

Today a 'Spare the Air' day

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Aug. 3, 2007

Today is a "Spare the Air" Day in Tulare County, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced.

Officials said residents can help reduce and control pollution by:

- Taking public transportation.
- Avoiding the use of gas-powered yard-care equipment.
- Avoiding the use of water craft and off-road vehicles.

Recycler going green

Facility set to reduce harmful emissions

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 6, 2007

A project under way will make a city-owned recycling center even more environmentally friendly.

Yes, even recyclers can be polluters.

The Mount Vernon Greenwaste Facility -- where grass clippings, tree limbs and other yard waste is made into compost -- will replace its diesel-run equipment with electric-powered machines by the start of next year.

The changeover will drastically reduce the amount of nitrogen oxides the facility creates. NOX, as it's known, is primarily responsible for smog, the haze that clouds our air and obscures mountain views.

The upgrades will bring the facility into compliance with an air regulation that requires operators of stationary diesel equipment to seek cleaner alternatives, said Kevin Barnes, the city's solid waste director. Another newly passed air rule that takes affect in the next few years will require diesel trucks at the facility to have cleaner burning engines, further reducing the facility's harmful emissions.

The current changeover at the facility will cost about \$3 million.

Part of the cost is covered by a grant for \$280,000, which came from money paid for through developer impact fees.

The city's solid waste department also will solicit money from local developers looking to offset pollution caused by new housing tracts and other developments by paying for air quality improvements.

The rest of the conversion will be covered by money the department has stowed away over the years in anticipation of the project.

Barnes said city garbage rates are not expected to increase because of the project.

When studying ways to reduce the facility's emissions, the city also explored solar and natural gas power as options.

But electricity was the cheapest and most efficient alternative, Barnes said.

By the numbers

197,820 - Tons of grass clippings, tree trimmings and other yard waste processed at the city's greenwaste facility in 2005-06

51,412 - Gallons of diesel used by mulching and sorting equipment at the facility in one year (at a cost of \$153,855)

Worried about all the smoke?

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 6, 2007

Don't fret: The reddish-gray pall that darkened local skies over the weekend came from a blaze well out of town.

Smoke from the Zaca fire in Santa Barbara County is seen at sunset in Lake Isabella in this photo taken last month.

The month-old Zaca fire in Santa Barbara County is at least 25 miles away from the southwest corner of Kern County, according to Tony Diffenbaugh of the Kern County Fire Department.

Hundreds of folks have called county fire stations from Pine Mountain Club to Tehachapi, Diffenbaugh said, thinking a fire had broken out nearby.

Residents in east Bakersfield and Walker Basin called The Californian with similar concerns Sunday.

If the fire does head our way, Diffenbaugh said, locals would have several days warning.

Meteorologist Paul Jones of the National Weather Service said winds are pushing the smoke here.

"The winds are blowing the smoke ... right into the valley," Jones said, with most of it heading over Bakersfield.

The Zaca fire started July 4.

The blaze was 70 percent contained Sunday, officials said.

So far, it has chewed through more than 56,200 acres, mostly in the Los Padres National Forest northwest of Santa Barbara.

More than 2,300 firefighters along with helicopters and air tankers are battling the human-caused blaze, officials said. Eight Kern County firefighters are helping.

The fire is threatening 515 structures. A dozen people have been injured so far, according to a news release from fire officials.

Rails come 'round again

Fresno looks to the past for public transportation that could enliven, spark downtown development.

By Matt Leedy

The Fresno Bee, Monday, August 6, 2007

Fresno leaders are looking into an old idea to deliver new life downtown.

Think streetcars. That's a key element of the latest revitalization plan from Mayor Alan Autry's administration.

Officials propose spending about \$60 million for a two-mile rail line that would connect downtown with the more vibrant Tower District.

A similar strategy was used more than a century ago when electric streetcars shuttled Fresnoans between a bustling downtown and quiet Tower District suburbs to the north.

Streetcars are being used by more than two dozen cities across the United States as a way to jump-start development and reduce air pollution.

Fresno hopes to follow suit. About 30 city officials, elected leaders and local developers are traveling to Portland, Ore., this week to look at its streetcar system and the residential and

commercial development that has sprung up around it. The city is picking up the group's \$20,000 airfare and lodging tab.

In Portland, they will examine a 7.2-mile streetcar loop that links downtown with several neighboring districts. It cost \$100 million, and another mile will soon be added to the route for \$14.5 million.

Since it opened in 2001, more than \$2 billion in development has occurred within two blocks of the streetcar rail line, Portland officials say. This includes about 7,200 new homes and 4.6 million square feet of offices, stores and hotels.

New buildings that hug Portland's rail line have stores, restaurants and offices at street level and condominiums above. The city also has added new sidewalks, benches, street lights and trees along its streetcar route -- all meant to encourage people to stroll, shop and live downtown.

Parks, sculptures, fountains and murals followed Portland's streetcars downtown. And grocery stores and dry-cleaning businesses have opened as more people have chosen to live downtown.

Traffic congestion downtown has decreased and air pollution dropped, Portland officials said.

"We've used transit to stimulate development and reduce our reliance on automobiles," said Steve Iwata, a Portland transportation planning supervisor.

It's a model Fresno hopes to duplicate.

Fresno leaders envision streetcars running past condominiums, coffee shops and cafes that would fill downtown with activity during the day. They imagine new clubs, bars and restaurants lighting up the night.

But for that dream to become a reality, city officials will need to convince residential and commercial developers that it's possible.

Reza Assemi, a developer and artist who is responsible for downtown's Vagabond Lofts and is building the H Street Lofts nearby, shares some optimism.

New streetcars "could be a catalyst we need to get more people downtown and more homes downtown," said Assemi, whose residential developments on Broadway are within a block of City Hall's proposed light-rail line.

He said his next project -- which would feature row houses, apartments and commercial space near Broadway, Fulton Street and Divisadero Street -- could be finished in two years.

Tentative plans call for a streetcar rail line on Fulton Street that would run from Olive Avenue in the Tower District, through the Fulton Mall, to Kern Street next to downtown Chukchansi Park.

Eight streetcars would be powered by overhead electric lines. They would share a lane with other vehicles and travel 15 to 20 mph. It would cost \$1 to ride, and they would run from about 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The city plans to pay for the bulk of the project with money from Measure C, the county's half-cent sales tax that Fresno County voters extended last November. The Measure C funds officials hope to tap are reserved for new technology. They also plan to apply for state and federal transportation grants.

Construction could start in 2009 and be finished in two years, officials said.

But first it must receive City Council approval.

Council Members Blong Xiong and Cynthia Sterling say it's a plan worth considering. Xiong is making the Portland trip, and Sterling is sending her chief of staff.

Xiong says he likes the rail idea for its potential to get people out of their cars. He believes streetcars could make traveling around downtown easier, because visitors could park anywhere along the route and avoid traffic headaches. And a more leisurely downtown experience would entice more people to eat and shop in the area.

Sterling agrees and hopes Tower residents would hop on the streetcars to check out downtown. Her district includes downtown.

In 2004, she used money from her council district budget to help fund a lunchtime trolley loop from downtown to the Tower District. The trolley, which more closely resembled a small bus, was stopped because of poor ridership.

Sterling said poor promotion and little advertising were to blame for the trolley's failure.

For a streetcar to be more successful, assistant city manager Bruce Rudd concedes there must be more downtown attractions and points to planned development along Kern Street as possibilities.

A Pasadena developer recently purchased the 1922 Virginia Hotel on Kern Street and has begun remodeling it. Stores are slated for the ground floor and offices for the two upper floors.

The city has \$3.5 million budgeted to purchase the old Gottschalks building on the southeast corner of the Fulton Mall and Kern Street. The city will clean it up and hopes to sell it to a private company that would redevelop it with a sports theme.

If a Kern Street-to-Olive Avenue streetcar line is successful, it could be expanded to include stops near Fresno City College and the Fig Garden Village shopping center, Rudd said.

Before they were replaced with buses in 1939, streetcars were a common way for Fresnoans to get to work, shop and run other errands throughout the city.

The transportation system allowed businesses to locate almost anywhere, as long as they were close to the rail line so customers could get to them easily, said Catherine Rehart, a Fresno historian.

There is a resurgence of streetcars throughout the country, with more than 60 cities planning to put in new rail lines, according to the American Public Transportation Association.

Reconnecting America, a nonprofit group pushing for streetcars, predicts that by 2030, the number of households near light rail lines will reach nearly 16 million, up from 6 million today.

Sterling said it's about time Fresno boarded the streetcar trend: "We're on the late train, but we'll get there."

Crafting a new kind of clean

With the phasing out of dry-cleaning staple perc, firms seek out safer, greener alternatives.

By Robert Rodriguez

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, August 5, 2007

Second-generation dry cleaner Steve Berglund knew the day was coming when the effective but toxic solvent essential to his business would be outlawed in California.

Berglund, owner of Mastercraft Solvent Free Dry Cleaning in Fresno, invested about \$17,000 five years ago to buy an environmentally friendly system that uses a spray of water and detergent to clean clothes.

It was money well spent.

This year, the California Air Resources Board announced the phaseout of perchloroethylene, or perc.

Used since the 1930s, the solvent is now classified as a toxic air contaminant and potential carcinogen by state and federal health officials.

And by 2023, California's 4,500 dry cleaners, of which many are mom-and-pop operations, must find safer alternatives to launder and remove stains from clothes.

Not everyone is ready to toss out their favorite stain fighter, and some are balking at the cost. Industry officials estimate the price of new cleaning equipment can range from \$25,000 for a water-based machine to more than \$100,000 for a liquefied carbon dioxide system.

To help offset that cost, the state is providing \$10,000 grants to dry cleaners switching to safer methods.

The California Air Resources Board has issued 10 grants this year and about an equal number last year, ARB spokesman Dimitri Stanich said.

Berglund is doing all he can to help spread the word. Several weeks ago he launched a national Web site that serves as a clearinghouse for consumers searching for non-perc cleaners.

The Web site -- <http://www.professionalwetcleaning.com> -- has 11 cleaners listed. "My feeling is why stick with something that has been shown to be a problem?" said Berglund, who uses the Green Jet machine. "There are other choices."

Berglund's Fig Garden Village store will also be the site of an industry-organized demonstration of alternative cleaning methods on Aug. 19 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. State officials will also be on hand to answer questions about the new regulations.

Similar meetings have been held in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Industry officials say that the switch is not going to be easy for some.

"There are some operators that just won't be able to afford it," said Lynnette Watterson, owner of Crystal Cleaning Center in San Mateo and past president of the California Cleaners Association. "That is an unbelievable expense for a little business."

Watterson estimates that 80% of the state's dry cleaners still use perc, and she is among them.

"My personal hope is that someone will come up with a new solvent that is effective and that everyone can live with," Watterson said. "Truth is, I am at the point of possibly needing a new machine and I am thinking about buying one that uses perc."

If she does, she'd better hurry.

Beginning Jan. 1, no new perc machines will be installed in California. And perc machines that are 15 years or older must be removed by 2010.

Manufacturers who sell perc for dry cleaning are also required to keep monthly sales records.

Frank Silva, owner of Fashion Cleaners in Hanford, isn't ready to stop using perc after 33 years in the business.

Silva believes the state's concerns are overblown: "This is the best solvent for dry cleaners, and I can't believe they are getting rid of it. I may use it even after the deadline."

State officials recommend compliance.

Violators would be dealt with by the ARB's legal staff and enforcement division.

Fresno dry cleaner Louis Martinez, owner of Falcon Cleaners in Fresno, is among the converts.

Although he agrees that perc cleans clothes well, he prefers to use a safer product.

Perc, a colorless, nonflammable liquid with a sweet smell, is used largely by dry cleaners. Perc is also used to degrease metal.

Martinez moved away from perc several years ago and is contemplating buying another non-perc cleaner called Green Earth that could cost at least \$64,000.

"It is not cheap," Martinez said. "But in the long run I think this is a good thing for cleaners and the environment."

Berglund's customers say they prefer the nonsolvent method that also eliminates the "dry cleaning" smell clothes often have.

"Yeah, I don't miss that at all," said John Baker, a Mastercraft customer.

"I take my clothes to Steve because he provides quality customer service, and if they do it in a green way, then I am all for it."

Low temps are breath of fresh air

Ozone levels dropping, returning to normal

By Saqib Rahim and Julie Sevrens Lyons, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, August 6, 2007

Gone are the sweltering days of summer 2006, when the heat wreathed the Bay Area with a choking doughnut of smog, and ozone levels violated federal standards 12 times.

With a relatively cool July behind us and just one violation so far, Smog Season 2007 has gotten off to a relatively good start.

Temperatures in the East Bay have been cooler than average this summer, and much cooler than scorching weather last summer that stoked high smog levels.

Livermore's average high temperature in July, for instance, was 86 this year, 3 degrees cooler than the historical average the National Weather Service reported.

That means ozone levels are coming down from last summer, and coming back to normal.

"Temperatures pretty much throughout the West have been normal or below normal this year," said Steve Anderson, a weather service forecaster.

Livermore temperatures reached 100 degrees on three days in June and July this year, compared with 13 days in those two months last summer.

Temperatures approaching 100 degrees are essential to creating unhealthy smog levels in Bay Area air.

Hot, windless weather accelerates the photochemical reaction that converts pollutants from vehicles, factories, lawn mowers and other sources into ozone, the main ingredient in smog.

In recent years, the number of days violating the federal air quality standard has stayed well under 10, with occasional forays into the teens. Bay Area ozone levels have steadily improved over the last 50 years, as improved pollution control technologies have counteracted rising energy use.

So while a year with 20 or 30 violations might have been acceptable in the 1960s or '70s, even 2006's 12-day tally was quite unusual.

The main ingredient in smog, ground-level ozone, forms on very hot days when gasoline emissions get cooked in the sky with pollution from other sources. The result is "like sunburn on the lungs," said Air Quality Management District spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick, and it can aggravate asthma, among other breathing conditions.

So with June and July under our belts, can we make it out of summer ozone-free?

Forecasters are uncertain, since weather patterns are notoriously fickle. But based on their current analyses, forecasters aren't envisioning any extreme heat in the days ahead. Computer models suggest that temperatures will continue to be normal — in the mid 80s — or below normal, Null said, for at least the next two weeks.

"We've been fairly fortunate," said Diana Henderson, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Monterey. "Temperatures really haven't gone up dramatically for any length of time."

But the Management District's window of caution stretches to Oct. 12 this year, so anything's possible.

"It's been a fairly cool summer, but you never know," said Ashley Nguyen, senior transportation planner at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "I can't predict the weather, but August and September may be warm months."

If the cool spell keeps up, Bay Area residents may miss out on one of the perks of smoggy summers — free transit through the air district's Spare the Air program.

On Spare the Air days, when smog reaches high levels, commuters are offered free public transportation to keep pollution-belching cars at home.

This year, the district says it can fund four days of free transit on most services, except BART, Caltrain, ACE or Bay ferries, which are only free until 1 p.m.

If it stays cool through Oct. 12, Nguyen said, the MTC will probably shift the \$8.5 million Spare the Air budget to other programs, such as car buybacks, vehicle incentive programs and garbage truck retrofits.

Six free transit days last year — which covered all systems, including BART — temporarily raised ridership 15 percent, according to a report by the MTC and air quality district. Critics said the program attracted rowdy teens, tourists and other joyriders, making it hard to determine how well the program worked.

MediaNews staff writer Denis Cuff contributed to this story.

UC panels plan outlines cut in transportation fuels

By Betsy Mason, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, August 6, 2007

University of California experts released a blueprint last week for reducing the states carbon emissions from transportation fuels

10 percent by 2020.

The work was commissioned by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who wanted an assessment of a reduction he called for in January with an executive order, and to outline ways to achieve that goal.

This is really transformational, said Daniel Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UC Davis and co-author of the report.

Not only does this reduce emissions, it also improves energy security by reducing oil imports, and it should reduce local air pollution as well.

The plan is unlike any other in the world today because it **doesn't** mandate how the reductions will be achieved, Sperling said.

Transportation fuels account for 40 percent of the states greenhouse gas emissions. The report suggests that gasoline and diesel fuel providers can take a variety of tacks to reduce emissions including blending more biofuel into the petrofuels and improving efficiency at refineries.

Companies will also have the option to buy emissions credits from other producers, electric utilities or biofuel and hydrogen suppliers.

Were providing the structure and the target and the rules and leaving it up to industry to respond in whatever way they feel is the most cost-effective, Sperling said.

Though a 10 percent reduction in California alone will not have a significant impact on climate change, other states, countries and the federal government have followed California's lead on other environmental measures.

Sperling said this flexible approach to reducing emissions is the most likely to be adopted elsewhere, rather than mandating specific solutions such as increasing ethanol fuel use.

We think this is a much more efficient and effective way, he said.

Sperling and co-author Alex Farrell, director of the Transportation Sustainability Research Center at UC Berkeley, recommend starting slowly with modest reductions in the early years with bigger cuts in the future as new technologies become available.

Even a 10 percent reduction would require dramatic changes, he said. We will be beginning the process of transforming the energy industry.

In May, Sperling and Farrell released the first part of the report, which looked into the technical details and outlines six scenarios based on different technologies that could achieve the 10 percent reduction. They concluded the goal was ambitious but attainable.

In June, the California Air Resources Board voted to adopt the new standard and is expected to finish the regulatory process to implement the standard by December 2008.

The report predicts the new standard will result in a wider variety of fuel choices for Californians, and will spur development of the necessary infrastructure such as ethanol fueling stations and electric vehicle charging stations.

This will lead to more diversity of fuels because it provides incentives to invest in them, Sperling said.

Anti-smog agency approves pollution credits

Associated Press

L.A. Daily News, August 5, 2007

DIAMOND BAR - Southern California's anti-smog agency is letting power plant developers buy credits allowing them to pollute more in a move that could speed construction of nearly a dozen plants.

The move was approved Friday by the board of the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Under the rules change, developers could buy credits to offset some of the pollution they otherwise would be required to curb through costly and elaborate equipment. The credits were originally created for schools, hospitals and buildings housing emergency agencies.

They would cost \$92,000 per pound of coarse particulates and \$34,000 per pound of sulfur oxide and bring in an estimated \$419 million.

The AQMD covers Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Supporters of the credits said the region will need more electricity to supply its surging population, and new, cleaner plants could replace older coal-fired plants that are being phased out under state law.

"As our region continues to grow, we will need more clean energy to prevent rolling blackouts," AQMD board Chairman William A. Burke said.

Current plants supply enough electricity for the Los Angeles

basin but new plants are needed "as a preventative measure," argued AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood.

"It takes at least four to five years to plan for and construct a power plant, and thus we can't afford to wait until we're in a crisis to take steps to increase generating capacity," Atwood said.

Critics argued that the rules change would simply increase pollution. "It's outrageous. Our air district has assumed the role of polluter proponent," said Tim Grabel, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Dozens of people picketed outside before the meeting. Many testified to the board that their communities already had high levels of respiratory problems because of existing industrial pollution.

The vote didn't entirely please Mike Carroll, an attorney representing six of the proposed power plants.

"We are happy the board recognizes the need for additional power generation," he said. "However, they put so many restrictions on us it could potentially kill the project."

State energy regulators also must approve the new plants.

Credits offer profits for going green

By Dale Kasler and Jim Downing - Bee Staff Writers
Sacramento Bee, Sunday, August 5, 2007

SAN FRANCISCO -- Offsets are controversial, meanwhile, because they let polluters pay someone else, maybe thousands of miles away, to tackle the problem. In that sense, they discourage the eco-tech innovation the market is meant to foster, critics say.

"Reducing our greenhouse gas emissions is not a job that California can hire out to other jurisdictions," said Bill Magavern, senior representative with Sierra Club California. "We need to actually reduce the emissions coming from energy use in California."

A market wouldn't replace traditional regulation and isn't a foregone conclusion. AB 32, the state's global warming law, only says California must cut emissions 25 percent by 2020 -- it doesn't specify how.

Standard "command and control" regulations are expected to account for at least 60 percent of the emissions cuts. A cap and trade market could be used to achieve the balance of the cuts, but only after review by the California Air Resources Board, or ARB.

Still, the market has such broad support that it's probably inevitable. New ARB Chairman Mary Nichols, a Democrat and veteran environmental regulator, favors it. The California Chamber of Commerce endorses it, as do some national environmental groups. And while Legislative Democrats say Schwarzenegger has oversold the idea, they aren't seriously opposed.

Market design will continue over the next few years. It's not clear which industries will have to participate, how quickly the cap on emissions will decline or whether offsets will be allowed. Trading could be expanded to other Western states or even melded into a national market being considered in Congress.

Above all looms a multibillion-dollar question: How will the state distribute the permits? Will it auction them, the way the U.S. government sells acid rain permits? Or will it give them away, the way Southern California does with smog permits?

The ARB's design committee has suggested an auction for most, if not all, of the permits, but the issue is far from settled. Nichols won't comment.

Businesses say an auction would be a huge tax hike that would leave less money to spend on anti-pollution technology. The electric power industry alone would have to spend \$1.5 billion a year, raising costs to ratepayers, said Gary Rubenstein of consultant Sierra Research.

Environmentalists say a handout reduces the incentive to curb emissions and creates other problems. Europe's utilities charged ratepayers as if the companies had paid market prices for their permits, creating a \$1.6 billion windfall.

California's first experiment with pollution trading suffered from design flaws that initially allowed industry to avoid making emissions cuts.

By nearly everyone's reckoning, the 13-year-old Southern California smog program -- known as the Regional Clean Air Incentives Market, or RECLAIM -- gave away too many permits in its early years. Trading was minimal, and so was the market price for permits.

"We didn't see a lot of control equipment installed. It was cheaper to buy credits," said Carol Coy, deputy executive officer at the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which runs the market.

That all changed in 2000. The cap had declined to the point that companies had to take action. At the same time, the energy shortage sent the region's power generators into overdrive. The price for a ton of emissions went from under \$2,000 to more than \$60,000, forcing some non-energy companies to surrender.

"It just got too expensive; we shut our kilns for a while," said spokesman Frank Sheets of TXI Riverside Cement, a 100-employee manufacturer.

What's more, it appears some generators deliberately overpaid for permits to justify exploding electricity prices, said Frank Wolak, head of the market monitoring committee for California's electricity grid operator.

Coy agreed there were signs of deliberate overpayment. Rubenstein, who consults for power companies, called the charge "baloney."

In any event, the air district pulled the power generators out of the market in 2001 and subjected them to more traditional regulation until 2005.

For all its hiccups, advocates say RECLAIM proves markets work. Emissions of smog-forming pollutants have fallen 62 percent since trading began, Coy said.

RECLAIM is "an example of what can go wrong," said Nichols, the ARB chairman. But "it actually has reduced emissions. It has been successful."

Vote could speed 11 new Southland power plants

The AQMD allows developers to buy credits to offset pollution released by the facilities.

Critics call the plan a sellout.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, Saturday, Aug. 4, 2007

Southern California air quality regulators approved rule changes Friday that could speed the construction of 11 or more power plants across the region - a decision that could bring an estimated \$419 million to public coffers.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District board, in an 8-3 vote, gave power plant developers the opportunity buy credits to offset the pollution that would be released by the new facilities. The credits were originally intended for schools, hospitals and other emergency agencies.

The vote came after months of lengthy, contentious hearings - including six hours of testimony Friday - and appeared to satisfy neither environmentalists nor plant developers.

"It's outrageous. Our air district has assumed the role of polluter proponent. They seem to have forgotten they are the air quality district, in charge of protecting public health and the environment," said Tim Grabiell, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Dozens of community members picketed outside the board's headquarters in Diamond Bar before the meeting. Many testified that their potentially affected neighborhoods were already suffering from asthma, lung cancer and other respiratory ailments from industry.

But Mike Carroll, an attorney representing half a dozen of the proposed power plants - including a fiercely contested 943-megawatt facility in Vernon - said the conditions placed on credits by the board could make it too costly to build some of the plants.

"I have a lot of ambivalence," he said. "We are happy the board recognizes the need for additional power generation.... However, they put so many restrictions on us ... it could potentially kill the project."

The plants also need approval from state energy regulators. Other communities where plants are proposed include Victorville, Carson, Industry, El Segundo, Grand Terrace, Riverside and Sun Valley.

The board is considering using the profits to fund alternative-energy incentives and studies on pollution health risks, but put off that decision.

Developers would be required to pay \$92,000 per pound of coarse particulates they would emit and \$34,000 per pound of sulfur oxide. Both substances contribute to air pollution that plagues the Los Angeles Basin. Plant owners also would be required to buy enough pollution credits to offset cancer risks at a higher rate than is required under federal or state law, Carroll said.

Former state Sen. Martha Escutia, who lobbied board members in favor of allowing the Vernon power plant to buy the credits, praised the decision. "It's basically a vote to ensure energy reliability in the region," she said.

Board members voting in favor of the credits sale agreed with her and AQMD staff that new plants would help prevent electricity outages and might replace older, dirtier power plants.

"As our region continues to grow, we will need more clean energy to prevent rolling blackouts," board Chairman William A. Burke said. "Today's measures will help minimize the impact of new power plants, especially in low-income, environmental justice communities and other areas already subject to high levels of air pollution."

But board member Jane Carney, an attorney from Riverside who voted against the rule changes, said, "There is no current evidence I've heard that there is a need for [large] plants.... There is no crisis."

Representatives from two state agencies testified that there was no immediate need for additional power, but that there could be in coming years as older plants break down or are retired.

The nonprofit California Independent System Operator found that about 10,000 megawatts are needed in the Los Angeles Basin, and that about 12,000 megawatts are available. The California Energy Commission found that about 400 additional megawatts will be needed annually in coming years.

New power plants are "needed as a preventive measure. Even though we may not be in a power crisis today, it takes at least four to five years to plan for and construct a power plant, and thus we can't afford to wait until we're in a crisis to take steps to increase generating capacity," said AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood.

A backdrop for the hearing was the battle over what type of electricity will replace coal power, which is being phased out under state law. Natural gas-fired plants are a proven technology but still emit greenhouse gases; wind, solar and other renewable sources are less reliable but cleaner.

"These rules will allow more annual carbon dioxide emissions than what is generated by 107 countries around the world," said Angela Johnson Meszaros, an attorney with California Communities Against Toxics. "The impacts of these rules are staggering in terms of human health, local air quality and global climate."

Under the rules, she said, AQMD will allow more than 35 billion pounds per year of carbon dioxide emissions - the greenhouse gas believed to be the biggest contributor to global warming.

Even some who voted for the credit program expressed concerns about the Vernon project in particular, and the use of power from fossil fuel in general.

"Don't think you guys are the heroes here.... I think you're trying to create a cash cow for your city that will impact the health of your neighbors downwind," Chino Mayor Dennis Yates, a board member, said to Vernon officials, noting that the city stood to reap hefty profits by selling surplus power.

Miles From Home, but Now With Comfort and Cleaner Air

By ROBERT STRAUSS

New York Times, Sunday, Aug. 5, 2007

ROBERT McWILLIAMS adjusted his ample body into the cab of his tractor-trailer. He had been on the road from New England for the last 10 hours and was now ready to nap for his federally mandated 10 hours off the road.

"Most everywhere, this is, literally, a nightmare," said Mr. McWilliams, 43, who has been driving a big rig for nearly 20 years. The outdoor noise at the Petro Travel Center, a huge truck stop along Route 206 where Interstate 295 meets Exit 7 of the New Jersey Turnpike, was deafening, with 18-wheelers screeching around the lot, radios blaring and garbled-but-loud announcements coming from the travel center's offices. "Here, though, I can be in dreamland in a minute," he said.

Mr. McWilliams's peaceful hours are a result of the introduction of IdleAire, a system that allows truckers to turn off their engines instead of idling them for the hours they have to be off the road, saving large amounts of fuel, as well as pollution from the truck engines.

The State Transportation Department and the Department of Environmental Protection and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission received \$600,000 in federal grants to help IdleAire, a company based in Knoxville, Tenn., set up its system in 92 parking spaces at Petro in late June. The opening of the system there coincided with new state regulations for trucks that curtail the amount of time diesel vehicles can idle.

"The governor is focused on energy conservation and improving air quality, so when a federal grant became available, we jumped at it," said Kris Kolluri, the state transportation commissioner.

The IdleAire system consists of an electricity grid that runs above the trucks along the parking lot. Above each space is a box for heating, ventilation and air-conditioning with a wide vacuumlike device that attaches to an insert in the cab window. Instead of idling to keep the refrigeration mechanisms or other motorized devices going during the truck's down time, the system keeps it connected electrically without having to burn gasoline.

The system also gives, at additional cost, connection to the Internet, satellite TV, pay-per-view movies, video games and a telephone line.

"It isn't quite like home, but now there is less pollution around me, quiet and cool inside, and sometimes even a good movie," said Mr. McWilliams, who said he thought he might take in "Shrek III" before his nap.

The Petro center is the third truck stop in the state to have IdleAire; the others are at Travel America centers in Paulsboro in Gloucester County, along I-295, and in Columbia in northwestern New Jersey along I-80.

Jim Briggs, the site supervisor at Bordentown, said about three-quarters of his customers use only the basic services, which require buying the window insert for \$10 and then paying \$2 an hour. Internet service costs about \$4 a visit, while unlimited long distance is \$5 and unlimited movies cost about \$10.

Mr. Kolluri estimated that the services at the three truck stops would save two million gallons of gasoline, and its attendant pollution, a year.

"We talk about the dependence on foreign oil, so though this may not be all that big, it is a step toward doing something about it," he said.

He called it a quality of life issue for those who live near the truck stops and for truckers. "If we are to mandate them off the road to rest, they should really rest, not be half-sleeping with pollution all around them," he said.

Mr. Kolluri, who is also the chairman of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, said he was working to have an IdleAire or similar system installed in at least one turnpike service area by the end of 2008.

"We're looking to be ahead of the curve in this," he said, "and we think it will enhance our standing as a safe and reliable transportation corridor, attracting the best of the trucking industry."

Whatever it takes, China aims for dazzling Games

By Calum MacLeod and Paul Wiseman, USA TODAY

USA Today, Monday, August 6, 2007

BEIJING — They are evicting tenants to make room for visitors, shutting down factories to reduce pollution, plotting to control the weather, staging rallies to teach English and ordering Beijing's brusque citizens to mind their manners.

Whatever it takes, the organizers of the Beijing Olympics are determined to put on the grandest Games ever a year from now — and make them a symbol of the communist nation's arrival as a global economic power. Even the time and date of the opening ceremony — 8:08 p.m., Aug. 8, 2008 — were chosen to try to ensure success, eight being a lucky number in China.

A series of recent scandals involving contaminated food and consumer goods produced in China has only heightened the urgency for Beijing to put on a good face for the more than 10,000 athletes and 550,000 visitors expected here next summer. In its zeal to do so, China will dole out a record \$40 billion on stadiums and airport and subway improvements, more than twice what Greece spent on the Athens Olympics in 2004.

Humanitarian groups claim the Chinese government has evicted more than 1 million people to clear the way for venues and other Olympic facilities. The Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) puts the number at 1.5 million; it said in a recent report many of Beijing's displaced tenants have been given little or no notice and forced evictions often have been violent. Evicted residents frequently have received little compensation and have been at risk of becoming homeless, the report said.

If COHRE's figure is accurate, China's effort to clear out residents for the Games would be unprecedented — double the number the group says were relocated by South Korea for the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

The Chinese government, however, says the number of households displaced is only about 6,000. And Giselle Davis of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) says COHRE's estimate on displaced residents "is not consistent with our understanding."

For the most part, the IOC has taken a hands-off approach to questions about the Beijing government's human rights record.

"We believe that the Olympic Games will have definitely a positive, lasting effect on the Chinese society," IOC President Jacques Rogge said at an executive board meeting in April.

For all the criticism, it's become clear the Chinese government's approach has been effective in remaking parts of Beijing, a city of about 15 million. Visitors will see newly landscaped parks and sophisticated designs in showcase Olympic venues such as the National Stadium, called the "bird's nest" for the lattice steel shell that wraps around it.

Rogge has called Beijing's venues "the best I've ever seen."

"The transformation is amazing," says Daniel Bell, a philosophy professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing. "Unlike Athens, there will be no last-minute panic. There are problems with having an authoritarian state (as Olympic host), but they will get things done on time."

"They'll do a fantastic job," Olympic historian David Wallechinsky agrees. "The venues will be in order. ... Everybody will be on their best behavior. There will be no spitting on walls. I expect the opening ceremony to be the most spectacular ever."

Planning a 'green' Games

Pollution is a chronic problem in Beijing, and lately it's been exacerbated by a construction boom partly inspired by the Olympics. Beijing's sky is often a yellowish mix of factory emissions, car exhaust and Gobi Desert sand.

For the Olympics, Beijing will spend more than \$3 billion on pollution control this year, Shi Hanmin, director of the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau, told state-run Xinhua News Agency.

Authorities will order 1 million cars off Beijing's gridlocked streets for two weeks this month to test a plan to cut [traffic and auto emissions](#) during the Games. Organizers also plan to run 50 electric buses to transport Olympic officials and athletes, Xinhua reported. Last year Beijing removed 15,000 old taxis and 3,000 buses from the city to try to ease [pollution](#) and traffic.

Chinese officials have closed a large chemical factory. And one of Beijing's leading manufacturers, the Capital Iron & Steel Works, will reduce production during the Games before moving to an island in the Bohai Bay in 2010.

"We would have moved anyway, but the Olympics has speeded the process," Capital spokesman Yu Xiangmin says.

At a time when the International Energy Agency says China is surpassing the USA as the world's top producer of greenhouse gases, the Chinese also are touting their efforts to create an environmentally friendly, "green" Olympics.

Going green isn't new to the Olympic movement. In the 2000 Games, Sydney's Olympic Village operated on solar power. Beijing's organizing committee has hired some Australian engineers and architects involved in the Sydney Games to design the Olympic Village and National Aquatics Center.

Beijing's Olympic venues will use silicon solar panels that use much less energy than those used in Sydney in 2000, says inventor Ma Xin, who works with the Beijing organizing committee.

Beijing officials also say they have planted nearly 200 million trees since 2002, the year after Beijing became the 2008 Games host.

The Olympics has inspired Chinese officials to press for ways to ease Beijing's chronic water shortages. Organizers are pushing a costly scheme to divert water to Beijing for the Olympics from reservoirs 190 miles away in Hebei province. A section from Shijiazhuang to Beijing will cost about \$2.2 billion and is part of a \$61 billion project to divert water from southern China to the

north that won't be complete until 2010, says Chen Xichuan, an official at the central government commission leading the project.

Landscape architect and environmentalist Yu Kongjian dismisses the plan as "an engineer's solution" to China's water problems. He says the nation needs more efficient rainwater management, expanded wetlands and smarter farming.

Then again, Chinese Olympic officials are hoping to control the rain to keep outdoor events dry. Before Olympic events for which rain is forecast, they will blast clouds with rockets carrying chemicals designed to make it rain quickly, so any storm is over before the event begins. The USA pioneered "cloud-seeding" in the 1940s and '50s, and today some ski resorts use the procedure to try to boost snowfall.

Besides zapping clouds, the Chinese will roll out technology to try impress visitors. Athletes won't carry keys in the Olympic Village: Their room doors will open when they show their faces. Cameras on the doors will be linked to digital recognition scanners.

"We don't want too many policemen around or too many identity card checks," Ma says. "It would spoil the atmosphere."

Compared with recent Olympics, security will be less of a concern in China because of its authoritarian state. For the 2004 Athens Games, security costs climbed to \$1.4 billion because of the country's history of domestic terrorism and its proximity to known terrorist havens. State media in China have reported that \$300 million will be spent on security here.

China's iron hand may be tested

China's communist regime isn't known for tolerating dissent, and it doesn't show signs of making much of an exception for the Olympic Games, which often are used as a forum for protests. An early test came when the Olympic torch relay route was announced this year.

Tibetan activists seeking more autonomy for the Himalayan region oppose Beijing's plan to take the torch atop Mount Everest. In April, China expelled four Americans for protesting at an Everest base camp.

Meanwhile, the government of Taiwan — which rejects China's contention that Taiwan is part of China — has protested its inclusion as part of the domestic torch route. Taiwan wants to be part of the international route, on which the torch will pass through other nations before arriving in China.

Chinese officials discount the possibility of disruption. "I don't think dissent is a big issue," says Wang Wei, secretary general of Beijing's organizing committee. "We have laws in China and if you want to protest, you must apply."

Such applications are rarely filed or approved.

London-based Amnesty International says China has failed to improve human rights, a promise the country made when it was awarded the Olympics. The group's report in April cited the persecution of civil rights activists and the censoring of domestic media.

"There is no indication the Chinese will change any of their policies," says Wallechinsky, the Olympic historian. "They will follow the Moscow (Olympics) model from 1980. They'll just arrest everybody (who protests) and ship them a thousand miles away."

The Amnesty International report says China's government misuses its "re-education through labor" system to detain activists. The system, in place since 1957, can keep a crime suspect in jail for up to four years without a trial.

"Beijing is using the Olympics to boost China's international image and domestic legitimacy," says Xiao Qiang, director of the China Internet Project at the University of California-Berkeley. "But giving China's people fundamental political rights is not on their agenda."

Seeking well-mannered hosts

Beijing's toughest task in preparing for next year could be teaching its citizens to be more polite, says Zhang Huiguang, a government official who has the role of Miss Manners of the Beijing Olympics.

"Building the hardware, like stadiums, is no problem for China," Zhang says. "But building the software, like improving the people's quality, is harder."

On a recent day, 10,000 Chinese students shout themselves hoarse at the Beijing Science and Technology Institute. They punch the air, wave pamphlets and shout English phrases — a method taught by Li Yang, founder of the English language learning method Crazy English and a consultant to the Games.

"If you're not crazy, you can't really learn English," Li says. "Crazy English suits Chinese. They are too shy by themselves and afraid of making mistakes. But they are less shy when all speaking together."

He wants to reach 1.5 million Olympic volunteers and dreams that all 1.3 billion Chinese eventually will be able to recite the '08 Games' motto: "One World, One Dream" in English.

Student Song Qingju, 21, chants slogans with abandon but reverts to Chinese in a one-on-one conversation. "I'm sorry," she tells a USA TODAY reporter. "You are the first foreigner I've ever spoken to."

Beijing also wants taxi drivers to learn some English. "If I fail the English test, I could lose my job," says driver Ma Junjin, 45. Not so successfully, he tries two English phrases he's learned: "Welcome to China" and "I love you."

Wang Tao is leading a campaign to get Beijing residents to stop spitting in public. He's fighting centuries of tradition. "People should swallow their spit," he says. "But that is hard for most Chinese to accept. So I focus on 'civilized spitting,' telling people to spit into tissue and dispose responsibly."

Olympic organizers hope to break the Chinese of other habits, at least for the two weeks the Games are here. They have designated the 11th of each month as "queuing day," during which sharp-elbowed Beijing residents will be urged to show restraint and line up while waiting for services, Xinhua reported. Officials also hope to curb smoking at Olympic venues. About 350 million people — roughly 25% of the population — smoke.

"I hope U.S. visitors will see China as a normal country, friendly with good manners, good hosts," Wang says. "China always seems so far away and mysterious. When I meet people who are on their first trip to China, they always say, 'It's so different from what I had read about or seen on TV.' That's what I am hoping for."

Electric cars waiting for roadworthy batteries

Kevin Cameron, New York Times

San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, August 5, 2007

Clever and attractive, the Chevrolet Volt, a design study for a new wrinkle in electric cars, dominated the headlines coming from the Detroit auto show in January. But the introduction was punctuated with an asterisk.

The car that promised a fuel economy equivalent of 150 miles a gallon and a total range of 640 miles using its onboard recharging system carried a major caveat: the lithium-ion batteries required to make it a reality are not yet available, and won't be until 2010 at the earliest, industry experts say.

The Volt is not the only car waiting for lithium-ion batteries to be roadworthy. Reports last month in Nikkan Kogyo Shimbun, a Japanese business newspaper, said that the next generation of the Toyota Prius would be delayed by six months because the carmaker had decided that lithium-ion batteries were not quite ready.

Officially, the car was not postponed because Toyota had never announced an introduction date, but such a decision would have major implications: reverting to nickel-metal hydride batteries in today's Prius means finding room for a larger and heavier power pack. A Toyota spokesman, John Hanson, said that while the company saw "huge potential" in lithium-ion batteries, it wanted to assure future Prius buyers the same levels of affordability and reliability they experience in today's models.

The quest for batteries that provide sufficient range at a reasonable cost has gone on for a century. Electric power was a viable alternative when automobiles were first gaining popularity, eventually losing out to combustion engines in the 1920s.

Like King Canute, who as ruler of England commanded the incoming tide to go out, the state of California decreed in 1990 that [pollution](#)-free electric cars must come into being. Battery-electric cars looked like a sensible solution for urban [air-quality](#) problems because pollutants would be produced where the electricity was generated, rather than where the car was driven.

Since the early 1990s, the price of gasoline has doubled, and with it the motivation to seek alternatives. Battery technology has evolved considerably; hybrids have arrived, priced to reflect their need for two power plants instead of one and a battery that by itself is one-third of the car's driveline cost. The plug-in hybrid - whose battery can be recharged from a wall socket as well as by an onboard combustion engine - has attracted a vocal following.

Before 1990, the principal battery choices were lead-acid, the familiar auto engine starting battery, and nickel-cadmium. The lead-acid battery is well-proved, but heavy considering the small amount of energy it can store. Nickel-cadmium batteries offer more miles of driving for a given weight and size, but are less attractive because a recycling system is not well-established. They are also at least four times as expensive.

The real force driving battery development has been portable electronics and cordless power tools, not vehicles. Both are high-volume applications. The workhorse here is the nickel-metal-hydride battery, which can store three times the energy of lead-acid cells in a package the same size. Nickel-metal-hydride is the most commonly used type of battery in hybrids and electric-only vehicles because they are long-lived - Honda's warranty for the Civic Hybrid battery runs 10 years/150,000 miles in some states - but are a great deal more expensive than a basic lead-acid battery. With a rapid recharge taking three hours, they were not the answer to California's push for mainstream zero-emissions cars.

Another new battery type came along in 1991 - the lithium-ion battery. Its light weight - lithium is the third-lightest of elements - improved energy capacity for a given weight, and subsequent developments in electrode chemistry suggest that by 2010 it will be the winning technology for all applications. (It is already common in devices like cell phones and laptop computers.)

One problem has been durability, with early lithium-ion units tolerating only 750 cycles of discharge and recharge, or about two years of service, before deterioration of the terminals carrying power reduces charge capacity. A change from a terminal made of carbon to one made of lithium titanate spinel oxide holds the promise of raising this to 9,000 cycles and 20 years' use.

Many other battery chemistries exist - sodium-sulfur, nickel-zinc, and nickel-iron - but the major contenders for use in electric vehicles remain the nickel-metal hydride and lithium-ion types.

Temperature control is an important consideration in the development of auto batteries; some cell or electrode types need to be warmer than others to function. And there are upper temperature limits - overheating and fires from lithium-ion batteries in laptop computers have made headlines.

All batteries slowly lose their charge to small internal currents, which generate heat just as a toaster does. If electrode deterioration increases this self-discharge current enough, catastrophic overheating can occur. Novel electrode chemistries or external control electronics promise to eliminate this hazard.

So far, lithium-ion batteries have gained capacity at the rate of 8 percent to 10 percent a year, doubling their ability to store energy over a decade. This and improved electrode chemistry have refreshed the appeal of the battery-electric car. Tesla, an electric-car startup that plans to start delivering its \$98,000 Roadster this fall, has developed a power storage system of 6,831 lithium cells, each about the size of an AA battery, that it says will power the car 200 miles.

With the prospect of greater range and their low cost to refuel, battery-electric vehicles start to look like just a bigger and more practical power tool - one that may well make more sense than electric cars that use hydrogen fuel cells to produce power.

Would urban and suburban citizens buy lots of small electric vehicles at a price competitive with gasoline-powered economy cars? Have batteries matured enough to hit such a price point? Or will new emissions solutions make the small turbodiesel our first choice, as in Europe? It all comes down to price.

Bush Sets Emissions Summit

World Powers Are Invited to Discuss Climate Change, Growth

By Michael A. Fletcher, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post, August 4, 2007

President Bush yesterday formally invited top officials from the world's leading economic powers to take part in a climate change summit aimed at establishing voluntary goals for lowering greenhouse gas emissions while sustaining growth.

The meeting follows a May pledge by Bush to convene the world's leading economies -- and most prolific polluters -- to find a solution to the problem of climate change that would both promote energy efficiency and encourage prosperity

"Science has deepened our understanding of climate change and opened new possibilities for confronting it," Bush said in the letter of invitation.

Long wary of the effectiveness of global environmental agreements, Bush tried to seize the initiative on global warming with his pledge to initiate a series of meetings to set flexible, long-term goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. He said his approach would allow countries to find their own best paths to reducing pollution. The proposal marked a clear shift for Bush, who had come under international criticism for his opposition to participating in the Kyoto Protocol, a United Nations-led environmental agreement that will expire in 2012.

The United States, the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, is not a party to the Kyoto agreement, which calls for the 35 participating nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Rapidly developing countries including India, China and Brazil are not bound by the deal, despite booming growth and worsening air pollution in those nations, a factor that has caused Bush to call the accord unworkable.

Many environmentalists and some lawmakers oppose the approach, saying that anything short of mandatory targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions falls short of what is needed to address the threat posed by climate change.

"We need binding emissions targets across the economy and across borders," Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) said. "Our only hope is that this president, who just a few years ago was

questioning the science behind climate change, may wake up one day and finally decide he is ready to lead on this critical issue."

Bush said the climate meeting would be scheduled for Sept. 27 and 28 and would be hosted by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He asked that the participating nations send delegations that include a senior official and aides who can address environmental, economic and energy issues. Bush plans to address the gathering.

The White House sent the invitation to the European Union, France, Italy, Germany, Britain, Japan, China, Canada, India, Brazil, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Australia, Indonesia, South Africa and the United Nations.

Bush issued his invitation as nearly 100 countries took part in a United Nations meeting on climate change, an early step in moving toward a replacement for the Kyoto agreement. The White House said that the meeting being spearheaded by Bush should complement the U.N. process.

"We expect the results in 2008 from these major economies to contribute to the global agreement under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change by 2009," White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said.

In his letter of invitation, Bush said he envisions the two-day Washington summit allowing the major world economies to agree upon a post-Kyoto framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

He said the meeting would place "a special emphasis" on how the nations could work with private companies to promote clean energy technologies. The initial meeting would be followed up by a series of other sessions in 2008 to refine the plans.

Jack Bauer's Next Mission: Fighting Global Warming

Washington Post, August 5, 2007

From "An Inconvenient Truth" to popularizing the Prius, Hollywood has helped lead the way on some environmental issues. One of the latest initiatives: Cool Change, Fox's company-wide program to reduce the network's impact on global warming. As part of that effort, the seventh season of "24" will take steps to reduce and offset the carbon emissions from the show's production, with the goal of having the season finale be entirely carbon-neutral.

It may sound like a publicity stunt, but Fox spokesman Chris Anderson says the network isn't after bigger ratings. "We are publicizing '24's' commitment to climate change for two reasons and two reasons only: to inspire the public to take global warming seriously and hopefully to motivate other studios to make changes to their production practices as well," he says. After all, shooting on soundstages requires energy-hungry lighting and gear, and going on location means using portable generators and driving trucks, vans and cars loaded with equipment, costumes and people. When production on Season 7 begins this month, the show's 26 diesel vehicles and five generators will run on a more planet-friendly biodiesel blend, which will start at 5 percent biodiesel and gradually increase, barring any problems, according to executive producer Howard Gordon.

The show's electricity bills will go toward renewable-energy credits that will bring a share of wind, solar and water power to Los Angeles's grid. A diesel-powered soundstage will be converted to electricity, thus lessening the show's contribution to the local air pollution problem, and the show's five location scouts will be given Priuses to drive. Scripts, schedules and memos -- which used to be hand-delivered by car -- will be sent via e-mail.

The "24" page at Fox.com now features energy conservation tips and a public service announcement about global warming featuring Kiefer Sutherland; more information will be posted when the show airs in January. Plus, climate change will be incorporated into the series' plot (which just might scare some viewers into taking action).

The extent to which the plan will reduce the show's imprint on Earth is difficult to calculate, but the measures certainly won't hurt; more shows and films aiming to reduce their carbon footprints could have a considerable impact. Some productions before "24" were green -- films such as "Syriana" and "An Inconvenient Truth" were carbon-neutral, as was Comedy Central's recent roast of Flavor Flav. But "24's" weekly visibility might spark a domino effect -- in Hollywood, Bollywood and beyond.

SoCal power plants get boost from smog agency

Associated Press

Fresno Bee, San Francisco Chronicle and other papers, Saturday, August 4, 2007

Southern California's anti-smog agency is letting power plant developers buy credits allowing them to pollute more in a move that could speed construction of nearly a dozen plants.

The move was approved Friday by the board of the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Under the rules change, developers could buy credits to offset some of the pollution they otherwise would be required to curb through costly and elaborate equipment. The credits were originally created for schools, hospitals and buildings housing emergency agencies.

They would cost \$92,000 per pound of coarse particulates and \$34,000 per pound of sulfur oxide and bring in an estimated \$419 million.

The AQMD covers Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Supporters of the credits said the region will need more electricity to supply its surging population, and new, cleaner plants could replace older coal-fired plants that are being phased out under state law.

"As our region continues to grow, we will need more clean energy to prevent rolling blackouts," AQMD board Chairman William A. Burke said.

Current plants supply enough electricity for the Los Angeles basin but new plants are needed "as a preventative measure," argued AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood.

"It takes at least four to five years to plan for and construct a power plant, and thus we can't afford to wait until we're in a crisis to take steps to increase generating capacity," Atwood said.

Critics argued that the rules change would simply increase pollution.

"It's outrageous. Our air district has assumed the role of polluter proponent," said Tim Grabel, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Dozens of people picketed outside before the meeting. Many testified to the board that their communities already had high levels of respiratory problems because of existing industrial pollution.

The vote didn't entirely please Mike Carroll, an attorney representing six of the proposed power plants.

"We are happy the board recognizes the need for additional power generation," he said.

"However, they put so many restrictions on us it could potentially kill the project."

State energy regulators also must approve the new plants.

Emission plan from UC team

State must reduce greenhouse gases, carbon in its fuels

David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer

San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, August 4, 2007

University of California researchers made public this week a plan for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from cars, trucks, trains and the refineries that make their fuel.

In a report released Thursday, the researchers detail a system in which oil companies would blend more renewable biofuels into their products and find new ways to power their refineries. Drivers would have more choices of cars, some running on electricity and others on ethanol.

The report is a key element of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's low-carbon fuel program. In January, Schwarzenegger signed an executive order that the state cut the carbon content of vehicle fuels 10 percent by 2020. Thursday's report, which he commissioned, outlines steps to reach that goal.

The report covers only transportation fuels, which account for about 40 percent of the state's greenhouse gas emissions. The low-carbon fuel program is just one piece of a larger state effort to slash California's total greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020, an effort that will cover other sources of energy, such as electrical power plants.

"This orchestrates the transition away from petroleum fuels," said Daniel Sperling, who is one of the report's authors and leads the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies. "This is a long-term framework. It's not just for the next 10 years."

For all its detail, the report does not recommend that oil companies be required to use specific technologies or alternative fuels. Instead, it sets goals and lets the companies figure out the best way to reach them.

"The history of alternative fuels is a history of failures, and that's because we kept trying to pick winners," Sperling said. "We'd subsidize specific fuels, and we could never get it right. What this does is create a more flexible and durable framework."

The report's recommendations would need the approval of the California Air Resources Board to take effect. Under Schwarzenegger's executive order, low-carbon fuel regulations must be adopted by January 2009.

The air board also will need to make the low-carbon fuel program work within the broader state effort to cut California's overall greenhouse gas emissions.

For example, the state may limit the amount of carbon dioxide companies can release into the atmosphere and create a market in which businesses that emit less than allowed can sell carbon credits to those that are over the limit. Such a system, called cap and trade, would affect the way the low-carbon fuels program works, and vice versa.

California's oil refineries and electrical utilities have a huge stake in these regulations. The UC report's authors consulted with them at length.

"The report lays a decent foundation to start from," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer for the Western States Petroleum Association, an oil industry lobbying group. "I would certainly agree with (the authors) that it's ambitious, and I hope it's attainable."

Among the report's recommendations:

- The low-carbon fuel program should cover all gasoline and diesel in the state, including fuel used by construction and farm machinery. Jet fuel would not be covered because international treaty exempts aviation fuel from state regulation.
- Gasoline and diesel producers should be required to track the global warming emissions produced by making, transporting, storing and using their fuel.
- Refineries could turn to new sources of power - such as burning biomass - or make their plants more energy efficient as a way to cut their carbon dioxide emissions.
- Makers of ethanol and biodiesel should be able to sell credits to oil refineries under a cap-and-trade system. So should electric utilities.

How these steps would affect gasoline and diesel prices remains to be seen.

Some state officials hope that bringing in new sources of fuel will stabilize California's volatile gasoline prices. Reheis-Boyd, however, warned that some of the steps under consideration might add to the price drivers pay at the pump, at least at first.

"Nobody can predict what the market's going to do," she said. "But in the short-term, none of these options is cost-effective compared to what we have now."

Brown haze speeds up melting in Himalayas

Study says huge smoke clouds from cooking fires in Asia are trapping heat, contributing to global warming

By Michael Casey, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, August 3, 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand -- Huge haze clouds over the Indian Ocean contribute as much to atmospheric warming in Asia as greenhouse gases and play a significant role in the melting of the Himalayan glaciers, according to a study published Thursday.

Unmanned measuring devices were sent into the haze pollution, known as Atmospheric Brown Clouds, over the Indian Ocean in March 2006 near the island of Hanimadhoo to measure aerosol concentrations, soot levels and solar radiation.

Researchers concluded that the pollution -- mostly caused by the burning of wood and plant matter for cooking in India and other South Asian countries -- enhanced heating of the atmosphere by about 50 percent and contributed to about half of the temperature increases blamed in recent decades for the glacial retreat.

Veerabhadran Ramanathan said his team's research shows the brown clouds are an additional factor in the melting of glaciers, along with overall global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

Until this study, published in the journal *Nature*, scientists believed the brown clouds mostly deflected sunlight, cooled the atmosphere and did not contribute much to the effects of global warming. But Ramanathan said their observations show particles also absorbed sunlight and warmed the atmosphere much more than previously believed.

"All we are saying is that there is one other thing contributing to atmospheric warming and that is the brown cloud," said Ramanathan, a chief scientist at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla.

Syed Iqbal Hasnain, a senior fellow at the Center For Policy Research in New Delhi and a glacial expert, agreed brown clouds could be a factor in the melting of the glaciers that supply water to most Asian rivers. But he said more research was needed to understand why the Himalayan glaciers in China are also melting at a dramatic rate.

"Glaciers across Himalaya are receding, but their response is dependent on many factors like size, orientation and intensity of monsoonal moisture," Hasnain, who was not connected with the study, said in an e-mail message from New York. "There is a great urgency on the part of the international scientific community to establish high altitude research stations across Himalaya and monitor climate accurately to develop scientifically correct models."

Scientists have expressed concerns the Himalayan glaciers will melt entirely and the rivers will run dry for months at a time, fed only by annual rains like the monsoon that sweeps across the subcontinent every summer.

Melting is exacerbated by India's and China's fast-growing, coal-fed economies. Scientists say the glaciers are melting at a rate of as much as 49 feet a year and predict they could shrink even more with temperatures projected to rise as much as 11 degrees by 2100.

Although much of the melting has been blamed on global warming, Ramanathan said the new findings offer another way to tackle the problem of the melting glaciers. He said he was hopeful

the findings would spur regional governments to step up efforts to replace wood-burning stoves, for example, with solar-powered cookers and biogas plants that capture methane and carbon dioxide emissions and convert them to fuel.

Achim Steiner, the executive director of the United Nations Environment Program, which helped fund the project, said the research showed brown clouds are "complicating and in some cases aggravating" the effects of growing greenhouse gases.

"It is likely that in curbing greenhouse gases we can tackle the twin challenges of climate change and brown clouds and, in doing so, reap wider benefits -- from reduced air pollution to improved agriculture yields," Steiner said in a statement.

Ramanathan is now in India working on a pilot project with the Energy Research Institute in New Delhi that would provide fuel alternatives to 1,000 families in the Kumaon region in the foothills of the Himalayas. If the project proves successful, he said he is hoping it can be expanded in other parts of India.

"If the pollution increases, the glacier retreat will be much worse than projected," he said. "It now depends on what energy path that India, China and Asia will take."

[The Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Aug. 6, 2007:](#)

Gave Arvin a voice

If it were not for Sen. Dean Florez's courageous effort to clean the air, we would be still breathing in tons of pollution from agricultural burns and our kids would still be choking on fumes inside old, gross polluting school buses.

Florez has been a champion for communities throughout the Central Valley, such as Arvin, which has the worst ozone pollution in the nation. Florez was instrumental in giving the city of Arvin a voice when it came to the city's unfortunate air pollution issues.

Thank you for a story that recognizes the work he has done so we can all breathe a little easier.

-- RAJI BRAR, Arvin Councilwoman. Arvin

[LA Times, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Aug. 5, 2007](#)

Nuclear hypocrisy

Paul Josephson (*Re "The mirage of nuclear power," Opinion, July 30*) should first check with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to see how farfetched his arguments are about the "mirage" of nuclear power. The lowest cost clean power (10%) delivered to the customers of the city of L.A. is from the Palo Verde Nuclear Power facility in Arizona. He speaks of the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl incidents that occurred almost 30 years ago but does not mention the 103 nuclear reactor plants that have been operating safely and economically throughout the U.S. for 40-plus years, providing up to 20% of the power in some East Coast states. He writes about the French experience but fails to mention that it has the cheapest energy costs and [the cleanest air in Europe](#) -- 85% of its power is from nuclear facilities, and it also exports electricity to its neighbors. He comments about nuclear aircraft but fails to mention the U.S. Navy's nuclear-powered ships and submarines that have operated without problems throughout the world for decades. It is unfortunate that a teacher of history would be so irresponsible in his assessment of the industry.

Joe Vitti, Granada Hills

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, August 6, 2007](#)

Our view: The Bus bringing back popular program that gave 130,000 rides a month during last year's promotion

While there may be no such thing as a free lunch, it's possible now to get from one part of Merced County to another without it costing anything. Who can beat that kind of deal?

This is the third year the Merced County transit system, known as The Bus, has provided free rides on its fixed routes from August through October.

It's a win-win situation on several counts: The Bus gave 130,000 free rides a month for those same three months in 2006, obviously going easy on the wallets of faithful patrons. In past years the bus system gained more riders when it came time once again to pay fares.

What with the price of gas these days, a number of motorists obviously are taking advantage of the potential windfall and here's where another benefit comes in: Less air pollution from private vehicles in an area already besieged by poor air quality. The summer months are the worst for smog in the San Joaquin Valley. One of the strategies in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is "Spare the Air" days and motorists are urged to limit driving during the worst smog days.

The federal government is picking up the tab for the three months of lost local revenue and ridership seems to be picking up. In a normal month 50,000 to 60,000 people would ride The Bus so it's obvious extra folks are choosing public over private transit.

These free rides seem like a terrific program that benefits local residents, keeps some cars off the road, ultimately increases ridership and makes Valley air a little bit more breathable

[Fresno Bee Editorial, Sunday, August 5, 2007:](#)

Fresno County must consider Valley air in setting dairy regulations Reducing emissions would help reduce costs of bad air.

Fresno County has lagged behind most other counties in the state when it comes to regulating emissions from dairies that help pollute the air we breathe. Now the county has a chance to move to the forefront.

In the next few weeks, county staff will come up with proposed regulations for dairies. It's a contentious issue, since adding systems to control pollution will cost farmers more.

But not that much more, according to the Healthy Dairy Commission, a coalition of doctors, environmentalists and community activists that is pushing for more stringent regulations than were first proposed for Fresno County.

Members of the group cite a recent report from the California Institute for Rural Studies that suggests large gains in Valley air quality can be had for as little as 2-3 cents per cow each year.

Since the average dairy cow produces more than \$300 in annual profits for the farmer, the study says, the cost of new regulations is not substantial.

The payoff, however, would be. Dairies generate a significant portion of the volatile organic compounds (VOC) and particulate matter that plague us in the Valley. Livestock waste produces some 6.5% of VOCs in Valley skies.

Reducing those emissions would help reduce the enormous health costs of bad air, estimated at more than \$3 billion annually in the Valley, where the percentage of residents with asthma rose from 14% in 2001 to 17% in 2005.

Dairy cows produce about 37% of the ammonia in our Valley air. Ammonia is increasingly viewed as a health risk.

Today, milk is the sixth most valuable commodity produced on Fresno County farms, at nearly \$300 million annually. That's about 6% of all county agricultural production.

That wasn't always the case.

The dairy industry in California was once concentrated in Southern California, but increasing urbanization there has led to dairy farmers shutting down their operations and shifting them to the Valley. The greatest number have found homes in Tulare County, but Fresno County's dairy industry is large and growing.

The methods the Healthy Dairies group suggests to realize those gains sound simple: Line the waste lagoons at dairies, enclose barns and use methane digesters to turn harmful gases into electricity. It doesn't appear to be too much to ask for cleaner air.

Without regulation, the air problems caused by dairies will only worsen. Between 2002 and 2006, 16 new dairies opened in Fresno County, and the number of dairy cows shot up 27%, to around 106,000.

Pending permits with the Valley air district suggest that as many as 35,000 more dairy cows will soon call Fresno County home. The state Air Resources Board projects that dairies will be the No. 1 source of VOCs in the Valley by 2020.

Now is the time to get useful regulations in place before even more dairies open for business in Fresno County. In that manner, we'll preserve a dairy industry that is an economic powerhouse in the Valley as well as help to clean the air we all breathe. That's a winner.

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, Sunday, August 5, 2007:](#)

Assess real need

Valley residents want cleaner air according, to the lead editorial July 30. But once again, a high-speed rail system, one of our best possible solutions to pollution, has been lost in the California budget mess. Would legislators set different priorities if they weighed the cost of childhood asthma versus the cost of education?

Lost in the budget debate is any discussion of school enrollment. A quick examination of the statewide numbers reveals total K-12 registration has dropped in both of the past two years, kindergarten enrollment is the smallest in 12 years and K-6 elementary schools have lost students for four consecutive years.

This year's state K-12 budget will spend more than \$275,000 to educate each classroom of 25 kids. About \$75,000 of that will go to the teacher's salary and benefits. Meanwhile, community colleges saw their share of education spending cut in order to fund more than a 50% increase for the younger students in the last four years. Forced to double their tuition, the community colleges' annual headcount has dropped by more than 200,000 students in that period.

Would it be too much to ask legislators to assess real need, not greed, as they endlessly debate the budget?

Jerrold H. Jensen, Visalia

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, Sunday, August 5, 2007:](#)

Predictable views

Environmentalists are predictable in their views on forest management. They refuse to acknowledge that active forest management, as opposed to their "let it burn" philosophy, actually helps address global warming, reduces the severity of wildfires and keeps our air and water cleaner.

A July 29 article notes that since 1986 the number of catastrophic wildfires has quadrupled and annual acres burned increased six-fold. It quotes Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell: "Healthy forests with young trees absorb more carbon than old forests." That is, they're better at improving air quality. And "we can sequester more carbon with active management rather than a hands-off approach." That's well documented fact. The predictable environmentalist retort from Mike Francis of The Wilderness Society: "That's baloney."

Consider also what happens to the sequestered carbon stored in trees during catastrophic wildfires. You guessed it: All that carbon, and millions of tons of other air pollutants, gets released back into the atmosphere, not to mention the destruction of wildlife habitat and runoff fouling rivers and streams.

Environmentalists' approach to forest management clearly destroys our forests, contributes to global warming, fouls our air and pollutes our waterways.

L.W. Johnson, Shaver Lake

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, August 6, 2007](#)

Dan Walters: Green building rules should be handled by public agencies

The 15 "trailer bills" accompanying the stalled-out state budget contain countless words, many of which deal with matters that have nothing to do with the budget itself. As noted in this space previously, the trailers are often used as vehicles to slip into law provisions that bypass the ordinary legislative process.

One bill, Senate Bill 86, contains a two-pronged assault on democratic process that not only bypasses the usual procedure for making new law, but transfers the regulations authorized by the new law to a private organization that's completely unaccountable to the public.

For much of the year, legislators and lobbyists for various interests have been negotiating over how state buildings should comply with anti-greenhouse gas emission policies, but one passage of SB 86 short-circuits those talks by decreeing that buildings the state builds or leases after Jan. 1, 2009, must meet standards of a private organization called the United States Green Building Council.

By all accounts, USGBC is a legitimate organization that acts as a forum for agreements on environmentally friendly building standards. But it's not the only organization doing that work. At any rate, the standards it decrees and the methods it uses to draft those decrees are matters of its internal politics — including influence from those who support it financially — and are shielded from input by the outside world.

Under SB 86, therefore, California taxpayers would be on the hook for whatever standards USGBC developed by whatever process it uses. Were this an isolated case, it might merit a pass, but it's part of a broader legislative tendency to avoid tough policy decisions by shifting them to unaccountable outside organizations.

A few years ago, for instance, then-Assemblyman (now Sen.) Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, carried a bill aimed at creating what could only be called dossiers on the families of children served by social service and health care agencies, authorizing amazingly detailed interrogations of kids about their family lives.

When one version of his bill didn't fly, Steinberg took the backdoor approach, requiring that children's programs use recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics in fashioning questionnaires. Whatever information the academy decreed to be sought would be sought, under law, from children under Steinberg's bill, which ultimately failed.

This year's legislative session offered another example of abdicating important regulatory or rule-making power to an outside body. Assemblyman Ed Hernandez, D-West Covina, originally proposed that young California girls be immunized against cervical cancer with a specific vaccine called Gardasil.

When an intense controversy erupted, he changed his bill to wipe out all current legally required student vaccinations and decree, instead, that whatever the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended would be more or less automatically required in California. That didn't quiet the critics. So the bill, Assembly Bill 16, was changed again to place the responsibility for immunization rules on the state public health officer, which is where it should be.

If someone objects to a proposed law, or a proposed administrative rule, there are processes to register those complaints. Once an outside, often private, organization is given the legal power to promulgate rules with the force of law, however, those rights wither.

Getting back to the issue at hand: If the Legislature wants to impose green building rules on state agencies, it should do it, or at least give that authority to some other publicly accountable agency. Handing it to a private group in a sneakily drafted bill is simply undemocratic.

[Editorial in Orange County Register, August 6, 2007](#)

Today's editorial: Much hot air on melting glaciers

Boxer's calls for economy-killing laws against greenhouse gases aren't backed by latest research.

Sen. Barbara Boxer returned from a helicopter and boat tour of Greenland to breathlessly announce that because of global warming, "this massive glacier that's five miles wide and 500 miles long ... [is] crashing into the sea ... moving, and it's melting and every single day, 24 hours a day, 20 million tons of ice comes off that glacier and streams into the ocean."

Her remedy? Pass a half-dozen new laws in Congress to stem evil manmade, greenhouse gas emissions by imposing Draconian limits on all industries. "From this trip," she intoned, "you get the sense of urgency."

Alarmists like Ms. Boxer claim Greenland glaciers are melting because of manmade carbon dioxide, which they say is warming the atmosphere at a dangerous rate. Some facts are called for.

"The problem for global warming alarmists," writes James M. Taylor, senior fellow for environmental policy at the Heartland Institute, "is that the poles currently show no sign of human-induced global warming." Antarctica is in a prolonged cold spell, gaining ice, not losing it. Despite Ms. Boxer's wide-eyed fervor, even Arctic temperatures have been relatively stable since the 1970s, Mr. Taylor said.

Worse yet (for Ms. Boxer and her co-alarmists), Greenland just had its two coldest decades since the 1910s, and "recent temperature readings indicate the cold spell is continuing," Mr. Taylor says. While Greenland is losing ice at lower elevations, it's gaining ice inland, more than offsetting the losses.

Ms. Boxer and her contingent of equally alarmed congressional tourists were presented with an illustration of what "could" happen "if" Greenland's glaciers melted completely away, raising sea levels 20 feet. The problem, again, is that even the global warming proponents at the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have dramatically revised downward the scary prediction of 20-foot increases to a yawn-inspiring seven inches or so over the next 100 years, hardly enough to raise Ms. Boxer's tour boat.

The Penn State University professor who developed an "illustration" of a 20-foot rise in sea level for the touring congressional delegation's edification admitted it's not really a forecast or a prediction. What it is, however, is merely another worse-case scenario employed to scare the public and their representatives into Draconian laws limiting liberty and wreaking economic havoc.

Before climbing aboard Ms. Boxer's global warming tour bus, consider that the latest global warming research goes against alarmism. In the "most comprehensive ever" study on Greenland glacier movements, Danish researchers found in 2006 that "Greenland's glaciers have been shrinking for the past century, suggesting that the ice melt is not a recent phenomenon caused by global warming," let alone by recent manmade CO₂ increases.

A 2006 study from Los Alamos National Laboratory, Space and Remote Sensing Sciences found Greenland's warming rate in 1920-30 to be 50 percent higher than in 1995-2005, suggesting carbon dioxide "could not be the cause." The study also concluded "[W]e find no direct evidence

to support the claims that the Greenland ice sheet is melting due to increased temperature caused by increased atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide."

Physicist Dr. Syun-Ichi Akasofu, former director of University of Alaska Fairbanks' Geophysical Institute and International Arctic Research Center, told a congressional hearing in 2006 that highly publicized climate models that predict a disappearing Arctic are nothing more than "science fiction."

And, in July, Dr. Nigel Calder, co-author of "The Chilling Stars: A New Theory on Climate Change," said flatly: "In reality, global temperatures have stopped rising. Data for both the surface and the lower air show no warming since 1999." Meanwhile, CO2 has increased during that period, completely undermining alarmists' call for Draconian measures to curb greenhouse gases.

[Fresno Bee Editorial, Monday, August 6, 2007:](#)

No excuse for GOP budget holdouts

Republican senators are holding out for a reason other than principle.

If Senate Republicans were delaying a state budget purely for reasons of fiscal and political principle, they'd be in better standing to defend the mounting consequences.

But that's not the reason the senators met Wednesday and were unable, after five frustrating weeks, to enact a spending plan.

As Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, made clear Wednesday, Senate Republicans are holding out for an unrelated cause.

At the behest of oil companies and other industries, the GOP leadership is seeking a law that would prevent lawsuits against local governments, oil refineries and other industries, under the California Environmental Quality Act, for failing to assess their global warming impacts when planning an expansion.

Unless a final budget bill includes this exemption from CEQA, the Republicans are poised to shut down government services, including payments to hospitals and health clinics that care for the elderly and infirm.

This spurious crusade started on June 21, when the California Chamber of Commerce, the Building Industry Association and other groups sent a letter to the governor and legislative leaders seeking an urgent exemption from CEQA. In this letter, the groups claimed that Attorney General Jerry Brown and environmental groups were misusing CEQA and the state's global warming law to file "premature and unwarranted lawsuits" that could delay "vital housing, commercial and public infrastructure projects."

Without a doubt, the sweeping nature of the California Environmental Quality Act makes it ripe for abuse. In Sacramento and elsewhere, lawsuits have stopped or slowed affordable housing projects and infill development -- a factor that often encourages developers to build on the periphery of cities, adding to traffic congestion and air pollution.

To date, however, the attorney general has been pursuing policies entirely consistent with the state's environmental goals. In San Bernardino County, supervisors had adopted a growth plan that was sure to facilitate more spread-out development, air pollution and greenhouse emissions. Brown's intervention has prompted the county to consider sensible changes. Other local governments are taking notice, which could lead to new communities that are more suited to transit and less dependent on the automobile.

If anything, the Chamber of Commerce and other groups should be thankful that Brown is encouraging wiser transportation planning. Transportation accounts for one-third of the state's greenhouse emissions, and California's law mandates a 25% reduction in all emissions by 2020. If the state doesn't have a strategy for reducing emissions from transportation, utilities and industries will likely be forced to make up the difference.

A recent poll by the Public Policy Institute of California revealed that global warming has become a top environmental concern among Californians, second only to air pollution. If the state hopes to confront both of those challenges, it must change the way communities are planned. Politicians and industries that are leading the 21st century economy understand that imperative. Unfortunately, too many remain stuck in the past -- and the state budget remains stuck in limbo.