unhealthy levels, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is asking people not to burn wood in their fireplaces, and to limit their driving tonight and tomorrow morning.

The "Spare the Air Tonight" advisory is intended to help reduce particulate pollution, which are predicted to reach unhealthy levels today and tomorrow.

Unlike recent Spare the Air advisories, public transportation agencies are not offering free rides this time.

Small particle pollution is especially dangerous for the elderly, the young and for people with cardiovascular or respiratory disease.

Air quality experts want to remind people that "wood burning is not an efficient way to heat your home and that it contributes to the unhealthy build-up of harmful air pollutants."

Cool weather actually contributes to the pollution because the earth cools the air closest to the ground, creating a warmer layer of air above it. When there is no wind, the warm air traps the pollution. Particulate pollution is most concentrated at night and in the early morning.

Here are some tips from the experts: Convert wood-burning stoves to natural gas or pellet stoves. Drive less. Use public transportation more.

For more information call 800 Help Air (800-435-7247) or go to [www.sparetheair.org](http://www.sparetheair.org).

## **Car-sharing catching on with Bay Area drivers**

### **Firms provide autos for those who don't want hassle of ownership**

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer  
S.F. Chronicle, Monday, January 22, 2007

For economic and environmental reasons, Tara Hunt wants to avoid buying a car, but sometimes she needs to drive from San Francisco across the Bay Bridge to Ikea or Home Depot. Keith Kamisugi finds it a hassle to own a car in San Francisco -- especially trying to find a parking place near his home -- but he has to drive to business meetings and on occasional errands.

For Hunt and Kamisugi -- and thousands of other Bay Area residents -- car-sharing is the answer to that dilemma.

"Not owning a car in San Francisco is a big benefit to me," said Kamisugi, 36, who lives in the parking-deprived Inner Richmond District. Car-sharing "fills the gap between my use of public transportation and the times when I need a car."

So many people in the Bay Area are interested in car-sharing that two for-profit companies have joined nonprofit pioneer City CarShare in the market -- and all three are surviving and growing.

"This is the only city in the country -- possibly in the world -- that has three car-share companies operating at the same time," said Dan Shifrin, regional vice president for Zipcar. "It speaks volumes about San Francisco."

Rick Hutchinson, chief executive officer for City CarShare, estimates that about 13,000 people actively participate in Bay Area car-sharing operations. About 4,000 joined in the past year.

"It's been a great year for car-sharing," he said.

And all three operations expect their memberships to grow substantially in the coming year as they collectively put hundreds more cars into service.

Car-sharing services offer their members an organized and high-tech system for using cars for short-term trips, charging hourly or daily rates and sometimes a per-mile fee. Gasoline, insurance and maintenance are included. Members book the cars online or over the phone, pick them up at locations scattered across their cities, and return them when they're done.

Made popular in German and Swiss cities in the mid-1980s, car-sharing now exists in 600 cities on four continents with about 350,000 people using 11,000 vehicles. In the United States, where car-sharing was introduced in the late 1990s, about 102,000 people shared 2,558 cars as of July, said Susan Shaheen, a UC Berkeley research scientist who tracks car-sharing. Initial estimates for December show those numbers rising.

City CarShare opened the first car-sharing service in the Bay Area in 2001 with a fleet of eye-catching green Volkswagen Beetles that have since been retired. In 2005, the two national, for-profit firms -- Zipcar and Flexcar -- moved into the market.

Representatives of the three firms say that they're doing well and that there's plenty of room in the San Francisco market for all of the companies.

"I don't really feel like we're competing. We're helping each other out," Shifrin said. "We all have the same product: cars; we all charge hourly; and we all want to remove cars from the streets and support public transportation. We have more in common than we have differences."

Officials at the other car-sharing operations agree. City CarShare's mission, Hutchinson said, is not to make money but to reduce car ownership, and pollution, congestion and oil dependence. City CarShare laid the groundwork and established the market that attracted the two for-profits, he said.

"When the other companies came to town, we were pleased that they were legitimizing the mission," he said. "And the fact that they have brought additional resources has benefited car-sharing."

Flexcar spokesman John Williams said the companies have their differences -- mainly rate structures and car-sharing locations -- but have worked with each other to build interest in sharing cars instead of owning them.

"We all share a healthy sense of competition," he said, "but I think there are enough people out there who don't even know about car-sharing to support all three."

San Francisco's dense population, dearth of parking, high gasoline prices, public transit systems and environmental activism make it a strong market for car-sharing. With Berkeley and Oakland sharing some of those characteristics, all three companies have cars and members in those cities as well.

For members, convenience is key. Hunt, 33, who owns an Internet marketing consulting business, lives and works South of Market. The Toronto native is used to living without a car but found that San Francisco's transit and taxi services often made that difficult. So she and her boyfriend decided to try car-sharing, and picked Zipcar because she saw a lot of its cars in her neighborhood.

"I saw that Zipcars were everywhere," she said. "And they had the coolest cars. ... It's one of the best things we've done."

Hunt pays \$250 a month on a prepaid plan that gives her discounted rates of \$7 an hour or \$55 a day for most cars. Zipcar charges higher rates for cars like the BMW 325i or the Mini Cooper convertible. It's enough to fit in not only the trips to the East Bay for furniture and home-improvement shopping but also grocery shopping, visits to clients on the Peninsula and even an occasional out-of-town weekend trip.

Several Zipcar sites are within easy walking distance of her home and work, Hunt said, and getting a car hasn't been a problem.

"I can't always get exactly the car I want -- I like Priuses, and they're popular," she said. "But I can always get a car when I want."

Linda Johnson, 40, director of a nonprofit arts organization, is equally satisfied with City CarShare, which has a different rate structure, charging \$10 monthly dues, \$4 an hour and 44 cents a mile. The per-mile charge, Hutchinson said, is designed to encourage shorter trips so more members can use the cars.

Johnson and her husband, who live in a small Mission District apartment, drive to the grocery store, to pick up friends at the airport and to go hiking. They spend between \$30 and \$75 a month -- less than insurance used to cost when she owned a car.

"The prices are very low," she said. "When I tell people how little we spend, their jaws drop."

Shaheen believes car-sharing has a big future, not only in the Bay Area but also across the country as the concept spreads and companies reach out to suburbia, lower-income communities and other specialized markets. She's projected that as many as 2 million people nationwide could eventually become car-sharing customers.

Officials with car-sharing companies are equally optimistic, though they know it goes against the national culture and tradition.

"We're battling against the American dream," said Williams. "But we've found tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people who would rather not own a car."

## **East Bay mayors look to London for clean-air tips**

Carolyn Jones, Chronicle Staff Writer  
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, January 20, 2007

Inspired by London, the mayors of five East Bay cities said Friday they'd like to adopt some of the bold British air-cleaning strategies but said they'd probably resist the temptation of charging motorists to drive downtown.

"I think it's very inspiring, and these are things I'd like to try in Berkeley," said Mayor Tom Bates, who hosted a brainstorming session with Allen Jones, the head of London's Climate Change Agency, who spearheaded the city's precedent-setting battle against greenhouse gases.

Jones, who's in the Bay Area to share strategies for reducing greenhouse emissions, explained how London was transformed from one of the most polluted cities in Europe, with its pea-soup skies, soot-covered buildings and coughing populace, to a blue-sky city filled with happier pedestrians and bicyclists, not to mention Toyota Priuses, in only a few years.

"London's not sooty anymore," said Martin Uden, British consul general in San Francisco, who also was at Friday's meeting at Oakland City Hall with the mayors of Emeryville, Union City, Piedmont and Albany, in addition to Bates.

"There's even salmon in the Thames," Uden said. "It's inspiring because now we know that we can actually fix these things."

Jones' global-warming battle began in Woking, a city of 100,000 on the outskirts of London. Starting in 1990, he began implementing alternative-energy programs that led the city to cut its greenhouse emissions by 77 percent.

The mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, hired Jones to do the same thing in London, where voters listed climate change as their No. 1 priority. Livingstone's ultimate goal is for London to have zero carbon emissions.

With the backing of a popular mayor and a mandate from voters to cut pollution, Jones' job was relatively easy, he said. It's also an easy sell because the evidence of apparent global warming is everywhere: balmy nights in January, flowers blooming in winter and last year's severe drought in London.

Among the most significant changes was requiring that 10 percent of the resources in constructing new buildings be renewable. When that seemed to work, Jones increased it to 20 percent. The city is also encouraging low-energy lighting, more efficient windows and solar power for older buildings.

Developers weren't happy, but "we made it more expensive to fight it than to just do it," Jones said.

The city also is encouraging the use of anaerobic digesters, airtight tanks that turn restaurant scraps, paper, yard clippings and other organic waste into natural gas, which can be used for energy. Ideally, a city could be self-sufficient, generating its own power by recycling its own organic waste.

But the most well-known change was a plan adopted in 2002 to charge motorists, depending on a vehicle's emissions, to drive into central London. The trek is free for hybrids, about \$10 for regular cars and more for trucks and busses. Fines for not paying run as high as \$300.

A similar plan was adopted for parking. Hybrids can park for free, but everyone else has to pay steep rates.

The money raised from the fees was spent on adding trains to the Underground subway and improving streets for bicyclists and pedestrians.

"After all the moaning and groaning, it really does seem to be working," Jones said. London is now home to 35,000 Priuses, and subway ridership has greatly increased because there are more trains.

In 2008, the rates will increase again and the circle will expand to include all of London. The charge to drive a bus or truck into greater London will be about \$50.

While the mayors liked the concept of charging motorists to drive into the city, they agreed it's not likely to happen soon in the East Bay.

"I love the idea, but there's no way it could work here," Bates said. "The logistics, the DMV -- it'd be nearly impossible."

But the city will look into adopting free parking for hybrids and increased rates for everyone else, and installing anaerobic digesters as part of a \$30 million overhaul of the recycling center this summer, Bates said.

Emeryville Mayor Nora Davis said she wants to adopt the London parking plan, as well.

"We've got to do something, and we've got to do it fast," she said. "Especially if your city's at sea level."

Cities need to take the lead on fighting global warming because cities generate 75 percent of the world's carbon emissions, Jones said. And it's often easier to make changes on a smaller scale than nationally.

Jones and his cohorts praised California's new law, AB32, to cut greenhouse emissions by 25 percent by 2020.

"We feel we're setting a good example to the world, but we need to do more than that," said Uden, the consul general. "We're waiting for California to take on the mantle of world leader on this issue."

## **Lodi hosts forum on renewable energy from corn starch**

By Ross Farrow

Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, January 18, 2007

Some corn growers are helping to provide a new energy source needed for vehicles and industry by using the starch from kernels of corn and converting them into alcohol.

Ethanol is created from corn the same way its starch ferments into alcohol.

"It's really just vodka. It's moonshine," Tom Koehler from Sacramento-based Pacific Ethanol said during a two-hour presentation Wednesday afternoon at the Lodi Wine and Visitors Center.

Pacific Ethanol hopes to produce more than 420 million gallons of ethanol by the end of 2010 to help reduce the nation's dependency on gasoline and oil, Koehler said.

Koehler was one of five people who spoke Wednesday on how agriculture can increase the energy supply for vehicles and industry. The 30-some in attendance from all over the country also heard about energy that can be derived from cows and livestock.

Additionally, the visitors heard Cliff Ohmart from the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission discuss the Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing, which includes using solar energy and other environmentally sound methods.

The visitors to Lodi — a Maryland-based group called 25x'25 — want to find as many renewable energy sources as possible by the year 2025. These energy sources would come from agriculture and forestry.

"At some point in the future, there will never be anything called a waste product in agriculture," said A.G. Kawamura, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

"The Lodi-Woodbridge producers are among the most progressive in the country as an organized group in terms of sustainable practices that help enhance marketability, quality and presence in the community," Kawamura said.

Before coming to Lodi, the 25x25 group toured the Sacramento Municipal Utility District plant, where they learned about wind energy, dairy digesters and hybrid vehicles. They also visited the University of California, Davis, to hear about renewable resources in the College of Engineering, the economics of renewable energy research and other topics.

From Davis, the tour bus then headed to Lodi for the final leg.

Before his presentation, Ohmart said that hosting the afternoon portion of the day-long tour brought good exposure for Lodi wines.

**How agriculture can help renewable energy**

- Conservation in the winegrape industry.
- Ethanol derived from corn starch.
- Methane gas derived from cows.
- Wind.
- Forestry projects.

*Source: 25x25 Work Group.*

"I'm delighted because they contacted us because of our sustainable focus," Ohmart said.

Ohmart told the 25x25 group that Lodi was the first region where peers developed their own sustainable winegrowing standards.

Twelve Lodi-Woodbridge growers participated in 2006, he said.

Two speakers, Michael Marsh from the Western United Dairymen, and Hal LaFlash from Pacific Gas and Electric Co., discussed saving methane gas from cows to increase the energy supply.

"We are anxious to develop supplies for electricity," Marsh said.

Marsh told the group about efforts by Castelanelli Brothers Dairy in Lodi to convert methane gas into energy.

Methane floating in the air has 21 times the greenhouse effect that carbon dioxide possesses, LaFlash said. California has 1.7 million cows on 2,100 dairies, he said.

Meanwhile, Pacific Ethanol is working with PG&E to develop ethanol because the demand for fuel exceeds the supply, Koehler said. Ethanol is working well in the Midwest, and Koehler sees great potential on the west coast as well.

Michael Koewler Jr., CEO of Sacramento Rendering Co. in Rancho Cordova, said his company recycles animal carcasses, grease from restaurants into shampoo, anti-freeze, explosives and other items. It also keeps animal parts out of landfills, he said.

## **Texas study suggests link between pollution, cancer**

Washington Post, January 19, 2007

HOUSTON (Reuters) - A University of Texas study found a possible link between childhood leukemia and living close to the city's refinery row along the Houston Ship Channel, one of the study's co-authors said on Thursday.

The study found that living within two miles of elevated levels of 1,3-butadiene around the ship channel's petrochemical complex was associated with a 56 percent increased incidence of childhood acute lymphocytic leukemia compared with those living more than 10 miles away, according to a statement from the city of Houston, which financed the study.

"When we looked at distance from the ship channel we find data that suggests there is an association with chemicals in the air and childhood leukemia," said Ann Coker, professor of epidemiology at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston.

Houston Mayor Bill White said the city would use the study to support efforts to reduce pollution from petrochemical plants.

"The science supports our claim that reducing hazardous air pollutants must be a high priority for Houston," White said in a statement.

White has used the threat of tougher enforcement of anti-pollution laws to win agreements from petrochemical plants to reduce pollution.

The substance 1,3-butadiene is used to make petrochemicals like ethylene.

## **8 counties might see pollution restrictions eased**

Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Sunday, January 21, 2007

MILWAUKEE - As air quality continues to improve in eastern Wisconsin, businesses there might be seeing lighter environmental restrictions.

The state will ask the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to reclassify eight counties as compliant with federal standards for ozone pollution levels, Gov. Jim Doyle announced Sunday.

If the request is approved, perhaps this year or in early 2008, the new designation would hold companies that expand in the region to less stringent pollution controls.

"We believe this will provide businesses with considerably more flexibility, and it will really help the economic growth of the area," Doyle said.

The counties included in the state request are Kenosha, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Washington and Waukesha.

Door and Sheboygan counties may be included in a future EPA request, Doyle said, noting that ozone levels there are down but not yet below the federal threshold.

Allen Shea, the top air regulator with the state Department of Natural Resources, said local companies have long blamed tough controls for inhibiting their growth.

"I can't tell you on how many occasions people in high levels of companies, or folks in operational levels, have told me that they simply didn't consider certain expansions because of this issue," Shea said.

Environmentalists counter that the state must maintain tough standards to reduce emissions of pollutants that cause ozone, or smog.

Bruce Nilles, an attorney with the Sierra Club, acknowledges that the state has made significant progress in reducing air pollution in the past 35 years.

"But the important question is whether the air is safe to breathe," he said.

Doyle said the state will continue to comply with federal mandates that preserve air quality, including reformulated-gas requirements and vehicle inspections in southeast Wisconsin.

The threshold for federal compliance with ozone standards is a three-year average of 85 parts per billion. According to the EPA, ozone levels in eastern Wisconsin were 83 parts per billion from 2004 to 2006, down from an average of 101 parts per billion from 2001 to 2003.

Nilles noted that an EPA panel recommended in October that the current standard "needs to be substantially reduced to protect human health."

Ozone can irritate the lungs and cause breathing difficulty, particularly for children and people with respiratory troubles.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Monday, January 22, 2007](#)

## **Smog check cheaters hurt the whole valley**

Cleaning up the valley's dirty air is a difficult task. It's made all the harder by people who cheat on vehicle emissions rules, either to rake in ill-gotten profits or just to avoid the hassle of doing things by the book.

"Clean-piping" is the practice of falsifying smog check results by substituting data from a clean engine for the results produced by a dirty one. The vast majority of smog service stations are above-board in their work, but a handful are caught every year issuing fraudulent smog certificates for cars. Within the past couple of years, two Stanislaus County stations have lost their licenses for performing illegal checks.

The problem is serious. The cars and trucks involved usually are "gross polluters," typically older vehicles that can spew 20 times as much smog-causing emissions into the valley's air as cleaner, well-maintained vehicles.

Bill Malone, supervisor of the Fresno office of the state Bureau of Automotive Repair, estimated that 5 percent of registered cars that need to be smogged have been certified illegally. That would add up to thousands of vehicles in our region.

"Clean-piping is the worst crime in the smog program," said Malone, and the punishment can be stiff. Falsifying emissions checks is a felony, and usually results in jail time, plus revocation of state licenses to perform smog tests and auto repairs.

So why run the risk? The motive for cheating usually is greed. Malone told The Bee that some technicians will charge as much as \$300 for a "clean-pipe" test, about six times the cost of a legal smog check. Vehicle owners pay the price because they worry about the cost of repairing their vehicle to meet the smog test.

We're all victims of this crime. Vehicle emissions create about 60 percent of the valley's smog, which in turn causes higher rates of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses among valley residents. An estimated 48,000 adults and 16,000 children in Stanislaus County suffer from symptoms of asthma.

State investigators, aided by improvements in technology, soon may be able to do an even better job of tracking down cheaters. That's good news for us all. The sooner these miscreants are stopped, the closer we'll be to cleaner air for all of us to breathe.

*Anyone who knows or suspects that a smog test station is falsifying results is asked to call the Bureau of Automotive Repair hotline at 800-952-5210.*

Our Point

The valley's air quality pays the price for fraudulent smog checks.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Sunday, Jan. 21, 2007:](#)

## **Blinding Ourselves in Space**

You don't have to be a space or climate expert to recognize that this country's ability to track climate and environmental changes from space is heading in the wrong direction. At a time when concerns about global warming are rising, the Bush administration is sharply reducing the number of satellites that can measure the impact of rising temperatures and a host of other environmental trends.

The administration's hypocrisy is stunning. For years, the president and top officials have justified their refusal to grapple seriously with global warming by insisting that more research is needed.

Now, after pledging that such research would be the centerpiece of a new climate change strategy, the administration is underfinancing some of the most important efforts to gather data.

A report issued last week by the National Academy of Sciences projected an alarming decline in vital studies and monitoring. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration currently has a sizable number of Earth-observing satellites and instruments in orbit, but since 2000 its budget for earth sciences has decreased over 30 percent when adjusted for inflation.

By 2010, the number of operating sensors and instruments on NASA satellites that observe the Earth is likely to drop by 40 percent as old equipment fails and is not promptly replaced. Meanwhile, at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, huge cost overruns and technical problems have delayed planned launchings of key climate and weather-monitoring satellites and forced the elimination of instruments essential for climate science.

The setbacks are bound to hobble efforts to understand whether hurricanes and heat waves are becoming more frequent and intense, whether ice sheets will collapse and drive sea levels dangerously high, and how fish stocks, deforestation, drinking water supplies and air pollution are affected as populations grow and economies take off. We clearly need more data in coming years, not less.

The academy's panel estimates that some \$7.5 billion in new money is needed through 2020, mostly at NASA, to conduct high-priority observational missions. NASA's resources are already grievously overextended. It must finish building the international space station, keep flying the rickety shuttle fleet and start developing a follow-on spacecraft to explore the Moon and get ready to travel to Mars.

With little new money to carry out these costly tasks, the agency has been forced to rein in other parts of its budget, including earth science studies. Unless Congress gives NASA more funds, the agency should shift money internally to give Earth observations higher priority. Studies that could affect the livability of the planet seem vastly more consequential than completing a space station or returning to the Moon by an arbitrary date.

[Guest Commentary in the Contra Costa Times, Sunday, January 21, 2007](#)

### **Plan to cut emissions must be attractive to market**

By David Sunding

GOV. Arnold Schwarzenegger's State of the State speech emphasized his commitment to reducing greenhouse gases. His recent executive order to begin implementation of a market-based compliance program encouraging businesses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is clearly a step in the right direction toward cleaning our air of harmful carbon particulates.

The next step is to make it financially attractive enough for businesses to comply.

Ask any inventor: Thinking up a workable idea is one thing. Marketing it in a meaningful way is another.

It's the difference between, say, having the blueprints for the internal combustion engine and having an assembly line ready to roll out a fleet of Model Ts.

The carbon market is in a similar situation. We know that sustainable forestry can help lower atmospheric carbon levels, a stated goal for those concerned with global climate change.

Well-managed forests flush with rapidly growing trees remove (or "sequester") carbon quite efficiently. But we don't know whether markets can be established in this country to provide any economic incentive to do so.

Trading carbon credits might work. The idea is straightforward: If a company wants to build a new power plant that would result in X amount of carbon emissions, for example, it could offset those emissions by buying credits from another company with the means of sequestering the same amount of carbon in trees or other sources.

In Europe, carbon trading is already practiced. Components of the Kyoto protocol, the first multinational attempt to limit carbon emissions, established protocols for companies in ratifying nations to openly trade carbon credits. And though the agreement has proved controversial in the United States and elsewhere, interest in developing domestic carbon markets is gaining momentum.

In fact, some carbon trading efforts are under way, but prices and limitations make it hardly worth the effort.

Why the challenge? Complexity is the main culprit. Markets require established definitions, baselines and enforcement mechanisms -- features missing from the relatively new practice of commercial carbon sequestration.

Much of the accepted science in the field comes with margins of error as high as 40 percent. Truth is, carbon sequestration is difficult to measure. The amount of carbon being sequestered is not obvious, nor is the length of time the carbon is being sequestered.

Exactly what level of credit to grant for various activities isn't obvious, either. One school of thought says that credit should be given for actions that decrease net carbon emissions. But what about companies that already sequester carbon efficiently? They would receive no reward for their actions under such guidelines. The same is true for energy producers using comparatively "clean" technologies.

No company that helps reduce net carbon emissions should be ignored. California companies that practice sustainable forestry, for example, sequester tremendous amounts of carbon -- and do so very efficiently -- by optimizing tree-growing conditions on their lands. Unless these companies are "grandfathered" into any market agreements, they would forgo any benefit for what are extremely positive actions. If you are already sequestering carbon efficiently, your potential to provide a significant difference over "business as usual" is very slim.

These challenges, however, shouldn't prove insurmountable.

Markets, once established, ultimately bring efficient solutions. They are certainly preferable to more government regulation and mandates.

Command-and-control approaches tend to be comparatively inefficient, and they likely would make it more costly to reduce net carbon emissions.

California may have sufficient economic clout to be a leader in establishing domestic carbon markets. Although high real-estate values and costs of doing business may put California companies at a disadvantage, there are advantages to taking a leadership role and encouraging markets to develop sooner rather than later.

Once markets are established, the expertise companies develop becomes marketable, transferable knowledge. If the cost of sequestering carbon in forests or through other means provides a financial incentive to other methods of reducing net emissions, carbon markets could flourish.

It's too soon to tell for sure, but forestry and other land-based sequestration possibilities look promising.

*Sunding is a professor of environmental and resource economics in the College of Natural Resources at UC Berkeley and served as a senior economist for the White House Council of Economic Advisers during the Clinton administration.*

[Guest Commentary in the Contra Costa Times, Saturday, January 20, 2007](#)

## **Reasons for warming far from settled**

Global warming advocates show desperation. Two prominent reader letters two days in a row and a large op-ed in Saturday Extra by former Concord Mayor Ron Mullin aim to silence a growing body of skeptics.

One even admonished the Times for printing opposing views. Wow, that writer gives meaning to the term "enviro-Nazi" -- "if they don't agree with us, they don't have a right to voice their opinions."

Mullin does a softer version by arguing scientists who have a different interpretation of the data must be bought and paid for by the oil industry, therefore, their findings are to be dismissed no matter its scientific basis.

However, the scientists funded by environmental interests are unbiased. Huh?

The Earth is warmer, glaciers are melting -- those are facts. The cause is in dispute. Recently, the Times reported on a U.N. study saying man-made gases have a lesser impact than previously thought. What happened to that study? Also, how could the planet have been hotter in the past when man didn't have the capacity to pollute? So, please, don't tell me the issue is settled.

All scientists agree that greenhouse gases contribute but disagree on how much. I would be interested to have a scientifically based analysis quantifying a 10 percent, 20 percent, or 50 percent reduction in carbon dioxide on the environment, i.e. how much longer we can exist, so we can gauge the sacrifice the scaremongers ask of us.

Or is global warming unstoppable unless all of man is extinct? If so, why bother? Reasonable conservation and clean air quality are worthy goals for quality-of-life reasons now, but why worry about what may not happen hundreds of years after I am gone based on an unproven theory? What if warming is inevitable and followed by cooling as per a meteorological study of such cycles, which suggests we are near the end phase of the warming cycle now?

*Kellner is a resident of Walnut Creek.*

[Letter to the Editor, Contra Costa Times, Friday, January 19, 2007](#)

## **Traffic woes drive opposition to Target**

I had to laugh when I read Jordan Schnitzer's characterization of the anti-Target faction as being "against a lot of mass merchandise, media, and sameness."

I know that's one of the arguments against building a Target at the Alameda Towne Centre.

But the other big reasons that some of us oppose the proposed Target are that we fear it will cause terrible traffic jams on the main roads in Alameda, as well as increased air pollution.

Personally, I really like Target. But I don't like it so much that I'm willing to sit in traffic jams on High Street, Otis Street, Broadway, or Southshore as I try to get from place to place on the Island.

Nor do I think that increased air pollution (and the respiratory illnesses it can cause) is a good price to pay for more convenient shopping. Can Mr. Schnitzer figure out a way to "smooth over" that issue?

Susan Davis

[Letter to the Editor, Contra Costa Times, Friday, January 19, 2007](#)

## **Target's size matters**

After reading the article on Target in the Jan. 12 Alameda Journal, it doesn't matter who speaks for Target, they all have different figures for the size of the store they want to build. Is it so hard to say the right figure?

In 2003 they asked for a 112,000-square-foot building. Now they have asked for a 49,000-square-foot extension. That adds up to 161,000 square feet, not 127,000 or 145,000. In the Jan. 12 article it's 147,000.

We are not anti-Target, we asked to build a smaller store. The answer was, it's this size store or none.

As I stated at one of the hearings, there are 12 exits and 10 entrances onto Otis Drive, and only two of each on Park Street, Shoreline Drive and Willow Street. Otis has become a truck route. We have children that walk Otis to get to two schools less than three blocks away. We also have several care centers plus the Alameda Hospital in the vicinity of the center. The pollution for the children and sick will not help them get well.

The increase in traffic which will be in the 30-40 percent range is too much for our streets. Let's be realistic, this is not a mall. It's a neighborhood shopping center. A smaller store, yes. A box store, no.

Rich Perenon

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, January 18, 2007](#)

### **Yellow flag RMP project**

Editor: I totally agree with the Sun Star "Our View" comments about yellow flagging Riverside Motorsports Park and proceeding with caution. Yes, we do need to keep them accountable just like the medical community is doing with the tobacco industry, in particular the R.J. Reynolds Company and the highly toxic cigarette issues. The state and county need to take every penny of profits from RMP to go toward environmental research and cleaning up our Valley air.

All that money should be funneled right to UC Merced for medical and environmental research regarding air and noise pollution. If RMP, Merced County, the state of California, and the medical community do not take immediate and decisive steps toward this end, I believe that all Central Californians need to prepare for a major class action suit against Riverside CEO John Condren and his ilk regarding an extremely serious environmental issue that will inevitably have deadly medical ramifications regarding respiratory issues and claims by hundreds of thousands of Merced County and Central Valley residents. It seems that right now our little county Board of Supervisors can't seem to see the pollution problems for the smoke.

RON ARAGON  
*Merced*