

EPA to settle 2004 lawsuit on valley ozone standards

By Marc Benjamin, The Fresno Bee

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Wed., Sept. 3, 2008

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to settle a lawsuit about ozone standards in the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles air basins.

The lawsuit dates to 2004, when ozone plans were proposed by the two air districts. The EPA never accepted or rejected the plans because it invoked a newer, more stringent standard, EPA officials say.

The lawsuit, filed by the Association of Irrigated Residents and the Natural Resources Defense Council, sought a decision from the EPA on the less-stringent one-hour ozone standard.

The EPA had a year to accept or reject the ozone plans after the districts approved them in 2004, but did not, said Brent Newell, a lawyer and director of the San Joaquin Air Quality Project.

The valley district was able to reduce pollution more than was required under the one-hour standard, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District.

The district approved use of the eight-hour standard last year, Sadredin said.

The EPA felt the eight-hour standard offered more health protection, said Kerry Drake, associate director in EPA's air division in San Francisco.

A one-hour standard requires air quality not to exceed a certain level of pollutants for any one hour of a day. The eight-hour standard requires that pollution not exceed pollutant levels for an eight-hour period.

In settling the lawsuit, Drake said, the EPA determined that it needs to address the one-hour standard from the 2004 plan.

A decision is expected by January.

Residents, supervisor sound off on refinery expansion

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wed., Sept. 3 2008

Economic growth versus community safety.

The need to balance the two will be the biggest issues decision-makers face as plans to expand the Big West of California refinery proceed through the approval process in coming weeks, Supervisor Mike Maggard said Tuesday night.

Maggard's comments came while addressing a small crowd at the first of three public workshops to provide details on the refinery project and get community input. A formal public hearing on the project will take place later this month before the Kern County Board of Supervisors votes on whether to approve the project in October.

"I'm confident the five county supervisors are going to look at how to keep our community safe, keep jobs here, make fuel to deal with this fuel crisis we have and help the economy," Maggard said. "But the first thing they're going to be concerned about is safety.

"I'm optimistic we will find an answer for our community."

Maggard's statements also reflect a critical decision supervisors face.

A long-awaited environmental impact report on the project released in June showed that the refinery could expand without the use of modified hydrofluoric acid, a toxic chemical the company has proposed to use.

The alternate expansion design, called Alternative D, would be safer for the community and have less environmental impacts. However, it would have some economic drawbacks for the company.

Big West officials have made clear they prefer their original plan but would be comfortable with Alternative D if it's what decision-makers want.

Jenny McLean, a Bakersfield resident who works near the refinery, was the lone voice to speak in favor of the Alternative D at the meeting.

"I'm all for Big West continuing to grow and produce gasoline. I'm not opposed to that," she said. "But when it involves a community of children, homes, day cares ... there's always a compromise."

If the company is allowed to use a dangerous chemical, "a catastrophe unfortunately could happen," McLean said. "And then what?"

Supporters of the expansion for the most part did not mention Alternative D but focused on the fact that safety in the refining industry has made great strides in the past two decades and that many refiners safely use the same chemical Big West has proposed all the time.

Kevin O'Neill, who lives near the refinery and has worked industrial construction for years, said he researched the number of refineries in the United States that use modified hydrofluoric acid and felt confident that Big West could use it safely.

"There's a lot of refineries using this stuff across the U.S. and I don't hear that many problems," he said. "I think that's proof that it's being used without problems."

O'Neill and several others speaking in support of the expansion also pointed out that "there can be dangers in taking the safe route."

Big West's "Clean Fuels Project" would allow the facility to nearly boost gasoline and diesel output without increasing crude oil coming into the facility.

The refinery would add equipment to convert an intermediary petroleum stream, called gas oil, into transportation fuel. Currently, the refinery can't convert all its gas oil to fuel so it sells the product to other refineries in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas.

Big West's parent company, Flying J, said when it bought the refinery from Shell Oil in 2005 that an expansion would be needed to ensure the facility's long-term viability. The project is expected to cost about \$700 million.

For the project to move forward, the Kern County Board of Supervisors must approve a conditional use permit for additional storage tanks and a zone variance for equipment that will exceed height requirements.

Interested in the refinery issue? You can read past stories, watch a video and participate in a blog discussion at Bakersfield.com/refinery.

Two more public workshops are scheduled to discuss the refinery expansion.

They are from 6 to 8 p.m.:

- Tuesday at Caroline Harris Elementary School, 4110 Garnsey Lane
- Sept. 16 at Columbia Elementary School, 703 Mondavi Way

You can obtain a copy of the Big West environmental impact report by contacting Kern County Supervising Planner Cheryl Casdorff at 862-8624.

A formal public hearing will be held before the Kern County Planning Commission on Sept. 25, after which time the commission will make a recommendation on the project. It will then be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

The Kern County Planning Department will continue to accept written comments until the Board of Supervisors votes.

Turning green ideas into green actions

By Julia Scott, San Mateo County Times

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Tues, Sept. 2, 2008

A survey of actions taken by cities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties shows a high concern for the issue of climate change but mixed results when it comes to taking action.

The Sierra Club's Loma Prieta chapter has been successful in persuading cities to adopt significant emissions reduction goals, according to a survey released today. Following through on that commitment is the next step, and organizers say it can't come too soon.

Twenty-three of the 35 cities in both counties, along with the counties themselves, have adopted the emissions-reduction targets in the U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement at the urging of local activists with the Sierra Club's "Cool Cities" campaign since 2006.

The agreement calls on cities to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, both at the municipal level and in neighborhoods, to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012 — in line with the targets of the Kyoto Protocol.

Most of those cities will have completed inventories of their own government's carbon "footprints" by the end of 2008. The next step will be to figure out how to reduce emissions, according to the report.

Cities that have chosen not to commit include Belmont, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, San Carlos and five other cities in San Mateo County; and Gilroy and Milpitas in Santa Clara County.

The next step for cities will be to compose a plan of action that tackles everything from giving people incentives to limit their commutes to making it affordable for residents to put solar panels on their homes.

But the wheels of bureaucracy turn slowly, and while cities are waiting to compose their action plans, the report points out several actions cities could be taking right now but appear to be resisting for one reason or another.

"We've seen a combination of public activism and general awareness that has led to greater levels of civic engagement, but a lot of them are having problems with the execution for a variety of reasons," said Julio Magalhaes, coordinator of the global warming program for the local chapter of the Sierra Club and author of the report.

One example of an area in which changes could pay immediate dividends is reforming a city's building code to require that residential and commercial buildings meet minimum "green building" standards — and not just voluntary ones, he said.

The electricity and natural gas combustion associated with buildings is the second-biggest cause of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., according to Magalhaes.

The Sierra Club report notes that most cities in Santa Clara County will have such requirements in place by year's end if they don't already, whereas only San Mateo County itself has instituted tough new "green" building standards for new homes and homes undergoing major renovations. Atherton and the city of San Mateo are expected to follow suit, but most of the other cities that responded to the survey haven't taken any action yet, the report says.

Several cities, including Colma, Daly City, East Palo Alto, Hillsborough and Millbrae, did not respond to the survey despite repeated requests.

"It is striking how many more cities in Santa Clara County expect to have something accomplished in 2008," Magalhaes said. "There have been some commitments but there need to be decisive actions to step up to the challenges and that's not happening (in San Mateo County)."

San Mateo City Manager Susan Loftus said neighboring cities were paying attention when San Mateo required LEED silver certification for all new municipal buildings beginning a few years ago, and they will be watching as the city eases into its new regimen of "green" building requirements in 2009 along with an education campaign.

LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a "green building" rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

"We'll give people suggestions for things like energy savings, water savings," Loftus said. For other cities, she said, "I don't think it's a matter of if, I think it's a matter of when. I think you'll see this more widely in the county, in other jurisdictions."

In Foster City, however, Assistant City Manager Kristi Chappelle defended the City Council's decision not to adopt the Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, which is nonbinding. She said the city did not have enough data to show that Foster City could benefit from meeting the goals laid out in the agreement. She pointed out that Foster City is working on a carbon footprint analysis of its own.

"Is it feasible? Is it cost effective? Our council is not particularly interested in symbolism for symbolism's sake," Chappelle said. "We want realistic goals, so if we say we're going to reduce (emissions) by 20 percent we've got some steps in place to make sure that it's a possible goal."

Magalhaes said the "wait-and-see" attitude many cities have adopted points to the fact that the California Air Resources Board has provided no regional guidance or financial assistance to cities that are attempting to move forward on their own to meet the emissions reduction standards in AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

The Sierra Club has urged state officials to support cities' efforts and not just focus on capping industrial emissions. In the meantime, Magalhaes is hoping Silicon Valley activists will use the latest survey results to press for more action in San Mateo County.

Santa Clara residents express concern over stadium

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times and Modesto Bee, Wed., Sept. 3, 2008

SANTA CLARA, Calif.—Santa Clara residents are letting officials know how they feel about a new stadium for the San Francisco 49ers being built in their city.

Asked for their input on a new stadium, dozens of residents expressed their concerns to city planners during a meeting Tuesday night.

About 70 people said they have concerns about the impact a stadium would have on area freeways, utility taxes, noise, air and light pollution. The meeting comes as the city begins an environmental assessment of the proposed stadium project. Input from Santa Clara residents and the environmental review are part of an evaluation process being prepared before the stadium would be put before a public vote.

Builder Goes Green in Tulare **Daley Homes Offers Environmentally Friendly Neighborhood**

By Rick Elkins

Valley Voice Newspaper, Wed., September 3, 2008

Visalia -Carbon Footprint appears to be the buzz phrase of the 2000s and while Daley Homes' new "green" subdivision in Tulare certainly reduces a homeowner's carbon footprint, it also reduces that homeowner's energy and water bills.

This week, Daley Homes showcased Tulare County's first California Green Builder Community – Palm Ranch in Tulare's newest residential area, east of Mooney Blvd off of Alpine Avenue.

Being "green" means offering homes that go way beyond just being energy efficient, noted Scott Daley.

Not only will all 89 homes in the first phase of the new subdivision come with solar panels built into the roof, they will have scores of other energy features, be environmentally safer, use less water for landscaping and even the construction waste materials are recycled.

There are now more than 1,000 builders, remodelers and other members of the home building industry that have earned the Certified Green Professional (CGP) educational designation since it was introduced early this year by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), said the NAHB.

There are several in California, but Bob Keenan, executive vice president of the Tulare and Kings County Building Industry Association, said Daley is perhaps the first to offer an entire "green" subdivision in the Central Valley. He said many builders will construct a green home and follow environmentally friendly practices, but he was not aware of any entire subdivisions. Definitely, he said Paul Daley, owner of Daley Homes, is breaking new ground.

"I think it's really neat. With people concerned about global warming and carbon footprint, it will be marketable," said Keenan.

He explained the state building commission has drafted Green housing building standards to be phased in starting in 2009, so "green" subdivisions may become common within a few years. "Paul's doing them now," noted Keenan.

Certified Green Professionals must complete 24 hours of classroom training, including 16 hours of green building instruction, must have two years' industry experience, must sign a code of ethics and must commit to fulfilling continuing education requirements to qualify for the designation. The educational designation is an important part of the new NAHB National Green Building Program, introduced in February.

"Home owners and home buyers are demanding more green products and features in their homes, and the building industry wants to meet that demand. That's how this market works," said NAHB President Sandy Dunn.

Scott Daley explained that his father has always been environmentally conscious and he has had solar panels on his office for years.

"He's interested in energy efficiency. It has just been an evolution. It gives us a competitive advantage and it is good for the environment," said Scott Daley. "The time is right."

Besides the solar panels that are hardly detectable on the roof, every home comes with extra installation, higher than standard dual pane windows, coating of the roof sheeting to future reject outside heat and cold, a higher than standard energy efficient cooling and heating system, dim switches on lights, high-rated energy efficient appliances and more.

"Where we really go over the top is energy efficiency," noted Scott Daley. He pointed out that the homes exceed energy efficiency by 35 percent. The solar panels alone provide 30 percent of the power needed for the home and extra panels can be added.

"With everything included – energy efficient and insulation – you can save 50 percent of your power bill," said John Davis, senior construction manager for the home builder.

There are six components to the "green" program. First is energy, but there is also insulation, wood (using recycled or reconstituted wood products), inspections (home is certified for maximum energy efficiency), water (homes must use at least 20,000 gallons less water per year) and waste (builder must recycle more than 50 percent of waste – Daley recycles more than 80 percent).

Daley said they go "above and beyond" in insulation, explaining they use 2x6's on outside walls "that allows us to put in thicker insulation." Thicker insulation is also put in the attic.

The company also uses certified inspectors to make sure that are few leaks of air, both into the home and out of the home. The inspection includes both the walls and the ducting.

Low volatile organic compounds are also used, lowering the environmental effects in the home from paint and other materials, resulting in better air quality.

To reduce water usage, every home comes with a Toro Intelli-Sense irrigation controller. The system automatically calculates the optimum irrigation scheduled and the control receives daily water updates from satellite-based weather stations and adjusts the watering accordingly.

Also, every home is equipped with a tankless water heater that immediately heats water on demand. The system is centrally located to quicken the delivery of hot water to outlets.

Daley said they also are installing drought-tolerant plants, and low-flow toilets and shower heads to reduce water usage.

Cost of the homes starts at \$199,950 for the 1,245 square-foot model, up to \$236,950 for the largest model, 1,732 s.f.

Davis said that is about \$15-20,000 more than a conventional home, but much is recovered through reduced energy costs.

"We're trying to give people the best green bang for their buck," said Daley.

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Burlingame lags in reducing greenhouse gas emissions

By Christine Morente - San Mateo County Times

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008

BURLINGAME — The city has made initial steps in climate protection, but it lags behind some cities in San Mateo County that already have developed initiatives to reduce green house gas emissions, a consultant said Tuesday night.

Kathleen Gallagher reported to the City Council that it has not developed and implemented a climate action plan, nor has it set greenhouse gas reduction targets in response to Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

So far, Hillsborough, San Mateo and Menlo Park are engaged in climate protection, she added.

According to the legislation — also known as AB32 — greenhouse gas reductions should be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020. By 2050, emissions should be reduced by 80 percent, below 1990 levels.

Michael McCord, a resident and member of the city's Green Ribbon Task Force, said that 20 cities will have green fleets by the end of the year, a "logical step Burlingame has overlooked."

He also brought up providing green building initiatives and requirements.

"Before long, contractors are going to expect it," McCord said. "This is a direction the council is going to have to move to."

Last year, the council signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, and soon after formed the task force.
never formally delegated to do a climate action plan.

"It was a key step that fell through the cracks," he said. "We're realizing now that many cities have taken steps, and it's time to catch up."

Mayor Rosalie O'Mahony explained why the city has delayed in coming up with a plan.

"We're cautious and conservative," she said.

At the study session, Gallagher recommended that the council have the task force recommend greenhouse gas reduction goals, and direct it to develop a climate action plan.

Also, the group should look into energy efficiency, transportation alternatives, waste reduction or commercial recycling.

Resident Sandra Lang said she tries to conserve water and energy. For example, she cuts down on using the dryer, uses energy-saving light bulbs, and "graywater," or wastewater from her washing machine, to wash her car.

She said, however, that it is discouraging to hear that Burlingame has been slow to being green.

"I think that it's not proactive," Lang said. "The overall climate crisis dictates that we need to take responsibility for this. It's important we move ahead."

Air Board Blinks Over Tough Compost Rule

No Author Listed

Valley Voice Newspaper, Wed., September 3, 2008

The Valley Air Board is rethinking its plan for tough new composting rules that local green waste composters suggest would put them out of business. A message sent by email late last week to

stakeholders concerned over the proposed draft rule 4566 said that staff is now recommending an extension of time to study the rule after questions of its effectiveness came up.

The memo says “new data shows the emissions from this category are much less than estimated in the Attainment Plan, but that effectiveness of controls was lacking.”

Postponing the draft rule, that was set to be adopted and in place by 2009, is good news to local composters who recently attended a Visalia City Council meeting to complain about the rule.

Two local companies compost all of Visalia green waste. Tulare County Compost Operations Manager John Jones says the company would not be able to afford a \$2 million digester to keep emissions from escaping into the air.

Both local compost firms say they would simply go out of business if the rule was adopted, as proposed by board staff.

The proposed rule would have covered commercial companies processing at least 50,000 tons a year. The Air Board sought to cut emissions by 15% in part to meet mandated emission cut goals submitted to the EPA.

Questioning the Science

COS President Bill Scroggins, an engineer by education, told the council that 50% of VOC emissions were naturally decaying matter that would decay with or without composting.

Several studies have been reported to the Air Board that appear to show the practice of covering piled rows of compost with new compost dramatically reduces VOCs – volatile organic compounds like methane.

The Air Board had been given a study done in Modesto to prove the claim that enclosed composting operations were not necessary. The study, funded through the state Integrated Waste Board, suggested finished compost lowered air pollution emissions by 75% compared to uncovered piles of compost.

Cities like Visalia work hard to divert green waste from their landfills under state regulatory requirements by the Integrated Waste Management Board to cut landfill waste by at least 50% and more in the future.

Visalia residents do their part of diverting green waste by putting their grass clippings and tree prunings in special cans collected and delivered to the two companies – Tulare County Compost and Wood Industries.

Wood Industries owner Kent Kaulfuss told the Voice that “the staff would have simply slipped these new rules by if it wasn't for the outcry of people from all over telling them that the science that backs up these proposals didn't make sense.”

One reported idea offered by the Air Board to cut emissions from green waste was to tarp fields requiring the use of heavy equipment and fueled by diesel appearing to cause more pollution than it cuts.

The proposal by the Air Board had put commercial composters in an impossible position of trying to comply with opposing government agencies battling over recycling rules.

"I think (COS president) Bill Scroggins may have made the difference," says COS trustee Sue Shannon, whose family runs Tulare County Compost. "Not only does he have a keen grip of the facts, but he has a robust personality and seems to have the ability to get 900 people to move in the same direction."

Shannon says Cal State University Fresno researchers will now do VOC testing at the company location on Lovers Lane with the data to be passed on to the Valley Air Board.

Now the Air Board says they will ask for further input at an October 16 board meeting.

Dairy researchers, like some in the composting industry, have been having a similar ongoing battle with air officials over the extent of the problem from cow emissions and the wisdom and cost of fixes for it – an issue that remains up in the air.

Aid agencies plan CO2 offsets that also help poor

By Megan Rowling, Reuters

in the Washington Post, Tuesday, September 2, 2008

LONDON (Reuters) - From fuel-efficient stoves for displaced Congolese families to drought-resistant cashew trees in Brazil, some aid agencies offering carbon offset schemes want to marry emissions savings with help for people living with climate change.

A London-based coalition is launching a new funding scheme to address concerns about existing trade in carbon credits -- primarily that this excludes the world's poorest communities, which are most at risk from the impact of global warming.

"This is very much not a minor absolution for your carbon sins, but is honestly a compensation payment for the impact you know your personal carbon emissions will have," said Andrew Simms, policy director at the New Economics Foundation (NEF), coordinating the initiative with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The consortium says its scheme differs from conventional carbon offsetting -- which has focused mostly on promoting renewable energy -- because it will also help vulnerable people cope with phenomena such as more severe droughts and floods.

In the jargon, it will fuse mitigation -- measures to curb carbon dioxide emissions -- with adaptation -- activities enabling people to deal with climate-related problems they are already experiencing.

Over the coming year, the approach will be tested in regions expected to be worst and soonest hit by climate change in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Pilot projects will prioritize adaptation: for example teaching Indian children to swim so they can survive floods, and planting the drought-resistant cashew trees whose fruit pulp families plan to sell to schools for income.

But they will also include mitigation steps such as providing solar-powered lighting for girls in Mauritania to do their homework after dark, and solar-powered freezers to store the Brazilian cashew apple pulp which makes juice.

The partners -- including the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), Greenpeace, CARE International and Trocaire -- describe the scheme as a way for charities, business and individuals to take responsibility for the damage caused by their carbon emissions in the short term.

They call people who help fund the scheme investors, rather than donors: the capital involved is human as well as financial.

"It connects me with a human being at the other end of the world who's being affected by my pollution, and I then invest in that person and relate to that person, and feel there is solidarity between us," said Saleemul Huq, head of the climate change group at IIED.

"It's not buying and selling -- it is much more investing in people."

[Modesto Bee guest commentary, Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008:](#)

What we learned from Diablo Grande: Whiteside's Opinion

Perhaps there should be fewer, but bigger, 'new towns' built

By CAROL WHITESIDE

Over the years, here in our valley, there have been dozens of proposals to create new developments in remote locations. New towns are often designed as gated communities, with a golf course or a lake. In spite of the grand aspirations, very few succeed.

People who can afford to buy homes in resort- golf course communities expect both services and amenities, and new towns rarely are large enough to provide them. There are minimum population thresholds to support grocery stores and gas stations, and the numbers required to have a McDonald's, a bank or a doctor's office are even bigger. Homeowners in Diablo Grande have to drive to get the most basic of goods and services. With gas prices escalating and growing concern about air pollution caused by tailpipe emissions, the challenge is even more daunting.

Maybe the solution for Diablo Grande is an unexpected one. Maybe there should be fewer new towns — and they should be bigger!

A new city should be planned to house 50,000 or more to generate a tax base sufficient to provide public services and schools within the community. Even today, in spite of a growing population, Salida does not generate enough revenue to be self-sufficient!

New cities should provide housing for a diverse population, with apartments, entry-level housing and places for seniors, families and workers from every field, not just an enclave of expensive homes. Prior to government approval, a secure source of water has to be guaranteed, and there has to be "patient capital" — infrastructure funding over time for sewer, water, roads, parks and public spaces — that is sufficient to withstand the inevitable ups and downs of volatile real estate markets.

The most successful new developments are built in or adjacent to existing cities, where there is already a population base and schools, museums, restaurants, professional offices, golf courses, playgrounds and parks are already part of the fabric of the community.

Trying to build a successful new town in an isolated and remote area is a daunting challenge — one that is often insurmountable.

[Modesto Bee commentary, Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008:](#)

EPA: Transportation Dept off base on fuel estimate

By JOAN LOWY, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency says another arm of the Bush administration may be low-balling the economic benefits of increasing fuel economy standards for cars and trucks.

Echoing criticism previously voiced by Democrats and environmentalists, the EPA said in comments filed with the Transportation Department that the department would have been better

off using higher estimates for future gasoline prices when it proposed increasing the average fuel economy of all vehicles to 31.6 miles per gallon by 2015.

The proposed fuel economy increase was based in part on estimates that gas would range from \$2.04 a gallon to \$3.37 a gallon, averaging \$2.42 a gallon in 2016.

"EPA has several concerns with the methodology used to determine the relative benefits and costs of the alternatives analyzed," Susan Bromm, director of EPA's Office of Federal Activities, said in a letter last month to DOT.

Gas prices were already over \$3 a gallon when Transportation Secretary Mary Peters unveiled the increase in fuel economy standards in April. The national average price for unleaded gasoline peaked in mid-July at \$4.11 and was down to \$3.68 on Tuesday, according to the AAA.

Congress last year required the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - an agency within DOT - to set mileage standards at the "maximum feasible" level each year, reaching a minimum of 35 mpg by 2020, a 40 percent increase over current standards.

If the highway administration uses a higher estimate for gas prices in its analysis, it could make a more cost-effective case for raising the requirements beyond 31.6 mpg by 2015.

Gas prices estimated by NHTSA "are more optimistic than I think any reasonable person would be in this era," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch.

The EPA also expressed concern that the Transportation Department placed too low a value on the societal benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks by increasing mileage performance.

The highway administration placed a value of \$7 a ton on the domestic social costs to the United States of greenhouse gas emissions, failing to consider the global costs of climate change, the EPA said.

Administration spokesman Rae Tyson declined to say if the agency plans to change its economic assumptions.

"We will take all comments into account as we draft the final fuel economy regulation," Tyson said.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Wed., Sept. 3, 2008:](#)

Arambula's wrong

I must disagree with recent letters to The Bee praising Assembly Member Juan Arambula for endorsing Republican Ashley Swearingin over City Council Member Henry T. Perea for the office of mayor of Fresno.

Assembly Member Arambula ran on the Democratic ticket and was elected to office by Democrats in his district. I cannot understand his endorsement of a Republican candidate who has never held an elected office, nor has any real experience other than in nonprofit organizations.

Council Member Perea has given of himself to Fresno for nearly eight years. His efforts on behalf of downtown Fresno have been very productive. He is a leader in backing environmental concerns of our area, especially in cleaning our air. Fresno can trust Henry T. Perea to make the best decisions for Fresno. He is proud to be a Democrat. We will all, Democrat and Republican alike, be proud to have him as our mayor.

Billie MacDougall, Fresno

School starts too soon

I watch my children go off to school in the blazing heat, I listen to the news telling me air quality is unhealthy. Starting school before Labor Day is a pressing problem.

August means students have long holidays off throughout the year (the Fresno Unified School District takes three weeks at Christmas), leaving parents searching for child care many times without success. We have heat exposure, bad air and economic impact with air conditioning demand at its highest.

Nine of California's 10 highest performing school districts, measured by the California Standards Test, start at the end of August or after Labor Day, so there is no problem with the testing timeline as alleged. It shows test scores soar with a later start date. The fact is a growing list of states have legislation mandating later start dates because of these critical factors.

It's clear the decision to start school early has ramifications for the entire community. I encourage the Fresno County Office of Education to hold an open meeting and obtain public input. There is far too much at stake for anything less than thorough consideration of all factors and affected interests, and to reach a true community consensus.

Carrie Krikorian Zulewski, Fresno