

In The News – Online Clips 04-11-07

Uranium dust

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories has applied for a permit to blow up as much as 450 pounds of depleted uranium in explosives tests west of Tracy this year

By John Upton

Tracy Press, Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Proposed explosives tests upwind from Tracy will release as much as 450 pounds of radioactive depleted uranium dust into the air every year, according to an air pollution permit application filed Friday by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

The blasts will annually release other elements into the air, some of which will also be radioactive, the application reads.

A permit allowing the blasts was approved with no public scrutiny by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in November, but was withdrawn after a community backlash.

Regulators in March instructed the weapons lab to reapply for the permit and to provide data that would allow it to analyze the health effects of radiation that would be released by the blasts.

The district does not normally regulate radioactive material, and it had not been informed by the lab that the blasts would be radioactive.

District spokeswoman Jaime Holt said Wednesday that air pollution controllers had begun to evaluate the lab's new permit application.

"We'll be looking to see the extent of their risk assessment, and if we need to conduct one ourselves, we will," Holt said.

Holt said there would be an "appropriate opportunity for public input" before the district approves or rejects the permit based on guidelines in the California Environmental Quality Act.

Many of the radioactive elements in the blasts already pollute the soil and water at Site 300, which along Corral Hollow Road is hidden in hills southwest of Tracy.

The director of the lab's public affairs department said late Tuesday that she was unable to answer technical questions about the application.

"Nothing has changed from our application last fall," Susan Houghton said. "We have simply resubmitted our application."

The \$1.7 billion a year Department of Energy lab has sought to increase its outdoor test limits from the equivalent of 100 pounds of TNT to 350 pounds, and to increase its annual testing amount eightfold to 8,000 pounds "in support of homeland security and national defense activities," according to the permit application.

Houghton and other lab representatives in January told the Tracy City Council that the lab has currently planned just three of the 30 blasts in the 350-pound range that would be allowed by the permit in the coming 18 months.

U.S. offers renewable fuel standards for vehicles

By Deborah Zabarenko, Environment Correspondent, Reuters

Washington Post Wednesday, April 11, 2007

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States announced new standards for renewable fuels for cars and trucks on Tuesday, but stopped short of committing to regulate greenhouse gases that spur global warming.

The renewable fuel standards program aims to cut dependence on foreign oil and curb global warming pollution by expanding the use of ethanol and other alternative fuels, said Stephen Johnson, head of the Environmental Protection Agency.

"The increased use of renewable fuels ... will prevent the release of greenhouse gas emissions equivalent of up to 13 million metric tons," Johnson said. "That's equal to the carbon dioxide emissions of nearly 2.3 million automobiles."

Carbon dioxide, emitted by petroleum-powered vehicles and coal-fired power plants among other sources, is one of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change.

The new standards, ordered by Congress in 2005, require 4.02 percent of all motor fuel, or about 4.7 billion gallons (21.37 billion liters), sold in the United States this year to come from renewable sources. The standard gradually increases to 7.5 billion gallons (34.10 billion liters) a year by 2012.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled April 2 that the environment agency has the power to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, but Johnson said that ruling was still being considered.

"We are evaluating that Supreme Court decision and we're looking at our options and what actions we may take," he said at a news conference. "Today is premature to talk about it."

In 2003, the environment agency refused to regulate greenhouse gases, saying it lacked the power. Even if it had the power, the agency said it would hinder President George W. Bush's ability to negotiate with developing nations to cut emissions.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRITICISM

California and 13 other states have proposed mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emissions. But Johnson said that in the California case, this would not be possible until after that state's petition is evaluated.

The evaluation process will begin "shortly," Johnson said.

[Sen. Barbara Boxer <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/b000711/>](http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/b000711/), a California Democrat who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee, called the use of renewable fuels "an important part of the fight against global warming and also increases our energy independence."

However, Boxer took aim at the Bush administration's plan to develop such alternative fuels as "coal-to-liquids," which she said generates twice as much global warming pollution as gasoline.

The National Petrochemical & Refiners Association said it supported the agency's clean fuels plan but warned that individual states should not try to issue their own biofuel standards because it could make it harder for refiners to deliver fuel in a timely manner to motorists.

The Sierra Club applauded the renewable fuels standards, echoed Boxer's criticism of liquid coal and urged the Bush administration to raise fuel efficiency standards.

The Natural Resources Defense Council sounded a similar note, faulting the government for failing to limit emissions.

"What is missing today? Any sign that the Bush administration will follow last week's Supreme Court decision, which ordered EPA to decide -- based on the science and only the science -- whether the pollution from cars and trucks is contributing to global warming," the council's David Doniger said in a statement.

Governor likes LNG despite panel vote

Lands Commission rejected Australian company's project

Mark Martin, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Sacramento -- Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger voiced his support for liquefied natural gas in California on Tuesday, a day after a state commission voted to deny an Australian company's bid to build the state's first liquefied natural gas terminal off the Ventura County coast.

Although Lt. Gov. John Garamendi and state Controller John Chiang were the deciding votes in a 2-1 decision against BHP Billiton, Schwarzenegger said he would continue reviewing the project and that "liquefied natural gas should be a part of California's energy portfolio," according to a statement he released after the end of the state Lands Commission meeting.

The meeting Monday marked what could be the first of many such decision-making hearings for public officials on LNG during the next few years, as three other proposals for California are being pursued by other energy companies. Representatives for those companies were quick to note Tuesday how different their projects were from BHP Billiton's, all saying their projects would be far less harmful to local air pollution.

"We're very sensitive to the air pollution concerns," noted David Maul, who is working for Esperanza Energy, a subsidiary of a Texas oil and gas firm that wants to build an offshore LNG terminal 15 miles southwest of the Port of Long Beach.

The projects are all coming at a critical time for state energy policy, as electricity demand is expected to grow and Schwarzenegger and the state have begun a push for a significant increase in the use of renewable energy.

Natural gas is used to produce 40 percent of the state's electricity, and although it is the cleanest-burning fossil fuel, it is nonetheless a large emitter of greenhouse gases.

The Lands Commission shot down the BHP-Billiton project, which called for a terminal to be built 14 miles offshore of the Southern California coast, after a meeting in Oxnard (Ventura County) that didn't end until after 10 p.m.

Both Garamendi and Chiang, who are Democrats, stated concerns with the amount of greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution as major factors in their votes against the project.

"The governor and the Legislature have enacted statutes to reduce California's carbon footprint and move us from fossils fuels toward cleaner, renewable alternatives," Chiang said in a statement. "I do not think this project is something that carries out the spirit of our new, groundbreaking laws."

The decision, with a Schwarzenegger administration official casting the lone favorable vote, is a major setback in BHP Billiton's four-year effort. Although the Coastal Commission is set to issue or deny a permit to the project Thursday and Schwarzenegger also will have say, the project is not feasible unless the company gets approval from the Lands Commission.

The president of the company's LNG division said in a statement Tuesday it was evaluating its options, but offered no specifics.

Paul Thayer, executive director of the Lands Commission, said the company's only option, unless it changed its proposal and began the application process again, was to appeal the decision through the courts.

Schwarzenegger aides insisted Tuesday that the governor had not made a decision on BHP Billiton's proposal, although he has spoken favorably about the project in the past and his appointee, Anne Sheehan of the state Department of Finance, voted for the project at the commission hearing Monday.

The governor's press secretary, Aaron McLearn, said Sheehan's vote shouldn't be construed as support from the governor for its position.

Even if BHP Billiton's project fails, there are three other LNG proposals in California, and Schwarzenegger suggested in his statement that he would welcome at least one terminal in the state.

"Natural gas is the cleanest-burning fossil fuel and an LNG facility to serve our state would make California less vulnerable to variations in supply and price," the governor said.

The other projects include a proposal by a Houston company to convert an unused oil drilling platform 12 miles offshore near Oxnard, one by another Australian company that would be 22 miles south of Malibu, and the Esperanza Energy project.

The commission vote has also brought renewed interest in changing the permit process for LNG terminals. Garamendi complained that state officials should be allowed to review all of the projects at once and decide which one is best, instead of deciding on each project individually.

A Bay Area lawmaker said he would try again to push legislation changing the process.

Sen. Joseph Simitian, D-Palo Alto, has introduced a bill that will require the state to do further study on whether more natural gas is needed and determine which sites would be best for a terminal. Similar legislation failed the last two years under opposition from LNG companies.

Simitian has argued that the current process - in which each company faces separate votes at separate times on their project - doesn't make sense, given that California seems unlikely to ever have more than one or two LNG terminals, if any.

"If I was hiring someone, I wouldn't take the first person who applied," he said. "I would look at all of the applicants together and then choose the best one."

EPA stays course on ethanol

Agency undeterred by high court's ruling on greenhouse gases

Zachary Coile, Chronicle Washington Bureau <mailto:zcoile@sfchronicle.com>
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, April 11, 2007

The Bush administration -- a week after a rebuke by the Supreme Court for refusing to regulate greenhouse gases-- insisted it would plow ahead with the president's plans to boost ethanol production and ask Congress for more power to raise fuel economy standards.

The announcement fell well-short of the comprehensive steps that environmentalists, energy experts and many lawmakers say are needed to ease America's dependence on oil and to combat climate change.

But Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson said his agency would soon launch a rulemaking process to decide whether to grant California's request for a waiver to regulate greenhouse gases from cars and trucks, beginning in the 2009 model year.

Automakers are battling the state in court, but the Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling last week was seen as strengthening California's case for regulating greenhouse gases as pollutants. At least 10 other states have adopted California's standards, so the EPA's decision could shape the future of the entire U.S. automobile fleet."

They cannot go ahead until we make our determination," Johnson said Tuesday of California's new rules. "We are initiating that process shortly."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will personally lobby Johnson for the waiver at a meeting scheduled today during a tripto Washington that includes a speech on global warming at Georgetown University.

The EPA chief was pressed repeatedly by reporters Tuesday about the high court's ruling, which ordered the federal agency to regulate greenhouse gases or prove that global warming does not pose a threat to human health or welfare. Johnson replied, "We are evaluating the Supreme Court's decision and we are looking at our options and what actions we may take. Today it's premature to talk about it."

Administration officials were seeking to drum up support for Bush's "20-10" proposal -- unveiled in his State of the Union speech in January -- to reduce America's use of gasoline by 20 percent over the next decade.

EPA officials said they would boost the amount of ethanol and other renewable fuels that refiners must blend into gasoline to 7.5 billion gallons by 2012, part of a mandate from Congress in the 2005 Energy Policy Act. Bush has set an ultimate target of 35 billion gallons by 2017.

Johnson said the new target would help farmers, increase America's energy independence and protect the environment by cutting greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 13 million metric tons a year by 2012.

Critics said the announcement contained little that was new. Since Congress passed the ethanol mandate, the industry has grown so quickly it is already exceeding the yearly targets set by lawmakers-- and sparking side effects such as raising the price of corn, which has helped Midwest corn farmers but hurt ranchers.

Environmentalists and energy experts questioned the administration's efforts to pin its strategy for global warming and energy independence on ethanol. Scientists point out that corn-based ethanol produces a relatively small net energy gain -- about 1.6 units of energy for every one unit of energy input, according to federal estimates.

A UC Berkeley study last year found that while producing corn ethanol required less petroleum than gasoline, ethanol emits almost as much in greenhouse gases as gasoline because of the fertilizer and energy used to irrigate, grow and transport the crop. The study concluded that corn ethanol could be made with much less energy, but only cellulosic ethanol offered major reductions in greenhouse gases.

"It turns out we are using so much fossil fuel to make the fertilizer and for the irrigation of corn, we give back much of the benefit of using a biofuel over a fossil fuel," said Daniel Kammen, the founding director of UC Berkeley's Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory, who co-authored the study.

"If you embraced low-input corn or low-input switchgrass -- that means you don't use forced irrigation, you don't use a lot of fertilizer -- then you can make these fuels very clean. That's the problem with the president's approach. ... He means well, but we need to grow a better form of corn, and we're not doing that."

Administration officials also repeated Bush's call for Congress to give the Transportation Department new authority to set federal fuel economy standards. The White House said it wants to increase fuel economy by 4 percent for cars starting in 2010 and light trucks in 2012.

Critics said the administration already has wide leeway to raise Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards, but has only modestly raised the standards for light trucks over the last six years.

Democrats are pushing a bill by Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., that would require a 4 percent yearly increase in fuel economy for cars and trucks.

Markey, who chairs a new House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, also faulted the White House for not backing new limits on greenhouse gases from power plants, which make up nearly 40 percent of U.S. emissions.

"When it comes to making the link between our energy challenges and the need to fight global warming, the administration still just doesn't get it," Markey said.

Kammen said the administration should follow the lead of Schwarzenegger and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who both support California's approach of requiring refiners to produce low-carbon fuels.

"The more we get locked into corn ethanol today, the more difficult we make the emergence of a low-carbon ethanol economy tomorrow," Kammen said.

Energy giant mulls options after vote

BHP Billiton can't overturn land panel's rejection of its gas plant plan off Oxnard, but it hopes to still get OK from other agencies.

By Gary Polakovic, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Wed., April 11, 2007

As environmentalists cheered a state agency's rejection of its project, Australian energy giant BHP Billiton was left scrambling Tuesday for a way to salvage its plans to build an \$800-million natural gas processing plant off the Ventura County coast.

The state Lands Commission's decision late Monday night dealt the project a potentially fatal blow, denying the energy company permission to construct a pair of pipelines to move natural gas onshore in Oxnard from its terminal 14 miles off the Ventura and Los Angeles county border.

"We're disappointed in the decisions by the state Lands Commission," said Renee Klimczak, president of BHP Billiton LNG International Inc. "We're evaluating our options and next steps."

The commission, in a 2-1 decision split along partisan lines, voted against the project after an all-day public hearing in Oxnard that drew more than 2,000 people, from Oxnard homemakers and environmental activists to actor and Malibu resident Pierce Brosnan.

Democratic Lt. Gov. John Garamendi and State Controller John Chiang, who sit on the commission, voted against the project after they concluded that its environmental impact report was seriously flawed and that California did not need a liquefied natural gas terminal. The crowd responded with cheers.

"The significant and unmitigated environmental impacts this project could have on California's environment and its residents outweigh any economic benefit it might generate," Garamendi said.

Paul D. Thayer, executive officer for the California State Lands Commission, said BHP Billiton has few options to overturn the decision.

"They will have to go to court," Thayer said. "Or, theoretically, they could change the project, but that would be difficult and probably involve a whole new process. There is no administrative remedy and no appeal available."

Under the law, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has until May 21 to decide on the project, though he cannot overturn the commission's decisions or those by other state agencies. The governor has not officially endorsed the BHP Billiton project, but his delegate on the state Lands Commission cast the one favorable vote.

Schwarzenegger has expressed strong support for a liquefied natural gas terminal for California and he has in the past expressed a "personal preference" for the BHP Billiton project.

"Natural gas is the cleanest-burning fossil fuel and a LNG facility to serve our state would make California less vulnerable to variations in supply and price," Schwarzenegger said in a prepared statement Tuesday.

Despite this week's setback, BHP Billiton pledged to continue seeking approval from other agencies. The project, called Cabrillo Port, consists of a 971-foot-long moored ship that would process about 800 million cubic feet of liquefied natural gas daily for Southern California homes and businesses. California gets about 40% of its electricity from natural-gas burning power plants.

But the path ahead for Cabrillo Port doesn't get any easier. On Thursday, the California Coastal Commission will hold a public hearing in Santa Barbara to determine whether to certify the environmental impact report and decide if the project is consistent with state and federal coastal protection laws. The commission's staff is recommending against the project.

Although natural gas is the cleanest-burning fossil fuel and is favored under California's stringent air pollution laws, a number of proposals for development of liquefied natural gas processing plants have encountered opposition unforeseen four years ago when they were proposed.

The BHP Billiton project is the second in four months to be rejected. Long Beach officials dropped plans for a LNG terminal by Mitsubishi-ConocoPhillips in January after they concluded that the harbor project posed unacceptable safety risks. Three more offshore projects have been proposed for the coast between Long Beach and Santa Barbara, and another is under construction near Ensenada in Baja California, Mexico.

Cabrillo Port galvanized a peculiar opposition alliance of Malibu celebrities and Oxnard working-class families. Environmentalists - who have been fighting energy development on the California coast since a Union Oil Co. petroleum drilling platform blowout in 1969 caused a major oil spill off Santa Barbara - helped hold the opposition together.

"This is the biggest organized effort to address an issue that I've ever seen," said Ventura County Supervisor John Flynn, whose district includes Oxnard. "About 80% of my constituency is non-white, and the Hispanics were better organized than I've ever seen on an issue."

Meanwhile, Schwarzenegger and lawmakers have approved a raft of new legislation to limit greenhouse gases, promote energy conservation and spur wider use of alternative fuels and technology. Last year, California became the first state with a comprehensive strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2020.

During Monday's hearing, Garamendi questioned whether BHP Billiton had done enough to reduce emissions that contribute to smog and haze as well as global warming. Even with advanced emission controls, the Cabrillo Port project's environmental impact report states that the tankers, support vessels and floating gas processing plant would emit 160 tons of nitrogen oxides and 60 tons of hydrocarbons per year, both of which are precursors to ozone, a colorless, toxic gas and the most abundant pollutant in Southern California.

BHP Billiton spokesman Patrick Cassidy said the project was misunderstood by California residents.

"It's an unfamiliar product and that makes it difficult to accurately convey all the benefits and advantages," Cassidy said. "Our project had the most minimal environmental footprint."

OC transit board endorses plan for more access to carpool lanes

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, April 10, 2007

SANTA ANA, Calif.- The Orange County transportation board endorsed a plan to let solo drivers use carpool lanes on freeways during off-peak hours and sent the proposal to state transit officials for consideration.

The Orange County Transportation Authority also decided Monday to ask the California Department of Transportation for permission to allow drivers to pull in and out of carpool lanes at any location, rather than only at designated spots.

Caltrans officials gave no immediate indication of how long it would take to study the effects of allowing more access to the lanes.

If the proposal is accepted, Orange County motorists would be granted the same carpool privileges as drivers in some parts of the San Francisco Bay area and Sacramento, where Caltrans restricts carpool lane access only during morning and evening rush hours.

The changes would also have to be approved by federal environment and highway agencies and the state air quality district.

Summer forecast: No relief from \$3 a gallon

By Dale Kasler, The Sacramento Bee

In Sacramento Bee and the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Fed up with \$3 gas? Tough.

California motorists should expect prices to stay above \$3 a gallon through the summer, the U.S. government predicted Tuesday.

The good news: There probably won't be any major price spikes in the state this summer, absent significant supply glitches.

The annual summer gas price forecast, released by the U.S. Department of Energy, said tight supplies will keep gas high in California. Yet while prices should rise, the increases won't be extraordinary. The statewide average surged past \$3 in early March and stood at \$3.28 Tuesday for a gallon of self-serve regular, according to AAA.

California prices go up every spring, as refiners switch to harder-to-blend summer fuel recipes. This year prices rose earlier, aided by refinery production problems and more expensive crude oil.

While that infuriated Californians, it means the worst is likely over.

"California and the West Coast are pretty much done going up, barring anything stupid," said industry consultant David Hackett, of Stillwater Associates in Irvine. By "stupid," he meant a production problem at a California refinery.

Hackett said prices in California could go down somewhat, although "we're not going to be under \$3." The U.S. Department of Energy forecasts that California prices will keep rising but at a moderate pace compared to the rest of the country.

The forecast assumes oil prices will average \$65.58 a barrel, nearly \$5 a barrel less than last summer. Yet crude can fluctuate widely, particularly if geopolitical problems arise. Tuesday, crude settled at \$61.89, up 38 cents, on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

More than any other state, California is vulnerable to production problems because of its unique clean-air specifications and geographic isolation from refineries in other parts of the country. Both factors make it difficult to obtain replacement supplies on short notice.

"Unexpected disruptions at California refineries, such as those that occurred in February and March, often lead to price spikes," the Energy Department noted.

The Department of Energy said it expected gas prices nationwide to go up through the summer, but not by much. The price is expected to average \$2.81 a gallon throughout the summer, or 3 cents lower than last summer. Currently, the U.S. average is \$2.79, AAA said.

As in California, the national average shot up because of refinery problems, higher crude costs and other issues.

The U.S. average has risen 64 cents since January, roughly the same as the California average.

Regulators say refineries may be linked to mercury poisoning

In the Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 11, 2007

State water regulators suspect oil refineries may be the leading source of mercury in San Francisco Bay and want the area's five petroleum producers to account for thousands of pounds of the element extracted during crude oil processing each year.

No one knows whether the mercury removed while turning oil into gasoline ends up in the air or in wastewater, but it could be poisoning fish in the Bay and threatening public health, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board recently determined.

The theory contradicts previous thinking that old mines were the main culprit behind the bay's mercury contamination.

"This is huge," said Sejal Choksi, program director for San Francisco Baykeeper, an environmental group. "We might be looking at the main cause of the mercury problem in the bay."

The water quality board is scheduled to consider regulations Thursday requiring refineries owned by Chevron, Conoco Phillips, Shell, Tesoro and Valero to document where the mercury from their crude oil goes. If they do not comply, they could be fined up to \$1,000 a day under the proposed rules.

Tupper Hull, a spokesman for the Western States Petroleum Association, said the board has already ordered refineries to study mercury levels in air emissions and that it was premature to talk about additional requirements.

The study was supposed to be submitted by the end of next month, but oil companies said they would not be able to finish it until 2009.

The order the water board is scheduled to consider would give the refineries until Oct. 31 next year to complete the air quality study, but also compels them to monitor mercury levels in their oil and to measure air and water emissions and solid waste for presence of the metal.

Mercury occurs naturally but causes brain damage and other health problems in high concentrations. Health officials worry that people who eat fish from the bay may be at risk.

The five refineries process 781,000 barrels of oil a day, from which about 3,700 pounds of mercury are withdrawn a year, according to estimates from the water board.

Environmental activists maintain that the mercury is emitted by smokestacks and falls into the bay when it rains. Previously, authorities thought abandoned mercury mines in the Sierra Nevada and hills above San Jose were the primary source of mercury in the bay.

Local asthma facts

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Asthma is the No. 1 reason for missing class in the Bakersfield City School District, according to BCSD's top health official. "We can't even count how many kids there are (with asthma) because there's so many," said Debbie Wood, health services coordinator with BCSD.

And the estimate that only one in five American children have their asthma under control is probably optimistic for Kern County.

"In this community, it's probably not even that good," she said.

From what she's seen, most parents aren't educated on how to control their children's asthma. A lot of the children are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke and pets.

Other parents dismiss asthma as a minor problem, not realizing that it can lead to scarring in the bronchial tubes and then chronic bronchitis, said Sharon Borradori, program director at the American Lung Association's KernCounty branch.

World Bank warns of environment cost of India growth

Reuters

San Diego Tribune, Tues., April 10, 2007

NEW DELHI - India's robust economic growth will put unprecedented pressures on its land, water, air, soil and forestry resources, a World Bank report said on Tuesday.

India's economy has grown more than 8 percent annually in the past two years, with manufacturing and services leading growth.

The country, which has Asia's fourth largest economy, is tipped to be a major global player in the next two decades.

'Rapid economic growth and the resulting changes in consumption patterns are drastically changing the nature and scale of impact on the country's environment and natural resources,' the report said.

Industries like electronics and information technology - one of India's flagship growth sectors - textiles, pharmaceuticals, and basic chemicals, belong to the 'red category' of major polluting processes, the report said.

These sectors are significantly polluting water and air and causing more hazardous waste.

Increased investment in the construction, mining and iron and steel sectors is leading to a mushrooming of brick-making units, iron plants and steel mills, many of which use highly polluting processes, it said.

'The result is a visibly deteriorating environmental quality in many industrial townships,' the report said.

Citing the example of Singrauli, which until the 1960s was an isolated rural region in central India, the report said it was now dotted with massive open-cast coal mines, thermal power stations and several large industries.

This development had brought disruption to traditional ways of life, and displaced up to 300,000 people amid a lack of adequate infrastructure and public amenities, the study said.

'Air and water pollution are of great concern, especially the presence of mercury in the food chain and other chemicals and heavy metals in water resources,' it added.

[Editorial in the Tracy Press, Wednesday, April 11, 2007:](#)

China to turn green; no U.S. help

Even environmental Republicans (yes, there are some out there) held out hope last week that President Bush would turn a little green, what with the Supreme Court decision concerning carbon dioxide emissions from autos and the United Nations report on potential dire effects of global warming.

Bush seemed to have turned the corner on the issue when he said in his response to the court decision that "whatever we do must be in concert with what happens internationally." That's a pretty positive statement from our commander in chief whose Environmental Protection Agency doesn't believe CO2 is an air pollutant of global warming, and if it ever does believe it, doesn't think the environment needs government protection.

However, Bush once again added his customary trailer: "Unless there is an accord with China, China will produce greenhouse gases that will offset anything we do in a brief period of time."

Guess what, Mr. President China might be turning green before our eyes.

A dispatch Monday from The Yomiuri Shimbun, a Japanese newspaper, reported that a joint Japan-China statement this week during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Japan will have China promise to participate proactively in international talks to fight global warming beginning in 2013. By then, China could be the No. 1 producer of CO2, overtaking the U.S. in this dubious achievement.

China has invited Japan to implement greenhouse gas-reduction projects in China and transfer energy-saving technologies to China in industry sectors like steel and cement that are heavy users of dirty coal. We applaud such an

accord, if it's credible, between neighboring nations, but wonder why the Bush administration wasn't as progressive in first establishing this clean development mechanism for that country. Can the U.S. quickly adapt this model to "green" a similarly emerging India

That's highly unlikely if the Bush administration remains in denial. It and scientists like Dr. S. Fred Singer have tried to soften the conclusions of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Singer, an atmospheric physicist at George Mason University and founder of the Science and Environmental Policy Project, a think tank on climate and environmental issues, is skeptical of the scientific consensus. He says warming of the Earth will be inconsequential or modest, and if it happens, people will adapt.

But perhaps not every species. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report warns that a rise in temperature of just 1 degree Celsius will have catastrophic impacts on wildlife. With a rise between 1.5 C and 2.5 C, 20 percent to 30 percent of the world's species could become extinct.

Would that include the anti-green Republicans - that stubborn contrarian faction of the Republican Party that's been in control of the national agenda for much of the past decade.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., April 11, 2007:](#)

Making the grade

If Fresno wants to emulate cities that are in the top 10 in protecting themselves against global warming, we need to start doing some of the things endorsed by the Kyoto Treaty. I was amazed at the lack of preparation we've done, compared to the cities on the list (see thegreenguide.com/doc/113/top10cities).

Getting with the program for these cities included: excellent public transportation, pedestrian-oriented shopping areas, clean air, good water, smoking ban, high percentage of renewable energy, wind power and a high percentage of bicycle commuters.

How does Fresno score on these qualifiers?

Kendall Bartela, Fresno

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, April 11, 2007:](#)

Prevent bad air

I'm not going to debate or pretend to know the long-term consequences of global warming. But please, let me explain why everyone in this valley should be for long-term programs to limit the perceived effects.

It's the air, folks. Our air is among the very worst in this country. Anything that limits hydrocarbon emissions should be applauded by everyone in this valley. Can you see it today?

And as far as man not being too insignificant to affect climate, look no further than right here. Our humidity is greater now on average during my lifetime here, which is just over 50 years. And that's because more farmland is under irrigation, etc. Apologies to our local weather people. Look it up.

The problem with global warming and the explanations is it is gradual-- over a long period of time. It doesn't ramp straight up. I am not alarmed, but I do see the point of being careful. An ounce of prevention-- just once, please.

CHUCK SUKUT, Bakersfield