

Growth-restricting deal earns Stockton a rare spot among green cities **City officials make first trip in years to Yosemite forum**

By David Siders, staff writer

Stockton Record, Monday, March 16, 2009

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK - It was before the bar opened at the Local Government Commission's 18th annual conference for local elected officials, and Stockton City Manager Gordon Palmer and City Councilwoman Susan Eggman were addressing an audience interested in making cities more compact, walkable and green.

The conference, in Yosemite National Park, was one Stockton had not attended in years.

"If anyone knows Stockton, you know that we have a little bit of a problem with sprawl," Eggman said.

The Local Government Commission, a nonprofit group in Sacramento, had invited Eggman and Palmer to Yosemite Lodge to talk about Stockton's growth-restricting deal last year with state Attorney General Jerry Brown and the Sierra Club over Stockton's General Plan.

Their presentation followed a "Boxed Lunch and Hiking Break" and came before dinner and an evening session, "Transitioning to a Green Economy."

The PowerPoint started with what Eggman called "BAG - Before the Attorney General." Even before the General Plan settlement, she said, Stockton was concerned about the environment.

In January 2008, the city promised to measure and reduce its carbon footprint, and it became the first Central Valley city to require that future municipal buildings meet strict standards for green building and design.

Popular Science magazine rated Stockton No. 49 on its list of the nation's 50 greenest cities.

But praise from environmentalists was mild in comparison to their criticism of the city's General Plan, which was adopted in 2007 and called for Stockton's population to about double by 2035, mostly in subdivisions at the city limits.

The Sierra Club sued the city, claiming the plan blessed sprawl, and Brown threatened to join the club in court.

Palmer said that in his initial meeting with Brown, "Jerry lays the map down on the table and says, 'Your map is bad. Your plan is bad.'" There were about 65 people in the audience, and many of them laughed.

In settling with the Sierra Club and Brown, Stockton agreed to consider measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of development on the environment.

"You're not at the bottom of the barrel anymore," said Judy Corbett, executive director of the Local Government Commission. "That's what really tickled me, to see Stockton stepping up front. That's just too cool for words."

The PowerPoint ended with Eggman describing a campaign by developer A.G. Spanos Cos. to force a referendum on the General Plan settlement.

Before abandoning its campaign in October, one of Spanos Cos.' objections to the settlement was the cost of implementing green building standards and other deal points.

The Building Industry Association of the Delta's John Beckman said he is concerned about that, too.

"All of these principles that people are putting in place, these mandates, drive up the cost of housing so much that by the time you build a house, the guy who lives in the Central Valley can't afford to buy your house for what it cost you to build it," he said.

Such standards might be appropriate in Marin County, where people can afford them, Beckman said. Stockton, he said, cannot.

Two speakers followed Eggman and Palmer, and then the cash bar opened.

Someone brought a glass of wine to Dominic Farinha, an Alameda County planner and a Patterson city councilman.

Farinha said Stockton's initial reliance on "the standard way of doing things" is how it "kind of got into trouble" with the General Plan.

But for the city's negotiation of a settlement and withstanding pressure to abandon it, he said, "They were able to rise from the ashes and become a model."

Web site keeps eye on S.J. carbon County's footprint 15th largest in state for emissions

By Alex Breitler, staff writer

Stockton Record, Sat., March 14, 2009

There's a reason it's called global warming.

For years, scientists have struggled to pinpoint the many sources of carbon dioxide, a leading cause of climate change. Where does it come from and how much does each of us contribute?

For the first time, you can see some answers on your computer screen. A team of researchers has developed a Google Earth map that cuts up the carbon pie for every county in the United States.

California, not surprisingly, is one of the leading carbon culprits.

The good, the bad

Purdue University's "Vulcan Project," which relies heavily on federal pollution data, shows California trailing only Texas in the amount of carbon spewing from its smokestacks or tailpipes.

Within California, San Joaquin County has the 15th-largest carbon footprint, with nearly half of its emissions attributable to cars and trucks.

Visit the site, play with the map and see for yourself:

- San Joaquin County has more emissions from industry (including farms) than most neighboring counties; it emits 10 times more than Sacramento County. However, San Joaquin County spews far less carbon from power plants.
- San Joaquin's overall carbon footprint is larger than San Francisco County's. However, it's smaller than three of its more crowded neighbors: Alameda, Contra Costa and Sacramento counties.
- Nearly 3 tons of carbon is emitted annually for each San Joaquin County resident. That's about average for the state.
- The "big toe" of our carbon footprint comes from driving - not surprising, given the many lengthy commutes to the Bay Area. On the plus side, San Joaquin County residents are doing a better job at home, where central heating, water usage and cooking can all lead to greater carbon emissions.

Larger things ahead

"Vulcan" scientists hope to get a lot more specific in the future. Someday they hope to show the carbon footprint for your own street, or even individual businesses or homes.

This could be useful as local planners consider strategies to fight climate change, said Purdue's Kevin Gurney.

"The idea is to bring climate change into the living room" and make it relevant, he said.

"It's been very difficult to create any kind of image or conception of for what this problem is," Gurney said. "I think it's been an incredible barrier to people actually doing anything."

Governor Schwarzenegger Announces Appointments

Imperial Valley News, Thursday, March 12, 2009

Sacramento, California -- Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger today announced the following appointments: Arthur Carter, Andrew Chesley, Sidney Craighead, Christopher Kennedy Lawford, [Michael Nelson](#), Richard Ortega, Robert Pacheco, David Quackenbush, Ashley Swearengin, Traci Stevens and Gary Willard.

Arthur Carter, 67, of San Francisco, has been appointed to the Occupational Safety and Health Appeals Board. Prior to his retirement, he owned and served as the legislative advocate for Art Carter and Associates from 1984 to 2004. In 1983, Carter was the deputy chief administrative officer for the city of San Francisco and, from 1976 to 1983, he worked as the chief of the division of occupational safety and health administration for the Department of Industrial Relations. Carter was the secretary-treasurer for the Contra Costa County Central Labor Council from 1967 to 1976. This position requires Senate confirmation and the compensation is \$111,845. Carter is a Democrat.

Andrew Chesley, 53, of Stockton, has been appointed to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. He has served on the San Joaquin Council of Governments since 1979, where he has served as executive director since 2005. Chesley previously served as deputy executive director from 1989 to 2005. He is an officer for the Self-Help Counties Coalition of California and is a member of the American Planning Association and the Institute of Transportation Engineers. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Chesley is registered decline-to-state.

Sidney Craighead, 71, of Avenal, has been appointed to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. He has served on the Avenal City Council since 1994 and served as mayor from 2004 to 2006. Craighead was a teacher at Avenal High School from 1986 to 2007 and at El Dorado High School from 1983 to 1986. From 1971 to 1983, he was a partner for California Grain Brokers. Craighead is the representative of the Local Agency Formation Commission of Kings County, Kings County Association of Governments and Kings County Area Public Transit Agency. Additionally, he serves on the California League of Cities Policy Committee. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Craighead is a Republican.

Christopher Kennedy Lawford, 53, of Marina Del Rey, has been appointed to the Public Health Advisory Committee. Since 1986, he has served as president of Chrislaw Entertainment. Additionally, Kennedy Lawford serves as a national spokesperson for the Hepatitis C Public Awareness Campaign for Roche Pharmaceuticals. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Kennedy Lawford is a Democrat.

Michael Nelson, 51, of Atwater, has been appointed to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. He has served on the Merced County Board of Supervisors since 2003. Nelson was a fire engineer for the Atwater Fire Department from 1994 to 2003, director of safety for J.R. Wood from 1990 to 1994 and was the manager of Nunes Farms from 1989 to 1990. In 1989, he was a technician for the Merced County Agricultural Commissioner and from 1988 to 1989, Nelson was the manager of Empire Nut Company. From 1980 to 1988, he was the superintendent of Tenneco West. [Nelson serves on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Governing Board](#) and is chairman of the Foreign Trade Zone Governing Board. Additionally, he serves on the California State Association of Counties Board of Directors and is a member of the Transportation Steering Committee and the Telecommunication and Technology Steering Committee for the National Association of Counties. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Nelson is a Republican.

Richard Ortega, 76, of Tulare, has been appointed to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. He has served on the Tulare City Council since 2001 and served as mayor from 2004 to 2006. Prior to retiring in 1992, Ortega owned Oakbrook Farms from 1972 to 1992 and co-owned Circle JB Dairy from 1960 to 1972. He is a member of the Tulare County Association of

Governments and Tulare Noon Rotary. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Ortega is a Democrat.

Robert Pacheco, 74, of Walnut, has been reappointed to the Occupational Safety and Health Appeals Board. He has served on the board since 2005. Pacheco previously served as a three-term member of the State Assembly from 1998 to 2004. He has practiced law for 30 years and is currently senior partner with the Law Offices of Pacheco & Pacheco. Pacheco is also owner and chief financial officer of Western Hardware Company, a manufacturing and import business. Before joining the Assembly, he served as a city council member and planning commissioner for the city of Walnut. Pacheco is the founder of the Gabriel Foundation, the Walnut Valley Unified School District Educational Foundation and the Walnut Humanitarian and Medical Mission. This position requires Senate confirmation and the compensation is \$111,845. Pacheco is a Republican.

David Quackenbush, 38, of Sacramento, has been appointed to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. He has served as chief executive officer of the Central Valley Health Network since 2006. Prior to that, Quackenbush was the development director for the Mexican American Alcoholism Program from 2004 to 2006, development specialist for the Public Health Institute from 2002 to 2004 and policy analyst for the California Hispanic Health Care Association from 1999 to 2002. He serves as vice chair of the Rural Committee for the National Association of Community Health Centers and is a member of the California Primary Care Association Board, California State Rural Health Association and the California Telehealth Network Advisory Board. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Quackenbush is a Democrat.

Ashley Swearingin, 36, of Fresno, has been appointed deputy chair and member for the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. She has served as mayor of Fresno since January 2009 and previously served as the lead executive for the Partnership from 2007 to 2008. From 2000 to 2008, Swearingin was the executive director for the Office of Community and Economic Development for California State University, Fresno and, from 1998 to 2000, she was the director of the Central Valley Business Incubator. Swearingin worked as the development coordinator for Baker, Manock and Jensen from 1995 to 1998, client services representative for Jackson, Emerich, Pedreira and Nahigian from 1994 to 1995 and marketing director for Casa Metropolitan Skilled Nursing Facility from 1993 to 1994. She is a member of the League of California Cities Board of Directors, Council of Fresno County Governments, Fresno County Zoo Authority Board of Directors, Fresno County Transportation Authority Board of Directors and San Joaquin River Conservancy. Swearingin is also an ex officio member of the Fresno Business Council. This position does not require Senate confirmation and there is no salary. Swearingin is a Republican.

Traci Stevens, 52, of Roseville, has been appointed deputy secretary of legislation for the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency. She has worked as a realtor for Lyon Real Estate since 2007 and previously worked for RE/MAX Gold Real Estate from 2005 to 2007. Prior to that, Stevens was the regional vice president of Traffic Research and Analysis from 2000 to 2005. She served as the deputy director of legislation for the California Energy Commission from 1998 to 1999, State and Consumer Services agency from 1996 to 1998, Department of Consumer Affairs from 1993 to 1996 and the Department of Housing and Community Development from 1991 to 1993. From 1987 to 1991, Stevens was the senior budget consultant for California Senate Minority Leader Ken Mady and, from 1984 to 1987, Stevens worked as a policy assistant to State Senate Minority Leader Jim Nielsen. This appointment does not require Senate confirmation and the compensation is \$95,808. Stevens is registered decline-to-state.

Gary Willard, 56, of Woodside, has been reappointed to the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission. He has served on the commission since 2006 and currently serves as chair. Since 2001, Willard has worked as the managing director and partner at NAI BT Commercial. Prior to that, he was the senior vice president at CB Commercial Real Estate from 1983 to 2000 and was a broker and associate at Century 21 - Willard Realty from 1973 to 1983.

This position requires Senate confirmation and the compensation is up to \$100 per diem. Willard is a Republican.

Effort to save Tulare County rail line leads to a change in Measure R Original goal of Measure R was improving county's roads

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, March 14, 2009

Tulare County Supervisor Allen Ishida spent his youth loading freight trains with fruit from his family's orange groves and surrounding farms. In those days, the line that ran through Lindsay carried local produce and goods all over the state.

The proposed abandonment of that little-used section of track has prompted the Lindsay-based orange grower to wage a nonstop battle to keep the rail line in place.

Officials now are trying to save the line from Jovista to Strathmore, but Ishida said the lines from Lindsay to Exeter and even north to Dinuba may need to be saved next. His plan: reestablish a short-haul rail line that eventually would link Porterville, Lindsay and Dinuba with Kern County and the Bay Area.

"If we can extend the railway to the Port of Oakland, it creates a huge regional benefit," Ishida said. "By the time this becomes viable I will be long dead and gone, but we in government have to have foresight."

A viable line would lure manufacturers to the area [and reduce air pollution](#), he said.

Ishida, who said he has no financial stake in the outcome of this effort, has flown to Washington, D.C., three times this year to lobby for the federal help needed to make the rail line attractive to a prospective buyer.

During the county's One Voice trip to the Capitol last month, local officials were told the rail line should be a top priority for federal funding requests, according to meeting minutes of the Tulare County Association of Governments, the agency charged with overseeing Measure R — the half-cent county sales tax dedicated to transportation projects.

The agency also is putting together a shippers association that may include Svenhard's Bakery, Tulare Frozen Foods, Weyerhaeuser and oil companies in Kern County.

Amending Measure R

Measure R was initiated to improve roads in Tulare County. Transportation projects like the widening of Road 80 or the construction of overpasses are generally pieced together from federal, state and local sources.

The more local money an agency can pull together, the easier it is to gain matching funds. Other surrounding counties have similar programs.

But passing any new tax can be a challenge, especially in Tulare County. Despite heavy lobbying and fundraising, Measure R barely attained the two-thirds majority it needed to pass.

In 2006, there was no mention that any money from the measure would go toward preserving a rail line. And the proposal wasn't mentioned in TCAG's Strategic Work Plans as recently as 2008, even though efforts were well under way to gain support for using the fund to preserve the line.

Last year, the measure was amended to allow the purchase of the line's right of way, which would cost an estimated \$3 million. If the expenditure is ultimately approved — no sure thing — the money would come not from the road fund but the measure's transit and bike program.

TCAG's director, Ted Smalley said the measure was amended to accommodate "unforeseen circumstances."

"We certainly had no idea when we wrote Measure R about the ongoing problems with the railroad," he said.

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors gave its approval Oct. 14. The agenda item was on the consent calendar along with 21 other requests, which were voted on as a group.

There was no discussion of the Measure R amendment during the board's meeting.

The same was true at the Nov. 18 meeting of the Tulare City Council, which put the item on the council's own consent agenda.

But TCAG officials did make public presentations at city council meetings in Porterville and Visalia in October. Each of the city councils also approved the amendment, but their continued support of the line is not guaranteed.

"I'm supporting the purchase of the right of way — until they give me a reason not to," said Greg Collins, a Visalia City Councilman. "It will take a lot of trucks off of the road, and any time you increase the capacity of roadways and make them safer to drive on, you're accomplishing something."

But Cameron Hamilton, the mayor of Porterville, is less than convinced.

"It's not what the public was voting on when they approved Measure R."

Costs could mount

Hamilton said with all of the repairs that will need to be done to the tracks, the \$3 million in funding is only the tip of the iceberg.

"The railroad moves no faster than 4 mph — and 10 miles of track has already been removed," he said. "It's going to cost a lot more money, and I only know of three or four people who would want it."

Officials still must write a business plan for the railroad's operation. The cities will be asked to approve the \$3 million expenditure specifically for the Strathmore-Jovista right of way.

The right of way involves the land beneath the railroad tracks, which is owned by Union Pacific. The actual steel and ties are owned by the San Joaquin Valley Railroad and its parent company, Rail America.

"We still want to own the right-of-way, even if the rails and ties are owned by another company," Ishida said. "Once that right of way is gone, it would be nearly impossible to get back."

There may be more requests for additional funds in the future, Ishida said. Officials hope to forge a public-private partnership to rehabilitate the line, with an association of local manufacturers luring a private firm to take over the railroad line. But if that doesn't happen, the project may be stuck in limbo.

"We do not have the funds to purchase the rail line at this time," Ishida said.

Rail is gaining prominence nationwide. Both Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe posted hefty profits last year and a firm in Delano, Railex, has begun to guarantee timely shipments of agricultural products to New York.

The service, which has been in operation since October, has several customers in Tulare County.

Railex General Manager Gary Peña said smaller users are pushed off of the main rail lines by the large railroad companies. He said the creation of a direct route from the Valley to the Port of Oakland would be a sound business decision.

"Oh, God yes, there's a big need for that," Peña said. "Our company wouldn't do that — but, yes, I think it's a good idea."

Additional Facts

Measure R At A Glance

- Implements a half-cent sales tax dedicated to transportation projects for 30 years.

- Passed in 2006 by a two-thirds vote.
- Supporters raised \$158,983 for the Measure R campaign.
- Major donors included home builders, developers and an array of business and trade groups.
- Expected to raise about \$800 million over 30 years.

Source: Tulare County Association of Governments and elections filings

Burn Season is at an end

Sixth wood-burning season ends

Sierra Star, Thursday, March 12, 2009

According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Control District, a more health-protective wood-burning rule resulted in cleaner Valley skies this winter. The sixth "Check Before You Burn" season ended Feb. 28.

This season, the rule was tightened in order to be even more protective of public health and preliminary air-quality measurements illustrate that the result was cleaner air throughout the Valley; compared to last season, there was a 50 percent reduction in the number of days deemed unhealthy throughout the air basin. The average concentration of pollutants declined by 10 percent.

A full report of this season's wood-burning rule will be presented at the air district's governing board meeting in April.

"By calling for wood-burning curtailments at lower levels, we were able to prevent some of the worst air pollution this winter," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's air pollution control officer in a statement.

"Of our major air pollution concerns in the Valley, particulate matter is the most harmful and has devastating health effects."

Businesses in the Valley, including agriculture, are subject to some of the toughest air regulations in the nation.

According to the Air District, particulate matter has been linked to increased incidence of chronic lung disease, acute respiratory impairment, heart attacks and premature death. Residential wood burning, whether in an open-hearth fireplace or wood-burning device, can put as much as 17 tons per day of harmful particulate matter into the eight-county air basin and residential wood-burning devices are the largest source of particulate pollution during winter months.

"We have made significant progress in cleaning the Valley's air, but we cannot achieve our clean air goals on the back of businesses alone. We can get to cleaner air faster and cheaper by Valley residents doing their part to help," Sadredin said.

The Valley's wood-burning rule aims to address these emissions by prohibiting the use of wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates. The wood-burning season runs from November through February and violators are subject to fines.

Clearing Big Bend air in Texas will take 146 years

By Alicia A. Caldwell, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Modesto Bee and other papers, Monday, March 16, 2009

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK, Texas – Growing up in a speck of a desert town in the heart of Texas' Big Bend region, Delia White once had picturesque views of rugged mountains in every direction. On a clear day, she could see jagged peaks 100 miles away.

But now, on most summer days, the 53-year-old convenience store owner in Terlingua can barely make out some of the highest peaks of the nearby Big Bend National Park.

"I remember clear views in every direction," White said on a recent hazy day.

The thick brown haze that hovers over the massive national park on warm days has been a problem for at least two decades, according to those who live in the area. And federal and state environmental officials agree that the cloud of pollution caused by factories and power plants hundreds or thousands of miles away in the U.S. and Mexico is a problem that needs to be cleaned up.

But officials differ, by about 91 years, on how long it should take.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has asked states to clean up areas they've dubbed "Regional Class I Areas," a group of sites that include national parks and other federal lands, by 2064.

But officials at the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality have decided it will likely take until 2155 to clear the air over the park.

Commission officials say the haze problem is complicated because the pollution is funneled to Big Bend by winds from east Texas, the Ohio River Valley and northeastern Mexico.

Dale Kemery, an EPA spokesman, said many states have missed the deadline to turn in regional haze plans. But of those that did, Texas is the only state to miss the 2064 target.

The lengthy plan, which includes reducing haze in the Guadalupe Mountains National Park by 2081, does not call for any pollution reductions for Texas facilities. It was unanimously approved by the three-member commission board last month.

Margaret Earnest, a commission planner, said specific reductions weren't necessary because other air quality plans already in place will eventually help cut haze at Big Bend and the Guadalupe Mountains.

But not everyone agrees.

Ken Kramer, director of the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter, called the commission's plan a "virtually absurdist approach."

"There are a number of things that could be done to clamp down on power plants in the state," Kramer said. "Many of those plants were built decades ago and although their pollution controls may have been improved slightly over time, they are still not using the best available technology."

Retrofitting pollution-emitting plants in Texas would cost about \$300 million, a price tag that Earnest said commission officials didn't deem necessary right now.

"We've made reductions in other plans that affect haze in Houston and Dallas," Earnest said. "Because we have spent so much time and money on rules and controls in those areas, there was a decision not to add additional controls."

The commissioners who approved the plan agree the state could have done better.

"We look ridiculous saying it will take us 146 years to achieve this," Commissioner Larry Soward told the Houston Chronicle last month.

Soward, through a secretary in his office, declined to speak to The Associated Press about the plan. Neither of his colleagues, Commissioner Bryan Shaw and Chairman Buddy Garcia, returned telephone messages seeking comment.

Shaw told the Houston newspaper that the plan was "somewhat of a charade. But it has a chance of reducing undo burden on the state."

Raymond Skiles, the acting chief of science and resource management at Big Bend, said the environmental effects of the haze on the park is unclear - park service scientists are only now starting environmental reviews. But it's clear from complaints by visitors and local outdoor outfitters that the lack of visibility on the hottest, steamiest days of the year is affecting tourism at the park, which attracts 300,000 to 400,000 visitors annually.

Jan Forte, who runs Big Bend River Tours in Terlingua, said the haze has become a health concern for many residents.

Forte, 66, and others say they've noticed more people, including themselves, complaining of allergies that seemingly didn't exist 20 years ago.

And with fewer than 300 people living in the towns closest to the park, Forte worries they don't have the political clout to make officials in Austin take notice.

"Your voice is not very well heard out here," said Forte. "There's not a lot of votes out here to make any politician shake in their boots that we we're going to vote them out of office."

Placer biomass plant gets federal funding

By Ramon Coronado

In the Sacramento Bee, Saturday, March 14, 2009

An innovative energy-producing biomass plant in Placer County got a boost of green this week from the federal government.

The plant was one of more than 800 projects earmarked in this year's \$410 billion federal spending bill signed by President Barack Obama on Wednesday.

"It is kind of like a down payment to pay for the technology," biomass plant project manager Brett Storey said of the coming \$1.4 million in federal funds.

The plant, which was two years in the planning, is expected to be built by 2012 in a yet-undetermined site in the north Lake Tahoe region.

Placer's project will provide a clean-burning source for electricity and heat from a renewable energy source. It will convert forest waste from tree thinning and debris from orchards and vineyards into renewable energy.

The plant also will use an internal combustion process equipped with special scrubbers and filters that are expected to eliminate 75 percent to 99.9 percent of the pollutants that would be produced by open burning of the same biomass, Storey said.

Placer County Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery said a biomass plant is a natural fit for the county since it has so much forestland.

"The potential benefits from the technology are far-reaching," Montgomery said.

The benefits include healthier forests, a lower wildfire risk, watershed protection, improved air quality and new jobs, the supervisor said.

Throughout the state, about 30 biomass plants have been located near forest lands so they can be fueled by woody debris. The plans also can be used to burn trees unsuitable for lumber or unsafe to leave standing, but the trees must be ground into small chunks about the size of lemons.

The closest biomass plant to Lake Tahoe is in Rocklin, with a third one near Thunder Valley Casino.

Locating the new plant in the Lake Tahoe region is expected to save in transportation costs and could provide electricity and heat to surrounding communities that now depend upon polluting fossil fuels, Storey said.

Forests are routinely thinned for fire protection, but the debris sometimes is piled and left for as long as 15 years, representing potent fuel for wildfires, he said.

The biomass project, which could cost about \$6 million when completed, is a joint partnership of Placer County and a yet-unnamed Nevada power company, Storey said. The agreement is expected to be finalized by October, Storey said.

The plant will include a two-story building 80 feet long by 80 feet wide, with a covered storage area nearby. Most of the woody material will be trucked out to be ground into chunks and then returned to the plant, Storey said. The process will allow the plant to blend more with its surroundings, he said.

Officials from other counties have been hearing about Placer County's biomass plant and calling for details.

"This past year, we got calls from Amador, Plumas and Butte counties," Storey said. "Everyone is calling."

Your eyes aren't deceiving you: Skies are dimmer

By Doyle Rice

USA TODAY, Friday, March 13, 2009

Air pollution has caused skies above most of the world's land areas to dim slightly over the past 30 years, says a study out today in the journal *Science*.

Scientists found that most of the blame can be traced to aerosols — suspended airborne pollution — that are released from the burning of fossil fuels. Aerosols in the atmosphere block sunlight from reaching the Earth's surface.

The dimming has been nearly worldwide. The report says that while visibility worsened only slightly in North America, it "decreased substantially over south and east Asia, South America, Australia and Africa, resulting in net global dimming over land."

Europe, however, has actually experienced brightening skies, the authors say, where visibility has increased since the mid-1980s. This is because of declines in pollution over that continent, likely because of controls on using sulfur in coal, says study co-author Robert Dickinson of the University of Texas.

When averaged globally, Dickinson says, the dimming has been rather subtle, akin to a 100-watt bulb dimming to a 99-watt bulb. But it has been more noticeable in the most polluted locations.

The research was conducted by Dickinson along with Kaicun Wang and Shunlin Liang of the University of Maryland. Wang used a database from the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., to collect visibility measurements from 3,250 meteorological stations worldwide from 1973 to 2007.

While decreases in atmospheric visibility have been reported in the past, the new study compiles satellite and land-based data for a longer period than had been available.

Ellsworth Dutton, a scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Earth System Research Laboratory in Boulder, Colo., countered in an e-mail that the locations of the weather stations, in many cases near population centers, do not represent the entire land-area distribution of the planet.

"Also, their methodology does not account for any changes in aerosols above the lowest 10 or so meters of the atmosphere, which can be strongly affected by rain and wind," Ellsworth writes.

While the effects of increased greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide) on global warming are clear, the effects of increased aerosols are not, the scientists report. Studies of the long-term effects of aerosols on climate change have been largely uncertain up to now, due to limited aerosol measurements over land, Wang and his team say.

However, with this study, Wang says, researchers now can compare temperature, rainfall and cloud-cover data from the past 35 years with the aerosol measurements in the new database. Wang says, "This is the first time we have gotten global long-term aerosol information over land to go with information already available on aerosol measurements over the world's oceans."

Pollution dims skies as well as befouling the air

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, March 13, 2009

WASHINGTON—The skies are dimming, for most of the world. Increases in airborne pollution have dimmed the skies by blocking sunlight over the past 30 years, researchers report in Friday's edition of the journal Science.

While decreases in atmospheric visibility—known as global dimming—have been reported in the past, the new study compiles satellite and land-based data for a longer period than had been available.

"Creation of this database is a big step forward for researching long-term changes in air pollution and correlating these with climate change," Kaicun Wang, assistant research scientist in the University of Maryland, said in a statement. "And it is the first time we have gotten global long-term aerosol information over land to go with information already available on aerosol measurements over the world's oceans."

They reported that dimming is occurring everywhere except Europe, where declines in pollution have resulted in brighter skies.

Changes in aerosols can affect weather and also may have an impact on climate, though past studies have been inconclusive. These pollutants can result in cooling by reflecting sunlight back into space, but they also can absorb solar energy, warming the atmosphere.

Researchers at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, meanwhile, warned that suggestions for a high-atmosphere "sunshade" of particles to battle global warming could reduce energy production from solar power plants.

Those proposals are aimed at blocking sunlight that can be absorbed by so-called greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, warming climate.

But airborne particles also scatter light that does get through, and that diffuse light cannot be used by solar energy concentrating systems that produce electricity, Daniel Murphy, a scientist at NOAA's Earth System Research Laboratory in Boulder, Colo., reported in the journal Environmental Science and Technology.

Flat photovoltaic and hot water panels, commonly seen on household roofs, use both diffuse and direct sunlight, so they would be less affected.

U.S. Representative Brad Sherman stimulus appropriations

Sherman secures \$475,000 for zero emissions buses

L.A. Daily News, Friday, March 13, 2009

WASHINGTON - Congressman Brad Sherman announced that Congress approved nearly a half million dollars in federal appropriations funding for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Zero Emissions Bus Project.

The \$475,000 in strategically targeted federal investments that Sherman secured is included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2009, which passed the Senate today, and now heads to the White House for President Obama's signature.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) will receive \$475,000 in federal funds to demonstrate the latest zero emission technologies in heavily urbanized operating environments such as the San Fernando Valley. This funding will be used to help demonstrate the commercial and operational viability of current generation fuel cell-powered buses. The Zero Emissions Bus Project will be the first zero emission demonstration project in the Los Angeles basin.

"We are very pleased that Congressman Sherman successfully secured funding for Metro's zero emission bus project," remarked Metro Chief Executive Officer Roger Snoble. "Metro transit services currently reduce air pollution in Los Angeles County by over 1,100 metric tons each day. With the funding made available through Congressman Sherman's efforts, we look forward to further enhancing our clean air fleet," Snoble added.

"Given the drastic effects of climate change, we have a responsibility to act quickly to reduce harmful emissions of greenhouse gases," said Congressman Sherman. "I am glad that the Congress is recognizing the need to employ environmentally-friendly technologies as part of our efforts to improve mass transit systems."

Obama taps Conn. DEP commissioner

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, March 13, 2009

HARTFORD, Conn.—President Barack Obama on Thursday announced he plans to nominate Connecticut's environmental protection commissioner to a top post in the federal Environmental Protection Agency, overseeing air quality.

Gina McCarthy, if confirmed by the U.S. Senate, would become the assistant administrator for air and radiation. She would report directly to the EPA administrator and be responsible for all air quality programs, including policies regarding climate change.

"Much work needs to be done to address the nation's air pollution and climate change challenges and I would very much like to play a part in shaping these efforts," said McCarthy, who became commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection in 2004.

McCarthy, 54, also worked on environmental issues in Massachusetts for 25 years, coordinating policies and programs for state and local environmental, transportation, energy and housing agencies.

In Connecticut, McCarthy heads an agency with about 1,000 employees responsible for protecting the state's environment, natural resources and wildlife, and for maintaining parks and forests. Last year, she helped develop the state's climate-change policy that includes goals for reducing greenhouse gas pollution.

"Her leadership on climate issues is nationally respected, so it comes as no surprise that the Obama administration would reach out to Commissioner McCarthy, a dedicated public servant with tremendous talent and passion," said Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

McCarthy has a Bachelor of Arts degree in social anthropology from the University of Massachusetts and a joint Master of Science degree in environmental health engineering, and in planning and policy from Tufts University.

She is married with three children and lives in Hartford, Conn. and Canton, Mass.

Judge approves plea deal in BP plant blast

By Juan A. Lozano, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, March 13, 2009

HOUSTON—A federal judge on Thursday approved a highly criticized plea deal that fines BP PLC \$50 million for its criminal role in a deadly 2005 blast at its refinery near Houston that killed 15 people.

The plea deal, which has a BP subsidiary pleading guilty to a violation of the Clean Air Act, a felony, also sentences the oil giant to three years probation.

The deadly explosion at BP's Texas City refinery, about 40 miles southeast of Houston, also injured more than 170 people.

U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal's announcement during a brief court hearing came after the plea deal was first announced in October 2007. Its acceptance was delayed while the judge held hearings in which blast victims and their attorneys vigorously objected to the agreement as too low.

They also doubted that BP would meet its safety obligations at the refinery. They argued federal sentencing laws allowed the fine to be as high as \$3.2 billion.

Eva Rowe, whose parents, James and Linda Rowe, were killed in the blast as they worked at the refinery, said Rosenthal's decision was "not right."

"I thought the punishment would be more than \$50 million. That's pocket change for BP," she said after the hearing.

Both prosecutors and BP defended the plea agreement as the harshest option available in assessing criminal punishment for the blast.

"While this plea and penalty will not bring back the lives of those 15 workers, or erase the pain suffered by all those who were injured, it demonstrates that the federal government takes seriously its mission to prosecute those who knowingly violate the nation's environmental laws," the Justice Department said in a statement.

During the probation period, BP will be required to continue complying with safety agreements from both federal and state regulators that were put in place after the blast.

BP spokesman Darren Beaudou said the oil company deeply regrets the harm caused by the explosion.

BP will continue to "reduce risk, increase plant integrity and ensure environmental compliance so we can prevent something like this from happening again," Beaudou said.

But Brent Coon, attorney for Rowe and other blast victims, predicted BP would violate its probation by having another deadly accident.

"Habitual criminals don't change their stripes," he said.

Rosenthal's decision came after a protracted process in which blast victims unsuccessfully took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The plea deal between BP and the Department of Justice was first announced in October 2007.

It was part of an agreement by BP to pay \$373 million to settle various criminal and civil charges related to the plant explosion, energy price-fixing and pipeline leaks in Alaska.

Rosenthal's decision came after BP entered its guilty plea in February 2008. But blast victims appealed, objecting to not being consulted on the plea deal under the Crime Victims' Rights Act.

The case made it to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in July 2008 denied a request from blast victims to delay a decision on the settlement, sending the case back to Rosenthal.

Last month, BP agreed to pay almost \$180 million to settle pollution violations federal regulators found during inspections of the Texas City refinery after the deadly blast. This settlement was separate from the criminal case, prosecutors said.

The explosion at the plant occurred after a piece of equipment called a blowdown drum overfilled with highly flammable liquid hydrocarbons.

The excess liquid and vapor hydrocarbons were vented from the drum and ignited at the startup of the isomerization unit—a device that boosts the octane in gasoline. Alarms and gauges that were supposed to warn of the overfilled equipment did not work properly.

The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board found BP fostered bad management at the plant and that cost-cutting moves by BP were factors in the explosion.

State sees no common cause in Oroville's pancreatic cancer surge

By Carrie Peyton Dahlberg

In the Sacramento Bee, Friday, Mar. 13, 2009

The unusual surge in pancreatic cancer in the Oroville area cannot be traced to heavy industries that polluted the region but should still be watched, California's Department of Public Health has concluded.

In a report released Thursday, the department said the cancer cluster is more likely due to chance, coincidence or even poor population data.

"We feel fairly strongly, looking at where people worked and lived, there was not a common thread," said Dr. Bonnie Sorensen, the department's chief deputy director of policy and programs.

The conclusion disappointed the widow of Del Whittier, an Oroville man who died of cancer of the pancreas in 2007, when he was 72.

"I was hoping that they would find some common thread with all of these cases, because that way people would see something to look out for to try to prevent this disease," Bev Whittier said.

Still, she praised the state study for its thoroughness.

"I'm glad they looked into it," she said. Even with the limited results, "people can learn one thing. You'd better enjoy your loved ones every day, because you never know how long you're going to have them."

Researchers interviewed Whittier and other survivors and cancer patients about their lives, trying to figure out why the Oroville area had double the number of expected cases of pancreatic cancer in 2004 and 2005.

Many of those people turned out to have common risk factors for pancreatic cancer, including diabetes, smoking, obesity or a family history of diabetes or cancer, the state report said.

One possibility, it said, is that the community may simply have attracted more people who have those risk factors.

Other things could explain the 24 cases ultimately documented in 2004 and 2005 – from individual hobbies or jobs to a combination of causes.

"Most cancers are caused by multiple factors," said Sorensen, including genetics, lifestyle and the environment. "There are solvents in glue, in paint, in work exposure. All those factors add up."

All the state report really ruled out is that any one industry, any single fire or waste plume, by itself caused the entire cancer surge.

The air, water and soil in the Oroville region have suffered from multiple environmental assaults.

Three area industries were at one point listed as Superfund sites: the Louisiana-Pacific sawmill and wood preservation plant; a Western Pacific Railroad site; and Koppers Industries Inc., a wood treatment plant.

A pesticide plume was found in groundwater in the 1970s, and a 1987 fire at Koppers released cancer-causing dioxins into the air, leading to warnings against eating chicken or eggs produced on dioxin-contaminated grounds.

Still, a relatively small number of those who contracted – and most commonly died from – pancreatic cancer worked at those sites, or ate food or drank water contaminated by them, the state report said.

It can be difficult to prove a cancer cluster exists, let alone find a cause. People move around. Cancers take years to develop. And statistics are deceiving, because high numbers sometimes turn up at random, just like a coin flip sometimes will turn up 10 "heads" in a row.

Dr. Mark Lundberg, Butte County's health officer, hopes people in Oroville will find this report reassuring, because it suggests there is no ongoing problem that needs fixing.

The county will hold a community forum on the report – and on cancer in general – from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday in the conference room at Oroville Hospital, 2767 Olive Highway.

"Pancreatic cancer is a small slice of the cancer issue in our county," where about 450 people annually die of cancers of all types and nearly 1,200 are diagnosed, Lundberg said.

He urged people to get preventive screenings for things such as colon, breast and prostate cancer, as well as to live healthily – exercising, eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, keeping weight under control and quitting if they smoke.

No one can know for sure yet, but Lundberg expects that in the next few years, pancreatic cancer rates in Oroville will trend back down to the six or so that would be expected annually. Cancer registries lag, so authorities have just tallied up 10 cases in 2006, and don't have data yet for 2007 or 2008.

If the rates don't decline, he said, further studies should be launched.

Study: Even low-level ozone exposure lethal in long run

By Thomas H. Maugh II

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, March 12, 2009

Ozone pollution is a killer, increasing the yearly risk of death from respiratory diseases by 40 percent to 50 percent in heavily polluted cities in Southern California and by about 25 percent throughout the rest of the country, researchers reported Thursday.

Environmental scientists already knew that spikes in ozone during periods of heavy pollution caused short-term effects, such as asthma attacks, increased hospitalizations and deaths from heart attacks.

But the 18-year study of nearly half a million people, reported in the New England Journal of Medicine, is the first to show that long-term, low-level exposure to the pollutant also can be lethal.

Current standards for ozone pollution cover only eight-hour averages of the colorless gas, but even with that relatively relaxed rule, 345 counties with a total population of more than 100 million people are out of compliance.

The Environmental Protection Agency "has already said that it will revisit the current ozone standards in the country," said Dan Greenbaum, president of the Health Effects Institute in Boston, one of the study's sponsors. "Undoubtedly, when it happens, these results are going to be a very important part of that review," said Greenbaum, who was not involved in the study.

The EPA might need to implement an annual standard, said environmental health scientist Daniel Krewski of the University of Ottawa, a co-author of the paper.

Co-author Michael Jerrett of the University of California at Berkeley said the findings could have profound implications because they show that ozone worsens conditions that already kill a large number of people. Deaths from respiratory diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema and pneumonia, account for about 8.5 percent of all U.S. deaths, an estimated 240,000 each year.

Worldwide, such conditions account for 7.7 million deaths each year.

Ozone is what is known as a secondary pollutant, one not formed directly by the burning of fossil fuels. Rather, nitrogen oxides produced by such combustion react in the presence of sunlight to form ozone. It is thus the biggest problem in areas that are sunny and hot, Jerrett said.

As an oxidizing agent, ozone reacts with virtually anything it comes in contact with. In particular, it reacts with cells in the lungs, causing inflammation and other effects that produce premature aging.

Jerrett and his colleagues studied 448,850 people over age 18 in 96 metropolitan regions who enrolled in the American Cancer Society Cancer Prevention Study II in 1982 and 1983. The subjects then were tracked for an average of 18 years. During that follow-up, there were 48,884 deaths, 9,891 of them from respiratory diseases.

The researchers found that every 10 parts-per-billion increase in average ozone concentrations was associated with about a 4 percent increase in dying of respiratory causes.

San Francisco had the lowest average ozone level of the 96 regions studied and only a 14 percent increased risk, probably because of the fog and prevailing winds, which reduce ozone formation. The Pacific Northwest also had low levels of ozone, again because of rain and cool weather.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, March 15, 2009:](#)

Lois Henry: Dodgy science strangles industry

By Lois Henry, Californian staff writer

We are about to cripple California's trucking and construction industries for absolutely no good reason. If I really believed the California Air Resources Board's draconian new diesel emissions standards would save thousands of lives a year, I might say, sorry guys, you gotta suck it up for the greater good.

But when you scratch the surface of the alleged science used by CARB to justify these rules, there's just no "there" there. Our air is NOT killing us, despite what the "environmental alarmist complex" would have us believe.

And, oh yeah, CARB's lead researcher, Hien T. Tran, who wrote the report on which the diesel rules are based lied about having a Ph.D. in statistics from University of California, Davis, according to a CARB spokesman.

That's right, he made it up to get a CARB management job for which a Ph.D. isn't even required. No Ph.D. requirement seems more than a bit loose to me, but that's another story.

The CARB spokesman said they're standing by that report, as well as their diesel rules, which were to go into effect in 2011 but likely will be delayed two years under a state budget deal as a nod to the crumbling economy.

Some people are calling for the rules to be eased while we get through this econ-aggeden, but I say that's a Band-aid on an axe wound.

The rules need to be scrapped. We need a redo, this time using a group of bonafide scientists who don't have to lie about their credentials.

The object of the new standards, by the way, is to reduce PM2.5 (tiny bits of soot) from diesel emissions, which CARB adamantly believes kills thousands of Californians every year, despite studies to the contrary.

The agency has mandated that all diesel trucks and heavy equipment be retrofitted with devices to reduce PM2.5 emissions by 80 percent by 2020 compared to what they were in 2000.

The report on which the rules were concocted is valid, insists a CARB spokesman, because it underwent "peer review" by other scientists.

Yes, but only the draft version. Not the final one with comments from the public, including a number of scientists who disputed its conclusions and the fact that it discounted studies showing little to no increased death rate in California from PM2.5. (Even a map from one of the studies CARB did value, showed little to no PM2.5 deaths in California, but that was also ignored in the report.)

As for the studies that were used in the report, they were weighted by a group of 12 scientists, nearly half of whom wrote or helped author the very studies being graded. And at least a few of those graders are being paid by CARB for more studies.

When I asked Bart Croes, chief of CARB's research division, and Linda Smith, chief of CARB's health and exposure assessment branch, how that's not a screaming conflict of interest, they passed the buck and said the scientists were picked by the EPA.

In my business, that's what we call a "non-denial confirmation."

Digging further into that report, I wondered why it was OK to take results from one air study that found increased death rates from PM2.5 in Los Angeles, mix them with results from studies elsewhere in the U.S., then average those results and apply them to the entire state of California.

I don't have a Ph.D. (real or fake), but that seems pretty slapdash to me.

Smith told me averaging results is perfectly acceptable because of the volume of studies from all over the world that show PM2.5 is dangerous to health and "PM is PM" — just as hazardous one place as another.

Not quite, according to Robert F. Phalen, Ph.D. (a REAL one!), with the Air Pollution Health Effects Laboratory at UC Irvine and author of the book "The Particulate Air Pollution Controversy: A Case Study and Lessons Learned."

CARB simply measures how many micrograms of PM are in a cubic meter of air, he writes, not by size or even chemical composition.

"The use of this crude mass indicator is not only scientifically shaky, but it can also be hazardous to public health," Phalen writes.

For example, filters that lower particles in emissions by breaking down them into smaller bits could actually increase adverse health effects, Phalen says. And without knowing the chemical makeup of the particles that are actually causing health problems, you could be eliminating harmless material while ignoring real culprits.

"The available science is not sufficient to define the key indicators that determine the health effects of PM," he concludes.

Even if you believed PM2.5 was knocking off your neighbors in droves, CARB's own estimates show we'll be very close to the 2023 emissions reduction goal without any extra regulation at all as old diesel equipment is retired. In fact, we'll be within four or five tons per day of the goal without any added regulation at all.

I mentioned that to CARB's Smith and she sharply reminded me that that four tons could represent five to 10 deaths per year, depending on where you looked in Los Angeles.

Which brings me back to the "science" CARB used to come up with its diesel rules.

They relied on a number of epidemiological studies, large sets of observational data (not experiments) queried by scientists to tease out patterns.

The problem with those kinds of studies, according to Stanley Young, Asst. Director for Bioinformatics at the National Institute of Statistical Sciences in North Carolina and who has a real Ph.D. in statistics and genetics, is they can't control for every factor and often end up with biased conclusions.

"Say you're looking at a situation where the temperature goes up, ozone goes up, PM2.5 goes up and humidity goes up. Which of those factors, if any, is killing people?" Young said. "It's a matter of political judgment if you put your finger on ozone."

When other scientists try to replicate results from observational studies, the conclusions don't hold up 80 to 90 percent of the time.

"If you do exactly what the original researchers did, yes, you get the same results," Young said. "When you look at the way they did their analysis, that's where things get dodgy."

"There is a lot of freedom to move the answer around."

It was Young who blew the whistle on Tran for not having a Ph.D. after he read Tran's report. He couldn't believe how amateurish and poorly done it was.

"Frankly, I was shocked," he said. "I asked if they had looked at the raw data from key papers and done their own analysis. They did not have the data and the answer was no."

"It's a crazy situation. And I've just been looking this from the outside."

The view isn't much better from the inside.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sat., March 14, 2009:](#)

Get on the bus

In response to, "Fresno's buses need to be clean, safe, on time" [letter March 10]: I would think that to the mayor of Fresno, getting us off the top of the bad air list would be a priority. Fixing the problems with the public transit system would encourage more people to use it.

Now that we have agreed that there is a problem with the public transit system, how can we bring it to the attention of a mayor who claims not to "have time for this issue"?

I used to take the bus both to work and school, leaving a two-hour gap in between stops just to ensure that I would arrive on time. I have a car now, but at times, when gas is going up, I look back at how much money I saved by taking the bus, then weigh that to how much time I save by using my car.

Operation Clean Air has installed 50 transit buses, four trolleys and six Handi-Ride buses into the public transportation fleet, but what good is spending city tax money on these buses if we can't attract more people to use the public transit system?

Robin Najera, Fresno

[Letter to the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, March 15, 2009](#)

Spare the Air educational, beneficial

It's too bad the Times decided to be against the Spare the Air program because it's not a "voluntary program."

As someone who only recently moved to California and bought a home with three working fireplaces, the Spare the Air program has been very educational to me, and I'm grateful to have it.

Spare the Air helps citizens realize the pollution put out by wood fires, and the potential cost if done excessively. Although I would probably prefer a phone call from a neighbor alerting me to a Spare the Air day if I had a fire going, I would not be upset if a neighbor reported me.

I can learn from my mistakes; we all can. So please don't worry about the "intrusion" this program puts into my life. I welcome it.

Thank you Bay Area regulators for trying to come up with viable solutions for good air quality, despite all the naysayers and lack of resources at your disposal.

Maggie Reeves, Orinda

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, Saturday, March 14, 2009](#)

Mileage tax delivers results

Mileage-based policies could fund transportation improvements and help encourage drivers to reduce unnecessary trips, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. This has been proven in projects in Oregon and elsewhere.

Existing technology can deliver strong privacy protection and be required by law to protect drivers who use it. California can quickly gain benefits of a mileage-based program by simply requiring drivers to self-report annual odometer readings when annually registering their vehicles, verifying numbers during smog-check years and determining incentives based on miles driven. This would make it easier for Californians to take advantage of pay-as-you-drive insurance discounts.

Pilot projects now under way show that a mileage-based approach can deliver results for drivers without raising privacy issues. California's leaders should consider incentive-based efforts, such as these pilot programs, to help Californians get more sustainable funding for better transportation, cheaper car insurance, safer roads and cleaner air, with less greenhouse gas pollution.

*Lauren Navarro, Sacramento
Environmental Defense Fund*

[Letter to the Editor, Sacramento Bee, Thursday, March 12, 2009](#)

Your chance to comment

On March 5, the federal Environmental Protection Agency held a hearing to reconsider California's request to set strong clean-car standards. This waiver, long overdue, will allow California (and more than a dozen other states adopting its standard) to lead the way in the fight against global warming.

Automakers wasted no time in making their arguments, asserting that such regulations will toll the death knell for their industry. However, it's clear that greening Detroit is what will ultimately save it.

Cars are responsible for almost 40 percent of California's statewide emissions. We have much to gain in securing the ability to clean them up. The EPA is accepting public comment through April 6; it's time for Californians to make themselves heard in Washington, D.C.

*Caitlyn Toombs, Sacramento
Environment California*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses darker skies. The visibility of the blue sky has diminished in the last 35 years throughout the world with the exception of Europe where they have adopted effective measures to reduce air pollution according to an article published in Science. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Tenemos un cielo más oscuro

La Opinión, Monday, March 16, 2009

Redacción Internacional(EFE).- La visibilidad del cielo ha disminuido en los últimos 35 años en todo el mundo menos en Europa, donde se han adoptado medidas efectivas para reducir la contaminación en la atmósfera, según un artículo publicado hoy en la revista Science.

Investigadores de las universidades de Maryland y de Texas llegaron a esta conclusión tras compilar la primera base de datos sobre niveles de aerosoles en la atmósfera y visibilidad recogidos entre 1973 y 2007 por 3.250 estaciones meteorológicas en todo el mundo.

"Esta base de datos es un gran paso adelante para investigar los cambios a largo plazo de la contaminación del aire y su relación con el cambio climático", según Kaicun Wang, del departamento de Geografía de la Universidad de Maryland, autor principal del estudio publicado en Science.

Los estudios preliminares hechos por los científicos sobre esta base de datos muestran un aumento continuo de aerosoles en la atmósfera durante el periodo que va de 1973 a 2007 y la consiguiente pérdida de visibilidad debido a que éstos impiden la llegada de las radiaciones solares a la superficie de la tierra.

"La única región del mundo en la que no se registra un aumento de aerosoles es Europa, que de hecho ha experimentado un aumento de visibilidad", afirman los científicos.

Wang explicó que la principal razón de este fenómeno son "las normas de calidad del aire que exigen una disminución de la contaminación liberada en la atmósfera" en el continente europeo.

Los datos recogidos en 68 estaciones meteorológicas en España confirmaron esta tendencia, según el científico.

La visibilidad es la distancia a la que un observador puede ver con claridad desde el lugar de medición, afirma el estudio, según el cual ésta será menor cuanto mayor concentración de aerosoles estén presentes en el aire.

Los aerosoles son partículas sólidas o líquidas suspendidas en el aire y nos referimos a ellos comúnmente como contaminación del aire. Incluyen hollín, polvo y partículas de dióxido de azufre.

Proviene de la utilización de combustibles fósiles, de procesos industriales y la quema de biomasa de las selvas tropicales y pueden ser perjudiciales tanto para la salud humana como para el medio ambiente.

A diferencia de las partículas de aerosoles, el dióxido de carbono y otros gases de efecto invernadero son transparentes y no afectan a la visibilidad. Sin embargo, causan un calentamiento global porque atrapan la energía solar e impiden que el calor vuelva al espacio.

Mientras que la relación de los gases de efecto invernadero con el calentamiento del clima es conocido, no están claros los efectos de los aerosoles.

"El efecto de los aerosoles sobre el clima es tan complejo que no podemos concluir si disminuirán o aumentarán el calentamiento global", declaró Wang.

Según el estudio, la nueva base de datos permitirá a los científicos determinar estos efectos al poder comparar las temperaturas, los niveles pluviométricos y la nubosidad con los niveles de aerosoles de los últimos 35 años.

Wang explicó que la mayoría de la gente percibe el cambio climático como el resultado de unos niveles elevados de gases de efecto invernadero, pero "una fuerte carga de aerosoles en la atmósfera puede intensificar el calentamiento global".

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses fine particulates in the air can cause heart attacks.](#)

La partículas finas en el aire podrían ocasionar infarto

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, March 16, 2009

Las partículas finas de la contaminación del aire pueden provocar ataques cardíacos a personas sensibles en embotellamientos vehiculares, confirmó un nuevo estudio. Aunque el análisis se aplicó en Alemania, un investigador de la Universidad de California en Los Ángeles, Gregg Fonarow dijo que el referido estudio es consistente con otros resultados similares que demuestran que la contaminación aumenta el colesterol, inflama las arterias y ocasiona paros cardíacos. En un embotellamiento pueden mezclarse el deterioro del aire y la tensión nerviosa o estrés, dijo el experto. La posibilidad de un paro del corazón es hasta tres veces más probable en los 60 minutos que siguen a un congestionamiento vial. Entre las comunidades sensibles que pudieran tener impacto cardíaco se encuentran los desempleados, los ancianos y en particular las mujeres, especialmente las que tienen historial clínico por anginas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses ozone levels are the cause of hundreds of thousands of deaths in California.](#)

El ozono es causa de cientos de miles de muertes en California

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, March 13, 2009

La contaminación del ozono en el aire ha causado 450 mil muertes prematuras en 96 zonas metropolitanas del país durante las últimas dos décadas, de acuerdo con un análisis de la Universidad de California en Berkeley. Cada muerte prematura significa vivir por lo menos cinco años menos de lo que se debiera.

Se trata del primer estudio nacional sobre efectos que ya se habían visto, en la salud de los californianos en particular. Los resultados se publican en el Journal de Medicine de Nueva Inglaterra.

El análisis tomó en realizarse 18 años. Encontró que la zona metropolitana con el mayor deterioro por ozono es Riverside, California, donde la población tiene hasta 32 por ciento mayores probabilidades de perecer por afecciones respiratorias.

El autor, Michael Jerrett, urgió a la EPA a restablecer límites al ozono en el ambiente.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Mexico City and cycletaxis. Mexico City will roll out their new ecological transportation program based on cycletaxis, vehicles charged by a hybrid system that will not pollute the air.](#)

Ciudad México en ciclotaxi

La Opinión, Friday, March 13, 2009

MÉXICO (EFE).- La alcaldía de Ciudad de México anunció hoy un programa de transporte ecológico en el casco histórico basado en ciclotaxis, vehículos impulsados por energía eléctrica mediante un sistema híbrido que no contamina el ambiente.

Las primeras 20 unidades comenzarán a circular el próximo lunes, a los que se sumarán otras 80, con el propósito de transformar al Centro Histórico, con una antigüedad de unos 500 años, en un paseo peatonal.

El alcalde de Ciudad de México, Marcelo Ebrard, dijo que estos ciclotaxis ayudarán a cambiar la forma de movilidad en el Centro.

"Hoy en día la movilidad esencialmente es Metro, peatonal y vehículos. Lo que estamos haciendo con esto es avanzar hacia un Centro Histórico donde se tenga cada vez menos vehículos y más peatones. De eso se trata", dijo Ebrard.

Además, la alcaldía instaló hoy 50 muebles para aparcar bicicletas con el objetivo de promover el uso de ese transporte.

Ebrard señaló que la alcaldía destinará este año alrededor de mil millones de pesos (66 millones de dólares) para reparar fachadas de edificios, calles y cambio de infraestructura del Centro Histórico.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Senators opposition to emission credits.](#)

Senadores se oponen a sistema de intercambio de emisiones

Algunos senadores afirmaron este miércoles que Estados Unidos no debería imponer este año un sistema de intercambio de emisiones de carbono para combatir el cambio climático, porque esto se traduciría en impuestos difíciles de pagar en momentos de recesión.

Terra.com, Wednesday, March 11, 2009

Algunos senadores afirmaron este miércoles que Estados Unidos no debería imponer este año un sistema de intercambio de emisiones de carbono para combatir el cambio climático, porque esto se traduciría en impuestos difíciles de pagar en momentos de recesión.

"Ahora no es el momento de imponer impuestos nacionales a las ventas en cada factura eléctrica y en cada compra de combustible", dijo a reporteros el senador republicano Lamar Alexander, miembro del comité senatorial de medio ambiente y obras públicas.

"Soy abierto, como lo somos varios republicanos, al sistema de intercambio de emisiones, pero es cada vez más difícil pensar en eso en medio de una recesión", dijo Alexander.

El presidente Barack Obama favorece esta medida, que establecería un límite de emisiones a las empresas para forzar a las más contaminantes a comprar créditos a las menos contaminantes, lo cual crearía incentivos financieros para combatir el calentamiento global.

Este sistema, que ya se practica en la Unión Europea, probablemente sea reforzado en la reunión sobre clima que celebrará ONU en diciembre en Copenhague como estrategia para combatir los gases de efecto invernadero, considerados causantes del cambio climático.

El secretario de Energía y Nobel de física, Stephen Chu, señaló en una audiencia ante el Senado que el intercambio de emisiones está contemplado en el presupuesto de 3,55 billones de dólares propuesto por Obama.

"Esta legislación establecerá un mercado de emisiones de carbono y llevará la producción hacia energías más renovables", dijo Chu.

Pero Kent Conrad, presidente demócrata del comité de presupuesto, señaló su preocupación sobre el impacto del presupuesto de Obama tanto en las empresas como en los pobres: "El presupuesto así como está probablemente no sea aprobado aquí", advirtió Conrad a Chu, pidiéndole que "flexibilice" la forma en que el gobierno espera compensar los costos que se deriven del sistema de intercambio.

El senador republicano Mike Enzi, escéptico respecto a esta legislación para el cambio climático, también advirtió a Chu sobre el impacto que considera puede tener en tiempos de crisis económica. "El intercambio de emisiones es un impuesto y el impuesto se cargará a los consumidores", dijo.