

Money available to fight drought conditions

By Carol Reiter

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Apr. 08, 2009

Farmers and ranchers in counties with extreme or severe drought conditions, including Merced and Mariposa counties, may apply for assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service in California until May 8.

The NRCS will take applications for \$2 million that's available for practices designed to protect soil and [air quality](#) in areas of fallowed fields, keep orchard trees alive and protect natural resources on ranch and pasture land. Because of drought conditions, NRCS will pay a higher-than-normal 75 percent cost share rate.

Practices being offered through the program include establishing vegetative cover, soil surface roughening, incorporation of soil-stabilizing organic matter, silt fencing next to highways, irrigation water management and more.

More information is available at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/features/cadrought.html.

Port of Oakland approves pollution reduction plan

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, April 8, 2009

Oakland Port commissioners Tuesday approved a master plan for reducing port diesel vehicle pollution that has contributed to a higher cancer risk for West Oakland residents.

In a 5-1 vote, the commission rejected recommendations from Bay Area, state and federal air pollution regulators to amend the plan to add more specific commitments and financing to cut pollution from diesel trucks, railroads and ships.

"The plan doesn't go far enough. It lacks details," said Jack Broadbent, executive director of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Port commissioners said the plan was a good starting point to carry out a variety of pollution reduction measures over the next 11 years.

In a related decision Tuesday, commissioners voted to restore up to \$5 million to finance grants for truckers to install diesel filters on their vehicles. Port commissioners in November had suspended the grant plans indefinitely, stirring howls of protests from environmental and community groups.

Air pollution regulators said the port should enact a container fee to finance pollution reduction measures.

Solar panels will power the Blessing of the Sun

Passover begins at sundown today.

The Orange County Register, Wednesday, April 8, 2009

Rabbi Ken Milhander knows a thing or two about renewable energy. He has contracted to have solar panels installed in his home. And this year, he gets to turn his passion for alternative energy sources to the celebration of Passover, which begins today at sundown.

This morning, Milhander is hosting a previously obscure ceremony known as the Blessing of the Sun at Temple Beth Tikvah in Fullerton. Wednesday, yom revii in Hebrew, or the Fourth Day, was when, according to the Book of Genesis, God created the sun, moon and stars.

The Talmud – an ancient compendium of Jewish law and tradition – seeks to track the 28-year cycle of the sun's return to its original position in the sky on the day of their creation.

Every 28 years, that moment is marked in the Jewish community with the Blessing of the Sun, or Birkat HaHammah in Hebrew, in conjunction with Passover.

Before this year's event, Milhander had not heard of the Blessing of the Sun. Then again, the last time the Blessing of the Sun took place was in 1981, he was a teenager. Although the rite is not widely known, it has come to the forefront with the recent attention paid to alternative energy sources.

"It seems like everything now is interconnected, and there's a much bigger focus on renewable energy," he said.

The synagogue had solar panels installed on Friday to channel the sun's energy into lighting the temple's "eternal light," known as ner tamid. In most temples, the ner tamid is placed above the ark, where the Torah scrolls are stored. Traditionally, they were first lit by oil, then electricity, and now in Orange County, solar energy.

Using a \$10,000 grant from the [South Coast Air Quality Management District](#), the Board of Rabbis of Southern California distributed funds among synagogues across four southland counties for the installation of solar panels. In Orange County, they are Temple Beth Tikvah in Fullerton and Temple Beth Sholom in Santa Ana.

"We think it's a great way to highlight environmental awareness," said Rabbi Mark Diamond, vice president of the board. He said it's part of a broader initiative to use alternative energy sources. In addition to harnessing solar power, synagogues are recycling, using biodegradable items and distributing reusable shopping bags.

About a year ago, Temple Beth Sholom in Santa Ana participated in a grant program in which nearly all of the lighting was switched from incandescent bulbs to more efficient fluorescent lighting.

"We're excited to be a part of this movement, and anything we can do to bring attention to using renewable sources of energy is a positive thing," said Rabbi Heidi Cohen of Temple Beth Sholom.

Her temple's Blessing of the Sun ceremony will include traditional readings from the Talmud and the Book of Genesis, as well as Psalm 148, which talks about the creation of the sun. The temple's new ner tamid will be dedicated and blessed before the congregation and an assembly of preschoolers.

Temple Beth Tikvah's ceremony will include similar readings, as well as featuring their preschoolers singing songs and presenting artwork they created for the event.

Congregant Tom Green plans to attend the event. Green is a proponent of renewable energy who recently purchased a Smart Car. "Part of the reason we bought the car is because it's so darn cute, and other reason is because it gets 36 to 38 miles to the gallon," he said.

Fellow congregant Mark Abramowitz's goal is to buy a hydrogen-powered car, so he's looking for a place to power it near his home in Yorba Linda. He owns two Honda Civics that run on compressed natural gas.

"I think it's a very positive thing for nonprofits of all sorts that have buildings to think of energy as a way to save money. As the saying goes, the cleanest bit of energy we can produce is the energy we don't have to produce," Abramowitz said.

The Blessing of the Sun will take place again on April 8, 2037.

"I hope that 28 years from now, we will have even better solutions for greening our homes and synagogues," Diamond said. By then, the congregation's preschoolers will be in their early 30s.

For now, "It's an opportunity for us to take a moment to remember and reflect on how we are a part of nature and how dependent we are on the sun for its warmth, power and energy. We need to refocus our priorities regarding our planet and our world," Milhander said.

EPA Is Reconsidering Dry Cleaners' Use of Cancer-Causing Chemical

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post Wednesday, April 8, 2009

The Environmental Protection Agency is reconsidering whether to compel dry cleaners to phase out a cancer-causing chemical used in tens of thousands of operations nationwide, according to court documents filed late last week.

The issue of whether to ban perchloroethylene, a hazardous air pollutant linked to cancer and neurological damage, has been the source of a long-running fight between environmental groups and the federal government. In July 2006, the Bush administration ordered dry cleaners located in residential buildings to phase out the toxic solvent by 2020 but did not impose the same rules on the 28,000 other cleaners that do not operate in such mixed-use buildings.

Instead, the EPA required these operators to use devices to detect leaks and to reduce emissions by conducting the wash and dry cycles in the same machine.

The Sierra Club challenged the rules in court, and on Friday the EPA asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit to postpone arguments on the case so it could reconsider the regulations on policy and legal grounds.

EPA spokesman Dale Kemery said in an e-mail that the agency and the Justice Department made the request "so that the agency's new leadership may review the rule." He added that they asked the court to leave the 2006 rule in place while the review is under way.

Between 1996 and 2006, dry cleaners reduced emissions of perchloroethylene, also known as perc, from 25,000 tons to 10,000 tons a year by replacing older dry cleaning machines and improving their efficiency, according to EPA data.

California regulators have ordered the phaseout of perc from dry cleaning by 2023, prompting some operations to conduct "wet cleaning" that does not require the chemical solvent or to clean by compressing recycled carbon dioxide into a liquid cleaning fluid. In California, at least 125 cleaners exclusively use professional wet cleaning, and 10 cleaners use carbon dioxide. There are 4,500 dry cleaners in California.

The industry's trade association, the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, could not be reached for comment yesterday, but dry cleaners have consistently said they need an extended phaseout period for perc because their machines are expensive and last an average of 15 years.

Earthjustice attorney Jim Pew, whose group is representing the Sierra Club in its case against the EPA, said he hopes the agency will decide at the end of its review to ban the toxin altogether from dry cleaning operations.

"The Obama administration has this great opportunity to eliminate this cancer risk for just about all Americans," Pew said, "and do it in a way that will not significantly impact dry cleaners."

Obama looking at cooling air to fight warming

USA Today and O.C. Register, Wednesday, April 8, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) — The president's new science adviser said that global warming is so dire, the Obama administration is discussing drastic options to cool Earth's air.

John Holdren told The Associated Press in his first interview since being confirmed last month that the idea of geoengineering the climate is being discussed. One such extreme option includes shooting pollution particles into the upper atmosphere to reflect the sun's rays. Holdren said such an experimental measure would only be used as a last resort.

As he put it: "It's got to be looked at. We don't have the luxury of taking any approach off the table."

Wash state's deal with coal plant sparks outcry

USA Today, Wednesday, April 8, 2009

SEATTLE (AP) — A deal struck behind closed doors by the state and Canada-based TransAlta on air-pollution limits at a Centralia coal-fired power plant has sparked outcry from critics.

Environmentalists say the agreement should have been brokered in public and not through confidential mediation.

The tentative deal governs how much toxic mercury and smog-causing nitrogen oxides can be released at TransAlta's facility, the state's only coal-fired power plant and its biggest single source of greenhouse gases.

TransAlta agreed to operate 20 percent below its current limit for nitrogen-oxide emissions and voluntarily cut mercury emissions in half by 2012 in an agreement revealed last week.

Environmentalists say the agreement demands too little of the plant and would continue to add smog in the area, including Mount Rainier National Park.

"We have some major concerns about this," the National Park Service's Don Shepherd told The Seattle Times. He reviews factory regulations that pollute air near national parks.

Shepherd said the plant could further reduce smog-causing nitrogen oxide by installing costly equipment used at new power plants.

Keith Phillips, Gov. Chris Gregoire's environmental policy adviser, said the public will have an opportunity to comment at a future public hearing.

He said Gregoire decided to pursue closed-door talks in late 2007 for several reasons: the closure of TransAlta's coal mine forced hundreds out of work; the company faced new pollution rules; and there was interest in seeing how the plant could reduce global-warming pollution.

The state didn't want to pass up getting a voluntary 50 percent mercury reduction from the plant, Phillips said.

TransAlta spokeswoman Marcy McAuley said the deal gives the company more certainty about its future, while curbing pollution.

Environmentalists say the state didn't get much. TransAlta had already said it would use cleaner coal, and other states have been able to force plants to set stricter limits, they say.

"I think the state got snookered," said Janette Brimmer, an attorney with the environmental-law group Earthjustice.

The state Department of Ecology revealed the deal at a workshop last week, but the agency's Sarah Rees declined to release the draft agreement because she said it was still confidential.

"I can't believe they totally shut the public out of the process," said Mark Riskedahl, head of the Northwest Environmental Defense Center in Portland, Ore.

Archer Daniels Midland project aims to bury carbon dioxide

The experiment will help determine whether storing greenhouse gases underground, or sequestration, is a viable solution for global warming.

By Joshua Boak
L.A. Times, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

Decatur, Ill. -- The drillers have gnawed through a mile of rock here, almost down to a 600-million-year-old layer of sandstone where they hope to bury about 1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide -- equal to the annual emissions of 220,000 automobiles.

The \$84-million project, of which \$66.7 million comes from the Energy Department, will help determine whether storing greenhouse gases underground, so-called sequestration, is a viable solution for global warming.

The project by Archer Daniels Midland Co., in which greenhouses gases from a corn mill will be buried beneath shale, is important because it's the furthest along of the seven federally sponsored partnerships nationwide to study the matter.

Near the drilling derrick are steel drill bits caked with mud and worn to nubs. Drillers have already burrowed 5,300 feet deep, and they have 2,700 feet left to go.

The idea is that by burying emissions, coal power plants and factories would cause less damage to the environment.

"The day has to come when we can remove coal from the ground and return carbon dioxide" to the ground, Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) said at the official groundbreaking Monday of ADM's project.

Durbin has been a proponent of sequestration on Capitol Hill, having included \$1 billion in the stimulus package to potentially restart FutureGen, an experimental coal power plant to be built in Mattoon, Ill., that would use sequestration. The Bush administration had pulled the plug on FutureGen.

Yet environmental groups say the government should not fund sequestration projects because of the risk of leaks.

"It is complete hubris to believe we can sink carbon dioxide into the ground and think there will be no leakage," said Carroll Muffett, a Greenpeace deputy campaigns director. "We see carbon capture as a serious distraction from real solutions. It's certainly not where public money should be going."

A gushing leak not only could release the emissions back into the atmosphere, it might also pose health risks to people in the form of "immediate death from asphyxiation" or prolonged exposure to high amounts of carbon dioxide, said David Gerard, executive director of the Center for the Study and Improvement of Regulation at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

The major question is whether shale will stop the waste from escaping. Shale resembles a series of overlapping flat plates that contain no room for the gases to pass through; the shale is a rock layer just above the sandstone at the ADM site.

"Right now we're evaluating the shale to make sure it will hold the carbon dioxide," said Jared Walker, a supervisor on the site for Schlumberger Carbon Services.

"With carbon dioxide, it's important that if we put it in the ground, it stays in the ground," said Scott Marsteller, a project manager for Schlumberger Carbon Services. "We're doing a lot of monitoring."

Also at stake with the ADM project is whether similar geological formations around the country and world can be used for sequestration.

If storage cannot be duplicated on a widespread basis, "it's not the option we're going to pursue," said Scott Klara, director of the Energy Department's Strategic Center for Coal.

The key to sequestration is dealing with different types of rock beneath the Earth's surface. Sandstone is porous, sort of like a box of marbles, explained Robert Finley, director of the Energy and Earth Resources Center of the Illinois State Geological Survey.

ADM plans to inject a liquid form of carbon dioxide waste from its mill into the space between the "marbles." Beginning about a year from now, ADM would deposit 1,000 metric tons of emissions each day, shooting them about 8,000 feet into the ground.

The injections at the ADM project would stop in 2013 with about 1 million metric tons, at which point the partnership would continue to study the site for potential leaks.

Having a bad hair day, Eugene?

USA Today, Wednesday, April 8, 2009

EUGENE, Ore. (AP) — Bad hair days may be more common in Eugene than in many other places across the country.

A California hair products Web site has ranked Eugene No. 13 on its list of the worst cities in the nation for hair conditions, citing the humidity.

The list was posted by www.totalbeauty.com, based in Santa Monica, Calif.

Company officials say the rankings took into account other factors than humidity, including air pollution, the number of beauty salons, water hardness and demographics, along with wind and sun exposure.

Corpus Christi, Texas, topped the bad hair conditions list, which also includes Olympia, Wash., Pittsburgh, Houston, New Orleans and Cincinnati.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial Tues., April 7, 2009](#)

Editorial: Plan now for a warmer future

The latest report from California's Climate Action Team contains some sobering conclusions from a broad collection of new research on global warming's likely effect on the state.

Dozens of studies completed in the past two years have projected the effects of [climate change](#) on California's snowpack and water supply, sea level, agriculture, forestry, [air quality](#) and electricity use.

The results suggest that quite apart from the state's controversial attempt to slow or reverse global warming, Californians and their government almost certainly will have to adapt to changing conditions by changing the way they farm, protect the coast and deal with a more fickle water supply. If the current temperature trends persist, these changes will be necessary whether the warming is caused by man, as most climate scientists now believe, or simply represents a broad and inevitable turn of the meteorological cycle.

Starting from a foundation of international research on average temperature increases and likely scenarios for the 21st century, the new research reports look in fine detail at how life in California would change under those projections. Some key points:

- Temperature. Summer high temperatures are expected to climb by 2.7 degrees to 10.7 degrees by the end of this century. The lower end of that range probably would not present huge

challenges. But if high temperatures gravitate toward the upper end of that spectrum, California will see longer summers with more frequent and more intense heat waves. This has implications for emergency response and electricity demand, as air conditioners would be cranking around the clock through most of the state.

- Precipitation. Interestingly, the projections here are not all in one direction. While both Northern and [Southern California](#) can expect reduced rainfall through the middle of the century, the consensus is that rainfall in the north would increase again by the end of the period, while it would continue to decrease in Southern California.

- Snowpack. Even if precipitation increases again in [Northern California](#), the warmer temperatures will affect the snowpack, the research says. An earlier peak in the water content of the snow and an earlier snowmelt would mean a reduction in the water supply later in the year and would force water managers and consumers to rethink the way they store and use the resource.

- Sea level. Measured over several decades, sea level in California has been rising at a rate of about 7 inches per century. The latest studies suggest the sea level will rise by 11 to 18 inches by 2050 and up to 55 inches by 2100. This would have implications for coastal property and public beaches and could lead to more damage when winter storms combine with high tides to flood low-lying property.

The research includes a few nuggets of good news: Some crops would grow better in the warmer temperatures, and commercially planted pine forests might boom in the new Northern California climate. But for the most part, the implications are difficult, if not bleak. They require serious evaluation and, if heeded, difficult policy choices.

[Letter to the N.Y. Times, Wed., April 8, 2009:](#)

The Silence of the Birds

Re “State of the Birds” (editorial, April 1):

In “A Fable for Tomorrow,” the brave allegorical introduction to “Silent Spring,” Rachel Carson created a composite of real towns where because of human activity, the birds disappeared — “a spring with no voices.”

Critics praised it as a brilliant rhetorical device to introduce the unpleasant subject of the deliberate poisoning of the earth by indifference, negligence and stupidity.

Carson, who died in 1964, did not live long enough to write against the new sources of damage inflicted on bird populations by global climate change and the accelerated intrusion of human activity. The villains she identified remain: chemical pollution of air, water and soil, and the misuse of pesticides.

But planetary overpopulation is now the heart of the problem of vanishing habitat, buttressed always by greed.

Carson’s powerful indictment stands: “No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.”

Linda Lear, Bethesda, Md.,

The writer is the author of a biography of Rachel Carson.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California is on top of the list of 15 states that have filed a lawsuit against EPA. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

California, encabeza a 15 estados que demandan a EPA ley contra contaminación

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, April 08, 2009

El procurador general de California, Jerry Brown encabezó una petición de 15 estados para que la administración del presidente Barack Obama autorice aplicar leyes estatales contra la contaminación.

Procuradores de 14 estados demandaron que la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) termine una "vergonzosa negativa" del gobierno del ex presidente George Bush, que prohibió a California implementar la ley más estricta del país contra la contaminación, aún en contra de una orden de la Suprema Corte de Justicia.

"La administración Bush negó vergonzosamente a California permiso para aplicar su ley, e ignoró el serio impacto que el cambio climático tiene en nuestro estado", declaró Brown en carta a la EPA.

California obtiene el referido permiso, este se extiende a los otros 14 estados para representar a la mitad de la población en el país.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses high levels of smog pollution due to the increase of heat cause an advisory alert in Santiago.

Decretan alerta ambiental en Santiago por aumento de polución

El Nuevo Herald, Wednesday, April 08, 2009

En alerta ambiental, debido al aumento de la contaminación ambiental por los intensos calores que afectan a la región, amaneció esta capital este miércoles.

La medida dispuesta por la autoridad regional dispone un mayor control de la restricción diaria a la circulación de automóviles y la prohibición de encender artefactos a leña. También se dispuso restringir los ejercicios físicos al aire libre.

El tiempo veraniego que se ha extendido este año ha facilitado el aumento de la polución, aunque las estaciones de control repartidas por la ciudad no marcaban este miércoles un incremento de la contaminación. Los meteorólogos explicaron que debido a los intensos calores y a la falta de vientos ha aumentado la contaminación atmosférica.

Es habitual durante los meses otoñales y de invierno que en esta capital de 6 millones de habitantes se registren episodios críticos de polución.

El Intendente (gobernador) de Santiago, Igor Garafulic, dijo que "aumentaremos la fiscalización para evitar un aumento" de la contaminación y prevenir su incremento.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA expands their monitoring systems in California schools.

Despliega EPA sistemas de monitoreo en escuelas de California

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, April 07, 2009

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) informó que instalará sistemas de registro continuo a niveles de contaminación en cuatro escuelas del sur de California donde los padres de estudiantes han reportado riesgos potenciales. Las escuelas se ubican en Lennox, El Monte, Los Ángeles y Cupertino, California.

Lisa Jackson, la administradora de la EPA dijo que como madre, comparte la preocupación de los padres de familia y anunció que su agencia aprovechará para instalar un proyecto piloto.

Científicos de la agencia analizarán a lo inmediato y durante dos o tres meses las condiciones en las escuelas y sus inmediaciones. Según los resultados particulares de cada caso, se tomarán medidas posteriores.