

Autumn pollution clings to Valley air Lung-clogging particles gathering a bit early this year.

By Mark Grossi and Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee
Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

Stubborn, stagnant weather has trapped unhealthy amounts of tiny debris in the air, creating a potential public danger that is expected to continue at least until Thursday.

Authorities, who banned fireplace burning in three counties over the weekend, on Monday advised residents to limit outdoor exercise in the morning and evening, when particle pollution levels are highest.

Officials said the air problems are at least 10 days earlier this month than they have been over the last five years.

Patients gasping for air flocked to clinic waiting rooms at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Fresno during the past few days, said Dr. John Gasman, a pulmonologist at the hospital.

"You can bet for every one patient who comes to the ER, dozens are having an impaired quality of life and are just getting by at home," he said.

The microscopic pollution, called particulate matter, can lodge deep in the lungs and cause asthma attacks and heart problems. About one in five San Joaquin Valley children has asthma.

The region from Stockton to Bakersfield is one of the most polluted areas in the nation for particulate matter, which includes dust, soot and chemical droplets. The pollution comes from many sources, such as vehicles and fires.

A high-pressure weather system, which is common in the fall, is preventing wind from blowing out the pollution. Meteorologists say a gusty storm might come into the Valley by Thursday and clear up the problem.

Forecasters also said another storm may arrive during the weekend.

"Right now, the winds are light and everything is getting trapped here," said meteorologist Jim Dudley of the National Weather Service in Hanford. "We need some type of frontal system to come through here."

The fireplace wood-burning ban was lifted at least for today in Tulare and Kings counties, but Kern will continue under the prohibition, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Authorities are asking residents of Kings, Tulare and Fresno counties to voluntarily avoid burning wood in their fireplaces.

Last fall and winter, the air district banned residential burning on 12 days in Fresno County, the most in the eight-county region, three days in Tulare County and two days each in Madera, Merced and Kings counties.

The pollution episode over the past few days is fed by fires and everyday activities that kick up particles of dust, such as driving and farming. Some particles from last month's Southern California fires may have contributed to problems in the South Valley, air officials said.

Shawn Ferreria, district senior air quality specialist, said there has not yet been a lot of residential wood-burning.

But, he said, last week's thunderstorms tracked mud onto roads, which traffic tends to grind up and send into the air.

Smog board wants to ban wood fires on bad-air nights in winter

Jonathan Curiel, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

It would be illegal to use residential fireplaces on nights with poor air quality under a rule being considered by Bay Area air regulators.

Over the next three weeks, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District will hold workshops to gauge public opinion on the proposal, which would follow similar bans in Sacramento County, the San Joaquin Valley, and such Bay Area cities as Mill Valley, where people who disobey the city's wood-burning law are already subject to stiff fines.

Spurred by growing evidence that shows smoke from wood-burning is as bad or worse than smoke from cigarettes, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is trying to reduce the amount of harmful particulate matter that people breathe. Children, the elderly and those with respiratory illnesses are particularly susceptible to smoke particles that emanate from wood-burning fireplaces.

The minute particles, which enter nasal passages and lungs, can cause asthma, bronchitis, lung disease and heart disease, according to health experts.

The workshops, which start Wednesday in Oakland, are designed to solicit comments and explain the proposed regulation, which would cover wood-burning stoves as well as indoor and outdoor fireplaces. On days in the Bay Area when particulate matter is at its worst, wood-burning is the greatest contributing factor, accounting for 33 percent of the pollution, according to the air district. The problem is especially acute in winter, when fire-place use is high.

"It's the single biggest source of air pollution that individuals have the greatest power to control," said Karen Schkolnick, an air district spokeswoman.

The district estimates that 20 days a year would require bans on fireplace use if the rule is approved.

As of now, during nights when levels of particulate matter are high, the district asks residents to refrain from lighting fires. Seventy-seven percent of Bay Area residents support bans on days when air quality is poor, according to the district. The proposed fireplace requirement is supported by the American Lung Association.

"People think wood burning is fine and healthy because it's a natural substance," said Jenny Bard, assistant director of communications and advocacy for the American Lung Association of California. "We associate the smells of wood smoke with good things, like camping and cooking over the fire. Unfortunately, we've learned that breathing these particles is the same thing as breathing tobacco smoke."

Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency strengthened its particulate standards, reducing by almost half the amount of such particles that can be released into the air. In the past 10 years, a growing number of Bay Area cities - including Oakland, Union City, Fremont and Los Gatos -

have limited wood-burning devices. In Mill Valley, first-time violators are warned before facing a \$150 fine.

Schkolnick said the Bay Area district's wood-burning law would mirror the regulations used in Sacramento and the San Joaquin Valley. During the 2006-07 winter, the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District - which covers San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties as well as part of Kern County - issued 192 tickets to residents. The first fine is \$50. Repeated violations can lead to fines of between \$100 and \$1,000, district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said.

In lieu of paying a fine, first-time violators can attend a two-hour "residential wood-burning compliance school," where they learn about the pollution hazards of wood-burning, Holt said.

Most violators in the San Joaquin Valley are initially reported by concerned neighbors, Holt said.

Sacramento's law, adopted last month, takes effect Dec. 1 and will be enforced until Feb. 29. Because Sacramento residents haven't been adequately informed about the new regulation, no fines will be issued until next year, said Christina Ragsdale, spokeswoman for the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District Board.

Besides limiting fireplace use on bad-air days, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's proposed regulation would ban burning garbage and limits the type of fireplaces allowed in new buildings, as well as the type of wood that can be sold.

Light my fire? Not without a penalty Proposal would ticket violators who burn during 'Spare the Air' nights

By Denis Cuff, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

Igniting a public health war on smoke, the Bay Area's air pollution agency proposed Monday to ban wood fires on bad air nights and to bar new installations of open hearth fireplaces in homes and buildings.

Up until now, the air quality district has not regulated indoor burning of wood.

Instead, the district has asked people to voluntarily refrain from lighting fires on chilly winter "Spare the Air" nights to protect the public from the health effects of tiny smoke particles that can lodge deep in human lungs.

The particles can aggravate asthma, emphysema and lead to premature death among the elderly.

Under the proposed rule, people in the nine Bay Area counties who burn on bad air nights would be subject to a ticket and small fine.

Enforcement of the rule would rely heavily on public complaints. District inspectors would provide a grace period for people to learn about the rule before any tickets are written.

"This isn't about tickets, but having the public participate in a wood smoke reduction strategy to protect public health," said Karen Schkolnick, a spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "Wood smoke accounts for 30 to 40 percent of the particulates on winter nights."

The proposal would exempt people who rely on wood fires to heat buildings — and have no access to other heating sources.

The district is holding seven public workshops on the proposal around the region, starting Wednesday.

After holding public workshops this month, air district administrators will consider whether to revise the draft smoke rule before sending it on to the 22-member district air board, a group of city council members and county supervisors from throughout the Bay Area.

No date has been set for the rule to take effect.

The proposed ban on bad air nights was expected, as several air quality board members have publicly called for it.

But agency administrators didn't stop there. They proposed to ban further installation of traditional open hearth fireplaces, which lack emission controls.

In contrast, most new homes these days are built with much cleaner wood-burning devices — EPA certified fire inserts, boxes or stoves — or with ceramic logs heated by natural gas.

To prevent smoky fires, the rule would require firewood offered for sale to meet a low-moisture content requirement. Burning garbage in fireplaces would be banned.

To discourage people from burning wet wood or garbage, the district would set an opacity standard for chimney smoke. A chimney belching a continuous flow of thick, visible smoke would likely flunk the standard, Schkolnick said.

Some critics of the rule say the air district should leave fireplaces alone and do more to reduce pollution from industries and autos.

Air district officials say cars and industries face many emission control requirements, but there are no clean-air rules for fireplaces.

In a report on the rule, the air district said fireplaces in Contra Costa, Santa Clara and Alameda counties spew out the most tons per day in the Bay Area of the fine soot particles from fireplaces that the district is trying to limit.

Last winter, district air violated the fine particle federal public health limit about 30 nights.

The three counties have many inland valleys that trap smoke. Also, those counties have large populations and chilly winter temperatures that can make people think about lighting up their fireplaces.

Public workshops on wood smoke proposal

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District will hold seven public workshops on its proposal to regulate wood smoke from fireplaces and stoves.

-1 to 3 p.m. Wednesday at Metropolitan Transportation Commission Metrocenter Auditorium, 101 Eighth St., Oakland

-1 to 3 p.m. Thursday, Steele Lane Community Center, 415 Steele Lane, Santa Rosa

-6 to 8 p.m. Nov. 14, San Jose State University, Costanoan Room, One Washington Square, San Jose

-1 to 3 p.m. Nov. 15, Holiday Inn, 1050 Burnett Ave., Concord

-6 to 8 p.m. Nov. 15, Ramada Inn, 1000 Admiral Callaghan Lane, Vallejo

-1 to 3 p.m. Nov. 16, Seaport Conference Center, 459 Seaport Court, Redwood City

-6 to 8 p.m. Nov. 26, Robert Livermore Community Center, Cresta Blanca Room, 444 East Ave., Livermore

Information about the proposed smoke rule can be viewed at <http://www.baaqmd.gov>. Click on rules and regulations, then on workshops.

Dairies convert waste into biogas for PG&E

By Janis Mara, business writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, November 6, 2007

ON A PETALUMA dairy farm underneath a dark gray tarpaulin, cow manure is producing one of California's newest sources of renewable energy — biogas.

Wind turbines, solar panels, ocean waves, even orange peels and sawgrass have been tapped as alternative forms of energy in recent years. But biogas is the real scoop and the straight poop, literally, when it comes to renewable electricity.

California will get up to 16,000 cubic feet of renewable natural gas a day, enough to meet the electricity needs of approximately 150,000 California homes over ten years in two separate biogas deals announced in mid-October.

Bakersfield-based BioEnergy Solutions and New Hampshire's Microgy will capture the gas at dairy farms, clean it and deliver it to Pacific Gas & Electric.

A PG&E manager noted that it's not a big stink yet, however.

"The actual big numbers (for biogas) aren't going to start until 2009 and later," said Rod Boschee, manager of business development for PG&E. Under a mandate from the state of California, the utility must get 20 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2010.

While the party is just getting started with regard to biogas, the potential for energy saving is great. There are about 1,900 dairies and 1.7 million dairy cows in California, Boschee said.

Some of these highly productive cows will be supplying energy for California's natural gas pipeline. At other farms, the cows will provide electricity to power their own dairies, taking a huge load (as it were) off California's energy grid.

"There are three reasons we think biogas is great," said Jennifer Zerwer of PG&E. "First, it's helping reduce vast amounts of harmful methane gas from Central Valley communities — where air quality is already compromised. Methane gas is 20 times more endangering to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide."

Though surprising at first, this statistic won't astonish anyone who has passed the Harris Ranch beef cattle feedlot abutting Interstate 5 on the way to Los Angeles; its aroma is indeed more unpleasant than car exhaust.

"Second, it's providing a revenue stream for these communities," Zerwer said. Farms can sell the biogas to energy companies. They can also sell "carbon offsets," marketable credits bought by companies trying to make up for the carbon dioxide or other pollutants they generate.

"Third, it's providing our customers with renewable, clean energy," Zerwer said.

Some, especially those endowed with a keen sense of smell, might quibble with the definition of manure-generated methane gas as nonpolluting. But biogas produces almost no emissions when generating electricity, unlike coal-fired plants that add tons of carbon dioxide and other toxic substances to the atmosphere.

The distinctive scent, as well as other unwanted ingredients, is removed from the gas before it's routed to the pipeline that distributes natural gas, Zerwer explained.

About 24 dairy farms throughout Northern California are using biogas created from their cows' manure to power their dairies, much as many California homeowners and businesses use solar panels to provide juice for their homes.

Manure drops onto runways in the barn and is flushed to a holding area and then to an area called, in one of the world's worst oxymorons, the "manure lagoon." The lagoon is sealed — at the St. Anthony farm in Petaluma, for example, with a thick gray tarpaulin — to create an oxygen-free atmosphere.

The methane gas produced as the manure breaks down is collected and "scrubbed," or cleaned, to create natural gas that powers the creamery.

"We're a Franciscan organization. Being responsible stewards of the land is an essential value of what we do," said Francis Aviani, a spokeswoman for the 57-year-old St. Anthony Foundation. The organization, best known for its dining room for the needy, also sponsors the organic farm in Petaluma, which functions as a drug and alcohol recovery program.

Manure from St. Anthony's 250 milk cows generates 40 kilowatts of electricity, enough to power the creamery, Boschee said. "I think it's exciting that they are so innovative and progressive."

Valley study could contribute important data to control pollution better

Stockton Record, Friday, Nov. 2, 2007

The Southern Californian wildfires provided tragic confirmation - again - that the wind knows no boundaries, doesn't respect topography and merits continuing study.

Wind patterns and how they contribute to air pollution have prompted the Valley Air Pollution Control District to undertake a thorough review of what blows into the region and what blows out.

Watching as the Santa Ana winds propelled towers of voracious flames across the Los Angeles and San Diego areas was frightening and enlightening. Air flows were crucial components both in fanning and extinguishing the flames.

In San Joaquin County, the wind-driven dangers aren't as apparent.

Air pollution district officials want to quantify the impact of winds from the Bay Area and better understand how the county's industrial, agricultural and transportation activities impact other areas.

Generally speaking, the Bay Area's polluted air flows east through the Delta and into San Joaquin County before shifting south toward Fresno and Bakersfield.

How much of the polluted air just passes through and how much gets stuck here?

It's hoped that the study will support what scientists already suspect with statistics and objective evidence.

Perhaps it also will create a better understanding of what impacts agriculture, commuters, industry and urban expansion are making.

Cleaning up the air isn't just a county problem, Valley problem, Northern California problem or state problem. It's a national and international problem.

Hopefully, this relatively small air pollution study can contribute to a better understanding of the larger problem.

Agency wants to put out wood fires

Bay Area air quality district proposes rule to ban indoor burning on 'Spare the Air' nights

By Denis Cuff, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

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Until now, the air quality district has not regulated indoor burning of wood.

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The particles can aggravate asthma and emphysema and lead to premature death among the elderly.

Under the proposed rule, people in the nine Bay Area counties who burn on bad-air nights would be subject to a ticket and small fine.

Enforcement of the rule would rely heavily on public complaints.

District inspectors would provide a grace period for people to learn about the rule before any tickets are written.

"This isn't about tickets, but having the public participate in a wood-smoke-reduction strategy to protect public health," said Karen Schkolnick, a spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "Wood smoke accounts for 30 (percent) to 40 percent of the particulates on winter nights."

The proposal would exempt people who rely on wood fires to heat buildings and have no access to other heating sources.

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No date has been set for the rule to take effect.

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But agency administrators didn't stop there. They proposed to ban further installation of traditional open hearth fire places, which lack emission controls.

In contrast, most new homes these days are built with much cleaner wood-burning devices -- EPA-certified fire inserts, boxes or stoves -- or with ceramic logs heated by natural gas.

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Last winter, district air violated the fine particle federal public health limit on about 30 nights.

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Local governments fear tax exemptions for pollution controls

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

AUSTIN—Local governments are worried they could lose millions of dollars in tax revenues because of a new state law allowing property tax exemptions for equipment that cleans up coal power plants.

Several lawmakers have joined school districts, counties and cities in asking the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to adopt a conservative interpretation of the legislation, which takes effect Jan. 1.

"It's a scary thing," said Jeff Branick, first assistant to Jefferson County Judge Ronald Walker. "It has the potential to significantly reduce our industrial tax base."

The law, which passed this year, gives businesses incentives to install pollution control equipment in coal plants. It's a revision of a program enacted in the mid-1990s allowing property tax exemptions for certain equipment that reduces air, water or land pollution.

But the wording of the new law is broad enough that local officials fear companies will lobby the environmental commission to approve exemptions for major parts of existing power plants or oil refineries.

Harris County chief appraiser Jim Robinson said the broadest interpretation of the new rules could reduce the taxable value of chemical plants, refineries and power plants in his county by \$1.6 billion. That would mean higher taxes for homeowners and other businesses to make up for the loss of revenue resulting from the lower values, he said.

The bill's author, Rep. Rick Hardcastle, R-Vernon, said such concerns are exaggerated. He said the new law was designed to ensure that new electric power plants are as clean as possible.

"People are making great big jumps and seeing black helicopters circling that were not out there," he said.

John Kennedy, a senior analyst at Texas Taxpayers and Research Association, a business group, called warnings about the exemptions a "scare tactic."

"There is nothing in this bill that expands the eligibility for the exemption," he said.

Still, the Texas Oil and Gas Association is asking the environmental commission to include some refinery equipment in the new law, including hydrotreaters and other equipment that removes sulfur from motor fuels.

Companies argue that the equipment produces cleaner diesel and gasoline that will improve air quality around the state, although it doesn't reduce pollution at the refinery. The equipment hasn't qualified for pollution exemptions in the past.

The new legislation includes a list of specific equipment that can qualify for the tax breaks.

Critics have pointed to older technologies on the list that could allow the owners of old power plants to exempt boilers and generators.

Hardcastle said in an August letter to the environmental commission that although the list includes "coal cleaning or refining facilities," the law was not meant to exempt an entire oil refinery.

"The 'refining' word was added to the bill to clarify that, in addition to coal cleaning, the bill would encourage folks to 'refine' coal before it is used," he said.

Rep. Dennis Bonnen, R-Angleton, told regulators that exempting entire plants because the plant installed pollution control equipment would subvert the intent of the original program.

"The local area needs both a cleaner environment and county services supported by the taxes paid," said Bonnen, chairman of the House Environmental Regulation Committee.

The environmental commission has asked the Texas attorney general for an opinion on the scope of the new law.

Turning cows to currents

Biogas created from manure in state can generate electricity for thousands of homes

By Janis Mara, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

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EPA supports permit for refinery growth

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has opened its comment period for the proposed expansion of the Big West of California refinery on Rosedale Highway in Bakersfield.

After reviewing the amount of new air pollution the expansion would create, the EPA has recommended that the refinery be issued a permit to expand.

Studies show the expanded refinery would not prevent the San Joaquin Valley from reaching federal standards for air quality, according to EPA's Web site.

The proposed \$600 million expansion would increase the refinery's gasoline and diesel output. The project requires separate permits from Kern County, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the U.S. EPA.

Information on the expansion can found on the EPA's Web site, at www.epa.gov/region09/air/permit/big-west/index.html, or by calling 415-947-4119.

Written comments on the EPA permit will be accepted through Dec. 12.

Send comments by e-mail to R9airpermits_bigwest@epa.gov or by mail to Kathleen Stewart (AIR-3), U.S. EPA Region 9, 75 Hawthorne St., San Francisco, CA 94105-3901.

EPA will hold a public hearing on the project from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. and from 6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 5 at Discovery Elementary School, 9500 Vaquero Ave., Bakersfield.

Kern County and the air district will hold separate public hearings on the permits at a later date.

Kern Oil likely to change hands

Connecticut company set to acquire refinery by 2008

BY JOHN COX, California staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

Kern Oil & Refining Co., a small petroleum refining operation in the southeast, would change hands -- and possibly expand to process more fuel -- under an agreement announced Monday.

The deal calls for Connecticut-based NTR Acquisition Co. to pay \$286.5 million for Kern Oil, a privately held refinery built in the 1930s. If approved by regulators, the sale is expected to close in the first quarter of next year.

Both parties expect Kern Oil's 113 employees to stay on after the acquisition.

Kern Oil President Jake Belin said consumers would benefit from an expansion.

"The potential is there," he said, "to produce ... more environmentally friendly gasoline and more environmentally friendly diesel fuel for the San Joaquin Valley and for the state of California."

Any expansion of California's refining capacity helps consumers because there are so few refineries that produce California-approved gasoline, said Claudia Chandler, assistant executive director of the state Energy Commission.

NTR's CEO, Mario E. Rodriguez, said the refinery, at East Panama Lane and Weedpatch Highway, produces about 8,800 barrels of gasoline, 8,400 barrels of diesel and 10,000 barrels of fuel oil daily. NTR would spend more than \$500 million over three years to increase output of gasoline or diesel by 50 percent to 70 percent.

Any such expansion must be approved by state and regional air regulators.

Also announced Monday: Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum Corp., one of the state's largest oil producers, has agreed to buy a 10 percent to 12 percent stake in NTR, in what Occidental spokesman Richard Kline called "finding a home for our oil." He said the company has never before owned shares in a refiner.

PG&E to buy new solar plant

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

An additional 177 megawatts of clean energy will be pumped into California's energy grid thanks to a purchasing agreement between Pacific Gas & Electric and Palo Alto-based Ausra, Inc., a company that develops and deploys utility-scale solar thermal power technology.

Ausra will build a plant in San Luis Obispo County that will use the sun's rays to generate steam. The plant is expected to begin generating power in 2010. Pacific Gas & Electric and other California utilities are under a mandate by the state to get 20 percent of their energy from renewable energy sources by 2010.

One megawatt of electricity is enough to power 750 average California homes under normal conditions.

The plant will burn no fuel, use minimal water, and have no air or water emissions. It will use only one square mile of land.

Solar thermal power uses the heat from the sun's rays to create steam. Solar collectors boil water at high temperatures to power steam turbine generators, much as traditional coal-fired plants do. But traditional plants generate toxic emissions including carbon dioxide, while solar thermal plants generate only minimal emissions.

Long Beach agrees to ban old diesel trucks from port

The mayors of the cities agree to replace the fleet of 16,500 rigs with cleaner models by 2012, but implementation is still unclear.

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

In a rare display of partnership, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster on Monday touted a joint plan to scrap old diesel rigs and replace them with newer, cleaner models as part of an effort to slash port-related pollution linked to 2,400 premature deaths a year.

Against a backdrop of massive cranes unloading a freighter as it spewed dark columns of diesel smoke, the often rival leaders embraced during a news conference held after the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners agreed to a progressive truck ban identical to one approved last week by the adjacent Port of Los Angeles.

For the time being, however, it's a ban with out an implementation plan. Unless the ports can reduce pollution, expansion projects likely to produce thousands of local jobs will face protracted legal challenges. With so much on the line, Villaraigosa and Foster turned from competition to cooperation.

"For the longest time, we were working on separate tracks," Villaraigosa told a crowd of about 75 truckers, environmentalists and shipping company representatives. "Let's join hands and work together."

"Long Beach and Los Angeles," Foster added, "continue to lead the world in pushing for cleaner air and healthier environment with our shared goal of having the cleanest ports in the world."

However, leaders from both cities forecast intense negotiations to come as port authorities, truckers, environmentalists, shippers and health officials begin devising a plan to implement the program, which calls for replacing the port complex's entire fleet of 16,500 trucks by 2012.

Now the big question is who will pay to own, operate and maintain the new trucks, worth an estimated \$1.6 billion.

Many of the fleet's mostly low-income, Spanish-speaking independent contract truckers insist they cannot afford to buy new trucks, let alone maintain them. They want trucking companies and shippers to buy the trucks and hire the truckers.

Trucking companies and shippers argue that the ports lack the legal authority to force them to purchase the fleet. Employing drivers also would attract union organizers, something most port businesses would oppose.

"Ultimately, the consumer will pay for it -- a nickel on a pair of tennis shoes and a quarter on every television set," said S. David Freeman, president of the Los Angeles Board of Harbor Commissioners. "So let's get on with it."

The truck ban, which must be approved by both city councils, is scheduled to begin Oct. 1, 2008. On that day an estimated 3,000 trucks built before 1989 would be denied access to the nation's busiest port complex.

"In just 11 months the people of the Southland can begin breathing easier," Villaraigosa said in a statement. "We will no longer sacrifice public health for the sake of adding a few pennies to the profit margins."

Pressure to reduce port pollution has been motivated in part by booming trade. Annual trade at the ports, currently about \$305 billion, is expected to double by 2020, port authorities said.

Cleaner trucks would save up to \$5.9 billion in health costs to workers and local residents, according to an economic impact study commissioned by the Port of Los Angeles. The study predicts the cleanup also would clear the way for port expansion projects that could generate 300,000 to 600,000 jobs by 2025.

But because the ports account for 25% of diesel particulate emissions in the Los Angeles Basin -- and more particulate-forming nitrogen oxide emissions than all 6 million cars in the region -- neither port has been able to complete an environmental impact report for any infrastructure improvement project in six years.

Julie Sauls of the California Trucking Assn. said the truck ban, which is only a portion of the landmark Clean Air Action Plan endorsed by the two ports a year ago, would improve air pollution by only less than 10% during the next five years.

Also, the plan "does not spell out how to cover the tremendous costs associated with such a transition," she said in a prepared statement.

Long Beach Harbor Commissioner James Hankla believes a compromise is inevitable.

"How are we going to pay for all this?" he said. "I don't know. But I believe we will find a way, not that it's going to be free or cheap, because if we are not able to grow green, we will not see a million new jobs created for this region."

Massachusetts pushes biofuel standards

By Ken , Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

Gov. Deval Patrick and top lawmakers want to put Massachusetts on the clean energy map by requiring biofuel blends in home heating oil and providing tax incentives for producers of more efficient ethanol technology, known as cellulosic ethanol.

The state would be the first to require all diesel and home heating fuel sold in Massachusetts to contain a minimum amount of bio-based alternatives in their blends, as well as the first to provide incentives for cellulosic ethanol production, Patrick said.

"For the sake of environment, our economy and our nation security, we must act and we must act now," the Democratic governor said Monday at news conference. "We see opportunities to create jobs, drive energy costs down, sharpen our competitive edge at home and promote environmental stewardship around the world."

The bill, introduced with Senate President Therese Murray and House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi, sets standards of a 2 percent blend by 2010, increasing to 5 percent in 2013, in all diesel and home heating fuel.

Ethanol currently is made from corn. Future sources include cellulosic feedstock such as switchgrass, a hardy prairie grass in great abundance, and wood chips and corn stems.

Currently, such renewable energy sources supply only about 6 percent of America's energy needs, according to the federal government.

Massachusetts is the third largest home heating oil market in nation, according to the Northeast Biofuels Collaborative.

Brooke Coleman of the collaborative described the bill as an economic development tool, rather than an environmental effort. "It's a guaranteed market for bio-based fuel," he said. "It's a huge spark for the industry locally."

Samuel Krasnow, spokesman for Environment Northeast, said the bill is a disappointment because there's no standards to reduce pollution. "There should be a requirement that there be a net reduction of greenhouse gases," he said.

Minnesota and Iowa are leaders in biofuel leaders. New York last year announced a \$20 million program to develop cellulosic ethanol. Texas also is focusing on creating biofuels through cellulosic feedstock.