

## **Bill offers rebates, exacts fees based on car emissions**

### **Buyers would get money back on autos with lower emissions and be charged extra on higher polluters**

By Margot Roosevelt

L.A. Times, Monday, Jan. 28, 2008

Say you buy a car that coughs out a lot of greenhouse gases. Should you pay more for the privilege of polluting?

And say your neighbor buys a car that spews out far less. Should he be rewarded for helping to save the planet?

This week, the California Assembly is expected to vote on the California Clean Car Discount Act, which, if passed, would be the nation's first "feebate" law, imposing charges and granting rebates based on a vehicle's emission of carbon dioxide and other gases.

One-time registration fees of up to \$2,500 would be levied on new gas guzzlers, such as Hummers, Dodge Vipers and Chevy Tahoes. Some cleaner sport utility vehicles, pickups and minivans would be exempt from any charge, while the Toyota Prius, Honda Civic, Nissan Sentra and other fuel-efficient cars would get hefty rebates.

The bill, AB 493, is among a raft of measures under consideration in the Legislature and, behind the scenes, by officials at California's powerful Air Resources Board, to press the auto industry to do its part to fight global warming.

"We put 1.8 million vehicles a year on the road in California," said Assemblyman Ira Ruskin (D-Redwood City), the bill's author. "We have to find ways to get more clean cars on the road and more dirty cars off. There's no time to waste if we're to avoid the catastrophes ahead from global warming."

A previous version of the bill was narrowly defeated in the Assembly in June after seven Democrats from the Los Angeles region, under heavy lobbying from auto dealers, abstained from the vote. Strategists say supporters of the bill need five of those seven legislators if it is to pass this time.

The fence-sitters included Mike Davis (Los Angeles), Mervyn Dymally (Compton); Hector De la Torre (South Gate); Tony Mendoza (Artesia); Felipe Fuentes (Sylmar); Edward Hernandez (West Covina) and Jose Solorio (Santa Ana).

This time the measure may have a better chance. The state is reeling from the Bush administration's refusal to allow enforcement of a 2002 state law to cut carbon emissions from vehicle tailpipes by 30% in the next eight years.

Unless that decision is reversed in court, overruled by federal legislation or withdrawn by the next president, those tons of emissions must be cut by other means.

Feebate laws have been enacted in Canada, Finland and France, and in the European Union overall, countries are moving to tax cars based on carbon emissions. In the United States, feebates have also been considered in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont.

"Industry argues that market signals don't exist for consumers to buy low-greenhouse-gas and fuel-efficient vehicles," said Daniel Sperling, director of the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies and a member of the Air Resources Board. "This bill fixes the market forces."

Even if California is able to enact limits on tailpipe emissions, other strategies would be needed to meet the state's broader commitment to slash heat-trapping gases to 1990 levels over the next

13 years, officials say. That goal requires radical cuts in transportation emissions, which are responsible for about 40% of California's carbon footprint, according to the air board.

While the board has not formally endorsed the bill, Chairwoman Mary Nichols said, "We've been looking at feebates for a long time. A modest break for consumers to buy cleaner cars is a good deal."

Auto companies, whose profit margins are higher on big cars, vigorously oppose feebates.

"Feebates harm businesses and consumers who need a range of vehicles," said Gloria Bergquist of the Washington, D.C.-based Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, noting that carbon emissions will drop due to a new average fuel economy standard of 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

Brian Maas, a lobbyist for the California Motor Car Dealers Assn., predicted a dip in sales tax revenue from the law. "If it is successful, and more people buy fuel-efficient vehicles, those are smaller, less expensive cars. We're talking about a hit to local and state government in the millions of dollars."

Under the bill, the air board would rank passenger vehicles, beginning with 2011 models, according to the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases they emit.

Fees and rebates would be applied on a sliding scale. About a quarter of vehicles would be unaffected, and about 35% would be charged a fee collected by auto dealers and sent to the State Board of Equalization. The fees would pay for rebates to about 40% of purchasers.

The Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group that worked closely with Ruskin, estimates that California's emissions could drop by as much as 57 million metric tons a year by 2030 as a result of the feebates. That would be equivalent to taking about 9 million cars and trucks off the road.

Opponents, including automakers and the United Auto Workers, warn that the fees could have a disproportionate effect on lower-income buyers who may need large family cars and businesses that haul equipment.

"What if some poor guy in Watts retires and says, 'I want an SUV,' " Dymally said. "Do you punish him for that?"

The bill exempts low-income buyers -- defined as those at or below twice the federal poverty level -- as well as businesses with fewer than 25 workers, from surcharges.

And even for those without exemptions, "there would be a tremendous amount of choice in each category," Ruskin said.

Advocates counter that air pollution aggravated by global warming disproportionately affects poor neighborhoods. A cleaner fleet, they say, would reduce the asthma, heart disease and other illnesses that plague poor communities.

So far, 83 organizations, nearly twice as many as last year, have endorsed Ruskin's bill, including the American Lung Assn. and the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, a business coalition. But the opposition has powerful allies too, including the California Chamber of Commerce.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Hummer driver, has yet to take a position.

Regardless of whether the feebate bill passes, pressure is mounting to find new ways to deal with transportation emissions.

In a letter last month, Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland) urged the air board to move beyond the battle with the federal government over tailpipe standards and "to act with appropriate speed and creativity" on such measures as "efficient car purchase incentives, smart growth investments, increased transit usage and other means."

Some environmentalists want the board to use its "zero-emission vehicle" regulations to require auto companies to move to a 100% hybrid-electric fleet by the end of the next decade. Others want to bring automakers under a statewide cap on emissions so that they would have to seek offsets in order to sell vehicles that emit more than a certain level of greenhouse gases.

State Atty. Gen. Jerry Brown, the Legislature and the air board are all grappling with how to encourage cities and counties to control sprawl and promote mass transit as a way to reduce driving.

State officials are optimistic that they will win their court fight against the federal Environmental Protection Agency over tailpipe standards and make a big dent in auto emissions through regulations that 16 other states have pledged to adopt. But they intend to forge ahead with other strategies in the meantime.

"Everything is on the table," Sperling said

## **Multiple-use plans cut sprawl, nurture efficient living**

By Sanford Nax

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, Jan. 27, 2008

The first of what city officials hope will be many projects under a new city policy that promotes a mix of uses in one building or on one site is nearing completion opposite Save Mart Center.

Veteran developers George and Armen Dervishian are including space for a restaurant, offices and two apartments in a two-story, 6,000-square-foot, European-style building behind University Plaza, a shopping center at Shaw and Woodrow avenues in Fresno they built 15 years ago.

It is the first of what city officials hope will be many similar developments. Other developers have proposed projects near Ashlan and Marks avenues, Olive Avenue and Freeway 41, Clinton and Blythe avenues and elsewhere.

Planners are encouraging the compact multiple-use plans as a way to cut urban sprawl, reduce air pollution and car trips and create a more efficient community.

"In, up and mixed," is the new mantra at City Hall, said Gilbert J. Haro, planning manager.

The Dervishian brothers bought the 1-acre site after George's son, Justin Dervishian, 25, suggested expanding the shopping center, which experienced a surge in business after the Save Mart Center was built. The mall houses Starbucks, University Chicken and other restaurants and businesses.

The idea to include a mix of uses in the new building came from supervising planner Stratis Perros, who thought the property near California State University, Fresno, would be an ideal place to test a policy put into place in 2006. The ordinance enables planners to loosen parking requirements and other conditions to accommodate compact developments.

The Dervishians' building contains three zoning classifications -- commercial retail, professional offices and residential.

Because they were pioneering a new development policy, the builders and planners worked closely.

"It's important to make sure the new ordinance works," said Nick Yovino, city planning director. "You don't know until you use it."

The architect, Armen Dervishian, said he tried six designs before finding one he liked. The challenge was to meet the various ratios required by the codes -- each use cannot exceed a certain percentage -- and still design an aesthetically pleasing building.

"We would have liked to make the restaurant larger, but we couldn't fit it into the formula," George Dervishian said.

In addition, the brothers had to include more insulation, thicker firewalls and a vent system because restaurant and housing are in the same structure.

The Dervishians are happy with the result. The ground floor features 1,300 square feet of restaurant space and 1,800 square feet earmarked for professional offices. Upstairs are two 1,100-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath apartments.

The architecture is European, with outdoor decks, wrought iron railings, tile roof and 8-foot windows. "In Europe, people live above their shops," Armen Dervishian said.

No tenants have been recruited, but the brothers think the apartments could attract college students or employees of the restaurant and offices located on the ground floor.

Perros said the mixed-use ordinance will encourage more urban-style projects downtown, in the Tower District and other parts of the inner city.

Known as "smart growth" or "new urbanism," mixed-use developments are being touted across the country. In fact, the concept is old; examples can still be found in aging neighborhoods of Fresno.

But more modern planning separated the uses, and an attempt by the Dervishians 30 years ago to develop a mixed-use project in the Tower District was rejected.

Whether the public embraces the new versions of an old idea remains to be seen, but the first few attempts have been popular.

Reza Assemi quickly sold out his Vagabond Lofts apartments in downtown Fresno. The apartments sit atop offices, and Assemi thinks retiring baby boomers and young environmentally conscious families want that type of housing.

"There is an attitude change," he said. "People are questioning what they want and how they want it."

Vagabond Lofts was approved before the new mixed-use ordinance was adopted. If the new policy had been in effect, Assemi wouldn't have needed a special variance to accommodate the reduced parking ratios, which would have saved the developer money and time.

Less than two years after adopting the mixed-use policy, planners already are fine-tuning it. The current policy does not require a developer seeking reduced parking ratios or a building close to the street in certain districts to incorporate housing into the project, but that will change.

"In retrospect we felt that [housing] was a key concept and the new one will require residential to be part of it," Haro said.

Perros has been encouraging those projects where he thinks they could fit. In the planning stages are a restaurant, shops and eight town houses in a three-story structure near Ashlan and Marks avenues; a combined commercial/apartment building near Olive Avenue and Freeway 41; a complex of businesses and 24 town homes at the southwest corner of Blythe and Clinton avenues; and shops and two apartments on a narrow lot at First Street and Iowa Avenue.

Two larger projects will be a greater test of public response. The proposed Campus Pointe development next to Save Mart Center and Fancher Creek near Tulare and Clovis avenues -- both proposed by Fresno developer Ed Kashian -- contain many examples of residential and business sharing space.

"Those will tell you how deep the market pool is," said Haro.

### **Cleaning the air in a sick house**

**Dust, mold, cleaning agents, pet dander, chemicals and especially tobacco smoke can keep you from breathing as easy as you should**

By DONNA BIRCH

Modesto Bee, Saturday, January 26, 2008

When you think of sources that cause air pollution, do you envision gas-guzzling cars and trucks that belch dirty air from their exhaust pipes? Or a fire that spews thick ash and soot into the sky?

But what about a humidifier that helps relieve a child's stuffy nose, household cleansers, dust bunnies or the dander from Fido or Fluffy?

Those items can leave the air inside the average home just as dirty.

Mention air quality and people are likely to think about the air they breathe outdoors rather than what's under their own roof. But dust, mold, certain cleaning agents, pet dander, chemicals and tobacco smoke are examples of pollutants that can make inside air just as toxic and a health concern.

In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that indoor pollution levels can be two to five times higher than outdoor pollution. Newer homes built to be more energy efficient tend to be more tightly sealed than their older counterparts. While that's good in terms of saving money on heating and cooling costs, it's not so good for indoor air quality because less fresh air gets circulated and pollutants stay trapped indoors.

And with Americans spending up to 90 percent of their time inside, exposure to indoor pollution can trigger a host of related health problems.

According to the National Safety Council, exposure to indoor pollutants and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can trigger sneezing, coughing, nasal congestion, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, watery eyes and breathing difficulties. Exposure to irritants can be even more troublesome in people with allergies, asthma and other respiratory conditions.

To help people understand the hazards of indoor air pollution, the EPA and the American Lung Association have designed campaigns to educate the public about indoor air quality and what consumers can do to breathe cleaner air indoors.

Their top recommendation? Banish indoor smoking. Tobacco smoke is the biggest indoor air pollutant. It contains thousands of chemicals, including formaldehyde and carbon monoxide.

If your house is outfitted with carpet, paint, wood paneling or furniture made of particle board, it could be time for a makeover, and not just for style's sake.

Certain furnishings and products could be releasing irritants and chemicals into the air. Cabinets and furniture made from particle board typically have a wood veneer finish glued on. The glue and particles could contain formaldehyde.

Formaldehyde, a colorless, pungent-smelling gas, can cause eye, nose, and throat irritation, wheezing and coughing, fatigue, skin rash and severe allergic reactions, according to the EPA. High concentrations may trigger attacks in people with asthma.

When painting, make sure the room is well-ventilated. Paint can emit VOCs long after the last coat is applied. Also, store extra paint in a locked cabinet in a ventilated area, such as the garage or a tool shed.

If you're thinking of investing in an air cleaner, do your homework first. Air cleaners come in a variety of sizes and filtration options. While table-top units are available, their smaller size might not be effective enough to remove pollutants in larger rooms. On their Web sites, the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers and the EPA both have extensive information on the most common filtration technologies.

Air pollution experts recommend that consumers first try eliminating indoor pollution sources and contributors before buying an air cleaner.

- Make your home a smoke-free dwelling. Do not allow smokers to light up inside.
- Improve ventilation and air circulation. Leave doors open between rooms. Open windows when possible to let some outside air in.
- Install exhaust fans in windowless bathrooms to remove moisture and control mold. If possible, put the fan on a switch separate from the light fixture. That way, the fan can continue to remove moist air after you've turned off the light.
- Keep indoor humidity below 55 percent. When using a humidifier or a dehumidifier, make sure to clean them regularly.
- Keep dust mites and other allergens in check with regular cleaning.
- Wash bedding weekly in hot water. The American Lung Association recommends water be at least 130 degrees, which is hot enough to kill dust mites. If your water heater is set lower, turn it up about an hour before you do laundry and reset it when you're done washing. Or add a pot of boiling water to the washing machine. Drying bedding in a clothes dryer set at the highest temperature might help with dust mite control, but opinions vary. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology recommends washing bedding in 130-degree water and drying it in a hot dryer.
- Cover pillows and mattresses with washable, allergen-resistant covers.
- Consider using window coverings made of plastic or wood, such as blinds or shutters, instead of drapes, which can collect dust more easily.
- In homes with wood-burning fireplaces, don't store more than a few pieces of firewood indoors. Drying firewood inside can generate mold spores that can contaminate the whole house.
- Check the chimney and flue for blockages and leaks. Smoke particles can seep into living spaces when the fireplace lacks proper ventilation.
- Consider replacing carpet with area rugs that can be cleaned more often.
- Turn on your gas oven's hood fan when cooking, or open a window to remove fumes.
- Consider using indoor cleaning chemicals that are less toxic. If you must use strong-odored cleaners or chemicals, make sure the room is well-ventilated and limit your exposure.
- Check for radon inside the home. Radon, a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that occurs naturally from decaying uranium from beneath Earth's surface, is the second leading cause of lung cancer, according to the EPA. It rises through soil and seeps through cracks, holes and drain pipes. Hardware stores carry radon-detecting kits that can be purchased for about \$10. Some kits require users to send the radon detectors to a lab, which in turn will send back results in about a week.

- Install a carbon monoxide detector.

Indoor air quality resources:

- Environmental Protection Agency, [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov).
- American Lung Association, [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org).
- Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, [www.aham.org/consumer](http://www.aham.org/consumer).
- California Air Resources Board, [www.arb.ca.gov](http://www.arb.ca.gov).

## **Strong gusts, dust keep county reeling**

BY VANESSA GREGORY

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Jan. 28, 2008

Unusually strong winds continued to blow through Kern County Sunday, causing power outages and intermittent road closures.

The occupant of this home on Olive Drive just east of Highway 99 escaped disaster by just a few feet when this pine tree, which was grouped among the three standing in the background, toppled in Sunday morning's powerful winds. The tree, estimated at more than 100 feet tall, landed harmlessly next to the house, just barely missing it. The home's occupant was not around at the time.

This weekend's storm was warmer than the squall that buried the Grapevine in snow last week, shutting down the main artery between Bakersfield and Los Angeles on Wednesday and Thursday.

But wind gusts on Sunday were clocked at 46 mph at Meadows Field Airport, and at 60 mph elsewhere in the county, said Jim Bagnall, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

"That's enough to blow some stuff around," Bagnall said.

Trees were knocked down, fences toppled and shingles stripped from roofs.

Saturday night, the winds kicked up enough dust for the California Highway Patrol to close Highway 58 between General Beale Road and Tower Line Road due to zero visibility.

The highway was reopened early Sunday morning.

The destructive winds were mostly over in the valley by Sunday evening, but were expected to blow through the night in the Tehachapi Mountains and the desert, he said.

And wintry weather could threaten the Grapevine again.

"The attention now is turning towards the mountains," Bagnall said.

Windy conditions and rain are forecast to further taper off today, he said.

About 1,400 Kern County PG&E customers were without power Sunday afternoon, but electricity was restored to more than half of those folks by evening, company spokesman J.D. Guidi said.

"It looks like the majority (of outages) are storm and weather related," he said.

Throughout the day, the CHP reported debris on the roadways and several road closures. All major roadways in the county were open as of 9 p.m. Sunday, Highway Patrol Officer Kirk Arnold said.

## **Churches find common ground on green issues**

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Saturday, January 26, 2008

Doctrines differ and creeds clash, but leaders of many faiths appear to share ground on at least one subject: the environment, and mankind's role sustaining it.

Some preach from the pulpit on this very topic. Others say it's already an implied, or intrinsic, part of their faith.

"I think if some churches are really making this a much more conscious effort, that we should also do the same," said the Rev. Charles Hasegawa at the Stockton Buddhist Temple. "I think we should all work together."

Where they stand

Here's a sampling of how several faiths weigh in on the environment:

- Catholic: "We need to care for the environment; it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom," said Pope Benedict XVI.
- Buddhist: "Humans, nature, everything is all interrelated. Buddhist teaching has always emphasized the truth of interdependence," said the Rev. Charles Hasegawa of Stockton Buddhist Temple.
- Jewish: Many commandments instruct Jews to protect God's creation, including conservation. Also, the greeting "Shalom" means peace or wholeness, or harmony in all creation, according to the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.
- Methodist: "God chose to give human beings a divine image not so we would exploit creation to our own ends, but so we would be recognized as stewards of God," says a statement from the United Methodist Church.
- Southern Baptist: Men and women are greater in value than the rest of creation but should exercise careful stewardship, says a 2006 resolution by the Southern Baptist Convention. Environmentalism has been made into a "neo-pagan" religion by elevating animal life; church calls for respect for ownership and property rights, and resisting alliances with extreme environmental groups.
- Hindu: Everything is divine; the form of a person is just a shell or container for that divinity. "We believe the physical world should be loved and respected as one loves and respects God," said Rick Nafzinger of Stockton, a practicing Hindu and author.

This "greening of the churches" in many cases transcends the gap between the perceived liberal and conservative faiths.

The National Association of Evangelicals, a group of 60 denominations, has challenged its congregations to reduce energy use, saying that "nowhere in the Bible does God condone mismanagement or waste."

Similarly, at Stockton's First Unitarian Universalist Church, congregants have committed to reducing their carbon footprints at home this year.

"This is one of our basic tenets," said member Rick Mielbrecht. "We are responsible not just for ourselves," but for the world around us.

Where churches sometimes differ is on the role humans play. May we exercise "dominion," as the book of Genesis says, by using the Earth's natural resources as we see fit? Or do such scriptures imply careful stewardship?

The latter, says Norman Kinney, pastor of Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Stockton.

Make no mistake: Kinney does not place man and animal on equal ground.

"We're focused on the (second) coming of Christ, not as hysterically focused on preserving everything at the expense of man for some horned toad or something like that," he said.

But the Bible says that God will destroy those who destroy the Earth, Kinney said.

A literal reading of the Bible says that earthquakes and natural disasters precede Christ's second coming, and that those who are unprepared will be destroyed, he said. The Earth is then melted and destroyed before being recreated clean of sin.

But the planet's ultimate demise does not make environmental stewardship a moot point, Kinney said.

"We've got to live here until it's over, and therefore we need to be concerned about it," he said.

The environment is invoked at nearly every meeting of the Interfaith Council of San Joaquin County, said Rick Nafzinger of Stockton, who through his Hindu faith believes that the divine can be found in everything.

Nafzinger avoids even stepping on ants and will not use chemical pesticides on fruits or vegetables.

"If we do harm to the physical world, we're harming ourselves," he said. "Our hell is not something we experience after our body dies. Our hell is something we experience right now as a result of our actions."

The current upwelling of environmentalism is akin to one of two primary deities, Mother Earth, making herself known to us, Nafzinger said.

Even the most prominent religious leaders have made natural resources a priority. Pope Benedict XVI earlier this month said: "Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests."

Betsy Reifsnider heads a three-year-old environmental justice program for the Catholic Diocese of Stockton. The group has delved into the complicated issue of [air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley](#), its members testifying before committees, writing letters and talking with lawmakers.

Members have distributed thousands of compact fluorescent light bulbs to Valley parishes, and messages during Sunday mass have been tailored toward the environment.

It is not just an ecological crisis, Reifsnider said: "It is a moral crisis."

## **Lead Linked to Aging in Older Brains**

By MALCOLM RITTER

Washington Post, Sunday, January 27, 2008

NEW YORK -- Could it be that the "natural" mental decline that afflicts many older people is related to how much lead they absorbed decades before?

That's the provocative idea emerging from some recent studies, part of a broader area of new research that suggests some pollutants can cause harm that shows up only years after someone is exposed.

The new work suggests long-ago lead exposure can make an aging person's brain work as if it's five years older than it really is. If that's verified by more research, it means that sharp cuts in environmental lead levels more than 20 years ago didn't stop its widespread effects.

"We're trying to offer a caution that a portion of what has been called normal aging might in fact be due to ubiquitous environmental exposures like lead," says Dr. Brian Schwartz of Johns Hopkins University.

"The fact that it's happening with lead is the first proof of principle that it's possible," said Schwartz, a leader in the study of lead's delayed effects. Other pollutants like mercury and pesticides may do the same thing, he said.

In fact, some recent research does suggest that being exposed to pesticides raises the risk of getting Parkinson's disease a decade or more later. Experts say such studies in mercury are lacking.

The notion of long-delayed effects is familiar; tobacco and asbestos, for example, can lead to cancer. But in recent years, scientists are coming to appreciate that exposure to other pollutants in early life also may promote disease much later on.

"It's an emerging area" for research, said Dr. Philip Landrigan of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. It certainly makes sense that if a substance destroys brain cells in early life, the brain may cope by drawing on its reserve capacity until it loses still more cells with aging, he said. Only then would symptoms like forgetfulness or tremors appear.

Linda Birnbaum, director of experimental toxicology at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said infant mice exposed to chemicals like PCBs show only very subtle effects in young adulthood. But more dramatic harm in areas like movement and learning appears when they reach old age.

Animal studies also show clear evidence that being exposed to harmful substances in the womb can harm health later on, she said. For example, rodents that encounter PCBs or dioxins before birth are more susceptible to cancer once they grow up.

Studying delayed effects in people is difficult because they generally must be followed for a long time. Research with lead is easier because scientists can measure the amount that has accumulated in the shinbone over decades and get a read on how much lead a person has been exposed to in the past.

Lead in the blood, by contrast, reflects recent exposure. Virtually all Americans have lead in their blood, but the amounts are far lower today than in the past.

The big reason for the drop: the phasing out of lead in gasoline from 1976 to 1991. Because of that and accompanying measures, the average lead level in the blood of American adults fell 30 percent by 1980 and about 80 percent by 1990.

That's a major success story for environmentalists. But work by Schwartz and Dr. Howard Hu of the University of Michigan suggests that the long-term effects of the high-lead era are still being felt.

In 2006, Schwartz and his colleagues published a study of about 1,000 Baltimore residents. They were ages 50 to 70, old enough to have absorbed plenty of lead before it disappeared from gasoline. They probably got their peak doses in the 1960s and 1970s, Schwartz said, mostly by inhaling [air pollution](#) from vehicle exhaust and from other sources in the environment.

The researchers estimated each person's lifetime dose by scanning their shinbones for lead. Then they gave each one a battery of mental ability tests.

In brief, the scientists found that the higher the lifetime lead dose, the poorer the performance across a wide variety of mental functions, like verbal and visual memory and language ability. From low to high dose, the difference in mental functioning was about the equivalent of aging by two to six years.

"We think that's a large effect," Schwartz said.

Hu and his colleagues took a slightly different approach in a 2004 study of 466 men with an average age of 67. Those men took a mental-ability test twice, about four years apart on average. Those with the highest bone lead levels showed more decline between exams than those with smaller levels, with the effect of the lead equal to about five years of aging.

Nobody is claiming that lead is the sole cause of age-related mental decline, but it appears to be one of several factors involved, Hu stressed.

If so, it would join such possible influences as high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, emotional stress and maybe education level, said Bradley Wise of the National Institute on Aging. Nobody knows exactly what causes mental decline with age, he said.

Although the studies by Hu and Schwartz suggest lead is involved, Wise and others say they don't prove the link.

"I think many things impact how we age, but I think right now it's maybe premature to be giving lead a huge role in our age-related cognitive decline," said Dr. Margit L. Bleecker, director of the Center for Occupational and Environmental Neurology in Baltimore. Still, she called the lead hypothesis "a very interesting idea" deserving more study.

Others were more impressed.

"The new evidence from these studies should concern people" said epidemiologist Andrew Rowland of the University of New Mexico. "These two research groups are finding adverse effects on the aging brain at low levels of lead exposure. More work needs to be done, but these studies are raising important questions."

In any case, scientists still face some basic mysteries about the delayed effects of lead. For example, when does it actually harm the brain? Does a high level in the shinbone merely identify those who were the most harmed by chronic exposure decades ago? Or does lead in the bone continue to do its dirty work over a lifetime, leaching into the bloodstream and continuously hammering the brain?

"I think that both things are happening," Schwartz said, though he suspects most of the damage occurred in the past, during years of higher exposure. Hu's suspicions are similar.

Just how lead impairs brainpower is still a mystery. And so is the question of whether anything can be done to help people who have absorbed a lot of lead over a lifetime.

A medical procedure called chelation can remove lead from the body, but it wouldn't help in this case, said experts, who had few suggestions.

For younger people, prevention is a clearer strategy, Hu said. He called for tougher federal standards on lead exposure in the workplace.

And plenty of low-income neighborhoods could use a strong effort to remove lead from old houses, many of which still have lead paint, Rowland said. "It's there on the walls, it's on the radiators, it's underneath the top layers of paint. In places where the paint is crumbling, there's still exposure going on," he said.

Yet another question: Who really has to worry about long-ago lead affecting their brainpower? What about people born after the high lead levels of the 1970s were history?

Schwartz noted that most Americans younger than 30 have gotten much less lead from the environment than the men in his study did. And Hu hopes that the lead effect will peter out in the future.

However, Hu points out that there's still lead in the environment, and exposure remains especially high in many developing countries. And citing evidence that lead can cross the placenta, he says women who grew up in the 1970s might dose their fetuses with the metal.

"Kids who grew up in the 21st century have a lot less to worry about" than their elders, Hu said. But "it's hard for me to be totally optimistic the current generation is completely scot-free."

## **Proposed N.E. shortcut needs long tunnel**

By Frank Eltman, Associated Press

In USA Today, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Sunday, January 27, 2008

OYSTER BAY, N.Y. — It would be the world's longest highway tunnel, running more than 16 miles under the west end of Long Island Sound.

The cost is estimated at \$10 billion — and it wouldn't cost taxpayers a dime. A developer wants to build the tunnel with private money, recouping his costs by charging drivers \$25 each way and by selling advertising.

Developer Vincent Polimeni says the tunnel between Oyster Bay and Rye on the New York mainland would let travelers going between Long Island and New England avoid crowded New York City highways and help alleviate traffic congestion.

While not expected to be completed before 2025, the proposal received renewed attention this past week when a state Senate committee held a hearing.

Polimeni acknowledges his idea was initially met with "smirks and skepticism." But he added: "The more people looked at the plan, the larger circle of intrigued citizens who said 'tell me more.'"

The tunnel also brought back memories of Robert Moses, the powerful New York municipal planner who was rebuffed in his bid to build a bridge over Long Island Sound three decades ago. Long Island officials savaged Moses for his plan.

"Considering that we're on Long Island, I'm amazed they didn't run me out of the room," Polimeni, a developer of malls and office buildings in the New York area and in Poland, cracked during a recess at the hearing Thursday. "I think it's a good sign."

Oyster Bay Town Supervisor John Venditto described the project as "intriguing to say the least," but said his initial reaction was "it is unrealistic." He promised to review the data "so we don't have to make knee-jerk reactions and we can make an informed decision."

Elected officials from the proposed northern terminus were not as congenial.

"We cannot in Westchester (County) absorb the additional traffic that this tunnel would bring to our roads," said Rye Mayor Steven Otis. "It simply would make our roads non-functional."

He said the Westchester Municipal Officials Association voted in December to oppose the project.

Some Long Island residents agree with Otis' stand. Gino Longinotti of Syosset, just south of Oyster Bay, said he was curious about the project but didn't "see it being feasible. We have traffic conditions now where all the roads are congested."

Polimeni contends the estimated 80,000 vehicles a day using the tunnel would simply represent a shift in the roads being used, not an increase. He also argues the tunnel would ease [air pollution](#) because vehicles would be traveling shorter distances.

Polimeni has paid \$250,000 out of his own pocket for engineering studies, and Bear, Stearns & Co. Inc. is providing investment banking advice.

Polimeni has also employed the engineering and construction firm Hatch Mott MacDonald, which has been involved in tunnel projects worldwide, including the 30-mile railroad "Chunnel" that connects Great Britain and France.

At 16 to 18 miles long, depending on the final design, the Long Island Sound project would eclipse Norway's 15.2-mile Laerdal Tunnel as the world's longest highway tunnel.

It would consist of two tubes carrying three lanes of traffic each, plus a central tunnel to be used for maintenance access and emergency ventilation and egress.

Where Moses — the man responsible for many of New York's major spans, including the Verrazano Narrows — failed in his bid to bridge the sound, Polimeni is not discouraged.

"Moses had the idea, only he was going to go up and over and nobody wanted to see this," he said.

The key to his strategy, is to take the project underground: "I thought, make it stealth."

## **Barbara Boxer: Why is EPA standing in way of state law?**

Since the Clean Air Act was amended 30 years ago to allow California and other states to work together to clean the air, we in California have always been given the green light to go further than the federal government, until now.

On more than 50 separate occasions, Democratic and Republican administrations have granted waivers to California so that our state can be on the cutting edge of clean air technology and law. Californians understand firsthand the need to clean up the air. We know how harmful air pollution is because we face so many challenges in our own state.

On Dec. 19, after two years of foot-dragging, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency turned down California's request to implement tougher standards to curb global warming pollution from motor vehicles.

As chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee with responsibility for overseeing the EPA, I asked EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson to provide all the information behind his unprecedented decision, including the advice he received from his professional staff, the role of the White House and the influence of special interests.

After weeks of missed deadlines, the EPA finally gave up a handful of documents. But page after page was whited out with masking tape.

When I insisted that EPA provide unedited documents, my staff was permitted to peel off the masking tape from a few of the documents – under the watchful eyes of EPA officials – and transcribe what had been hidden. Afterward, EPA returned the documents to the agency.

It was immediately evident why the administrator had made it so difficult to see what was in those papers. Johnson has testified that he personally doesn't believe California has any "compelling and extraordinary conditions" that would have justified granting the waiver under the law. But under the masking tape we found his staff had compiled no less than seven pages of examples – from wildfires and endangered species to dwindling water supplies, agricultural lands at risk and coastal communities threatened by sea level rise.

The same documents warned the administrator that by denying the waiver, he would face a lawsuit from California and other states – and that the agency would likely lose that suit.

Why should the taxpayers be forced to pay to defend the administrator's decision, when EPA's own lawyers explained to the administrator the EPA would likely lose in the end?

The administrator claims that he denied the waiver to avoid a "confusing patchwork" of state laws for vehicle pollution. That's simply wrong, and I would like to set the record straight.

There will be no patchwork of laws. There will be only two standards: a weaker federal rule and a California standard. States are free to choose whichever standard they prefer. More than 150 million Americans – a majority of the U.S. population – live in the states that have already either adopted or taken steps toward California's standards to do more to fight global warming pollution. The federal government should get out of the way of the states' pioneering efforts.

Every day that we wait makes it more difficult to address global warming. Yet the EPA administrator's every move seems calculated to postpone any real action to curb global warming pollution.

The mission of the EPA is to protect human health and the environment.

The administrator's decision does neither.

One way or another, this unjustified, unprecedented and illegal decision must be overturned. On Jan. 24, I introduced bipartisan legislation, with 18 of my colleagues, to reverse the denial of the waiver. I also plan to file an amicus brief in the state of California's lawsuit against the EPA. And I will continue the investigation. There remains much to be done as we work to uncover the facts behind this indefensible decision.

The people who pay the administrator's salary have a right to know how he came to a decision that is so far removed from the facts, the law, the science and the precedent.

[Fresno Bee Commentary, By Bill McEwen, Sunday, Jan. 27, 2008:](#)

## **Valley winter is something to behold**

Winter is the season of comforters, cold medicines and farm trucks stuck in the mud.

The holidays done, initiative slumbers until spring and longer days beckon. And even in our gentle climate, a trip up the big hill is accompanied by this question: Where in tarnation are the snow chains?

But there are days when the gray clouds scatter, and the San Joaquin Valley becomes a postcard of nature's soul-soothing vistas.

A hard wind visits, pruning the landscape of weak branches, shallow-rooted trees and long-leaning fences.

[Dirty air is scoured](#), dreary fog is sent packing and the snow-cruled Sierra dramatically appears to the east.

Its peaks are a blue-and-white canvas few eyes can resist. Sometimes the sun, clouds and mountains form a visual symphony of light and shadow connecting earth to heaven.

The spectacular sight inspires reflection about our great Valley. This is where the Miwoks and Yokuts prospered, living in the foothills but astutely taking what they needed from the desert floor. They ate salmon, acorns and game; beads and clams were their currency.

Then fur-trader Joseph Walker followed the twists and turns of the Merced River into Yosemite and down to the flat ground in 1833. A land of abundance, Walker said, and he set to sketching maps of the region and recording the route he took to get here.

The hard winds never last long. Black clouds arrive during the night. A spectacular dawn greets early risers. Layers of orange and blue light silhouette eastern foothills. The sky is a canopy of black ink. Light rain is a prism, bending the glow of stop lights and neon signs into shards of color dancing across the city.

The car's wipers and defroster do their work, and you drive east -- even if headed elsewhere -- to savor the scene until the sun rises and bleaches the landscape. Or the clouds win out and coat everything in a dreary winter hue.

The rain stops. The wind returns, and the drab curtain hiding the mountains is pulled back. It's a view worth a picture and, indeed, there's one in this newspaper the next day.

There are joys that can be forgotten or overlooked in winter: We can spy bald eagles and other birds escaping Canada's brutal winters sunning themselves at our lakes. Or watch kids -- and kids at heart -- make snowmen on those rare days when snowflakes stick on the Valley floor.

The shame of it is, people outside the Valley don't know we have four seasons. Their vision of Fresno is hot, dusty and ugly -- the view you get in summer speeding along Highway 99 -- or blanketed miserably in fog.

This is shaping up as a good winter. The ground is soaking up moisture, creeks and reservoirs are filling, and grapevines stand naked in anticipation of summer's sweet fruit.

Spring's palette of gold poppy, blue lupine and pink-purple milkweed will reveal itself soon enough. Majestic peaks and open sky surround us now, reminding all who take time to look that we live in a land of abundance, a place without limits.

[Modesto Bee, Commentary Excerpted from Wednesday's Iowa City Press-Citizen, Monday, January 28, 2008](#)

### **Coal plants on their way out; why build more?**

Right now coal produces more than half of the electricity in the United States, but that number likely is to go down dramatically as concerns about climate change, construction costs and transportation problems are making coal a less attractive and less cost-effective source for producing electricity.

Last year, more than 50 proposed coal-fired power plants in 20 states were canceled or delayed because of such concerns. Eventually, governments will be regulating coal plants out of existence. The process no doubt will be long and costly, but there's no need for Iowa to prolong this transition by allowing the construction of any new coal plants.

Advocates for the coal industry say the best way to ensure successful technology is to allow them to build their plants with large open areas in which a carbon-capturing system can be added when it becomes economically feasible. But a recent study by the industry-funded Electric Power Research Institute projects that coal power will cost more than nuclear power or natural gas by 2030 if coal's carbon dioxide problem is solved the way most experts envision -- separating the carbon dioxide from the other emissions, moving it through a series of pipelines to an underground storage facility. It's unclear if the technology will ever be feasible.

If the coal industry needs an additional incentive to perfect carbon-capturing technology, it should be that the industry can't begin building plants until it develops a workable system.

[Editorial, Washington Post, Sunday, January 27, 2008](#)

### **Another Inconvenient Truth**

#### **'The Environment' Isn't Important Unless Your Town Is Wealthy**

In November, The Post reported about Edmonston's \$6 million flood management project, which would use three massive 50-foot screws to churn 250 million gallons of stormwater a day out of the small Prince George's County town into the Anacostia River. While this project is a major environmental engineering and civic achievement, it is an exception rather than the rule. In many ways, the shape of the device reminds us of how working-class communities feel when it comes to environmental protection.

These blue-collar areas are home to our nation's teachers, soldiers, firefighters, police officers, and construction and office workers. Yet despite their resilience and contributions, they speak without being heard. Despite many vocal appeals, they find themselves overlooked and underserved, receiving hollow commitments from government -- particularly in the area of environmental protection.

Prius and Patagonia stereotypes aside, living in harmony with Mother Nature is an inter-class, multiracial imperative. Addressing the balance with our natural surroundings requires the exercise of power and is not dissimilar from guaranteeing the availability of food or public safety. The consequences of inaction are felt most acutely by the working class.

For years in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, community leaders urged upgrades to their flimsy levee system. The response from government was lackluster. When the storm came, these neighborhoods suffered terrible destruction and indignity that can never be undone.

For years, Edmonston residents urged county officials to upgrade their town's flood management system after suffering terrible floods. The response was lackluster. After an aggressive media

campaign and with the images of Hurricane Katrina fresh in the public mind, decision makers came to the table with a solution.

But let's consider Cedar Heights and Fairmount Heights, two neighboring communities inside the Beltway in Prince George's. For years, residents have complained about poor [air quality](#), dust and breathing difficulties as a result of an industrial facility on Sheriff Road that crushes concrete and makes asphalt. The response to these complaints has again been lackluster. A permit is pending to expand the operation into a massive concrete manufacturing plant. Despite their efforts, residents fear that they do not have the means to stop it.

Can you imagine downtown Bethesda flooding every year because of poor stormwater drainage? How about an industrial manufacturing plant in residential Takoma Park? Inconceivable. The propensity to overlook and under-serve blue-collar, mostly minority communities is flagrant. Our voices should be heard regardless of Zip code.

Environmental protection is not a liberal abstraction. To us, it is an urgent matter of justice and, in some cases, even survival.

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Friday, January 25, 2008](#)

### **Why put sprawl in the boonies?**

Re "About-face on Yuba measure," Jan. 18: After citizens' concerns about Yuba Highlands fell on deaf ears at the Yuba County Board of Supervisors, now the developer himself, Gary Gallelli, inadvertently states the obvious: "You never step back to think of the consequences of what you're doing or ask if this still is a good project." Well, duh!

What irony. For those who have been willing to open their ears, it's been clear all along: massive suburban sprawl many miles from existing infrastructure, no water supply, a new commuter road through a wildlife refuge, huge traffic increases on small rural roads, [more ozone for an area already suffering from some of the worst air quality in the nation](#), and encroachment on Beale AFB, threatening this area's biggest economic engine.

This stupid project should never have gotten past first base. Shame on the Yuba County Board of Supervisors for letting it happen.

Now Supervisor John Nicoletti suggests Gallelli is "listening" to the community by promising to downsize his monstrosity from 5,100 homes to 4,300 homes. What a pathetic joke. The fact is that Yuba Highlands, in any form, is a loser, and Yuba County voters are going to say so on Feb 5.

Don't bother bringing it back, Mr. Gallelli.

- John Hellwig, Penn Valley

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Jan. 28, 2008:](#)

### **Skeptical of Dages**

I read with bemused skepticism (Jan. 23) that mayoral candidate and Fresno City Council Member Mike Dages is polishing his credentials as an environmentalist. Mr. Dages is introducing an ordinance to require photovoltaic solar cell installations in all new construction in Fresno.

Strong alternative energy policies in Fresno will result in cleaner air in the Valley. Solar cells do not produce any local air pollution such as that caused by most other methods of electricity generation.

However, I am skeptical about Council Member Dages' newfound environmental sensitivity, given his long-standing opposition to bicycle transportation facilities that often cost little but paint stripes on roadways and reduce air pollution. Mr. Dages has never seen a bicycle lane installation project he didn't oppose. Good urban bike-lane networks have been shown to increase the number of people riding their zero-emission bikes, and leaving their polluting cars in the driveway.

Has Council Member Dages experienced a recent "foxhole conversion" and become an environmentalist, or is his proposed solar cell ordinance a campaign stunt? I hope for the former, but, given Mr. Dages' past votes, I remain skeptical.

*Stephen Lewis, Member, Fresno Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee*

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter, Sunday, Jan. 27, 2008:](#)

### **Westpark residents protest route study**

For the third time, we will battle to defend Westpark from absolute ruin. Another expensive highway study has been proposed the third time since 1994 at taxpayer expense.

Kern County Roads Director Craig Pope says that it gets traffic downtown. So, those who chose to live in a central neighborhood close to downtown, schools and work, saving gasoline and reducing pollution -- will be sacrificed for the sake of poor planning. This plan will place more traffic and pollution in the center of town, and destroy the tranquility and viability of four churches, two elementary schools, one large retirement center, the Henrietta Weill Guidance Center and 300 established Westpark homes and families.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy asked the rhetorical question: What is wrong with studying every option out there?

Here's what's wrong: The people and governments have already spoken. The citizens of this community deserve not to be lied to, tricked, manipulated and betrayed. We deserve to trust decisions and promises already made, and not re-study and re-fight this issue again.

Regional traffic should be directed around the city, not through it. Solutions with a low impact on established neighborhoods should be found. Neighborhoods like Westpark provide far more value to a community than any freeway ever can, no matter how convenient or short it is. Pollution is terrible, children have asthma and our air is thick and ugly.

Bakersfield planning has been poor, and now officials want to fix it, after the fact, at the expense of the citizens who trusted them.

AMY RICHARDSON, Bakersfield

[Patterson Irrigator, Letter, Saturday, Jan. 26, 2008:](#)

### **West Park would make us pay**

The article "County, developer submit bond application" in the Jan. 19 issue of the Irrigator contained an erroneous and understated number of projected daily vehicle trips generated by the proposed West Park LLC project in Crows Landing at buildout.

The correct number is more than 141,000, according to a study by TJKM Transportation Consultants, not the 14,827 trips the article stated. That is a difference of more than 126,000 trips per day! That is more than three times the present 40,000-plus trips per day on Interstate 5, just west of Patterson.

The article also says the application asserts the project would reduce regional pollution by many tons. Where in the region would the reduction occur? Actually, it would primarily occur along the Altamont Pass and in the Bay Area, transferring a great deal of pollution to the West Side. The same study used for the projected daily trips also projected a huge need for road expansion on almost all the roads leading in and out of the project because of the great increase in traffic.

Guess who will pay for all that road expansion and maintenance? You and I, Stanislaus County taxpayers! West Park also is asking for multiple millions in state infrastructure, transportation and pollution-reduction bond money just to get this project implemented. We'll pay for that, too! West Park and its investors are counting on making many more millions, even billions, from this massively public-financed project. There will be many years of public subsidies related to and caused by this project.

Sandra McDowell, Patterson

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses documents that contradict EPA's decision regarding California's waiver. For more information regarding this clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Presentan documentos que contradicen a la EPA sobre ley de California

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, January 28, 2008

Personal de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (epa, PORSUS SIGLAS EN INGÉS) recomendó en diciembre pasado autorizar una ley estatal de California al aceptar que la contaminación vehicular pone en riesgo a las personas y que el estado tiene condiciones extraordinarias para aplicar su ley.

Los documentos sobre esa apreciación fueron presentados en una audiencia en la que el administrador de la propia EPA explica al senado federal sus razones para negar permiso a esa ley de California.

La senadora que encabeza la audiencia, Barbara Boxer reinicia la sesión este lunes con sospechas de que el administrador de la EPA escuchó a la Casa Blanca e ignoró evidencias de su propia agencia.