

Superintendent of Schools unveils clean machines

County office wants all buses to be eco-friendly

BY LISA SCHENCKER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

The first money from settlements between environmentalists and developers is about to hit Bakersfield streets -- literally.

The Kern County Superintendent of Schools office unveiled seven new clean-burning buses Monday. The buses use compressed natural gas, which burns cleaner than typical fuel. Thirty-eight of the office's 89 buses are clean-burning.

Kern County Superintendent of Schools Larry Reider said his office hopes to lead by example.

"We feel it's the right thing to do with our air quality here," Reider said.

The seven buses cost about \$1.15 million. Of that, nearly \$330,000 is from the Kern County Air Pollution Mitigation Fund in which some local developers pay fees to offset air pollution caused by new developments. Local developers started paying fees into the fund in recent years as a result of a series of settlements between the Sierra Club and the developers.

The developers generally pay about \$1,200 into the fund for each home built, said local Sierra Club chapter vice chairman Gordon Nipp.

Local developer Craig Carver said developers weren't thrilled at first about the fees. But now all developers must pay some fees that eventually go toward the environment in one form or another, he said.

Carver also is one of three members of a committee that oversees how the money is spent.

"We all have to breathe the air here, and I think it's a necessary step we took," Carver said.

The money is the first the fund has paid out so far. The fund expects to dole out an estimated total of \$7 million over the next five years in Kern County.

Though the buses look almost the same as regular ones, they are expected to reduce emissions significantly.

Each releases about one ton fewer pollutants each year compared with buses made before 1980, many of which are still on the road, according to the Kern County Superintendent of Schools office.

"It's a real plus for the whole community," Nipp said. "It's a fairly effective way of dealing with air pollution."

The buses cost about \$160,000 each compared with diesel buses that cost about \$120,000 each, said Superintendent of Schools Transportation Services Director Paul Linder. But the compressed natural gas costs about one-third less than diesel, which helps offset the cost, Linder said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District also paid \$317,772 toward the buses' purchase. The Superintendent of Schools office put in \$470,232, and \$36,832 came from the state Small School Districts Bus Replacement program.

Reider said his office's goal is to buy seven more of these buses each year until all the buses are clean-burning.

Blowup over global warming

Air board director quits after governor fires her boss

By Kevin Yamamura - Bee Capitol Bureau
Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger played the part of global warming hero on magazine covers this spring, but carrying out that role is now proving more difficult than it once seemed.

Minutes after the Republican governor described why he fired the state's respected leader of the agency responsible for overseeing greenhouse gas reductions, Democrats criticized Schwarzenegger for micromanaging and environmentalists questioned his motives.

The governor's recent actions left him without two leading officials at the California Air Resources Board -- Chairman Robert F. Sawyer and Executive Director Catherine Witherspoon, who quit Monday in response to Sawyer's firing last month.

Legislative leaders said the vacancies pose a significant threat to the 2006 law passed by Democrats and signed by Schwarzenegger to reduce greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020 in California. Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, scheduled an oversight hearing Friday to investigate the governor's reasons for firing Sawyer and examine the implications for California's global warming efforts.

"It seems like the tires are flat on the juggernaut," said Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland. "These are cutting-edge things that (the governor) is trying to do, and arguably the two most important people responsible for implementing and enforcing that law are gone. ... I think this is a huge setback for the governor and his administration on an issue that he's been going around the world touting."

Sawyer's firing may have represented a collision between the governor's political image and Sawyer's practical considerations as ARB chairman.

Schwarzenegger said the problem was that "the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing." He blamed Sawyer for the ARB's June 14 vote to support a waiver that would allow San Joaquin Valley polluters until 2024 to comply with federal Clean Air Act restrictions.

Sawyer, a retired University of California, Berkeley, professor, said he backed the delay because the pollution-control technologies needed to comply would not be available for on-road trucks until 2010 and not until 2014 for construction equipment. He said the technologies have a "turnover time" of 10 years.

But the governor has built his green image this year around fighting the federal government on environmental issues, attracting international media attention particularly for taking on the Bush administration. The governor has threatened to sue the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for not giving California permission to set its own tailpipe emissions standards.

Schwarzenegger seemed particularly incensed Monday that Sawyer's vote didn't conform to his own political message. He tried to downplay the ARB departures as "stumbling blocks."

"And then we have an agency, the Air Resources Board, go out and say to the Bush administration: 'Hey, how about giving us an extension of 11 years?' " Schwarzenegger said. "It doesn't make any sense."

Yet environmentalists and Democrats say that the ARB chairman has always had a fair level of independence. They accused the governor of playing politics with Sawyer's chairmanship and trying to consolidate his power over how the 2006 greenhouse gas law, Assembly Bill 32, is implemented.

"The only reason (Sawyer and Witherspoon) are gone is because clearly the administration was tying their hands behind their backs in not allowing them to do the job that they needed to do in order to begin the implementation phase of AB 32," Núñez states in a recording released by the speaker's office.

Democrats remain disappointed with the low number of early actions by the ARB on greenhouse gas reduction. The board last month adopted only three steps, including the restriction of some refrigerants used in automobile air conditioners.

Witherspoon blamed the governor's aides for the lack of early actions. She also said Schwarzenegger's use of the San Joaquin example was a "cover-up" that allowed him to fire Sawyer for moving too aggressively against businesses on AB 32 regulations.

"I believe the governor cares deeply about air quality, but no one in his inner circle does," she said. "The day-to-day orders that we receive from the Governor's Office are to do less, to delay, to not burden industry."

But Schwarzenegger communications director Adam Mendelsohn said Witherspoon's accusations present the situation out of context. He said the governor was frustrated that the ARB did not act aggressively enough earlier this year to be in a position to approve more action items at last month's meeting.

The governor stepped further into the political fray when he said Monday that the next ARB chief must support a market-based system that allows companies to emit more greenhouse gases in California if they buy credits from clean firms elsewhere in the world. Schwarzenegger has signed agreements to link California to other states and nations under such a "cap-and-trade" system.

But Perata and Núñez expressed concern with the governor's use of that criterion as a prerequisite. Democrats assert that AB 32 never mandates cap-and-trade and includes it only as one option to be studied.

Environmentalists, who believe the governor needs to focus on strong restrictions before using cap-and-trade, also questioned Schwarzenegger's criteria. They see them as yet another sign of the governor's demand for control over the ARB rather than allowing it to act independently.

"I've never heard of a governor setting a standard like that, saying an ARB chair should have a certain position," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, a lobbyist for the American Lung Association of California. "He should choose an ARB chair that will improve public health and air quality rather than requiring a position on a specific issue."

Air agency's boss quits in protest

She says Arnold's staff meddles with job

BY LAURA KURTZMAN, Associated Press

in the Modesto Bee, L.A. Daily News and O.C. Register, July 3, 2007

SACRAMENTO (AP) -- The executive director of the California Air Resources Board resigned Monday, saying the Governor's Office had made it impossible for her to do her job by interfering with the implementation of the state's landmark anti-global-warming law.

"I think they're trying to control it, and they don't have a very cogent vision for what's needed," said Catherine Witherspoon, who has managed the agency since 2003.

Witherspoon's resignation comes days after the board's chairman, Robert Sawyer, a retired University of California at Berkeley engineering professor, was ousted by the governor.

Witherspoon said she felt some of the governor's top aides were trying to keep information from him, so he would not endorse more far-reaching action to put the anti-global-warming law into effect. The law, AB 32, is the nation's first cap on greenhouse-gas emissions from motor vehicles and calls for reductions up to 25 percent by 2020.

The picture Witherspoon painted of a governor who was being misled and micromanaged by a staff trying to weaken the anti-global-warming law out of fear it would harm businesses is at odds with the governor's carefully tended public image as an environmental champion.

Echoing a complaint that Democratic legislative leaders have made, Witherspoon said top Schwarzenegger aides were focused on using market-based mechanisms to implement the so-

called Global Warming Solutions Act, even though other methods, particularly regulation, are needed to meet the law's tough standards.

Pressed for details on the controversy at a news conference Monday, Schwarzenegger insisted he was "in sync" with his staff on how to implement the anti-global-warming law.

"My goal is to implement AB32, and I don't get caught up in all this dialogue," Schwarzenegger said.

Schwarzenegger said Monday he rescinded Sawyer's appointment because Sawyer had voted to grant a delay on new air standards for the San Joaquin Valley. The governor said that move contradicted the state's push to get a federal waiver to regulate tailpipe emissions under the Clean Air Act.

But Witherspoon said the governor was mixing apples and oranges. The Central Valley vote was on had to do with regulating ozone — which she said is an entirely separate issue from reducing heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide — while the federal waiver has to do with lowering vehicle-emission standards as part of in the effort to reduce global warming. Moreover, she said, it was the governor's own staff who pushed for the ozone delay.

She said Sawyer was fired because two top Schwarzenegger aides — Susan Kennedy, the chief of staff, and Dan Dunmoyer, the cabinet secretary — wanted him to go more slowly in implementing the global warming law.

"It's utterly mystifying," she said. "They're firing quality people who know how to do the job, emeritus people with 50 years' experience."

Adam Mendelsohn, Schwarzenegger's communications director, has said just the opposite was true and that it was Sawyer who was moving too slowly in implementing the law. He said Sawyer was unable to lead the agency and was "scrambling at the last minute" to find ways to implement AB32.

But on Monday, Sawyer released the transcript of a voicemail he said he received from Dunmoyer asking him to adopt fewer so-called early action items under the global warming law — in other words, to go more slowly in implementing it.

"There might be some bumpy press, but that is still the best way to go do it right and do it consistent with the statute," Dunmoyer said, according to the transcript.

In an interview Monday, Sawyer said the governor's office originally wanted only one early action item, but he pushed for more.

He said the governor's staff did not understand the global warming issue well enough to implement the law, and that is why the technical issues should be left to the Air Resources Board.

"The fundamental difficulty is there really is no one in the office who understands the science, the technology, the economics or even the legal aspects of air pollution control," he said. "Now is the time for the governor's staff to get out of the way and let the professionals do the job."

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, said he was troubled by the upheaval at the air board and promised to hold a hearing to investigate Sawyer's and Witherspoon's allegations on Friday.

"It's been pretty clear to me that the administration has been putting undue pressure on the leadership of the Air Resources Board," Nunez said during a Monday news conference. "The administration was tying their hands behind their back."

In addition to having Witherspoon and Sawyer testify, Nunez said he will ask the governor's office to send a representative "to speak directly, openly and honestly about what exactly is going on with the implementation of AB32. We have some very serious concerns."

Witherspoon has worked for the air board two separate times, from 1981 to 1994 and again from 1999 until now. She became executive director in 2003.

Schwarzenegger appointed Sawyer board chairman in December of 2005.

ARB official quits in air rift

Director accuses the governor's top aides of stymieing cleanup.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau
The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- The executive director of the California Air Resources Board quit Monday -- and on her way out the door accused Gov. Schwarzenegger's top aides of blocking efforts to clean the air and fight global warming.

"I believe the governor cares deeply about air quality, but no one in his inner circle does," Catherine Witherspoon said in an interview with The Bee.

"The day-to-day orders that we receive from the Governor's Office are to do less, to delay, to not burden industry."

Witherspoon's departure comes less than a week after Schwarzenegger fired air board Chairman Robert Sawyer. The Governor's Office said last week that one reason for the firing was Schwarzenegger's displeasure with the air board's approval of an 11-year delay of a smog clean-up deadline for the San Joaquin Valley.

But Witherspoon said that was a "cover-up." In reality, she said, Schwarzenegger's aides were worried that Sawyer was moving too aggressively on rules to implement the state's new global warming law, known as AB 32.

"The real reason for firing him was climate-change policy," she said. Sawyer "sought to adopt more early-action measures than the Governor's Office wanted."

Schwarzenegger denied the charges when asked about them at a news conference. He downplayed the recent turnover as "stumbling blocks" and said he and his staff were "in sync."

"My goal is to implement AB 32," he said. "I don't get caught up in all this dialogue. I just get caught up in one thing -- and this is to create action."

The upheaval started 12 days ago when Schwarzenegger said he was "deeply disappointed" in the board's actions on Valley air. The state air board recently approved a completion target for smog cleanup of 2024, more than a decade beyond the initial deadline set by the federal government.

Witherspoon and Sawyer supported the plan, agreeing with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District that the technology simply does not exist to clean the air sooner.

Sawyer, in an interview with The Bee on Monday, said Schwarzenegger's critique of the delay "came out of nowhere" because "we told them [the governor's staff] exactly what was going to happen and why."

Sawyer said Schwarzenegger forced him out because he refused to follow orders from the governor's staff.

The crux of the clash -- Witherspoon and Sawyer said -- is over the implementation of AB 32, which calls for a 25% cut in the state's greenhouse gases by 2020.

Sawyer, a professor emeritus of energy at the University of California at Berkeley, said he pushed for more regulations than the administration wanted, including a proposal that would have required the use of highly reflective paints on automobiles to keep their interiors cooler.

The lobbying by Schwarzenegger officials reached "a level where it was compromising the integrity of the board," Sawyer said.

He cited an effort by Schwarzenegger Cabinet Secretary Dan Dunmoyer to stop the paint rule.

In the end, the board approved three "early action measures": a new rule calling for less carbon in fuel, a restriction on the sale of "do-it-yourself" automotive refrigerants, and caps on methane emissions from landfills. It did not approve the paint rule.

Schwarzenegger spokesman Adam Mendelsohn said the communications were appropriate.

"Ultimately, the governor is going to be accountable for the [board's] success," he said. "We will work closely with them while respecting their independence."

Witherspoon, 48, led the air board for more than three years and had mixed reviews.

Environmentalists criticized her earlier this year after she sent a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency suggesting an extension to the 2015 federal deadline for cleaning up fine-particle pollution in the Valley and South Coast Air Basin. She later said the letter was misunderstood and did not apply to the Valley.

Overall, however, she and Sawyer had a solid reputation among environmentalists, said Bill Magavern, senior representative for Sierra Club California.

The departure of the two top air board officials led Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, to call a legislative hearing for Friday to review the situation.

Meantime, Valley air officials still are dealing with fallout from the governor's critique of the smog plan.

Officials met with the governor's staff Monday to defend the plan. But the governor shows no sign of backing off.

At the news conference, Schwarzenegger said the 11-year delay will make the state look hypocritical as it lobbies the federal government for tough new rules on tailpipe emissions.

"It doesn't make any sense -- it makes us look ridiculous," he said.

To a large degree, the governor has staked his political reputation on his credentials as an environmentalist, traveling the world to promote the new global warming law. Yet, according to Sawyer, Schwarzenegger has delegated too much to his staff.

"I was very disappointed that I served 18 months and never once sat down in a meeting with the governor to discuss those issues," he said. "I don't think his staff is properly informing him on what the issues are or how the process works."

Schwarzenegger has called for the Valley district and state board to toughen the smog plan within one month. But Sawyer and Witherspoon said nothing could be done, citing the length of time it will take for new regulations to take effect.

State air authorities are expected this year to approve unprecedented rules to reduce pollution coming from existing fleets of trucks. Many fleet owners are expected to replace trucks or install pollution-control devices to comply with new standards.

But the rules, which would begin reducing smog-making gases in 2014, would be too late to help the Valley achieve clean air until after 2020, state officials have said. Environmentalists disagree.

It is possible for the Valley to attain the federal smog standard by 2017, though it would require more aggressive action such as banning the use of older, polluting diesel engines on the worst-air days, said Nicole Davis, of the nonprofit International Sustainable Systems Research Center, based in Southern California.

Regulators have resisted such measures.

"If you push too hard, you're going to shut down business," Sawyer said. "You don't shut down the economy and put the Valley into a recession as a way of solving the air pollution problem."

State air board official resigns

The second key person to leave the agency in a week says the governor's team 'has lost its way' on fighting pollution.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

Saying that the Schwarzenegger administration "has lost its way on air quality," a top California air official resigned Monday.

Catherine Witherspoon, executive director of the California Air Resources Board, resigned less than a week after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger fired the board's chairman, Robert Sawyer, who said he was dismissed for aggressively pursuing greenhouse gas emission reductions.

In interviews with The Times, Witherspoon said there had been a pattern of interference by the governor's top staff in favor of industry lobbyists seeking to weaken or stall air pollution regulations, including the state's landmark global warming law and proposed regulations on diesel construction equipment and wood products containing formaldehyde.

"They were ordering us to find ways to reduce costs and satisfy lobbyists," she said, adding that the governor's chief of staff, Susan Kennedy, and Cabinet Secretary Dan Dunmoyer took the lead on pressuring the agency staff and board chairman.

Adding insult to injury, she said, members of the governor's staff have publicly blamed her and Sawyer for not doing more — conduct she described as "Orwellian ... a triumph of appearances over reality."

The departures, along with the planned resignation of the top Cal/EPA deputy, Dan Scopek, regarded by many as a key appointee on climate change policies, could hamper California's efforts to implement its landmark Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32) and other tough air pollution controls, legislative leaders and some observers said.

But Schwarzenegger's spokesman and Scopek himself said the opposite was true.

"What's important for the administration is to make sure the right leadership is put in place at [the air resources board] and that this state is able to aggressively meet its AB 32 commitment and clean its air," said Adam Mendelsohn, the governor's deputy chief of communications, who dismissed Witherspoon's charges as the comments of a disgruntled employee.

Witherspoon also accused Democratic legislative leaders of being so focused on criticizing the governor that, like Schwarzenegger, they were not making decisions about which industries need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and by how much.

The Democrats have consistently fought for mandatory regulations, while Schwarzenegger has advocated a cap and trade approach, in which limits are set on emissions but businesses can exceed the limits by purchasing credits from others that have stayed under the cap. She said both approaches were needed.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles), the author of AB 32, called the loss of the air board's top two leaders "a fiasco" and ordered legislative hearings to be held Friday to investigate the reasons for their departures.

"I don't want this issue to impact our fight on global warming," he said. "The spotlight is on California, and I don't want people in other states to say, 'Oh, look at California. AB 32 is falling apart, so we're not going to do anything either.' "

Nuñez said he agreed with Witherspoon that legislators need to "push harder" to make the law work.

Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland), said, "I think it's less about Democrats than it is about the governor's own centerpiece of his administration, which is global warming...."

"These are cutting-edge things he's trying to do, and arguably the two most important people responsible for implementing and enforcing that law are gone."

Witherspoon had worked at the air board for 27 years, starting as a clerk. She was an often controversial figure, particularly after she signed secret agreements with the nation's largest railroads to voluntarily reduce diesel pollution rather than mandating reductions.

"I'm happy to be going out with a roar and not a whimper," Witherspoon said. "My objective is to make sure people understand what is going on so it can be straightened out."

Mixed messages in the air

The governor's actions often work against his tough talk on pollution.

By Evan Halper, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

SACRAMENTO — As Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger travels the world exhorting countries to act quickly to reduce harmful gas emissions, his administration is helping California's construction industry stall tough new air quality rules at home.

In public hearings and private negotiations, administration transportation officials are working to slow a planned crackdown by regulators on aging diesel construction equipment — among the state's most noxious machinery and a major source of greenhouse gases.

The officials successfully lobbied a board appointed by the governor to delay voting on draft regulations for dealing with the polluters. The officials argued that the new rules, years in the making, were too tough on the construction industry — which is a major Schwarzenegger donor.

Last week, the governor fired the board's chairman, who said he was let go after pushing ahead with aggressive pollution curbs. The administration said the chairman was fired because he wasn't tough enough — a claim environmentalists find dubious. On Monday, the board's executive officer quit with a sharply worded criticism of the administration.

The departed air board officials said they were frustrated by administration meddling in both the diesel construction equipment crackdown and the implementation of landmark legislation the governor signed last year to curb global warming.

It is not the first time the governor has made bold promises on the environment while his administration dragged its feet behind the scenes. Schwarzenegger has vetoed bills that would put new taxes on polluters, spur the development of alternative fuels and help clean the air. He has accepted \$1 million in campaign cash from the oil industry, and he had threatened to veto the global warming bill unless it was made more business-friendly.

Although the governor says he wants to hold polluters more accountable, administration officials recently signaled lawmakers that Schwarzenegger may not support a separate legislative crackdown. Lawmakers are proposing to prohibit the dirtiest equipment from being used on public works projects bankrolled with state bond money approved by voters last year.

Going slow on goals

Environmentalists say the governor's lofty goals clash with his administration's go-slow approach on construction equipment, which could put California out of compliance with minimum federal clean-air requirements and make a mockery of his repeated pledge to reduce state air pollution by half.

"He's not going to get there if they water down these regulations," said Kathryn Phillips, an advocate with the nonprofit group Environmental Defense.

Schwarzenegger says he's just trying to be realistic.

"We have to have the ramp-up time and look at always what technology is available and how we can meet a certain goal," the governor said in a recent interview. "It is walking a fine line."

Fumes from heavy diesel construction equipment are linked to tens of thousands of cases of asthma and 1,100 deaths annually, state studies show. Scientists and economists say staying in compliance with the federal Clean Air Act would cost the industry more than \$3 billion over the next two decades. Construction companies say it could be at least three times that amount.

"We don't believe the technology is evolving fast enough" to do what the new state regulations would require, said Mike Lewis of the Construction Industry Air Quality Coalition, a trade group. "We're not arguing with the goal. But you are asking us to replace 85% of our equipment by 2020. We don't believe there is enough money in the industry to do this."

Construction companies and builders have buried regulators with letters and e-mails saying the regulations would put them out of business.

Officials at the Air Resources Board, a state entity that enforces environmental laws, say the costs are manageable for a multibillion-dollar industry whose business is about to boom because of a surge in public works spending.

They also say a delay could cost the state \$1.2 billion in lost federal transportation funding.

The 112,000 tractors, excavators, backhoes and other construction vehicles that regulators are targeting are the second-largest source of diesel pollution, after trucks and buses, in California. The rules drafted by the Air Resources Board would require construction firms, over the course of several years, to replace their dirtiest equipment or retrofit the machines with devices that capture soot.

Doing so, state scientists say, would avoid hundreds of deaths each year and thousands of cases of asthma. Such a move would cut smog and curb the release of greenhouse gases.

It also would arguably heed the governor's call to spur the economy with tough environmental rules that create a need for new technologies — technologies that could be developed by the state's budding "clean tech" industry.

"Technology, in the end, is going to save the day," the governor said at a news conference in London on Tuesday. "The faster we can improve technology with the green cars, green engines and so on, the better it is."

A few weeks earlier, however, top administration officials were encouraging the Air Resources Board to step on the brakes and consider industry pleas to push back the cleanup deadlines.

Small-business concerns

Gregg Albright, deputy director of the state Department of Transportation, said at a May hearing that the administration is "very concerned about the impacts on small business." He also expressed concern that the draft rules would drive up the cost of building roads and other infrastructure.

"When the industry says to us that this has an effect, even a modest effect, on cost ... we listen," Albright said.

The construction industry has developed close ties with Schwarzenegger. It worked with him to pass the \$37-billion public works bonds that he championed, taking a lead role in the campaign to pass the measures and contributing more than \$6 million to the effort.

Construction companies and related industries also directly contributed at least \$1.3 million to the governor's reelection campaign and kicked in tens of thousands of dollars after the election to help pay for the governor's inauguration celebrations.

Environmentalists were dismayed to see the air board put off its vote from late May until mid-July so the effect on industry could be examined more fully. And they were chagrined that the administration, through Albright, offered to spend the weeks leading up to the vote working to give industry more of a voice in the regulations.

The state officials who drafted the regulations noted at the hearing that they had been taking input from the construction industry for more than two years and carefully considered it in the rules they wrote.

"These emission reductions are absolutely needed to address public health," said Catherine Witherspoon, the air board's executive officer. "Doing less or waiting longer will mean more people will breathe unhealthy air, suffer adverse health effects and will also delay attainment of the federal air standards."

According to internal memos obtained by The Times, the administration sought in early June to have Witherspoon removed from her job, but the board declined to fire her. Within weeks, board Chairman Robert Sawyer — already at odds with the administration over how aggressively to combat global warming — was fired. Witherspoon resigned Monday.

Administration officials acknowledge that they were displeased by some of Sawyer's actions. But they said they were troubled most by his board's vote to seek a delay on certain federal air quality standards in the San Joaquin Valley.

Lawmakers lobbied

But meanwhile, the administration was lobbying the Legislature against limiting construction equipment emissions. Caltrans Director Will Kempton cautioned lawmakers against requiring contractors to use cleaner equipment in projects funded with state bond money.

"I'm concerned that by putting these kinds of requirements in place, we will be impacting the level of competition" in the bidding process for state projects, he said. "The governor made clear he wants all people to share in the benefits" of the public works funded by the bonds.

Lawmakers moved the requirement for cleaner machines along anyway, and it is now part of state budget negotiations. But it would not take effect unless the governor signed off on it.

Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto), who drafted the legislative proposal, said he still hoped the governor would do so. He called Kempton's testimony "inconsistent with the governor's positions on global warming and climate change."

"The governor has done a great job of laying out a positive agenda on the environment," Simitian said. "Now it is time to roll up the shirt sleeves and make it real."

Deconstructing pollution

In a recent report, the Union of Concerned Scientists analyzed the public health effects of heavy diesel construction equipment in California.

Estimated annual health effects (2005)

	Statewide	South Coast Air Basin*
Premature deaths	1,132	731
Respiratory hospitalizations	669	383
Cardiovascular hospitalizations	417	274
Asthma and other lower respiratory symptoms	30,118	20,941
Lost work days	182,940	123,439
School absences	331,040	175,339

* Includes most of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties

Source: Union of Concerned Scientists

Good news: Temps may hit just 107 on Friday Initial forecasts said mercury might rise to 112 by end of the week

By Gerald Carroll, Staff writer
Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

Weather-watchers are backing off from a hellish initial forecast for the coming weekend.

Early predictions had temperatures reaching as high as 112 by Friday before trailing off Sunday. Chris Stachelski of the National Weather Service station in Hanford said that while Friday will still be hot, temperatures likely will top out at 107.

"This system is tracking a little cooler right now," Stachelski said.

A massive high-pressure dome of air that had been centered over the Four Corners area of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico has moved slowly over California, causing a revision of forecasts, Stachelski said. Even so, the 100-degree mark is expected to be surpassed Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and possibly Sunday.

Don't look for relief anytime soon.

"Conditions are right for a repeat of this the following week," Stachelski said.

Kaweah Delta Hospital spokeswoman Angela Bouma recommends common-sense precautions when it comes to extreme heat.

"Stay hydrated and stay protected," Bouma said.

Residents should make sure plenty of water and sunscreen are available, she said. That lesson seems to have taken hold, since the hospital seldom sees increased patient loads when temperatures surge, Bouma said.

But bad air often accompanies high heat, said Anthony Presto, spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The district announced that Tulare County air reached the orange level - "unhealthy for sensitive groups" - on Monday and was expected to do so today.

Rising temperatures are accompanied by rising levels of ozone, a corrosive gas that can negatively affect breathing in humans. In the Valley, that gas can have nowhere to go.

"The Central Valley, surrounded by mountains, is like a pot with a lid on it," Presto said.

Presto recommends that people stay indoors when it's hot.

Governor urged to consult Senate

Two have recently left Air Resources Board

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

Amid recent departures from the Air Resources Board, Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter is urging Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to consult with the Senate before appointing new positions.

Executive Director Catherine Witherspoon resigned on Monday. Robert Sawyer was fired in June as the chairman of the Air Resources Board in part because of the board's approval of a controversial plan to postpone the timeframe for cleaning the San Joaquin Valley's air, according to the governor's office.

Florez wrote the governor to "restore confidence in the Air Resources Board" and "avoid any delay that may result in the confirmation process."

"Cleaning the air is too important to do any less," Florez said in a written statement.

The Air Resources Board aims to protect public health by reducing air pollution in the state.

Florez, who has been critical of the Air Resources Board, said that recent departures should be left behind and the board should re-focus its mission.

Governor accused of playing politics on warming rules

2 members of air board exit, saying he pressured them

Greg Lucas, Matthew Yi, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

Sacramento -- Democratic state lawmakers are questioning Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's commitment to fight global warming after the governor's top deputies thwarted an attempt by the state's air quality regulators to enact their own measure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The executive director of the California Air Resources Board, Catherine Witherspoon, resigned Monday -- three days after Schwarzenegger fired the board's chairman, Robert Sawyer, who had said he wanted to be more aggressive in curbing pollution that causes global warming than does the Republican governor, who signed the state's landmark bill last year.

Sawyer, a 72-year-old engineer, made public on Monday a transcript of a voice mail, left on his phone by one of Schwarzenegger's aides before the air board's meeting last month, urging the chairman to adopt only the three rules acceptable to the governor.

"The governor has made his name across the world as the jolly green governor, and now we have the regulators saying his inner circle has pressured them to go slow because the big industries don't want us to go too quickly," said Jamie Court, president of the Foundation for Taxpayers and Consumer Rights, a consumer watchdog group.

Democratic legislative leaders also criticized Schwarzenegger for his office's apparent role in determining the list of emissions-reducing rules that the 11-member air board approved on June 21.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, D-Los Angeles, primary author of the global warming bill that requires the state to reduce greenhouse gases by 25 percent by 2020, called for an oversight hearing on Friday.

"The only reason why they're gone is clear: The administration was tying their hands behind their backs in not allowing them to do the job that they needed to do," Nuñez told reporters.

Schwarzenegger said Sawyer was fired for his lack of leadership, while Sawyer said he was terminated because he disobeyed edicts from the governor's top aides to adopt three new regulations at its June meeting when he had wanted to approve a fourth rule, one requiring reflective automobile paints. The paint, by reducing the heat absorbed by cars, is supposed to cut down on the use of air conditioners.

The changes -- requiring oil companies to produce gasoline with less carbon dioxide by 2010, prohibiting sales of refrigerant to replenish auto air conditioners and forcing landfills to curb methane emissions -- were the first of several that the state is expected to approve in the next five years to meet the ambitious goals of the global warming measure.

Sawyer and two other board members voted against the three changes, saying they were insufficient.

The air board shakeup has as much to do with politics as air quality. After Schwarzenegger pledged to sign AB32, his chief of staff, Susan Kennedy, tried to shape the measure in the Legislature. After AB32 became law, the governor's staff tried to control its implementation, according to lawmakers and others involved in passage of the bill.

Much of the responsibility for implementation rests with the air board, whose members are appointed by the governor, but who have a long history of independence.

"Every signal the board got from the governor's office staff was, 'Slow down, don't hurt industry, don't get ahead of us on greenhouse gases,'" Witherspoon said in an interview on Monday.

The state's fight against global warming pits environmentalists against some of the most powerful special interests in the Capitol -- oil companies, automakers, farmers, builders, manufacturers and other business entities who argue the costs of compliance will hamstring their profitability and competitiveness.

Since the bill took effect in January, those interest groups have sought a go-slow implementation of its policies. Cathy Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer of the Western States Petroleum Association, said she believes the air quality rules already approved are challenging enough to industry.

"From my perspective ... I think the governor has laid out an aggressive target in meeting the goals of AB32," she said Monday.

Adam Mendelsohn, the governor's communications director, said last week that the governor wanted the board to adopt more than the three items last month. But on Monday, Sawyer made public a transcript of a voice mail message sent to him by Dan Dunmoyer, Schwarzenegger's Cabinet secretary, on the morning the board met.

Dunmoyer told Sawyer the governor's office was "very comfortable" with those three items, but added: "We really prefer you to stick to the three that we believe are vetted well, that are likely to succeed. That is the direction from the governor's office."

Mendelsohn said Monday that the board's lack of leadership held the list of recommended actions to three and added that Dunmoyer was trying to prevent the board from straying into adopting other policies that would prove ineffective.

"The air board was scrambling to put items on the table that neither made sense nor would have an impact. They potentially were going beyond their legal authority, especially the cool paints initiative," Mendelsohn said.

"When Dunmoyer called, it was to stop them from moving forward with regulations that had no impact and made no sense."

But Bill Magavern, a Sierra Club lobbyist, said Dunmoyer's message shows that the governor's top aide was trying to "dictate to the air board chair that he not take any more actions to reduce global warming pollutions -- and really second-guess the scientific judgment of the eminent scientist the governor appointed to lead the board."

Smog fighters furious at Bush administration

BY LISA FRIEDMAN, Washington Bureau
L.A. Daily News, July 3, 2007

WASHINGTON — California leaders reacted furiously Monday to newly released documents on the Bush administration's attempt to thwart the state's first-in-the-nation cap on greenhouse-gas emissions from cars.

In more than 70 pages of internal e-mails and memos released by the U.S. Department of Transportation, agency officials openly acknowledged their opposition to California's request for a waiver allowing the state to enact the nation's toughest-in-the-nation auto-emissions standards.

The documents also show that the Auto Alliance — a trade group representing Ford Motor Co., DaimlerChrysler and others — provided the agency with a breakdown of auto facilities and employees in each congressional district. DOT officials then used the list to systematically target lawmakers likely to oppose California's request.

"Just hit the members/senators with the really big facilities. No need to call those with small distribution centers or anything," Simon Gros, deputy chief of staff to Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, instructed his staff in a June 7 e-mail.

The DOT turned over the documents late Friday to Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee chairman. He

demanding that information after obtaining evidence the agency was urging lawmakers to fight California's waiver request.

"This initial set of documents reveals that the Bush administration was working hand in glove with the auto industry against state efforts to fight global warming," Waxman said Monday, adding that the committee

intends to acquire more materials from the DOT.

Waxman had previously questioned the legality of using federal resources to lobby members of Congress.

In releasing the memos, Transportation Department General Counsel D.J. Gribbin maintained the calls did not violate anti-lobbying restrictions.

"DOT's interest in informing the public and their elected representatives about this important issue is consistent with its longstanding and well-known support of a single, national regulatory scheme for motor vehicle fuel economy," Gribbin wrote.

In 2005, California requested a waiver so it could implement state legislation cutting greenhouse-gas emissions from cars by 25 percent and from sport utility vehicles by 18 percent, starting in 2009.

While California has the authority under the Clean Air Act to enact stringent air-pollution rules, it but must have a federal waiver to implement them.

Environmental Protection Agency officials say they continue to review California's waiver request and will decide by December. California leaders, however, say the memos expose the administration's bias toward the auto industry.

"It's stunning, but not surprising, that the Bush administration will do everything in its power to thwart California's effort to reduce greenhouse gases," said California Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez.

U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, expressed outrage over the memos and said she is scheduling a hearing with EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson to look into the agency's decision making.

"The inappropriate manipulation of the California waiver process was designed to make the California waiver controversial, when in fact it is necessary and essential in the fight against global warming," said Boxer, D-Calif. "The Bush administration must be held accountable once again for their underhanded effort to block environmental progress."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has already warned the EPA that a lawsuit is "inevitable" unless the agency makes a decision by Oct. 24.

On Monday, a Schwarzenegger spokesman said the governor is "very concerned" about the Transportation Department's lobbying efforts, but that it would not impact the state's efforts to obtain the waiver.

According to the released e-mails, agency officials targeted lawmakers in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, Missouri, Delaware and Tennessee with a suggested script:

"If California were to receive this waiver, this could lead to a patchwork of regulation on vehicle emissions, which would have significant impacts on the light-truck and car industry. If asked our position, we say we are in opposition of the waiver."

The message urged lawmakers to submit comments to the EPA opposing the waiver by a June 15 deadline. It suggests that sufficient feedback might prompt the agency to extend the comment period. Such an extension — which did not occur — was supported by the auto industry. It would have further delayed any decisions about California's waiver.

One e-mail from DOT General Counsel and former White House Counsel Jennifer Brosnahan laid out a strategy for delay.

"Apparently the autos have asked for more time, and some governors oppose an extension. That's why it would help to have different governors support an extension — helps justify a decision to extend the comment period," she wrote to colleagues in a June 6 e-mail.

Núñez had two words for the documents: "Dirty tricks."

Anti-smog law impeded, papers say

Documents released by federal Department of Transportation expose bias toward auto industry, California leaders say

By Lisa Friedman, MEDIANEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

WASHINGTON -- California leaders reacted furiously Monday to newly released documents detailing the Bush administration's attempt to thwart the state's landmark anti-smog law.

In more than 70 pages of internal e-mails and memos released by the U.S. Department of Transportation, agency officials openly acknowledge their opposition to California's request for a waiver allowing it to enact first-in-the-nation emissions standards.

The documents also show that the Auto Alliance -- a trade group representing Ford Motor Co., DaimlerChrysler and others -- provided the agency with a breakdown of auto facilities and employees in each congressional district. DOT officials then used the list to systematically target lawmakers likely to oppose California's request.

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"That's why it would help to have different governors support an extension -- helps justify a decision to extend the comment period," she wrote to colleagues in a June 6 e-mail. Nunez had two words for the documents: "Dirty tricks."

Russell City plant gets thumbs-down

Energy commission recommends against natural gas facility due to aviation safety hazard posed by heat plumes

By Matt O'Brien, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, July 3, 2007

HAYWARD -- Staff members with the California Energy Commission announced Monday that they do not think the Russell City Energy Center should be built because the proposed 600-megawatt power plant could pose an "aviation safety hazard."

The report possibly derails a project that many in Hayward assumed was a done deal because the state agency originally certified it in 2002.

The most significant concern, commission staff members said in their recommendation against the project, is not so much air pollution as it is the "thermal plumes, or columns of warm air," that could interfere with aircraft approaching Hayward Executive Airport.

"People have become more knowledgeable about how thermal plumes affect the approaches to airports, especially for light aircraft, which are the majority of those that use the Hayward airport," commission spokeswoman Susanne Garfield said.

San Jose-based power plant developer Calpine Corp. has been planning to build the massive natural gas-burning plant since the late 1990s but was forced to reapply after an economic downturn and other delays put the project on the back burner.

Calpine eventually lost control of the plot of industrial land for which the project was initially approved, and it faced internal financial troubles leading to a bankruptcy filing in late 2005.

But it found another plot of land about 1,300 feet away, adjacent to Hayward's wastewater treatment plant, and entered a partnership last year with General Electric that would help finance the plant's construction.

Pacific Gas & Electric also signed a 10-year power purchasing contract with Calpine last year, meaning the investor-owned utility would provide natural gas to the plant, and then procure the electricity generated by the plant to power tens of thousands of Bay Area homes and businesses.

Mike Argentine, director of project development for Calpine, said he remains optimistic that the plant will be approved by the commission and get built.

The commission staff's 494-page report released Monday is a preliminary assessment, not a final one. The project still has to go before the full board of appointed energy commissioners.

Argentine said the commission's concerns about thermal plumes stem from a difference in opinion on the effects those plumes might have on low-flying aircraft.

In March, a commission report said it was looking into the problems that hot, mostly invisible, high-velocity plumes had created at another power plant site in Southern California.

"Plumes are thermally buoyant during colder weather and more likely to maintain their vertical velocity at higher altitudes under calm, cool conditions," the report said.

There is also a difference in opinion on how to interpret Hayward's land-use plan for its busy general aviation airport off of Hesperian Boulevard.

"I think the city believes we are consistent with that plan and the (California Energy Commission staff) believes we are not, apparently," Argentine said. "We believe that we are consistent with the plan."

The Hayward City Council twice voted in support of the plant -- first at the original site and again last year after Calpine resumed its interest in pursuing the project. One of the perks of the plant's construction would be Calpine's promised contribution of \$10 million to help build a new public library.

But a number of Hayward residents have opposed the plant based on environmental concerns. Opposition grew in the last year after another company, Texas-based Tierra Energy, proposed a second, 115-megawatt power plant in the same area, leaving neighbors wondering why Hayward was being targeted as a site for polluting energy projects.

Residents began fighting against the second plant proposal, and the Hayward City Council joined them and unanimously voted against it in March.

Teresa Frank, who lives and teaches at an elementary school near the proposed plants, said she is concerned about the pollutants both plants would emit and was happy to hear that the commission staff is recommending against the Russell City project.

"What really upset us is they thought we were not going to fight it," she said. "We're not irrational. We are not the hillbillies they thought we were."

Garfield said the thermal plumes are the most significant concern, but the commission staff also is recommending a laundry list of conditions on the project, which are different from those originally imposed in 2002.

Argentine, however, said that other than the dispute over aircraft dangers, Calpine is "pretty happy" with the parts of the report it has seen, including those dealing with air quality issues.

The plant would work on a combined-cycle system that circulates some of the exhaust produced during the combustion process back into a steam turbine.

On Monday afternoon, the commission posted its assessment of the Russell City plant on its Web site at <http://energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/russellcity--amendment/documents/index.html>.

A similar state assessment of the other proposed plant, Eastshore Energy Center, is due at the end of this month. Commission staff members said they are also examining aviation safety concerns surrounding that proposed plant.

New department focuses on public health

By Sandy Kleffman

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald , Tuesday, July 3, 2007

RICHMOND - California has split up its giant Department of Health Services to put greater emphasis on battling diseases and ensuring the safety of food, water and [air](#).

The move has long been sought by health advocates who argued the state department was so busy overseeing the huge Medi-Cal program that it paid insufficient attention to public health issues.

Now, Health Services will be split in two. One section will oversee Medi-Cal, while the new Department of Public Health will deal with bioterrorism, avian flu, West Nile virus, tuberculosis, obesity and a host of other health threats.

"We intend to make it a much more efficient and effective organization," said Dr. Mark Horton, the state public health officer who will oversee the new department.

"I hope to take this department to a new level of excellence here in California."

To highlight the change, officials took reporters on a tour last week of the state's Public Health Laboratory in Richmond, which the new department will oversee.

Opened in 2001, the lab spreads across 39 acres just off Interstate 580. It houses 1,300 employees who use cutting-edge technology to detect the latest infectious diseases, protect the food supply, discover genetic abnormalities in newborns and identify human exposure to toxic chemicals.

In one room, scientists conducted one of five tests for West Nile virus as the season for the disease is about to get underway.

"It can be a very tricky test," said Dr. Carol Glaser, chief of the virus lab. "When (county) public health labs have any question at all, they forward it here."

In another section, scientists tested specimens from tuberculosis patients to determine whether they have a form of the disease that is resistant to commonly used drugs. They can get an answer the same day the sample arrives, said Edward Desmond, who oversees the unit.

But it can take weeks to learn whether it is an extensively drug resistant form, like the kind that recently drew international attention after an American with the disease boarded a plane to Europe, endangering his fellow passengers.

To avoid such mishaps, scientists at the Richmond lab are working on faster tests for extensively drug resistant TB, Desmond said.

Outside in the parking lot sits a \$500,000 emergency mobile lab, purchased with federal homeland security funds, ready to travel to the site of a major refinery release, chemical spill or other accident that threatens [air quality](#).

Specialized monitoring equipment will enable scientists to drive through a neighborhood to test the air for contaminants and get immediate results.

The equipment can tell which contaminants are present, whether levels are considered safe and which way the wind is blowing. The goal is to determine when it would be safe for people to return to their neighborhoods, said senior research scientist Stephen Wall.

The Department of Public Health is a result of legislation by Sen. Deborah Ortiz, D-Sacramento, who argued that the state has neglected its public health system for decades.

In 2005, the nonpartisan Little Hoover Commission warned that the state health system was losing microbiologists and other scientific experts because the private sector offers higher pay.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also sought the new department, saying he views it as a way to put more emphasis on emergency preparedness.

In 1870, California became the second state in the nation to establish a public health department, but Gov. Ronald Reagan disbanded it in the 1970s.

In recent years, groups such as the California Medical Association have campaigned to have it reinstated.

The department will not receive any new resources. But events during the past six years including terrorist attacks, the anthrax scare, and concerns about SARS and avian influenza have highlighted the need for it, Horton said.

Issues that may have been further down on the priority list in the old Health Services Department can rise to a higher level in the new department, Horton said.

It also will tackle such matters as the aging population, expanding electronic medical records, upgrading the state's computer database and improving patient safety.

Report: China Had Pollution Deaths Nixed

The Associated Press

in the San Francisco Chronicle, Washington Post and Contra Costa Times, July 3, 2007

BEIJING -- Beijing persuaded the World Bank to cut from a report findings that pollution has caused about 750,000 premature deaths in China each year, the Financial Times reported.

The World Bank said Tuesday that the paper referred to a report that had not been finalized.

Produced with the cooperation of Chinese government ministries over several years, the report found the deaths took place mainly from air pollution in large cities, the Financial Times reported on its Web site late Monday, citing unnamed bank advisers and Chinese officials.

"This is a joint research project with the Government and the findings on the economic costs of pollution are still under review," the bank's Beijing office said in a statement. "The final report, due out soon, will be a series of papers arising from all the research on the issue."

Advisers to the research team for the report _ "Cost of Pollution in China: Economic Estimates of Physical Damages" _ told the Financial Times that health and environment ministry officials suppressed a detailed map showing which parts of the country suffered the most deaths and other information.

"The World Bank was told that it could not publish this information. It was too sensitive and could cause social unrest," one unnamed adviser told the Financial Times.

Cut from the report were findings that air pollution levels in Chinese cities cause 350,000 to 400,000 premature deaths each year, the newspaper said. Another 300,000 people die from exposure to poor air indoors, and more than 60,000 die due to poor quality water, it said.

The mortality information was "reluctantly" cut by the World Bank, according to advisers to the project, the newspaper said.

Guo Xiaomin, a retired environment ministry official who coordinated the Chinese research team, told the FT that some material was omitted from the pollution report because of concerns that the methodology was unreliable. He also said such information on premature deaths "could cause misunderstanding," the report said.

The bank statement said comments had been received from the Chinese government, particularly the State Environmental Protection Administration, or SEPA.

It said some subjects such as economic cost calculations " ... have been left out of this conference edition due to still some uncertainties about calculation methods and its application. How to possibly make use of these materials will be continuously worked on during and after the conference."

A spokesman for SEPA, who would not give his name, said he had not heard of the World Bank report or the data it cited, and would not accept a copy of the FT story.

Asian Countries Eye Warming Problems

By MARGIE MASON - The Associated Press
in the Washington Post, July 3, 2007

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia -- Officials from more than a dozen Asian countries met Tuesday in Malaysia to outline health problems their populations are facing in relation to a rise in global temperatures.

Officials discussed ways to work together to limit the fallout in a region expected to be hit hard by flooding, drought, heat waves, mosquito-borne diseases and waterborne illnesses.

The World Health Organization estimates climate change has already directly or indirectly killed more than 1 million people globally since 2000. More than half of those deaths have occurred in the Asia-Pacific area, the world's most populous region. Those figures do not include deaths linked to urban air pollution, which kills about 800,000 worldwide each year, according to WHO.

"We're not going to have a magic bullet to fix climate change in the next 50 years. We need to motivate an awful lot of people to change their behavior in a lot of different ways," said Kristie Ebi, of the WHO's Global Environmental Change unit, a lead author on the health chapter in a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N. network of 2,000 scientists.

Ebi said health officials are about a decade behind other sectors, such as water and agriculture, in taking a look at what climate change could mean and how to deal with it. She said countries seeing the effects firsthand are now starting to realize that any problems with air, water or food will directly affect people's health. The poorest countries in Asia and Africa are expected to suffer the most.

Scientists have predicted droughts will lower crop yields and raise malnutrition in some areas, dust storms and wildfires will boost respiratory illnesses, and flooding from severe storms will increase drowning, injury and disease such as diarrhea. Increasing temperatures could also lead to the growth of more harmful algae that can sicken people who eat shellfish and reef fish. People living in low-lying coastal areas will also face more storms, flooding and saltwater intrusion into fresh groundwater that is vital for drinking.

Singapore saw mean annual temperatures increase 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit between 1978 and 1998, while the number of dengue fever cases jumped 10-fold during the same period.

Malaria has recently reached Bhutan and new areas in Papua New Guinea for the first time. In the past, mosquitoes that spread the disease were unable to breed in the cooler climates there, but warmer temperatures have helped vector-borne diseases to flourish.

Melting of glaciers in the Himalayas have created about 20 lakes in Nepal that are in danger of overflowing their banks, which could create a torrent of water and debris capable of wiping out villages and farms below.

The four-day workshop in Malaysia lays the groundwork for a ministerial-level meeting on the topic next month in Bangkok, Thailand.

[Capital Press Weekly Editorial Fri., June 29, 2007](#)

Reality collides with air rules

In a perfect world, greenhouse gas would just be a minor irritant to the planet and rivers would have plenty of water for delta smelt and farms. But some of society's biggest challenges defy a simple solution. That's true of our quest for cleaner air.

Air quality remains a top concern for state and federal regulators in many areas of California, especially in the San Joaquin Valley.

The valley's geography, meteorology and population are all working against air quality improvement and reduction of ozone and particulates.

On June 21, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced new, tough ground-level ozone standards. Bound by the federal Clean Air Act, EPA is required to revise ozone standards every five years, taking into account the latest scientific evidence about the health effects of ozone, the major component of smog.

The proposed ozone standard is within a range of 0.070 and 0.075 parts per million. The current eight-hour standard is 0.08 parts per million. The potential public health benefit of the new standard "could be in the billions of dollars," especially to those with asthma or other lung diseases, according to EPA.

Ozone is a serious issue. Ground-level ozone is created by the reaction of nitrous oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight. Sources are many - motor vehicle exhaust, electric utilities, industrial firms and farms.

Jon Scholl, an EPA spokesman, said the proposed standard means potentially tighter regulation in California.

"California has one of the larger non-attainment areas under the current standard of any other region of the country, so the prospect of having a further tightening down of that standard is something that will be of significant interest and I am sure a significant concern," Scholl said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air District's Seyed Sadredin has reported considerable progress in the past 25 years in making the air cleaner.

Valley smog has been reduced by 80 percent and residents are no longer exposed to unhealthy levels of particulates 10 microns in size and smaller.

But Sadredin is also a realist. Several areas of the valley remain non-attainment areas for the federal standards and he has requested an "extreme" designation and a delay until 2023 to meet federal air goals.

"Even if money were no object and we ignored all logistical constraints, the technology available today and in the foreseeable future could not achieve enough reductions in smog-forming emissions for these areas of the Valley to attain the clean-air standard any sooner than 2023," Sadredin said in a May district newsletter.

The new ozone standards come at a time when farmers already face numerous new regulatory constraints on agricultural burning, the use of certain pesticides and their use of internal combustion engines.

In many instances, farmers themselves have stepped up to help.

Shirley Batchman, a spokesperson for California Citrus Mutual, said farmers have voluntarily adopted conservation practices and changed out older engines to improve air quality.

"We have changed out thousands of engines long before there was an engine rule," Batchman said. "The change out of engines has been phenomenal. A lot of growers have taken advantage of the AgIce program through the utilities. Ag has definitely stepped up to the plate."

In terms of air quality improvement, there is economic pain in achieving the public health gain that EPA desires. The San Joaquin Valley Air District has estimated the regulatory cost of meeting the eight-hour ozone standard of 0.080 parts per million to be about \$20 billion. Ratcheting it down farther as EPA proposes will be more costly.

It is critical that research and technology be allowed to catch up to the regulation. EPA conceded as much when the agency announced a two- year, \$14.6 million study of animal feeding operations on June 14.

"We don't know enough about what is being emitted into the atmosphere," Dr. Al Heber of Purdue University, the lead scientist for the study stated in an EPA news release. "This study will give the EPA the data it needs to make science-based decisions."

Setting the regulatory bar higher as EPA has done on ozone will not make the air any cleaner. Only time, money, innovation and cooperation among all concerned can solve a complex challenge like this.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, July 3, 2007](#)

Look past spin doctors on transit budget

THE SPIN doctors are at it again (letter, "Governor isn't cutting transit budget," June 25).

The governor's Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing wants us to believe that Schwarzenegger's proposal to cut \$1.3 billion in public transit funding is no big deal.

The proposed cuts will take \$145 million from the operating budgets of Bay Area transit systems, including over \$22 million from BART, \$10 million from AC Transit and \$36 million from MUNI. This is real money that translates into a loss of real service — for instance, AC Transit's share means a loss of about 10,000 hours of bus service.

Reliable public transit reduces traffic congestion and car use, helping solve our traffic problems while at the same time reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

It is also the lifeline for 14.5 percent of the Bay Area's population: 61 percent of AC Transit riders and 46 percent of MUNI bus riders do not own or have access to a car, making them transit dependent and they will feel the governor's cuts the most.

When the voters adopted Proposition 1B last November, they voiced their desire to add \$4 billion into transit projects — not offset the governor's budget cuts.

They meant to supplement, not replace, the funding that transit systems need to pay their drivers and run their service. Proposition 1B's capital funding can be used only for infrastructure — not to operate transit service, as the letter writer implies.

Given the state's ambitious climate change goals and the critical role public transit plays in the mobility and quality of life for Bay Area communities, this is the time to be improving public transit — not raiding its coffers.

Juliet Ellis, Executive Director
Urban Habitat, Oakland

[N.Y. Times commentary, Tuesday, July 2, 2007:](#)

Moving Beyond Kyoto

By AL GORE

Nashville - WE — the human species — have arrived at a moment of decision. It is unprecedented and even laughable for us to imagine that we could actually make a conscious choice as a species, but that is nevertheless the challenge that is before us.

Our home — Earth — is in danger. What is at risk of being destroyed is not the planet itself, but the conditions that have made it hospitable for human beings.

Without realizing the consequences of our actions, we have begun to put so much carbon dioxide into the thin shell of air surrounding our world that we have literally changed the heat balance between Earth and the Sun. If we don't stop doing this pretty quickly, the average temperature will increase to levels humans have never known and put an end to the favorable climate balance on which our civilization depends.

In the last 150 years, in an accelerating frenzy, we have been removing increasing quantities of carbon from the ground — mainly in the form of coal and oil — and burning it in ways that dump 70 million tons of CO₂ every 24 hours into the Earth's atmosphere.

The concentrations of CO₂ — having never risen above 300 parts per million for at least a million years — have been driven from 280 parts per million at the beginning of the coal boom to 383 parts per million this year.

As a direct result, many scientists are now warning that we are moving closer to several “tipping points” that could — within 10 years — make it impossible for us to avoid irretrievable damage to the planet's habitability for human civilization.

Just in the last few months, new studies have shown that the north polar ice cap — which helps the planet cool itself — is melting nearly three times faster than the most pessimistic computer models predicted. Unless we take action, summer ice could be completely gone in as little as 35 years. Similarly, at the other end of the planet, near the South Pole, scientists have found new evidence of snow melting in West Antarctica across an area as large as California.

This is not a political issue. This is a moral issue, one that affects the survival of human civilization. It is not a question of left versus right; it is a question of right versus wrong. Put simply, it is wrong to destroy the habitability of our planet and ruin the prospects of every generation that follows ours.

On Sept. 21, 1987, President Ronald Reagan said, “In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all the members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.”

We — all of us — now face a universal threat. Though it is not from outside this world, it is nevertheless cosmic in scale.

Consider this tale of two planets. Earth and Venus are almost exactly the same size, and have almost exactly the same amount of carbon. The difference is that most of the carbon on Earth is in the ground — having been deposited there by various forms of life over the last 600 million years — and most of the carbon on Venus is in the atmosphere.

As a result, while the average temperature on Earth is a pleasant 59 degrees, the average temperature on Venus is 867 degrees. True, Venus is closer to the Sun than we are, but the fault

is not in our star; Venus is three times hotter on average than Mercury, which is right next to the Sun. It's the carbon dioxide.

This threat also requires us, in Reagan's phrase, to unite in recognition of our common bond.

Next Saturday, on all seven continents, the Live Earth concert will ask for the attention of humankind to begin a three-year campaign to make everyone on our planet aware of how we can solve the climate crisis in time to avoid catastrophe. Individuals must be a part of the solution. In the words of Buckminster Fuller, "If the success or failure of this planet, and of human beings, depended on how I am and what I do, how would I be? What would I do?"

Live Earth will offer an answer to this question by asking everyone who attends or listens to the concerts to sign a personal pledge to take specific steps to combat climate change. (More details about the pledge are available at al Gore.com.)

But individual action will also have to shape and drive government action. Here Americans have a special responsibility. Throughout most of our short history, the United States and the American people have provided moral leadership for the world. Establishing the Bill of Rights, framing democracy in the Constitution, defeating fascism in World War II, toppling Communism and landing on the moon — all were the result of American leadership.

Once again, Americans must come together and direct our government to take on a global challenge. American leadership is a precondition for success.

To this end, we should demand that the United States join an international treaty within the next two years that cuts global warming pollution by 90 percent in developed countries and by more than half worldwide in time for the next generation to inherit a healthy Earth.

This treaty would mark a new effort. I am proud of my role during the Clinton administration in negotiating the Kyoto protocol. But I believe that the protocol has been so demonized in the United States that it probably cannot be ratified here — much in the way the Carter administration was prevented from winning ratification of an expanded strategic arms limitation treaty in 1979. Moreover, the negotiations will soon begin on a tougher climate treaty.

Therefore, just as President Reagan renamed and modified the SALT agreement (calling it Start), after belatedly recognizing the need for it, our next president must immediately focus on quickly concluding a new and even tougher climate change pact. We should aim to complete this global treaty by the end of 2009 — and not wait until 2012 as currently planned.

If by the beginning of 2009, the United States already has in place a domestic regime to reduce global warming pollution, I have no doubt that when we give industry a goal and the tools and flexibility to sharply reduce carbon emissions, we can complete and ratify a new treaty quickly. It is, after all, a planetary emergency.

A new treaty will still have differentiated commitments, of course; countries will be asked to meet different requirements based upon their historical share or contribution to the problem and their relative ability to carry the burden of change. This precedent is well established in international law, and there is no other way to do it.

There are some who will try to pervert this precedent and use xenophobia or nativist arguments to say that every country should be held to the same standard. But should countries with one-fifth our gross domestic product — countries that contributed almost nothing in the past to the creation of this crisis — really carry the same load as the United States? Are we so scared of this challenge that we cannot lead?

Our children have a right to hold us to a higher standard when their future — indeed, the future of all human civilization — is hanging in the balance. They deserve better than a government that censors the best scientific evidence and harasses honest scientists who try to warn us about looming catastrophe. They deserve better than politicians who sit on their hands and do nothing to confront the greatest challenge that humankind has ever faced — even as the danger bears down on us.

We should focus instead on the opportunities that are part of this challenge. Certainly, there will be new jobs and new profits as corporations move aggressively to capture the enormous economic opportunities offered by a clean energy future.

But there's something even more precious to be gained if we do the right thing. The climate crisis offers us the chance to experience what few generations in history have had the privilege of experiencing: a generational mission; a compelling moral purpose; a shared cause; and the thrill of being forced by circumstances to put aside the pettiness and conflict of politics and to embrace a genuine moral and spiritual challenge.

Al Gore, vice president from 1993 to 2001, is the chairman of the Alliance for Climate Protection. He is the author, most recently, of "The Assault on Reason."

[Tri-Valley Herald Editorial, Tuesday, July 3, 2007](#)

EPA follows Bush's lead on curbing emissions

FOLLOWING SUIT with President Bush's stall tactics, the chief of the Environmental Protection Agency faced House Democrats and said we have to wait until late next year to learn whether the EPA will issue regulations controlling greenhouse gas emissions.

This goes along with Bush, who brought four agencies together — including the EPA — to mull over a plan to regulate emissions and have it completed for Bush to look at only weeks before he leaves office. This flies against a Supreme Court ruling that says the EPA has the clear authority to regulate such emissions.

Why is it taking so long for the EPA to act? EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson told the House special committee on global warming that "we're moving in a thoughtful, deliberate manner, looking at every appropriate option."

Hanging in the balance is an EPA decision on whether to grant California permission to enforce its own, more stringent tailpipe emission standards — 11 other states would follow suit. Johnson refused to say whether or not the agency would grant such a request.

To complicate matters, an official with the Department of Transportation has been lobbying an unidentified member of Congress to urge Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to oppose the state's EPA request, saying it would adversely "impact the auto facilities in your district." Does this smell like a dirty tailpipe?

Johnson refused to tell committee members even his own personal stance on the amount of emissions coming from vehicles, saying endangerment was a "legal term of art" that had to be studied.

Is he kidding? Either the EPA doesn't know what to do or doesn't want to act. We suspect the latter.

California Attorney General Jerry Brown predicted the EPA will not grant the state its request. Schwarzenegger said in April he would give the EPA 180 days to respond to the waiver request or the state would file a lawsuit against the agency.

It appears California is headed for a showdown in court against the EPA, expected to begin in October. We encourage other states and agencies to support California in this cause keep the pressure on the federal government until the waiver comes through. If the fight must be taken to a federal court, then so be it.

Unfortunately, it's clear we cannot count on the Bush administration to take action. The real consequence is that while we go through this lengthy process, our air quality suffers. But we have to start somewhere.