

## **Families breathe in fun, games on Asthma Day Merced College event also featured five green businesses.**

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

The air we breathe took center stage Tuesday at Merced's first World Asthma Day.

It shared the spotlight with five "green" businesses -- recognized for their sustainable practices -- and young winners of the event's poster contest.

Leaning against her shiny new bike -- a prize for winning the contest -- Cynthia Huerta explained that her interest in the medical condition began with her brother Enrique Carpenter, 10. He has asthma and experiences trouble breathing when he exercises.

Huerta drew a picture of people holding hands, next to the message, "Stop Pollution."

And the fight to stop pollution was a focus of the day. "Here in Merced, the biggest problems are ozone, PM-2.5 and PM-10 particle pollution," announced Allyson Holman, chairwoman of the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition.

She then presented Merced County with its first "Asthma Report Card." It compiled statistics about pollutants and other asthma triggers in the area and recommended programs and policies to help the problem.

About 745 Merced County children visit the emergency room because of asthma-related illnesses every year, according to the report. Schools should adopt an air quality policy that correlates with the colors of the flags schools fly outside -- which signify "good" and "bad" air days, the report suggested.

"Here in Merced, everyone knows we don't have the best air," Holman said. "It's mainly geography, and we can't support the trucks, methane sources, population growth. All of these things combined are a bad mix for air pollution."

On a lighter note, the Asthma Coalition recognized businesses doing their part to clean the air, including UC Merced, Cafe Sol, Service Master, Golden Valley Health Centers and Four Seasons Ag Consulting. These organizations are known for conserving resources and making use of local products.

Everyday residents then learned how they can clear the air and detect cases of asthma. They visited an "asthma circuit" of about 20 booths at the event's Merced College site.

Dr. Sunit Patel, a Merced physician specializing in lung diseases, spoke with visitors at a booth where people could get tested for asthma.

A common misconception about the condition, he said, is that people think it's episodic -- occurring sporadically between periods of normalcy.

"It's not," he said. "It's a chronic disease of the airway. People forget. Even if your symptoms are gone, don't stop your medication."

Volunteers Christina Hill and Mark Andrade manned the "trigger table." They quizzed visitors about what can set off asthma systems. They presented a flashlight and gum -- which are not asthma triggers -- and candles, perfumes, flowers and stuffed toys -- which can aggravate asthma.

"We're just interested in these things," said Betty Wetters, a Merced resident who visited World Asthma Day with her grandson, Evren Ayik, 6. "We wanted to learn about asthma and have some fun."

The "fun" included volleyball and bean-bag tosses for the kids, as well as educational booths. Evren took special interest in the bat-box booth, where he and his grandmother learned about the importance of bats to the environment.

Wetters, a retired nurse, doesn't have asthma. But when asked if she knew anyone who did, she quickly answered "Oh, yes!"

"Fortunately," she added, "no one in our family has it."

And through education and treatment, other visitors to the event might soon be able to say the same.

## **Report Highlights Scope of Asthma in Tulare County**

Staff Writer

Valley Voice Newspaper, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

*Tulare County* - In 2006, more than 500 children aged 5-17 in Tulare County had to seek treatment at a hospital emergency room for their asthma. This is one of many facts reported by the Tulare County Asthma Coalition in its annual report. (Copy of the report will be included with the May 8 issue of the *Voice*.)

The annual report is one of the ways the local Coalition marks World Asthma Day, which is on May 6 this year.

"We need to protect these students in school with a variety of chronic conditions, such as asthma," said Diane Sepeda, acting director of the Coalition.

Asthma is an inflammatory disease of the lung that is one of the most chronic diseases of children. The annual report notes that in 2005, the last year figures are available, 27.6 percent of Tulare County children ages 5-17 had been diagnosed with asthma, compared to 18 percent statewide. The geography of the Central Valley tends to make asthma more common.

"Asthma is a major public health problem in Tulare County, and World Asthma Day provides a perfect opportunity to improve local understanding of the burden asthma places on all of us. Our Report to the Community on Asthma will address our local disparity, projects implemented and local recommendations. By joining together with others concerned about asthma, we feel that we can begin to help relieve this burden," said Sepeda.

The Valley is known for trapping airborne pollutants, putting people with respiratory problems such as asthma at greater risk. Studies show that ozone and particulate matter not only increase symptoms, but can cause asthma.

The Asthma Coalition has worked with schools to reduce those triggers. The Coalition has implemented a daily air quality notification system and schools in Visalia and Tulare fly flags each day indicating the level of pollution based on the air quality index.

The Coalition is also working with schools to plant low-allergy or asthma-friendly landscaping. It provides both a brochure on best practices for landscaping, as well as assisting schools in choosing plants and shrubs.

Another way the Coalition assists schools is through its Indoor Air Quality Maintenance and Prevention Tools program. It is in the process of partnering with Tulare County Schools to evaluate school sites for environmental triggers and to identify low-cost solutions to minimize things that could put children at greater risk from asthma.

The report can be found on KJUG's web-site, [www.westcoastbroadcasting.com](http://www.westcoastbroadcasting.com), during the month of May, as well as at the coalition's Kid's Zone at KJUG Radio's Jugfest music festival on June 7 at Plaza Park in Visalia.

### **You Can Control Your Asthma**

Asthma control is the goal of treatment and can be achieved in the vast majority of asthma patients with proper management. A person's asthma is under control when he or she has:

- No (or minimal) asthma symptoms.
- No waking at night due to asthma.
- No (or minimal) need to use "reliever" medication.
- The ability to do normal physical activity and exercise.
- Normal (or near-normal) lung function test results (PEF and FEV1).
- No (or very infrequent) asthma attacks.

For more information on the programs offered by the Coalition call 685-3494. For further information about the Report to the Community on Asthma go to [www.CalAsthma.org](http://www.CalAsthma.org).

## **Big West lobbying to speed up expansion approval**

**BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer**

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

As public controversy swirls over its proposed refinery expansion, Big West of California now faces another hurdle.

A ticking clock.

Citing a November deadline to use its multi-million dollar air pollution credits, refinery officials have asked to bypass the county planning commission review of its project and go straight to county supervisors for approval.

"We've just asked the county to please understand the schedule," said Big West Health, Safety and Environmental Director Bill Chadick.

Big West's project has been stalled for more than a year after county planning staff deemed an environmental impact report on the project insufficient. The approval process is expected to restart in June but will likely stretch into November under normal approval procedures.

Normally the planning commission would vote on the project and the Board of Supervisors would take up an appeal of that decision. But an appeal is guaranteed because of mounting opposition, so Big West argues the issue should go directly to supervisors.

County zoning ordinances allow circumvention of the planning commission in certain situations. But project critics object to use of the provision in this case, saying a refinery expansion requires a full vetting by the planning commission and public.

"This is such an important issue. To bypass the planning commission and the public input that (process) would provide would be very unfortunate," said Betsy Ramsey, spokeswoman for Bakersfield Citizens Against Hydrofluoric Acid, a group opposed to the refinery's plans to use modified hydrofluoric acid in its new operations.

There's another reason the planning commission should weigh in on the issue first, said Gloria Smith, a San Francisco-based attorney representing unions who work at the refinery, residents who live nearby and a valley clean air group.

"This isn't a time-wasting mechanism. The county planning commission has expertise that the Board of Supervisors does not have," Smith said. "They're the ones that do the heavy-lifting and analysis on all aspects of the project."

Losing the pollution credits could impact the feasibility of the expansion, refinery officials say, because new credits are expected to become scarce and skyrocket in cost following a review this November of how the San Joaquin Valley's pollution credit bank compares with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards.

Refinery officials have approached county supervisors and Kern County Planning Director Ted James in recent weeks about speeding up the process.

James, who would make the final decision on expediting the process, said Monday it's premature to consider Big West's request now.

Supervisor Mike Maggard, who represents the district in which the refinery is located, said he hasn't taken a position on the expansion but he doesn't support skipping the planning commission's role in the approval process.

"The timing is very unfortunate and I commiserate with the refinery, but that doesn't mean the public gets disserved by the process," Maggard said.

The refinery isn't the only company that could lose its air pollution credits. Industries throughout the San Joaquin Valley are nervous about their credits being devalued this fall, said Leonard Scandura, a permit services manager with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The air district issues pollution credits to companies that take polluting equipment offline or install new equipment with pollution controls that exceed current requirements. The credits can then be used to offset pollution increases from future projects that exceed state and federal clean air limits. Companies can also sell their credits to other companies.

However, each year, the air district must show the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that its offset requirements are equivalent to EPA's offset requirements. In past years, the district has been able to make this demonstration, but district officials don't expect that to happen this year for a pollutant called nitrogen oxides due to power plants and other large industrial projects built in the past year, Scandura said.

After this year's review, the district anticipates those pollution credits will only be worth about 5 to 10 percent of their current value.

Big West owns about 458 tons per year of nitrogen oxides credits. This fall, the credits' worth could drop to between 20 and 45 tons per year. Big West needs 70 tons per year of credits to offset increased pollution from their expansion.

Smith, the San Francisco attorney, said the pollution credit problem raises new concerns about the project.

"Air districts do have inflated credit accounts and it's not good policy for (companies) to get in there and take advantage of what could be a flawed account," she said. "I believe the air district should freeze all (new projects that require credits) until they get an accurate view of what the credits are."

Big West says it won't put up a fight to bypass the planning commission and speed up the approval process but it will do what it can to get the project approved by November.

"We're down to the wire and it's become an extremely serious issue," Chadick said.

### **What is an air pollution credit?**

Companies receive air pollution credits when they voluntarily reduce polluting emissions beyond the level required. Credits can be redeemed to offset the pollution new projects will produce.

The credits may be banked or sold to other companies.

### **As written, farm bill a mixed bag for state**

#### **Cardoza's happy with legislation, but it still faces presidential veto.**

By Michael Doyle, Sun-Star Washington Bureau  
Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Farmers markets in cities like Merced could flourish with funding included in a new farm bill that's become a mixed bag for California.

Central Valley growers could buy new pumps and engines with federal funds dedicated to improving air quality. University of California researchers could conduct more organic agriculture studies.

Valley students would be served more fruit and vegetable snacks.

"I'm back to being happy again," Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, said Tuesday afternoon. "Currently, the bill is in a shape where I can support it."

Negotiators still face a potential presidential veto along with a May 16 deadline.

Final House and Senate approvals may be extended until next week, while last-minute haggling continues. Key lawmakers met again behind closed doors Tuesday.

Still, much of the farm bill is now finished. Funding levels are set, along with crucial language covering everything from specialty crops to conservation and research.

The settled provisions are part of a bill expected to cost about \$280 billion over five years and \$570 billion over 10 years.

Roughly two-thirds of the spending supports food stamp and nutrition programs.

The big wild card is a potential veto by President Bush, who has called the package "bloated." Congress could then either overturn a veto or simply extend current farm policy for another year, until a new president takes office.

Cardoza, who chairs the House horticulture and organic agriculture subcommittee, said his fellow lawmakers have little appetite for extending current farm policy and giving up the negotiating gains made on behalf of fruit and vegetable growers.

Farmers markets, for instance, are a modest winner in this year's pending farm bill. The bill includes \$33 million for an existing Farmers Market Promotion Program that currently provides only about \$1 million annually.

The program is very competitive, so the additional money could help.

"In recent years, the program has funded marketing campaigns by the California Olive Oil Council, Sun-Maid Growers, Sunsweet Growers and others. Sunsweet, for instance, received \$150,000 to market "PlumSweets," which are diced, chocolate-covered prunes.

This year, the value-added grants total \$18 million. By contrast, the new farm bill only guarantees \$15 million over five years.

Ferd Hoefner of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition called this "far less" than growers had hoped for.

Key conservation provisions, meanwhile, remain fluid.

Some negotiators, for instance, want to stretch out payments for the Wetlands Reserve Program over 10 years. Nearly 100,000 acres in California have been enrolled in the easement program, and California lawmakers fear stretching out payments would deter more farmers from signing up.

Cardoza and other California lawmakers secured \$150 million specifically for air quality projects funded through the existing Environmental Quality Incentive Program. The money targets farmers in rural counties that have not attained federal air quality standards.

This includes the San Joaquin Valley, ranked among the nation's smoggiest regions.

Valley farmers could get grants for efforts to cut pollution.

This might include replacing diesel irrigation pumps, controlling road dust and chipping orchard cuttings instead of burning them, among other activities.

"The citizens deserve to breathe cleaner air," Cardoza said.

The bill includes a record \$1 billion to expand an existing fruit-and-vegetable snack program. Currently, the program is limited to 25 schools in each of 14 states. The farm bill will expand this to schools in all 50 states, including California.

## **Concerns over roads stall proposed Northwest Communities**

By JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Northwest Communities will be put on pause for at least a month.

But Kern County Supervisors didn't call for the halt.

Developers of the controversial series of three projects in Rosedale asked supervisors Tuesday to give them a month to clear the air about roads.

The project will come back to the board on June 17.

Tuesday's discussion of the three linked projects — which zig-zag southwest from the intersection of Nord and Palm avenues to Brimhall and Driver roads — started with a jumbled discussion of how people would get into and out of the proposed developments.

The area is surrounded by a web of narrow paved and half-paved farm roads.

Supervisors asked detailed questions about which roads were paved, which weren't and when the area's hit-and-miss road network would be completed.

Planning staff, and Kern County Roads Commissioner Craig Pope, were a bit unprepared for the detailed line of questioning.

Pope, pacing the front of the board chamber with a handheld microphone in his hand, struggled to explain to supervisors exactly what kind of roads exist in the area.

Some roads will be improved, he said.

But many road segments will remain in their rural condition until they can compete with more urban areas for local road money.

"We're missing much of the (road) infrastructure out in this area," Pope said. "Missing lanes on roads are paid for by impact fees."

Even Supervisor Ray Watson showed concern with the road situation.

Watson has been a staunch supporter of the projects — earning him the ire of area residents who don't want quarter-acre lots near their one-, two- and five-acre homesteads.

But road infrastructure and safety, he said, are another matter.

"We should have had better presentations (on roads) from staff and developers," he said.

Developers, perhaps sensing wobbling support on the dais, withdrew their project from immediate consideration Tuesday. Larry Moxley, consultant for the developers, blamed staff for the need to delay the proposal.

"They did a very poor job of answering the board's questions and confused them," he said.

He argued that tough approval conditions and high traffic impact fees placed on the developments by county staff would solve the problems supervisors were asking about.

"They doubled the fees. They added requirements. They're very expensive," Moxley said. "And then they are unable to explain how they work. That's unprofessional and unacceptable."

Developer Mike Soper said he just wants supervisors to have full and complete information in front of them before they make a decision.

County Planning Director Ted James said the county will develop a comprehensive report on roads in the area for the next meeting.

But it won't change the fact that the Northwest Communities won't be converting all the community's country roads into urban streets as part of their development.

"There will be some rural roads that won't be improved for 15 years," James said.

A number of residents spoke out against the project Tuesday.

Jennifer Keller disputed the developer's argument that the project is needed to provide for housing demand in the urban area — even over the negative impacts to traffic and [air quality](#).

"No one is buying this — or houses — in Kern right now," she told supervisors. "If you really want to reduce vehicle miles and air pollution you would deny these projects."

Developers said they plan to reach out to community members as well to address their concerns prior to the next meeting.

## **Asthma awareness urged**

By Barbara Grady, Oakland Tribune

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

OAKLAND - Aiming to help asthma sufferers control the disease and spur health care providers to heighten awareness of asthma prevention and treatment practices, some local physicians and medical groups launched an End the Asthma Attacks Now campaign on Tuesday.

They will focus their campaign on Oakland's African-American community because statistics indicate that African Americans nationally are 30 percent more likely to develop asthma than whites and two to three times more likely to be hospitalized from asthma than whites, according to the American Lung Association.

"The burden of asthma in Oakland is very similar to national statistics," said Dr. Michael LeNoir, chairman of the campaign and a lung specialist with Bay Area Pediatrics in Oakland.

People living in "any area with exposure to freeways" are particularly susceptible, he said, as are children when exposed to regular amounts of hydrocarbons, the essence of urban air pollution. The campaign is sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline, a pharmaceutical company.

Nationally, across all ethnic groups, the incidence of asthma has risen dramatically over the past two decades.

"We are exposed to more things, more hydrocarbons. We are more crowded," LeNoir said.

The number of adults in California with asthma rose 80 percent in the last two decades, meaning 13.7 percent of California's adult population has asthma, according to a recent study by California Breathing. About the same percentage of Alameda County residents have asthma, according to the campaign.

Asthma is characterized by inflammation of the lungs and a narrowing of the lung's airways. Asthma attacks are brought on by exposure to certain triggers. Susceptibility is partly genetic and partly environmental, experts say.

"Few chronic diseases are affected by environment or place as much as asthma," according to a 2008 California Department of Health study titled "Strategic Plan for Asthma in California."

LeNoir said inflammatory cells establish themselves in the lungs to protect the lungs from allergens, hydro-carbons and other triggers, but can grow abundantly and restrict a person's ability to breathe.

He said current medical theory about asthma focuses on controlling the disease so the patient avoids attacks, rather than focusing on what to do with attacks.

End the Asthma Attacks Now will hold educational sessions this summer in Oakland to inform people about prevention and control.

## **ACE train updates designed to draw valley support for high-speed rail**

By GARTH STAPLEY

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

High-speed rail supporters, having shunned San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties in a contested December routing decision, are trying to mend fences with the promise of faster ACE trains to East Bay stations.

The carrot is partially designed to lure valley votes for a \$10 billion statewide bond measure in November needed for 220-mph bullet trains from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Political wisdom suggests passage might be difficult without support from people along the Altamont Pass route rejected five months ago, plus voters around Stockton, Modesto and perhaps Sacramento. The rejected alignment could have dropped riders at Disneyland two hours and nine minutes after leaving downtown Modesto, for the price of a \$49 train ticket.

Democratic Assemblywoman Cathleen Galgiani is pushing a bill that could win about one-tenth of the bond money, or \$950 million, to upgrade Altamont Commuter Express trains taken by some valley workers to the East Bay. Bullet trains could use improved ACE rails to zip from the valley to the Bay Area in a fraction of the time required by cars, Galgiani said.

"This is a huge, huge argument to make to our folks in the Central Valley," Galgiani said Tuesday. Her bill, co-authored by Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, D-San Francisco, is scheduled for hearing today in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

The bill also prohibits a depot stop near Los Banos -- a nod to environmentalists' demands for protection of nearby wetlands that could be endangered by rail-inducing sprawl.

Bullet train fans say they use one-third the energy of airplanes and one-fifth that of cars. The 800-mile system envisioned by state authorities would cost at least \$40 billion but could eliminate nearly 18 billion pounds of climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to removing a million vehicles from California's roads.

## **Private-public partnerships**

Gov. Schwarzenegger is pushing "P3" funding, or private-public partnerships. One scenario would split one-third obligations among business, state government and federal coffers. Detractors note huge government budget deficits in a sour economy.

Galgiani is from Livingston, a geographic winner whether or not rail officials had chosen the Altamont Pass over the Pacheco Pass for California high-speed rail's first phase. That they picked the latter "in essence infuriated the valley," acknowledged Modesto's Kirk Lindsey, a minority voice on the California High-Speed Rail Commission.

Commissioners endorsed Galgiani's bill last month.

Galgiani's district runs north through parts of Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties to include a significant chunk of Stockton. ACE commuters pick up trains there and in Lathrop and Tracy.

"My bill reflects the realization that both (Pacheco and Altamont) passes are complementary to one another," she said.

Opponents are not impressed.

The \$950 million carrot "was in the bond from the start," said David Schonbrunn, president of Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund. He said his group will sue to force reconsideration of the Altamont route, which was rejected, he said, because land along the Pacheco alignment is much cheaper.

"This is a real estate deal," Schonbrunn said, "not transportation. We think high-speed rail is the future of California, we think it's crucial and we think they're screwing it up badly."

Some environmentalists, however, are appeased by the amendment to Galgiani's bill prohibiting stops from Merced to Gilroy, to protect expansive waterfowl habitat. The Sierra Club of California continues to negotiate for resources to help valley agencies plan for transit-oriented development, or growth focused around depots to reduce vehicle trips.

"The role high-speed rail will play will push the valley either toward being more sustainable or less sustainable," Sierra Club advocate Tim Frank said.

He acknowledged that Galgiani's bill makes no promise for ACE money, but simply allows ACE to compete for the \$950 million with other corridors looking to boost connections to high-speed rail.

But Galgiani notes that a recent bill amendment "elevates the focus" of Altamont trains. She envisions ACE adding tracks and grade separations, or running rails over or under roads where vehicles now wait for trains to pass.

"Essentially, we're preparing the ACE system so that it could share tracks with high-speed trains," she said.

ACE trains carry about 3,500 riders daily, including about 350 from Stanislaus County, spokesman Thomas Reeves said. Delay complaints because of conflicts with Union Pacific freight trains could be reduced if ACE had money to build more and longer "sidings," or turn-out spurs, used to let other trains pass, he said.

Lindsey said Galgiani's bill is "very good" if it furthers valley interests. "This needs to be for the whole valley, not just part."

## **Tracks through Modesto?**

High-speed rail supporters say eventually they'll run tracks north from Merced to Sacramento, passing through Modesto. That could happen by 2020, assuming the Bay Area-Anaheim line is done by 2014, Galgiani said.

Modesto City Councilman Dave Lopez said downtown could experience another revival with business from bullet trains. He's even more intrigued at the thought of his son, who attends California State University, Sacramento, commuting from Modesto on a 31-minute train for \$22, figured in 2005 dollars. Other students might live at home and make similar trips to universities in Merced and Fresno, he said.

It won't happen soon enough for his son, Lopez said -- but could for his 5-week-old daughter.

On the Net: [www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov](http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov), [www.acerail.com](http://www.acerail.com).

## **Ford says it's doubling fuel-efficient 6-speed transmissions**

By DAVID N. GOODMAN, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

DETROIT - Ford Motor Co. said Wednesday it plans to greatly increase the use of more fuel-efficient six-speed automatic transmissions, doubling their number by the end of next year and putting them in 98 percent of its North American vehicles by 2012.

Ford said the six-speed automatic transmissions offer 4 percent to 6 percent better fuel economy than four- and five-speed automatics.

The Dearborn-based automaker says its 6F35 six-speed transmissions will debut in the 2009-model Ford Escape and Mercury Mariner crossover vehicles, which now have four-speed automatic transmissions. They also will go into the 2009 Mazda Tribute and two other vehicles early next year, Ford said.

"These technologies are all about fuel economy," said Craig Renneker, Ford's chief engineer for new automatic transmissions.

Ford Vice President Barb Samardzich, head of the company's North American transmission operations, said the new transmissions are key to Ford's planned 30-percent cut in vehicle greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

"They also deliver improved acceleration and smoother shifting, all at a great value for consumers," she said in a statement.

Congress passed a law last year that requires new cars and trucks to meet a fleet average of 35 mpg by 2020, a 40 percent increase from the current average requirement of 25 mpg.

Ford said its Sterling Heights, Mich., transmission plant will make 1.3 million 6F35 transmissions a year. A \$658 million investment announced last year at transmission plants in Sterling Heights and Livonia, Mich., and Sharonville, Ohio, was primarily for making these transmissions, Ford said.

General Motors Corp. last month unveiled a six-speed automatic transmission combined with a four-cylinder engine in the popular 2008 Chevy Malibu.

GM said the new powertrain would debut immediately in the high-end Malibu LTZ and next year in two lower-priced Malibu models.

## **European athletes in asthma study at Beijing Olympics**

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

ATHENS, Greece-Athletes from 10 European countries will take part in an allergy and asthma study at the Beijing Olympics.

The study announced Tuesday on World Asthma Day is likely to involve hundreds of athletes. It's sponsored by the Global Allergy and Asthma European Network, an EU-funded research network.

"The pan-European study will allow scientists to specify the prevalence of asthma, exercise induced asthma and other allergic diseases among European athletes qualified for the Beijing Olympics," the Brussels-based group said.

Participating countries are Britain, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

British asthma expert Peter Burney said the study would look at the effects of peak exertion and the polluted atmosphere in the Chinese capital.

"What we hope to do is follow the athletes with a questionnaire-before they go and a little bit afterward-and ... look at the relationship between activity at the Olympics and previous health and the outcome," Burney told The Associated Press.

Asthma rates are higher among athletes than in the general population.

"If you exert yourself a lot, you're more susceptible to the environment at that time because you're breathing in a lot more air," Burney said. "It does seem to be high in athletes, particularly in distance athletes and in endurance sports.

Burney, involved in the British part of the study, said details of the methods remain to be worked out.

He said he didn't believe pollution in Beijing would cause athletes serious problems.

"I don't think that will happen. I think they'll be well looked after," he said.

The study is coordinated by professor Kai-Hakon Carlsen of the Voksentoppen Children's Asthma and Allergy Center in Oslo, Norway.

## **Sea-Tac Airport tries to go green**

By Thomas Frank

USA TODAY, Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Six years ago, officials at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport rejected a proposal to have pilots turn off jets' engines while parked at gates and use the airport ventilation system to pump air into cabins.

Now the airport is moving to approve the idea once blocked as too costly because it will save money and help the environment. Sea-Tac's airlines will pay for the \$31 million project - and will recoup that money in 2½ years in jet fuel savings.

"The airlines are going to save so much money in the long term, they're saying, 'Can't you have it done yesterday?' " airport environmental director Elizabeth Leavitt said.

The project will cut about 40,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions a year by enabling jets to turn off their auxiliary engines at gates, said airport environmental program manager Russ Simonson. That's equivalent to taking about 5,000 cars off the road.

Airports across the country are moving to cut emissions of both greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and other pollutants that harm local air quality.

Buying shuttle buses that run on natural gas, building energy-efficient terminals and tapping renewable power sources such as wind and solar, airports are anticipating that climate-warming aviation emissions will be federally regulated.

"There really aren't greenhouse-gas emission regulations now (in aviation). That's obviously something that's coming," said Jessica Steinhilber, head of environmental affairs for the Airports Council International.

Industry officials say aviation emissions will grow as air travel soars in coming years. New regulations on greenhouse gases could stymie travel's growth.

"There's a concern that if we aren't able to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and become more carbon-neutral or even carbon-negative, then we won't be able to grow," said Debby McElroy, the airports council's policy chief. "We have to reduce our emissions so that we can continue to add flights."

Deron Lovaas of the Natural Resources Defense Council questions the benefit of airport efforts. Emissions from airports are "a real small piece of the puzzle" compared to airplane emissions, Lovaas said. And if airports use the money they save from curbing emissions to add runways, "you could generate more air traffic and offset some of the gains."

A report by the Seattle airport last year confirms Lovaas' point. Nearly 90% of greenhouse-gas emissions linked to the airport came from planes idling, taking off, cruising and landing. The next biggest source was cars driving to and from the airport, accounting for 7% of greenhouse gases.

Airports are trying to curb auto emissions through increased public transit.

More than half of 73 U.S. and Canadian airports answering a survey this year by the Airports Council International had installed ventilation systems similar to the one planned at Seattle. Nearly two-thirds had installed similar systems that provide electricity to airplanes parked at gates, enabling them to burn less fuel.

Airlines have grown increasingly willing to pay for these systems as fuel costs have hit record levels, said Stewart Dalzell, deputy director of environmental planning at Boston's Logan International Airport. "It's in their self-interest," Dalzell said. "Luckily it does have that other benefit of reducing the emissions."

Airport efforts are aimed both at global warming and at improving air quality in local areas.

Logan's efforts - including hybrid taxis and natural-gas shuttle buses - are driven partly because the airport is near a densely populated area.

Communities are pressuring airports to minimize emissions with the same intensity that they have protested airport noise, said airport consultant Darcy Zarubiak of Jacobs Consultancy.

Airports also have been encouraged, Zarubiak said, by a Federal Aviation Administration program to fund and promote airport projects that cut pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, which often come from airport motor vehicles.

"Controlling airport emissions and meeting national air-quality standards is essential to the continued growth and improvement of public aviation," the FAA wrote in a September report.

[Fresno Bee editorial Wednesday, May 7, 2008:](#)

### **Bees add another reason we must clean air**

Scientists are now suggesting that pollution may limit the effectiveness of bees as pollinators -- not that we need another reason to clean up our dirty air.

If that's true, it might help explain why bee populations are falling in the Valley and elsewhere. It could also provide new understanding of how air pollution is linked to crop losses.

Writing in the March issue of the journal *Atmospheric Environment*, a team of University of Virginia researchers suggests that air pollution reduces the distance that the scent-bearing hydrocarbon molecules released by flowers are able to travel. They found that air pollution can eliminate as much as 90% of flowers' aroma.

That limits their exposure to bees, which are keenly sensitive to the aromas.

And that makes it harder for the bees to feed, which may be one reason bee populations are declining. As bee populations drop, it becomes harder and harder to propagate fruits and vegetables that depend on the bees for pollination. Farmers and agricultural experts are very concerned about the phenomenon, which has major implications in the Valley, with its vast acreage of flowering orchards and other crops.

There is no evidence yet that the pollution is to blame in any degree for the phenomenon known as colony collapse disorder, or CCD, which causes bees to abandon otherwise healthy hives. Scientists have identified many other reasons why bee populations are in decline in some areas. But air pollution could clearly be one of those reasons.

Ozone, in particular, is suspect in stifling plant aromas. And ozone pollution increases as the weather warms, just as plants are blooming.

We have plenty of other -- and perhaps more pressing -- reasons to work very hard to erase air pollution from Valley skies. Start with 1,000 premature deaths each year, and added health costs in excess of \$3 billion annually borne by Valley residents. The list goes on.

But now maybe we'd better add declining bee populations to the huge and growing cost of dirty air.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., May 7, 2008:](#)

### **We have a right to fresh air in national parks**

When families drive to Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, they roll down the windows expecting clean mountain air. But as the American Lung Association's State of the Air report card demonstrates, despite minor improvements, the San Joaquin Valley and our national parks within it still receive an F in air quality.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon have ozone levels higher than allowed by the Environmental Protection Agency's health standards. This means that when children hike the trails in the park, they are also

breathing in small specks of soot and dust that provoke asthma attacks and can hamper lung development.

The National Parks Conservation Association is working with local and state agencies to improve air quality and reduce vehicle emissions so that the parks in our back yard again have fresh, healthy air. Our children have the right to enjoy our majestic parks without suffering from an asthma attack.

*Destiny Rodriguez, Program Coordinator  
National Parks Conservation Association  
Central Valley Field Office, Fresno*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses how children are more affected by asthma, especially those who live in low-income areas. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Enfatizan disparidad del asma en el día internacional de esa enfermedad**

Manuel Ocaño  
Noticiero Latino  
Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, May 06, 2008

Por lo menos un distrito de calidad del aire de California destacó ayer, en el día internacional del asma, que esa enfermedad que afecta principalmente a los niños y es prevenible impacta desproporcionadamente a vecindarios de residentes de escasos recursos.

Una supervisora de gobierno de San Francisco, Sophie Maxwell declaró que hay cinco veces más asma entre niños de vecindarios pobres que entre la población infantil de suburbios en California.

El área de la Bahía de San Francisco es una de las escasas regiones del país que cuenta con un Equipo Especial Interdisciplinario para combatir el asma.