

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Sunday, April 1, 2007:](#)

It's time to get gross polluters off our roads

Cogdill bill, air district plan are both useful approaches to cleansing the Valley's skies.

Getting "gross polluters" off Valley roads and highways should have a very high priority in the effort to clean up our dirty air. The Valley air district has an ambitious -- and costly -- plan to do that, and that effort could be complemented by a measure from a Valley legislator now being debated.

State Sen. Dave Cogdill, R-Modesto, wants to replace gross polluters with donated vehicles that produce fewer toxic emissions. His bill, SB 23, cleared the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee easily on Tuesday, and next goes before the Appropriations Committee. We urge its quick adoption.

Cogdill's plan is actually meant as an alternative to the air district effort, but we believe -- as do air district officials -- that both proposals have merit. Cogdill is critical of the district's plan to pay owners of gross polluters as much as \$5,000 for their clunkers, which would then be crushed and salvaged. He believes his effort can succeed at much lower cost.

That may be. But the problem is so large that we believe any and all efforts that promise a measure of success should be pursued.

Gross polluters do damage all out of proportion to their numbers. They only represent about 10% of the cars on California roads, but they spew about half of the smog-forming gases and particulate matter that do so much harm to people, livestock and plants every year. Getting even a few of them off the highways would be a great blessing.

Cogdill's aim is to get 200 gross-polluting cars off Valley roads at first, expanding the program if it is successful. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wants to remove a total of 33,000 cars through its program, getting 600 in the upcoming year, at a cost of \$2 million.

One of the biggest problems with removing gross polluters is the fact that so many are the sole transportation for a large number of Californians living at or below the poverty line. In many cases, they are the working poor, and they rely on their vehicles to get to and from their jobs. Any mechanism for removing the gross polluters must be sensitive to their situation.

The state's current program for removing gross polluters has tallied some success -- more than 15,000 vehicles were removed from the state's roads in 2005-06 -- but its effectiveness is limited by the fact that it can only offer \$1,000 to the owners of the vehicles. That's simply not enough to replace the gross polluters with something less offensive to air quality.

The attraction of Cogdill's plan is that the donated vehicles would be better and wouldn't cost the recipients anything. Donors would get a tax write-off, though the amount is still uncertain because of recent changes in IRS rules.

The Valley air district's plan, offering \$5,000 for vehicles turned in, would also make it easier for owners to replace gross polluters.

Neither system is perfect. Both would rely on Department of Motor Vehicle records to identify cars that failed a smog check. And many owners of the gross polluters don't bother with smog checks because they don't bother to register the vehicles. That's illegal, of course, but in many cases, poor people have little choice. Car repair and registration will always lose out to rent and food when people of limited means must make choices.

That's why these new efforts are worthy of support. One or the other may emerge as the better alternative, but we won't know until we've tried them both. Let that test begin as soon as possible.

Higher anxiety per gallon

A Bakersfield refinery wants to use a widely shunned toxic chemical in its expansion plan.

By Elizabeth Douglass, Times Staff Writer
Los Angeles Times, Monday, April 2, 2007

State and federal safety officials are worried by a Bakersfield refinery's proposal to use a toxic chemical shunned by most California oil companies.

Executives at Big West Oil of California have been talking about plans to produce more gasoline and diesel at the refinery since 2005, when parent company Flying J Inc. bought the plant from Shell Oil Co.

The expansion project was expected to face opposition on air-quality grounds, as is common with industrial proposals in California. But safety experts weren't prepared for Big West's recent disclosure that it would use hydrofluoric acid in its new equipment instead of a widely used, safer substitute.

"It caught me off guard," said Clyde Trombetta, a process safety expert at the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health. Processes using hydrofluoric acid, commonly known as HF, "are just so hazardous ... there's a reason why refineries moved away from it."

Edward Huhn, secretary and treasurer of the refinery's United Steelworkers union local, said Big West's plans had alarmed employees. Many believe that the Bakersfield plant has become less safe under its new owners, he added.

"Safety has gotten to be more of a problem with the current management than it was before," Huhn said. "Part of it is possibly not abiding by all the safety regulations, and part of it is not having enough trained personnel ... so the HF unit is going to be a concern."

Gene Cotten, vice president and manager of the Bakersfield plant, acknowledged that there had been disagreements about safety policies and that the number of minor injuries at the refinery had increased over the last two years. But he characterized the facility's overall safety record as "pretty good."

He also defended the company's decision to use hydrofluoric acid as part of the expansion. Many refineries have used the chemical safely, including a sister plant owned by Flying J in North Salt Lake, Utah, Cotten said.

"We recognize that it is something that people will be interested in," Cotten said. "But we've selected the superior technology ... and with the new, modern things we're going to do, and all the mitigation efforts, we feel we can manage the risks."

Big West's plans are being reviewed by the Kern County Planning Department and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which must approve permits for the project. Details were laid out in a draft environmental impact report, released in mid-February.

The project would nearly double the plant's gasoline production and increase its diesel output 60% -- an important supply boost in a state where fuel demand has outstripped refinery production.

"The Energy Commission has been talking about the problem of refineries not keeping pace with the growth in demand," said Gordon Schremp, fuels expert with the California Energy Commission. "So no matter who is proposing a refinery expansion, from a fuel-supply perspective, that's good."

To get the increase, Big West plans to add equipment that would convert a low-grade refinery byproduct called gas oil into motor fuels. The new processing units would transform the gas oil into an additional 1.2 million gallons of gasoline and diesel a day, Cotten said.

Cotten's company was hailed by government officials when it bought the plant and derailed Shell's plans to shutter the refinery. Then-Atty. Gen. Bill Lockyer called the reprieve "a victory for California drivers" because it kept open a refinery that produced 2% of the state's gasoline and 6% of its diesel and raised the possibility of higher output.

But the potential use of hydrofluoric acid raises significant safety questions, experts say.

HF is a fast-acting, corrosive chemical that forms a toxic cloud when released into the atmosphere. Experts say even slight contact can cause burns that penetrate the skin into the tissue underneath. Severe exposure can kill people by causing an irregular heartbeat or excess fluid to build up in the lungs.

"Accidents may or may not ever happen ... and it has a low probability," said Mohsen Nazemi, a top officer with the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which tried to ban the chemical from Southern California refineries. "But if it does happen, the consequences would be very significant."

Refineries have used hydrofluoric acid for decades to help produce alkylate, an octane booster and key component of cleaner-burning fuels. But safety concerns have driven the chemical out of many plants in recent years, with most adopting a safer process that uses sulfuric acid.

The only state refineries that still use the chemical -- Valero Energy Corp.'s Wilmington plant and Exxon Mobil Corp.'s facility in Torrance -- have installed or agreed to install safety modifications that reduce the chemical's tendency to vaporize.

Big West, however, said it had rejected the sulfuric acid option because it used more energy, was less effective and required more frequent replenishment, which would create additional hazardous truck traffic.

The company ruled out the modified hydrofluoric acid process adopted by Valero and Exxon because Big West "lacks confidence" that the necessary engineering support would be provided by ConocoPhillips, which owns the technology used in the modified system.

Instead, Big West said it would incorporate sensors, a water dousing system and other measures to reduce the risk of a catastrophic accident.

"Just the fact that they are going to be using hydrofluoric acid instead of sulfuric acid is something that people should be worried about," said Alex Fidis, an attorney at the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, a consumer advocacy organization that published a 2005 study called "Needless Risk" that examined the use of hydrofluoric acid in refineries.

Adding the chemical at the Bakersfield plant could elevate the refinery's rank on the government's list of potential terrorist targets and would probably trigger more security requirements, Fidis said. Refineries are tempting targets, he said, "not only because of the symbolic nature of the plants, but also because the release of hydrofluoric acid could cause severe casualties."

Many refineries operate safely despite their constant use of extremely hot, dangerous chemicals subjected to high pressure.

Francisco Altamirano, an investigator with the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, said his agency hadn't investigated any accidents that involved hydrofluoric acid.

"There are lots of hydrofluoric acid units here in this country, and thank God we haven't had any bad incidents," Altamirano said. Still, he was "quite surprised" to hear that a new one was being proposed, given the danger.

The draft environmental impact report, open for public comment through Thursday, counted 50 day-care centers, five medical centers, six nursing homes and 107 schools within a five-mile radius of Big West's Bakersfield refinery.

"We're expecting a flood of comments next week," said Lorelei Oviatt, special projects division chief at the Kern County Planning Department. "We're all for oil up here, but we want to be very careful and conscientious in weighing this project."

Chevron starts unit at Richmond refinery

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, March 31, 2007

San Ramon-based Chevron Corp., the second-largest U.S. oil company, started a unit at its Richmond refinery causing chemicals to be burned into the air early Friday, according to a report on a state-administered Web site.

The chemicals included sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide, according to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Web site. The report did not specifically identify the unit. A refinery spokesman was not available for comment.

The refinery has a processing capacity of 240,000 barrels a day and accounts for 23 percent of Chevron's U.S. refining capacity.

In other Chevron news, the company's unit in Kazakh, which produces about a quarter of Kazakhstan's oil, plans to spend \$800 million through 2009 to "improve environmental performance," after the government threatened to suspend Chevron's license.

The projects will reduce pollution and flaring, or burning off excess natural gas, provide advanced facilities for handling waste water and solid waste.

Technology

San Ramon-based SBE Inc., an company that provides Internet protocol-based data storage, completed the sale of its embedded hardware business for \$2.2 million to One Stop Systems Inc. One Stop will take over SBA's headquarters and equipment related to the embedded hardware business.

Greg Yamamoto, the company's chief executive, said the sale will facilitate SBA's plan to merge with Neonode, a Swedish maker of touchscreen mobile phones. That deal was announced in January, and SBE will likely change its name to Neonode once the sale closes.

The company also approved a 1 for 5 reverse stock split effective April 2. Yamamoto said the stock split will help boost SBE's share price and allow the company to comply with requirements to stay listed on the Nasdaq.

UTStarcom Inc., the Alameda-based wireless communications company, joined forces with Globecom Systems Inc., a satellite communications company based in Hauppauge, N.Y., to create mobile communications networks for companies using a satellite. The networks allow companies to connect offices in several locations.

Quick hits

Glacier Bay Inc., a manufacturer of eco-friendly diesel electric propulsion systems and climate control technology, is moving its headquarters from Oakland to a new 60,000-square-foot facility at 2930 Faber St. in Union City. The move to the larger site was made to accommodate the company's increase in both staff and production requirements. Currently about 55 people work for the company, which is about triple what it was nine months ago. The site will include a showroom to display its products and new labs for the engineers.

Group calls for stronger proposal to protect community's clean air

By The Associated Press

In the Madera Tribune, Friday, March 30, 2007

FRESNO - The community coalition spearheading efforts to improve air quality in Fresno County today outlined several improvements that should be made to the county's draft ordinance aimed at creating standards for controlling emissions from new dairies.

While activists praised the county for taking a first step toward improving air quality in the region, they were disappointed that the draft did not include tougher standards that would create noticeable changes in the Valley's quality of life.

"This first draft sets up a framework for Fresno County to protect public health as new dairies come to our county," said Mary Savala, president of the Fresno Healthy Dairy Commission and a board member of the League of Voters. "However, it does not yet include the necessary standards to limit air pollution and groundwater contamination from new dairies. In fact, it sets no standards for to limit air pollution-the greatest threat to public health in our Valley."

For example, the commission is concerned about the lack of stringent requirements for potential pollution from dairy waste lagoons. The guidelines do not mandate landfill-grade lagoon liners, which would protect groundwater from contamination, or lagoon covers, which limit methane emissions. Requirements that feed areas and barns be covered must be included for the same reason.

"With the appropriate regulations in place, we can take great strides toward safeguarding the health of the Fresno County community," said the Rev.

David Schlicher, pastor at College Community Congregational College and a board member of the Fresno Healthy Dairy Commission. "In the first draft, the county has outlined a process for dairy oversight. Now it is time to agree to air-quality standards."

Additionally, in order to be fully enforceable and consistently monitored, the new regulations must be included in the county's Zoning Code. The draft ordinance from county planners would only establish guidelines, leaving unclear which agency would enforce compliance and rendering unknowable the

impact these guidelines would have on dairies in the area.

Critics hope egg ranch does not hatch

Neighbors, animal rights activists oppose proposed site

By Cheryl Winkelman, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, April 2, 2007

Though it hasn't yet been given the final go-ahead, a proposed egg ranch near Lathrop already has ruffled quite a few feathers.

Neighbors and animal rights groups have flooded San Joaquin County's Community Development Department with letters of vociferous opposition.

Michael and Roberta Larkin wrote, "Our property lies parallel on the east side of the proposed site of the egg facility. Therefore, the smell will be intolerable."

The 240,000-square-foot egg ranch is planned for 4000 W. Undine Rd., which is west of Lathrop and the San Joaquin River. If built, it will be near Lathrop's River Islands, an 11,000-unit housing development that is under construction.

Up to 1 million chickens could inhabit the premises.

Another potential neighbor, William H. Reynolds, worried about the manure disposal. He mentioned four children who are home-schooled near the proposed site.

"The potential health issues for these youngsters is obvious," he wrote.

So far, the project has cleared one environmental hurdle. [The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) determined last week the cancer risk produced by the farm would be less than significant, according to county documents.

Other county departments still need to analyze the egg farm, including the Public Health Department for vector control and Asian flu concerns, before it again reaches the county's Planning Commission for a vote, said County Planner Ray Hoo.

Meanwhile, animal rights activists are working with Lunardi's grocery stores, a family-owned chain with stores in Danville and Walnut Creek, to get the company to stop selling eggs from Olivera Family Limited Partnership, the company behind the egg ranch. They run a smaller egg ranch in French Camp and previously operated an egg ranch in Gilroy. Company officials did not return telephone calls.

Fifteen animal advocacy groups also have banded together and created <http://www.nomoreolivera.com>. Christine Morrissey, a spokeswoman for East Bay Advocates said, "Our organization visited one of the previously owned facilities.... The conditions were completely unacceptable. The animals were living in filth."

Morrissey said the hens were confined to small wire enclosures. Often, their beaks are removed so they didn't peck each other to death.

At the French Camp site, 250 to 300 birds die daily, she said. Though 90 percent of egg-laying hens are raised in cages, Olivera Farms' sanitation practices are below par, Morrissey said.

The operational practices of the Gilroy facility were deemed a public nuisance by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in 2002. Weekly inspections from the county's Department of Environmental Health to monitor flies and manure clean-ups followed, according to county documents.

In late 2005, the poultry operation was shut down.

Complaints have also been filed with San Joaquin County's Department of Environmental Health about Olivera Farms' French Camp egg ranch about the bad smell.

Alabama farmers view air study differently

MARY ORNDORFF, The Birmingham News
In the Contra Costa Times, Sunday, April 1, 2007

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. - Hundreds of Alabama farmers are among 14,000 nationwide who signed up for a program expected to produce the first national study of air quality at large livestock operations.

While those participating get immunity for presumed air quality violations during the study, only 20 live stock barns and manure-storage facilities nationwide -- none in Alabama -- will be monitored.

Scientists begin work at those 20 facilities in May, and farmers hope they'll be able to use information gathered in the study.

"We need to study and look, as these farms get bigger, to see what we're doing," said Tim Donaldson, whose Calhoun County hog operation averages about 2,400 sows in 20 barns. "I'm interested in seeing what emissions we're producing out of those farms, too, to see how it compares to larger industries. If we do have an emissions problem, I want to see what we can do to reduce them."

It's not about odor; it's about materials such as ammonia, which is an ingredient in forming fine particulate matter that can cause health problems. The agreements are with large-scale farms where hundreds, even thousands of animals are confined and fed for at least 45 days a year.

In Alabama, 761 of 3,500 poultry and 14 of 34 swine operations are participating, according to the EPA and Alabama Farmer's Federation. There are no plans now for monitoring equipment to be installed at Alabama farms.

The deal with farmers was promoted by the EPA as an important step to enforcing clean air laws by working with the agriculture industry, which is helping pay for the study. Environmental groups challenge it as too industry-friendly.

"Instead of forcing polluters to clean up their act, the Bush administration has given them a get-out-of-jail-free card," said a statement from Ed Hopkins, environmental quality director at the Sierra Club.

Depending on their size, individually owned farms paid a fine of between \$200 and \$1,000. Fines were higher, up to \$100,000, for companies that owned multiple farms. In return, the EPA agreed to not bring certain enforcement actions during the study.

The emissions data are being collected over two years from the 20 farms. Then, within 18 months, the EPA will come up with rules for tracking emissions and how it plans to regulate them.

"This innovative approach will provide the best available science to guide EPA's decision-making in a way that is good for the environment, good for agriculture and good for the American people," EPA's assistant administrator for enforcement Granta Nakayama said when the deals were announced.

The scientists leading the \$14 million study are from Purdue University. They're looking at ammonia, hydrogen sulfide and particulate-matter releases, material that varies widely depending on the animal, its age, the size of the feeding operation and the method for managing manure and ventilation.

For example, a pig farm with sows uses feed with less energy than a farm where the animals are fattened up for market, changing the content of the waste. Emissions are also affected by how long the waste is exposed to outside air.

Blount County poultry producer Dennis Maze remembers the meeting in Cullman County when EPA came by to make the pitch about the study. It was not well-received.

"They just assumed we were over the limit and that we would pay a fine and let them monitor us," Maze said. "We don't feel like we're a toxic waste dump."

Alabama's poultry industry produces more than 1 billion broilers and more than 1.6 billion eggs in a year, making it one of the top poultry states in the country and a nearly \$3 billion-a-year business.

Donaldson, who lives in Cullman and runs the 467-acre farm in Calhoun County with his brother, said the swine industry's past problems probably made it more willing to participate in the EPA study. He's a contract pork producer, meaning another company actually owns the sows on his farm. That company recommended he and his partners take the EPA agreement. He did, despite reluctance to sign a legal document admitting to presumed past emissions that were never measured. And he also doesn't like to refer to the payment as a "fine."

"We looked at it as money put in to help fund the research and see what we are really up against," Donaldson said. "We looked at it as an investment on what we can do to better as an industry."

The American Farm Bureau, the largest agriculture lobby in Washington, has cautioned against increased government regulation of farms. In a speech to Alabama farmers, Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman said he fears aggressive attempts by environmental and animal-welfare groups to restrict how farmers manage the animals that provide food for Americans.

"Livestock production in this country is under attack," Stallman said. "We have a fight on our hands."

Congress is considering legislation to help them in that fight. Pending bills would exempt agriculture from some laws by saying animal manure is not a hazardous waste. And EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson on Feb. 28 told a House budget-writing committee the agency is considering a rule to exempt animal-waste air emissions from some reporting requirements.

"That is an important inconsistency there," said Hopkins of the Sierra Club. "It doesn't seem to me that if EPA by a rule exempts these facilities from reporting that there would be a need for the research project. Why study reporting if you're going to eliminate the requirement to report?"

An EPA spokesman on Friday said the rule Johnson mentioned would not affect the emissions study.

"We're going ahead just like it was planned," Dave Ryan said. "As far as we can see now, there is no slowdown to the plans for the air-monitoring study."

Court Boosts Regulators on Power Plants

By PETE YOST, Associated Press Writer

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Monday, April 2, 2007

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Supreme Court gave a boost Monday to a federal clean air initiative aimed at forcing utilities to install pollution control equipment on aging coal-fired power plants.

In a unanimous decision, the justices ruled against Duke Energy Corp. in a lawsuit brought by the Clinton administration, part of a massive enforcement effort targeting more than a dozen utilities.

Most companies settled with the government, but several Clinton-era cases involving more than two dozen power plants in the South and the Midwest are still pending. The remaining suits demand fines for past pollution that if levied in full would run into billions of dollars.

The justices ruled that the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., overstepped its authority by implicitly invalidating Environmental Protection Agency regulations in a way that favored Duke. The case now returns to the lower courts.

The appeals court's decision "seems to us too far a stretch," Justice David Souter wrote.

The enforcement program is aimed at reducing power plant emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide that contribute to smog and acid rain. Sulfur dioxide is the leading cause of acid rain.

The utility industry has long resisted installing costly pollution controls under the program called New Source Review. It waged vigorous campaigns against the program starting in the 1980s and more recently by battling it out with regulators when sued in federal courts.

Greenhouse gases are air pollutants under the landmark environmental law, Justice John Paul Stevens said in his majority opinion.

The court's four conservative justices - Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Samuel Alito, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas - dissented.

Many scientists believe that greenhouse gases, flowing into the atmosphere at an unprecedented rate, are leading to a warming of the Earth, rising sea levels and other marked ecological changes.

The politics of global warming have changed dramatically since the court agreed last year to hear its first global warming case.

Democrats took control of Congress last November. The world's leading climate scientists reported in February that global warming is "very likely" caused by man and is so severe that it will "continue for centuries." Former Vice President Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth* - making the case for prompt action on climate change - won an Oscar. Business leaders are saying they are increasingly open to congressional action to reduce greenhouse gases emissions, of which carbon dioxide is the largest.

Carbon dioxide is produced when fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas are burned. One way to reduce those emissions is to have more fuel-efficient cars.

The court had three questions before it. Do states have the right to sue the EPA to challenge its decision? Does the Clean Air Act give EPA the authority to regulate tailpipe emissions of greenhouse gases?

Does EPA have the discretion not to regulate those emissions?

The court said yes to the first two questions. On the third, it ordered EPA to re-evaluate its contention it has the discretion not to regulate tailpipe emissions. The court said the agency has so far provided a "laundry list" of reasons that include foreign policy considerations.

The majority said the agency must tie its rationale more closely to the Clean Air Act.

"EPA has offered no reasoned explanation for its refusal to decide whether greenhouse gases cause or contribute to climate change," Stevens said. He was joined by his liberal colleagues, Justices Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and David Souter, and the court's swing voter, Justice Anthony Kennedy.

The lawsuit was filed by 12 states and 13 environmental groups that had grown frustrated by the Bush administration's inaction on global warming.

In his dissent, Roberts focused on the issue of standing, whether a party has the right to file a lawsuit.

The court should simply recognize that redress of the kind of grievances spelled out by the state of Massachusetts is the function of Congress and the chief executive, not the federal courts, Roberts said.

His position "involves no judgment on whether global warming exists, what causes it, or the extent of the problem," he said.

The decision also is expected to boost California's prospects for gaining EPA approval of its own program to limit tailpipe emissions of greenhouse gases. Federal law considers the state a laboratory on environmental issues and gives California the right to seek approval of standards that are stricter than national norms.

Back-Seat Driver: RT chief dismayed at funds plan

By Tony Bizjak - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Monday, April 2, 2007

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is promoting California as an international leader in fighting global warming.

That means, among other things, reducing emissions from the millions of cars crawling around California.

Yet -- minus the fanfare -- Schwarzenegger also is proposing siphoning a billion dollars from the state's public transit agencies in this year's budget.

It's no surprise that transit officials are upset. They feel jilted. Doesn't the governor believe in mass transit, they ask?

Sacramento Regional Transit, which runs buses and light rail in Sacramento, loses big in the governor's budget proposal.

"Horrendous," is the word RT General Manager Beverly Scott used last week, testifying at the Capitol.

RT stands to lose out on \$14 million, she said. That's 10 percent of the annual budget for an agency that perpetually sees itself as cash-poor.

Transit advocates are lobbying the Legislature to thwart the governor's plan. They've also wondered aloud about the governor's true feelings on mass transit.

Last week, they got a glimpse -- and it wasn't all warm and fuzzy.

A Schwarzenegger representative tried, during a budget hearing, to assuage transit advocates, but moments later seemed to dismiss bus and light-rail systems as not really part of the mainstream commute.

"The governor does like transit," said Mark Hill of the Department of Finance. "He has a belief in it" and wants to see ridership increase.

But the state has a major budget deficit, Hill said. It needs to pluck money from somewhere to fill the gap. If it doesn't take money from transit, he warned, "less palatable measures would be likely to be considered."

Playing defense, administration officials point out they aren't setting any precedent here.

The money in question is "spillover" gas taxes, a bit of a windfall that becomes available when gas prices are up. Although the money is earmarked for transit, it has been diverted in the past for other needs.

Hill then issued what may be considered a rebuke or a challenge to transit officials: "At this point, only 2 to 3 percent of all travel in this state is (on) transit," he said.

The administration needs to spend money where it "really works," he said.

Assemblyman Mike Feuer, D-West Hollywood, didn't like the sound of that. Taking money from transit doesn't help it succeed, he argued.

He reminded the governor's representatives that poorer people often rely on transit. Those people, Feuer argued, have "very little voice in rooms like this one."

The statewide transit ridership percentages offered by the administration obscure transit's real impact in urban areas.

Thirty-seven percent of people daily between San Francisco and the east Bay make their trip on transit. If they didn't, driving over the Bay Bridge would be a three-hour nightmare, planners there say.

In Sacramento, 13 percent of commuters into downtown arrive on transit.

Administration officials have pointed out that the scenario isn't all bad for transit agencies. There is some new money available next year for them from the transportation bond measure approved by state voters last November.

Transit advocates counter that when voters approved Prop. 1B, the transportation infrastructure bonds, they didn't intend that money to be used as a substitute for diverted funds.

"Never in my wildest dreams," said RT's Scott, "did I think when I voted we'd wind up looking at a bait-and-switch."

'Green' electric cars will soon cruise quietly on Island streets

Futuristic city vehicles resemble golf carts, reach speeds of about 25 mph

By Alan Lopez, STAFF WRITER

Contra Costa times, Friday, March 30, 2007

Alameda's latest offensive against global climate change is a little bigger than a golf cart and will silently cruise the streets at about 25 mph.

On Monday, a fleet of six electric vehicles manufactured by Global Electric Motorcars will make their debut with a ribbon cutting in front of City Hall, 2263 Santa Clara Ave. Among other things, the buggies will be used to travel between city office buildings.

"We do a lot of trips around town, back and fourth between buildings," deputy city manager Lisa Goldman said. "This helps save on gas guzzling."

Last May, the city instituted a policy for purchasing electric-powered cars whenever possible. It fits into Alameda's effort to become a "green" Island that produces fewer fossil fuels and creates less waste.

With the city seal affixed to their doors, the new fleet resembles futuristic golf carts, but they seat four and can travel up to 30 miles fully charged with electricity generated by Alameda Power & Telecom.

City officials say that's a good match as AP&T uses about 85 percent renewable energy, which includes wind, water, and solar power.

Consequently, Alameda already counts itself as having the lowest greenhouse emissions among 11 local municipalities. And the city has a climate protection task force working on a plan for further reducing emissions.

"This is another in series of steps city is taking to become more green," Goldman said.

While AP&T has used electric and hybrid cars for a number of years, it's the first time electric vehicles being put into use by the Alameda city government. The city uses a total of 407 automobiles.

The motorcars' use is generally limited because they can't go much faster than 25 mph. But it's perfect for Alameda since the Island is flat and the speed limit, for the most part, is 25 miles per hour.

The city paid for the vehicles with a grant from the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency, through its Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program. The cost was \$93,892.88.

The vehicles being replaced with the electric carts will be sold at auction and the money will be put into a vehicle-replacement fund, Public Works Director Matt Naclerio said.

"It's a first step (in) making Alameda's fleet of vehicles environmentally sound," Mayor Beverly Johnson said. "So our goal will be to continue it. And as we buy new cars, to buy electric whenever we can."

Stretched to the Limit

California gas costs more than other states'

By Janis Mara, Business Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, April 2, 2007

WHEN Anne Siglin moved to Alameda from Chicago in 2005, she was shocked by the price of gas in the Bay Area.

"There are refineries right here," Siglin said. "Why does gas cost so much more?"

As gas prices continue to soar and Californians are paying a whopping 60 cents more for a gallon of unleaded than the national average, many Bay Area residents are wondering the same thing.

The cost of gas in California - which on Tuesday averaged \$3.19 per gallon statewide, compared with \$2.59 nationally - has been higher than in other states for at least five years. Worse yet, it's even more expensive in the Bay Area. Gas prices tied a record high Friday in the San Francisco metro area, which includes San

GASIBusiness 2Mateo County. The average price there for a gallon of unleaded gas reached \$3.36, according to AAA.

It's not much better in the East Bay (\$3.26) or the San Jose area (\$3.24).

What's the explanation?

Consumer advocates, oil associations and academics agree the problem is supply and demand. California's refineries are stretched to capacity, so any additional stress on the system drives supply down, and hence, prices go up.

But consumer watchdogs - and many individuals - say the oil companies manipulate supplies to make them run low and use refinery downtime as an excuse to jack prices up unduly high. Not surprisingly, oil industry representatives disagree.

Though experts agree that supply and demand is the primary issue, other factors enter in as well, from the state's cleaner-burning gasoline to refiners' rising margins.

"We use a cleaner-burning gasoline and that accounts for about an extra 10 cents per gallon for production," said Severin Borenstein, director of the University of California Energy Institute, based at UC Berkeley.

California's special blend, with its reduced levels of smog-producing ingredients such as aromatic hydrocarbons, is mandated by California's Air Resources Board.

The extra 10 cents from the special blend accounted for all the difference between 1995 and 2000, but it doesn't account for all the difference now, Borenstein said.

Because California refineries don't make enough gas to answer the demand, the state must import gas from the few refineries - two on the Gulf Coast and a few overseas - that can make the special blend.

"The cost of importing gasoline adds 10 to 15 cents a gallon to the price," Borenstein said. "It also makes gas prices in California more volatile," because instead of a steady stream of gas arriving via a pipeline, some days a lot of gas arrives and some days none arrives at all, he said.

California's higher gas taxes add another approximately 13 cents per gallon, according to the American Petroleum Institute.

If cleaner-burning fuel adds 10 cents, shipping costs 10 to 15 cents and taxes 13 cents, that accounts for 33 to 38 cents - and Borenstein says on average over the last five or six years, California gas has cost 20 to 25 cents more than the rest of the nation.

But right now gas is 60 cents more than the rest of the country.

Where does the extra 22 to 27 cents come from?

All about profit

"Profit," Borenstein said. "Sometimes (oil companies) make a lot of money because the market is really tight and demand pushes up the price."

California Energy Commission data show that the average price for a branded gallon of unleaded was \$3.08 on March 19, with a crude oil cost of \$1.32 a gallon.

The refineries' margins that day - their profits plus the cost of making the gas - were \$1.12 a gallon.

Compare that to March 20, 2006, when commission data show branded gas retailed for \$2.64 a gallon, with a crude oil cost of \$1.39 and the refineries' margins were 66 cents.

Meanwhile, oil companies have posted record profits and crude oil prices have been rising again, surging Thursday to a six-month high of more than \$66 a barrel.

The current 60-cent difference between gas in California and the rest of the country is one of the biggest margins in recent memory, said Sean Comey of AAA of Northern California. AAA tracks gasoline prices daily.

In Comey's opinion, commodity trading is another factor driving prices up.

"One of the elements of this story that people haven't heard before is the role of financial speculation in boosting oil and therefore gas prices," Comey said. "We've really seen an explosion in terms of the number of times oil gets traded as a commodity between when it's produced and when it's turned into gasoline."

Daily global demand for crude oil is about 85 million barrels per day, Comey said, and there have been days recently when one and a half billion barrels have been traded.

"Every time it changes hands someone makes money off it," Comey said. "As they keep buying and selling something before they use it, this tends to boost the price, and that price flows downstream to your local gas pump."

"(Trading) is an absolute huge factor, one of the biggest factors in why gasoline prices have gotten up so high to date," agreed Stephen Schork, author of The Schork Report, a research and trading report. "There has been an explosion in the amount of speculators trading in this market."

Schork said traders are competing to buy and "that in itself is going to make prices go up because so many people are buying."

On a positive note, Schork said he thinks a correction is due, and prices will go down in the coming months.

But for yet another view, Borenstein, of the UC Energy Institute, sharply disagrees with Comey and Schork's assessment of the effect of trading on gas prices.

"It's nonsense that trading adds to the price of gas," he said. "Traders could try to buy up a lot of gasoline and hope the price goes up, but when they tried to sell it, they'd be pushing the price back down. There's no empirical evidence that traders raise the price of gasoline."

Refinery disruptions

A final factor: Some of the current difference may be because of an unusual number of recent refinery disruptions.

Each disruption further restricts the supply of available gasoline, helping keep prices high.

Exxon Mobil Corp.'s refinery in Torrance, for instance, has been running below maximum capacity since February for maintenance.

Then, on March 22, a unit shut down after a malfunction, a problem that will take a week or two to resolve.

Other California refineries have had problems recently, with a fire in San Ramon-based Chevron Corp.'s Richmond refinery in January.

Also, the refineries are switching from the winter blend of gas to the cleaner-burning summer blend.

This disrupts supply because refineries let their supplies of the winter blend of fuel decline in anticipation of replacing them with the summer blend.

But the recent disruptions and seasonal downtime still don't explain the longstanding gap between prices in California and the rest of the nation.

Asked about the gap, "We have a very serious supply-and-demand situation in California," said Tupper Hull of the Western States Petroleum Association.

Refineries produce about 1 billion gallons a month, but the state typically consumes about 1.2 billion gallons a month, said Jay McKeeman, vice president of government relations for the California Independent Oil Marketers Association.

But consumer advocates and others say this isn't the only reason for high prices.

AAA's Comey said the two biggest factors affecting prices now are refinery problems and the increase in the price of crude oil, but "robust profits" also figure in.

"The energy companies like to point to supply and demand, and while these are legitimate forces, they only tell part of the story," Comey said. "Nobody likes to talk about their large profits and how that impacts what we pay."

Drivers, too, are feeling the pinch - and some blame the oil companies.

"Oil companies manipulate the price of oil so their profit and their stock will go up," said Fred Eisd of San Ramon, who drives daily to Oakland.

Consumer advocates agree.

"There's no reason gas should be \$3.40 a gallon when we were paying \$2.40 a gallon in October, other than the fact that the oil companies can do it," said Jamie Court, president of California-based consumer advocacy group the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights. "The price of producing the gas hasn't gone up since then. The cost of crude oil hasn't changed appreciably."

Exxon Mobil, the world's biggest publicly traded oil company, reported that profit rose 9 percent in 2006 to \$39.5 billion, the largest annual profit by a U.S. corporation.

Meanwhile, Chevron reported its best-ever annual profit in 2006, \$17.1 billion, up 22 percent from 2005.

"We all agree it's supply and demand, but we believe they (oil companies) are rigging their supply so that prices go through the roof," Court said. "In the fall leading up to the November election, oil companies flooded the market with gas.

But when they want to make profits, they can pull back on production and achieve a far higher price than their production costs."

Oil industry representative Hull, of the petroleum association, said Court is wrong.

Multiple investigations

"There have been dozens and dozens of investigations of the oil industry over the last 20 years from everyone from the California Attorney General to the U.S. Department of Justice and the California Energy Commission into the question of whether any market manipulation is occurring.

Each has found no illegal or improper conduct on the part of the industry," Hull said.

It's correct that no state or federal investigations have shown that oil companies have engaged in illegal market manipulation. But Court isn't saying that the oil companies are engaging in illegal behavior: "They create scarcity and it's legal," he said.

Hull rebuts this argument, as well.

"It is untrue that the supply is contracted in order to bring the price up," Hull said.

"The simple facts are that the demand for transportation fuel has gone up 50 percent in the past 20 years and the number of refineries making it has gone down by more than half," Hull said, citing California Energy Commission numbers.

According to the commission, 10 refineries closed between 1985 and 1995, leaving California with its current total of 21 refineries.

But Susanne Garfield, spokeswoman for the California Energy Commission, paints a different picture.

In reality, Garfield said, a number of smaller refineries merged to make larger refineries. "We haven't lost much capacity," Garfield said. "Twenty years ago refiners were not producing as much as they could produce."

Garfield said the real solution calls for less reliance on conventional fuels.

"We have a huge market and a huge demand, and our governor and the commission are working to move our dependency off fossil fuels," she said. "We're looking at more alternative gas vehicles, more hybrids and electric cars, natural gas, ethanol, fuel cell vehicles. We're trying to move our dependence from petroleum to alternatives."

Legislative proposals

Consumer advocate Court focused on legislative solutions.

"California needs to regulate supply and force oil companies to run their refineries full speed and sustain adequate levels of inventory," Court said.

"Either the Legislature has to pass such a law or the people have to enact it at the ballot box."

Still, Court, whose organization just launched OilWatchdog.org, a Web site and blog on the oil industry, doesn't hold much hope such measures will come to pass.

"The Legislature is too deep in the pocket of big oil," he said. "Even those who don't take campaign contributions from them are afraid to buck them. The real scarcity is political courage."

UK report calls for wider climate change fight

Reuters News Service

In the Washington Post, Monday, April 2, 2007

LONDON (Reuters) - The world needs to fight more polluting gases, and not just focus on carbon emissions, in the fight against climate change, according to a report published by the UK's Air Quality Expert Group (AQEG) on Monday.

While European Union climate change policies focus on reducing carbon emissions, the UK government commissioned report says the effects of a whole range of other gases and other emissions must be taken more seriously. "Air quality pollutants, such as particulate matter and ozone, influence climate change. Control of the gases that lead to the formation of particulate matter and ozone can therefore affect both air quality and climate change," the report says.

"Current international climate change policies do not recognize these impacts... Local, National and European policies must recognize the interactions between air quality and climate change pollutants in developing measures to reduce them."

Failure to slash air pollutants will also mean many cities being shrouded in summer smog as global warming intensifies and particulate matter grows.

"Hot summers like the 2003 heatwave are likely to become the norm by 2040, leading to increased summer smogs unless emissions affecting ozone concentrations are substantially reduced," the report says. "Episodes of winter smog, by contrast, are likely to be less prevalent."

European efforts to combat climate change are focused on cutting emissions of just one gas and even that does not look like having much impact.

Preliminary data showed on Monday that the European Union was too generous in its hand outs of free carbon emissions permits to heavy industry in 2006, undermining the first phase of the bloc's flagship weapon against climate change.

Europe's carbon market is supposed to curb emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂) by handing heavy industry too few emissions permits, forcing them either to clean up or buy extra allowances.

Olympic Trials for Polluted Beijing

By Ariana Eunjung Cha, Washington Post Foreign Service

Washington Post, Friday, March 30, 2007

BEIJING -- Less than a decade ago, this city was an industrial wasteland. The sky could be seen from Beijing's ancient monuments less than a third of the year. Nearby lakes were so contaminated that they couldn't be used to water crops. And children were warned not to play outside in the noxious air.

So when China applied to host the 2008 Olympics, it encountered deep skepticism about its ability to pull off the feat in one of the world's most populous and polluted cities. There was real concern about athletes choking on chemical-laden air as they ran the 100-meter dash.

Seven years and \$40 billion later, the Chinese have had remarkable success on many fronts. Practically every construction project is running ahead of schedule. The Chinese can brag of heroic feats of logistics and engineering: the "bird's nest" latticework of the 91,000-seat Olympic Stadium, the shimmering blue skin of the Water Cube aquatics center, a 70-mile high-speed railway, four new subway lines, an energy-efficient airport terminal.

But Beijing still has not conquered its pollution. Nearly 50 years after Mao Zedong's "war on nature" felled trees to make room for steel plants in the administrative capital and reversed rivers to provide irrigation, the Chinese government is finding that undoing the environmental damage and turning Beijing into a green showcase in time for the Olympics is no small task. China has only 16 months before 550,000 overseas visitors pile into a city of more than 15 million.

"Beijing has made significant progress compared to a few years ago, but just by looking outside you can see the pollution is still very bad," said Lo Sze Ping, campaign director for Greenpeace China. As he spoke, an acrid gray haze hung over the city.

Air pollution was greatly reduced in the initial years of Beijing's cleanup campaign, and by 2002 the number of "blue sky days" nearly doubled, to more than 200. Now, levels of ozone and other pollutants meet international norms. But for the past two years, fine soot in the air has failed to dissipate and still hasn't reached acceptable levels.

Several hundred million trees were planted in the capital, but moths descended on them, stripping much of the foliage that was supposed to absorb carbon dioxide emissions. And despite efforts to conserve water and process sewage more thoroughly, the most recent tests of nearby rivers and lakes showed that many are still badly polluted.

Chinese environmental officers say they are proud of their progress and that Beijing should be judged not by international standards but by how much it has improved.

"People who come here for the first time feel that the environment and the air is not good," said Yu Xiaoxuan, deputy director for construction and environment for the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games. "But they do not know how bad the pollution was several years ago."

Longtime Beijing residents say the change is striking. Bo Guoping, 60, a retired factory worker who on a recent weekend was flying a kite in one of the city's new parks with her grandson, remarked: "These days, we can see the sky. Before, it was all gray."

Members of the International Olympic Committee have repeatedly said how impressed they are with China's progress but have singled out air pollution as a challenge. Just this month on a visit to Beijing, IOC Vice Chairman Ludmilla Linberg urged city officials to further improve air quality.

Beijing is a 65-square-mile expanse of flatland surrounded by a desert that is fast encroaching because of massive deforestation. It wasn't until 2000, when the city was applying to host the Olympics, that the government began to take seriously the environmental consequences of its actions. That summer, a series of ferocious sandstorms hit, turning the sky yellow, closing the airport and filling hospitals with people who couldn't breathe. Even the state-run media lambasted the government for failing to anticipate the problem.

In its application to host the Olympics, China outlined more than 50 measures to improve environmental conditions. Beijing officials have been moving rivers and mountains since. Chunks of mountains in the northwest were blown up and the soil was moved to grow trees and greenery elsewhere. A river from a neighboring province is being redirected into Beijing to supply extra water.

About 190 steel, cement, chemical, paper and other factories have been dismantled piece by piece and moved away from the city and surrounding areas. Nearly 680 mines in the vicinity have been shut down. Some 4,000 buses and 30,000 taxis with high emissions were retired, and the government is discouraging driving.

A big question has been whether industry and construction around Beijing will be shut down during the Games -- a move that experts say would go a long way toward improving air quality, at least temporarily, but that corporations oppose.

Capital Iron and Steel, one of Beijing's largest polluters, recently announced that it would operate at "minimum levels," rather than close, setting off worry that other plants may follow its example.

Some gestures are small and gimmicky. The Chinese are using recycled paper to build desks in the Olympic Village, and they're stripping menus of dishes based on threatened wildlife, such as shark fin soup.

Other steps involve time and money. The Beijing municipal government has pledged \$13 billion for environmental cleanup and protection.

Crews have been working seven-day weeks for more than five years to make sure major construction is completed this fall, so dust can settle before the athletes arrive.

Beijing is planting three walls of trees around the city that include cypress, Chinese scholar trees, magnolias and Dragon spruces -- nearly 100 species. These green barriers not only change the look of Beijing but also defend against the desert, said Wang Sumei, deputy director general of the Capital Forestation Commission.

On a recent weekday afternoon in the city's northwestern Haidian district, Zhang Xuanxing was directing a team of 20 workers planting trees in an area already full of them. Their goal that day: add 150 myrtles, with their distinctive white blossoms.

"The goal is to beautify the environment and clarify the air," said Zhang, 55, quoting one of the countless slogans Beijing has been promoting. In all, by the time the Olympics begin Aug. 8, 2008, 300 million trees will have been planted, some on tops of buildings.

According to internal Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee documents described to The Washington Post, the city hopes to increase clean-energy usage in homes fivefold, make sure 80 to 90 percent of streetlights around Olympic venues are solar-powered and nearly double the capacity of the subway.

Even with the improvements, however, environmental experts say they have mixed feelings.

Some steps the city has taken are only stopgap measures, akin to hiding the dirty laundry in the closet before guests arrive. "Moving factories outside of Beijing doesn't mean much for solving China's environmental crisis," said Sun Shan, director of Conservation International in China.

Particles in Beijing's air are still 40 to 50 percent worse than in Los Angeles, the most polluted city in the United States. Fu Lixin, director of the Air Pollution Research Institute at Tsinghua University, who is advising the Beijing government, said that if pollution is severe, Olympic events could be put off until later in the day or even moved to another venue. The government is prepared to take radical measures such as seeding clouds to create rain, clearing the air.

"Time is too short," he said. "I don't think it's realistic for Beijing to meet international standards of air pollution. But people should know the whole city is supporting and trying their best."

Staff researcher Wang Juan contributed to this report.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Editorial, Sunday, April 1, 2007:](#)

Shipping still an unregulated source of pollution

ONE of the largest, most overlooked sources of air pollution on our planet is the shipping industry.

A study unveiled by the International Council on Clean Transportation has revealed that international shipping spews more acid rain and smog-producing sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere than all the cars, trucks and buses on our planet. And, if it isn't curbed, emissions by sea-bound vessels will eclipse those of vehicles, power plants, factories and refineries combined.

That makes shipping an obvious target for regulations and legislation that limit such emissions. But getting the world to agree and comply is no easy task, as has been discovered with other efforts to control pollution around the globe.

The size of the shipping pollution problem, however, makes it imperative that such efforts get under way. And, that the U.S. and other nations concerned about global warming and climate change lead the effort.

California and the Port of Oakland have attempted to do something about ship emissions within their jurisdictions. The port has tried hooking ships up to the local power grid and using mobile natural-gas powered engines so ships' engines don't operate in port.

The California Air Resources Board, a leader in curbing auto emissions, tried to require ships to use a more refined, lower-sulfur fuel in and around state ports. The Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, however, took the case to court, asserting that tougher rules need to be implemented on the international level to get shipper cooperation and avoid a patchwork of rules that would make it difficult for vessels to comply.

Congress, under Republican control, failed to ratify an international provision last year that would have allowed countries to create areas where ships would have to use low-sulfur fuel, presumably near ports and land. Hopefully, this Democratic-controlled Congress will resurrect that bill, or find better alternatives.

Shippers are right, this is an international problem that requires global efforts and cooperation. But there's much to be done. We have to start somewhere and leadership is badly needed at all levels. The United

States is the world's largest importing country and one of its largest exporters. If we come together on this issue, it would have an impact on countries and shippers that do business here.

By banding together to curb sea-going emissions, California's ports could show the way by instituting change. State lawmakers and regulators also could initiate efforts to cobble together a united front along the West Coast and across the U.S.

In those ways, we could also influence the policies of other nations, encouraging them to operate cleaner ports and shipping fleets.

Also critical is the amount of progress that can be made and at what cost. Ship emissions are a source of air - and water - pollution on which we can have a big impact. Compared to land-based sources, it's relatively new, untouched territory.

You can also get a lot more bang for your bucks. Trimming nitrogen oxide emissions on ships would cost between \$11 and \$729 per ton, compared to the \$1,071 to \$14,330 per ton on land. The ratio is similar for sulfur dioxide.

Getting the world's shippers and nations to cooperate on such measures will be a challenge, but it's necessary if we are going to ever control pollution on land, sea and in the air.

Ships now provide almost three times the emissions of land vehicles. It's time to seriously begin the cleansing process - and for us to take the lead.

[Lodi News Sentinel Editorial, Monday, April 2, 2007:](#)

Lodi's growth reflects trend of paving over farmland

By Joe Guzzardi

On Feb. 14, the Associated Press reported that during the last two years developers gobbled up irreplaceable California agricultural land for the purposes of new home and strip mall construction.

Specifically, according to Molly Penbreth, manager of the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Department of Conservation:

"In just two years, more than 18,800 acres of farmland in several San Joaquin Valley counties became subdivisions, shopping malls or other developments, setting a new state record for loss of farmland, according to newly released state data. A healthy real estate and construction market spurred farmers in Fresno, Kings, Madera, Tulare and Merced counties to sell 18,801 acres between June 2002 and June 2004."

Penbreth added that Fresno County, the nation's No.1 agriculture county in production value, lost the most farmland. Sadly, parking lots at California State University, Fresno, new schools and 100 acres of new homes in Selma replaced crops.

Bridgett Luther, the Conservation Department's Director, reminded Californians that: "A couple of generations ago, Los Angeles County was the leading agriculture county in the nation. Not anymore. One generation ago, Silicon Valley was known as, 'The Valley of Heart's Delights' because of all the agriculture production."

Preliminary data from the program that tracks land development found roughly 26 acres of farmland were removed from production each day in the two-year period.

Given this grim background, it is not surprising that the Lodi City Council approved by a 3-1 vote the Stockton-based FBC Homes Westside development project.

According to the News-Sentinel, the 151-acre development will include 745 homes and a new school. Despite mounting foreclosures, plunging prices and an increase in unsold homes inventory in the San Joaquin Valley, these projects are never voted down.

Sprawl is an insidious problem that slowly but inevitably takes over communities like Lodi, most often without the support of the general population.

Developers like FBC - whose 250-acre Southwest Gateway project in Lodi was approved in November - stress perceived benefits. In the case of the Westside development those include 24 acres of parks, the renovation of 25 Eastside homes and donations to public art and the Hutchins Street Square.

But rarely taken into account are issues that create a lasting impact on society: traffic, water shortages, overpopulation, noise, air pollution and more cement everywhere.

These don't go away - no matter how many donations are given.

Among the many problems for people like myself, who prefer less to more, are that real estate development is the economic engine that drives California.

Look at who contributes - and how much they give - to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's war chest. Through January 4, 2007, real estate development companies donated a total of nearly \$16 million, nearly \$4 million more than banking and finance and five times as much as farming and agriculture.

As long as growth is California's mantra, sprawl will grind on ... no matter what you or I may want.

With no end in sight to urban sprawl, here's a reminder to those who support more development and to those who sit passively by and let it change our lifestyles.

Whether it's soil, sunshine or water, the earth provides only so much. We need to protect what we have while we can.

When natural resources are gone, they're gone for good.

[L.A. Times, Commentary, Sunday, April 1, 2007:](#)

Carbon trading won't work

Experiments with the market scheme favored by Schwarzenegger shows trading favors big polluters without curbing global warming gases.

By Michael K. Dorsey.

Economists, some environmentalists and a growing gaggle of politicians are pushing a grand strategy that a market mechanism - known as "carbon cap and trade" - can rescue us fastest from a climate catastrophe. But early evidence suggests that such a scheme may be a Faustian bargain.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is one of the chief proponents of the market view. He has joined the governors of Washington, Oregon, New Mexico and Arizona to create the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative, which "sets the stage for a regional cap-and-trade program" that he hopes will serve as a model for a national program. The Kyoto Protocol, which went into effect in early 2005 (but which the United States has not signed), also endorses this approach.

Carbon cap and trade works this way: A group of nations (signatories to the Kyoto Protocol) or a group of states (the five Western states in Schwarzenegger's plan) cap their carbon emissions at a certain level. Then a government agency, such as the European Union or the California Environmental Protection Agency, issues permits to polluting industries that tell them how much carbon dioxide they are allowed to emit over a certain time.

Companies unable to stay under their cap can either buy permits, or "emission credits," on a trading exchange, which allows them to pollute more, or they will face heavy fines for exceeding their carbon dioxide targets. Firms that are able to come in under their caps can sell their excess credits on the exchange. Thus the right to pollute is a commodity bought and sold in a market.

The idea of trading pollution rights was part of the reauthorized 1990 Clean Air Act. The program successfully reduced the amount of sulfur dioxide emissions, which cause acid rain, largely because the sources were few enough (about 2,000 smokestacks in the Midwest) that they could be monitored effectively and because there was a national system, administered by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, to enforce the legally required limits, or caps.

Carbon trading on a global scale, however, amounts to an untested economic experiment. The most ambitious carbon-trading experiment to date began in the European Union in 2003. About 9,400 large

factories and power stations in 21 member states were targeted, and the EU Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme was established to trade pollution rights.

In January 2005, the EU governments distributed carbon credits - permits to pollute - to the companies and power plants. The credits were based in large part on what the firms estimated their annual carbon dioxide emissions would be. Because these credits were given out, not auctioned off, the firms did not pay for their pollution. Yet they stood to make money by selling them.

The EU's official accounting of the companies' emissions, released in April 2006, revealed that the companies' and power plants' actual emissions came in below estimates. Some said the firms had inflated their earlier emissions estimates, and thus all had credits to sell. This situation produced a surplus.

Once it was known that the number of available permits exceeded demand, prices slumped. Indeed, fear that there are too many permits for sale (combined with concerns about the EU's regulatory shortcomings) have effectively collapsed the market. A March 2007 report from Deutsche Bank Research noted that "many EU nations are still a long way from delivering on their Kyoto Protocol commitments to reduce carbon dioxide emissions."

Researchers at Open Europe, an economics think tank in Britain, recently issued a report on the experiment. They concluded that the EU Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme represents "botched central planning rather than a real market." As a result, the report said, carbon trading has not resulted in an overall decline of the EU's carbon dioxide emissions.

Worse, the early evidence suggested that the trading scheme financially rewarded companies - mainly petroleum, natural gas and electricity generators - that disproportionately emit carbon dioxide. The pollution credits given to the companies by their respective governments were booked as assets to be valued at market prices. After the EU carbon market collapsed, accusations of profiteering were widespread. In fall 2006, a Citigroup report concluded that the continent's biggest polluters had been the winners, with consumers the losers.

Larry Lohmann, who works with the Corner House, a research organization in Britain, argues that carbon trading is little more than a license for big polluters to carry on business as usual. For instance, the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme was further weakened by provisions that allowed big polluters to buy cheap "offset" credits from abroad. A British cement firm or oil company that lacked enough EU permits to keep on polluting could make up the shortfall by buying credits from, say, a wind farm in India or a project to burn landfill gas to generate electricity in Brazil. "Such projects," Lohmann said, "are merely supplementing fossil fuel ... not replacing it."

These problems may soon infect the cap-and-trade system of the five Western U.S. states. In July 2006, Schwarzenegger and British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced their intention to join together to address global warming, possibly by linking emerging markets for pollution credits in the U.S. with established ones in Europe.

U.S. industry and environmental leaders recently joined together under the catchy name USCAP, for U.S. Climate Action Partnership. Among the participants are Alcoa, Caterpillar, Duke Energy, DuPont, General Electric, Pacific Gas & Electric, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change. The group called for some form of carbon cap and trade, but its reduction targets, in effect, would keep atmospheric carbon dioxide at roughly current levels over the next five years.

The EU experience doesn't augur well for the effectiveness of a global carbon-cap-and-trade scheme in a world characterized by growing economic inequality and enormous differences in governmental capacity to provide oversight, let alone regulation. The risk is that by the time it's apparent such a scheme is not working, extreme climate change will already be wreaking havoc.

MICHAEL K. DORSEY, assistant professor on Dartmouth College's faculty of science, teaches in the environmental studies program.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Friday, March 30, 2007:](#)

Don't fall into the trap of the new urbanists

I am a 20-year resident of the City of Visalia, and every day I become increasingly more concerned about the direction that city officials and staff are encouraging for future development of our city. I have read many articles and definitions about a disease spreading throughout our nation called "New Urbanism." New Urbanism, also known as Smart Growth or Traditional Neighborhood Design, purports to create "walkable, livable" cities where the wealthy live in harmony next to the poor, children walk to school, neighbors know (and like) each other and a sense of "community" is created. In essence, urban utopia can be achieved, according to the New Urbanists, if we only built cities according to their vision.

After the City Council work session on Feb. 24, I became increasingly aware of how serious the city is about following this movement. I have found two articles from Reason Online (www.reason.com) that note a number of the downfalls of this New Urbanist movement and thinking. The articles are entitled "Dense Thinkers," dated January 1999 and "Crime-Friendly Neighborhoods," dated February 2005. I urge you to take the time to read these articles and take these comments and factual evidence into account before you decide to place our city into a similar type of turmoil and trouble.

I feel that one topic of major concern is the failure of New Urbanism to decrease crime rates. In fact, it has been proven to increase crime rates dramatically, which is one of the main reasons that has spurred me to write this e-mail. In the past, I have trusted the leaders of our city to make the right decisions for future development of Visalia. It has become very apparent to me that there are many people who have fallen prey to this make believe world of New Urbanism. The seriousness of this disease became very real to me when I discovered the city is spending a staggering \$850,000 (amount stated at the above mentioned work session meeting) to develop a New Urbanist style specific plan for 850 acres in southeast Visalia. Yes, \$850,000.

New Urbanists do not take into consideration the personal ramifications of these changes and their effects on one's quality of living. To anyone who is a supporter of New Urbanism I would ask these questions: How big is your backyard? Does your house have an alley behind it? Would you be happy knowing that your child is no safer in your backyard than in your front yard? Do you ride your bike or take public transportation to work every day? I surmise the vast majority of these so-called New Urbanist followers don't practice what they preach.

The city of Visalia is a great town because of the way it has been built. It defies all common sense to direct future development to meet the New Urbanist model that has been proved to increase crime rates, increase city infrastructure replacement costs due to increased densities, cause more traffic congestion, and most likely add to our current [air pollution problems](#). (Please refer to the referenced articles for evidence and detailed discussions.)

There are many thoughtful, intelligent individuals serving on the council, Planning Commission and city staff. I plead with you to take all the facts into consideration before leading our city into this New Urbanist movement. Don't let the individuals who have their own agendas make decisions that are going to negatively impact us in the future.

I am 26-years-old, and the decisions that you make now will directly affect my generation. I don't want to be leading the charge 20 years from now trying to figure out how to fix Visalia because we became victimized by the New Urbanist movement today. Please base your decisions on common sense, experience, and facts while considering the direction of future development in our city.

CHRIS CRAWFORD, Visalia