

## **Merced supervisor in hot water over comment at air quality board**

By Corinne Reilly, staff writer

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, June 16, 2009

Local air quality activists and the State Senate's majority leader are calling for the resignation of Merced County Supervisor Mike Nelson from a local air quality board, citing what they call Nelson's irresponsible remarks about his role as a board member.

Their complaints follow a comment Nelson made last month during a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board meeting. Nelson, who serves as Merced County's representative to the board, said he sometimes "tunes out" anti-pollution activists who he's deemed untruthful when they're giving testimony before the board.

In another public meeting last year, Nelson called his assignment to the air quality board "a sentence" that he was stuck with because no other county supervisor would take the position.

Nelson has defended the remarks, as has the air district's executive director, Seyed Sadredin, who said he believes they were taken out of context.

In a June 5 letter to Nelson, Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez, D-Shafter, said Nelson's statements "create an unwarranted level of hostility, damaging to the concepts of transparent government and public participation." The letter added that Nelson should consider leaving the air board.

Local air quality activists plan to demonstrate outside the air board's next meeting in Fresno on Thursday, where they'll ask Nelson to step down, said Merced resident Melissa Kelly-Ortega, who is organizing the event. She said she expects a few dozen participants.

"As a well-paid public official, Mr. Nelson doesn't have the right to tune out any of his constituents," Kelly-Ortega said. "If that's what he's doing, he needs to step aside and leave the job to someone who's interested in solving our air quality problems."

In an interview Monday, Nelson said he doesn't plan to step down and that he doesn't regret the remarks.

He said his comment about tuning out some environmental activists was taken out of context; it was part of a larger statement about the importance of listening to all sides in the debate over how to best implement anti-pollution regulation, he said.

According to transcripts from the May 21 meeting, Nelson said, "If we don't listen and work together, we won't get it. And that's good for me to remember, too. Because honestly when (some activists) get up here, I tend to tune out because ... I don't think they're telling the truth."

Nelson said the fact that he has voted in favor of air quality regulations that developers opposed shows his willingness to listen to all sides before making decisions.

"I don't always agree with environmentalists, but I also don't always agree with the business community, even if that costs me their support in the end," he said.

In a June 15 reply letter to Sen. Florez, Nelson said he stands by his argument that some environmental activists misstate facts when speaking before the air board.

Sadredin, the air district's executive director, said he agrees that some of Nelson's remarks were taken out of context and that he doesn't believe Nelson should be removed.

"Actions speak louder than words, and there's no evidence that any of our board members have paid less than full attention when making important air-quality decisions," Sadredin said.

Nelson was elected to his second four-year term on the Board of Supervisors in 2006. He's served as Merced County's representative to the air board since 2003.

## **Blaze Burns Recyclables**

### **Monday evening fire breaks out at Mid Valley Iron, Metal and Plastic**

Jeff Benziger, managing editor

Ceres Courier, Tues., June 16, 2009

Monday evening's fire at Mid Valley Iron, Metal and Plastic in southwest Ceres was reminiscent of two huge fires that have previously struck Bonzi Recycling plant. But firefighters say the pile of recyclables that caught fire was smaller than the monstrous Bonzi fires of before.

Six fire departments responded to the fire after it broke out at 5:15 p.m., at the business at 1015 Montclair Drive, sending plumes of black smoke into the air. The fire was overseen by Ceres Fire Captain Michael Lillie and was under control by 6:23 p.m.

"Apparently they were either cutting or grinding and sparks got into the cardboard and then jumped over to the plastic that was baled and waiting for recycling," said Ceres Fire Chief Brian Hunt. "That's what produced lots of black smoke."

The blaze damaged the building and a couple of buildings adjacent to the stacks of materials, said Hunt. An official damage estimate has not been produced but Hunt said it would likely be in the neighborhood of \$700,000 considering lost product.

"The buildings weren't a total loss but there is lots of outside damage that needs to be fixed."

Hunt said that Mid Valley Iron, Metal and Plastic collects recyclable materials in the industrial area south of Service Road.

"It was just the Bonzi fires only on a smaller scale," commented Hunt. Bonzi caught fire on May 13, 2008 and on Sept. 14, 2006. Hunt said Monday's fire was extinguished much faster as a result of efficient work as well as a smaller poundage of plastic involved. Mid Valley has a smaller more confined area to store materials unlike the large open area at Bonzi.

Hunt said Fire Marshall Brian Nicholes had planned to go out and talk to business' managers about ways to keep a similar fire from happening again.

## **Government Study Warns of Climate Change Effects**

By John M. Broder, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, June 16, 2009

WASHINGTON — The impact of a changing climate is already being felt across the United States, like shifting migration patterns of butterflies in the West and heavier downpours in the Midwest and East, according to a government study to be released on Tuesday.

Even if the nation takes significant steps to slow emissions of heat-trapping gases, the impact of global warming is expected to become more severe in coming years, the report says, affecting farms and forests, coastlines and floodplains, water and energy supplies, transportation and human health.

The study was prepared by the United States Global Change Research Program, a joint scientific venture of 13 federal agencies and the White House. Under a 1990 law, the group is required to

report every 10 years on natural and human-caused effects on the environment. The current study, which began in the George W. Bush administration, builds on the findings of the 2000 one.

The study, overseen by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, will be posted at [www.globalchange.gov/usimpacts](http://www.globalchange.gov/usimpacts).

Some of the effects being seen today and cited in the report are familiar, like more powerful tropical storms and erosion of ocean coastlines caused by melting Arctic ice. The study also cites an increase in drought in the Southwest and more intense heat waves in the Northeast as a result of growing concentrations of carbon dioxide and other climate-altering gases in the atmosphere.

Reduced mountain snowpack means earlier melt-offs and reduced stream volumes across the West and Northwest, affecting residential and agricultural water supplies, habitats for spawning fish and reduced hydroelectric power generation, the study found.

But the speed and severity of these effects in the future are expressed with less certainty in the report and will depend to some extent on how quickly the United States and other nations move to reduce emissions.

“What we would want to have people take away is that climate change is happening now, and it’s actually beginning to affect our lives,” said Thomas R. Karl, director of the National Climatic Data Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and a principal author of the report. “It’s not just happening in the Arctic regions, but it’s beginning to show up in our own backyards.”

Dr. Karl said that unless the country acted soon to reduce emissions and to adapt to inevitable effects of a changing climate, the costs would be severe.

“Our destiny is really in our hands,” he said. “The size of those impacts is significantly smaller with appropriate controls.”

Dr. Karl said the section of the 188-page report dealing with human-health effects generated the most discussion and uncertainty among the agencies. The study said rising average temperatures would cause more heat-related illnesses and deaths, along with some reduction in deaths from extreme cold.

The study also showed that higher temperatures combined with air pollution would cause a higher incidence of asthma and other respiratory ailments.

Michael C. MacCracken, a leader of the 2000 study and a principal outside reviewer of the current one, said in an e-mail message that the new report was a useful overview of the state of current climate science in the United States, but “there is not much that is new.”

## **Beetle-ravaged forests prompt pleas for aid**

By Joan Lowy, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, June 16, 2009

WASHINGTON—Officials from Rocky Mountain states urged Congress on Tuesday help them avert a potential catastrophe this summer as they grapple with millions of acres of beetle-ravaged pines that are prone to fire.

Local government officials and forestry experts told the House Natural Resources Committee at a hearing Tuesday that small towns, ski resorts, water supplies and electricity transmission lines surrounded by dead or dying forests are at risk for wildfires.

"The inevitable looms on the horizon like a gathering storm," John Rich, a commissioner from Jackson County, Colo., said in prepared testimony. "Shame on us if we do not heed the storm clouds and fail to take the actions necessary to adequately prepare."

Rich quoted Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, a former Colorado senator, as describing the mountain pine beetle infestation as the "Katrina of the West."

The pine beetle epidemic, which hit Colorado in 1996, has spread to more 2 million acres in the state. U.S. Forest Service officials have predicted that by the end of 2013, beetles will kill most of the state's lodgepole pines, the predominant pine at higher elevations.

Other severely affected states include Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. In Canada, more than 22 million acres have been affected and scientists suspect that the death of so many trees is altering local weather patterns and air quality.

"In spite of the state's best efforts, resources are limited and it is incumbent upon the federal government to act more aggressively to suppress and prevent fires," two Colorado lawmakers said in joint testimony.

State Sen. Dan Gibbs and state Rep. Christine Scanlan also said they want the federal government to help create a market for wood products—including wood pellets that can be burned to create energy—made from the dead trees.

## **Report flags environmental, economic concerns for West Contra Costa communities**

By Katherine Tam, West County Times

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, June 16, 2009

Whitney Dotson knows how to get to the shoreline in West Contra Costa, even though much of it isn't clearly marked or easy to reach.

He's one of the few.

"Most people are not aware of it," said Dotson, who heads the North Richmond Shoreline Open Space Alliance. "The shoreline is an amenity, and people should have access to it, for the water and the human psyche."

A report released Monday concludes that getting to large stretches of Richmond's 40.3 miles of shoreline isn't easy for most because obstacles such as crossing the busy Richmond Parkway pose a challenge. Of the 16,000 Richmond and North Richmond residents living within a half-mile of undeveloped shoreline, 72 percent do not have easy access.

At Wildcat Creek, an underpass was built so people don't have to cross the high-traffic Parkway, but that underpass is flooded 10 months of the year and attracts anti-social elements, Dotson said. An overpass pedestrian bridge is one solution his group is studying; one in Berkeley was successful in boosting visitors to the shoreline there.

The 108-page report details how environmental and economic conditions — some disproportionately affecting minorities and the poor — are putting West County residents' health at risk. It is the result of a two-year study by the Oakland-based Pacific Institute and seven environmental and community groups working in Richmond, North Richmond and San Pablo.

The report also concluded:

- 20 percent of households live within 1,000 feet of truck routes or other freight transport zones, where they are exposed to diesel exhaust. That can lead to asthma, cancer and other health problems. More minorities and low-income people tend to live in these areas.

- Creeks and bays do not meet regional water-quality standards. Urban, industrial and agricultural uses and runoff are to blame for contaminating waterways.
- 25 percent of Contra Costa County's liquor stores are in Richmond and San Pablo, which account for about 14 percent of the county population. Of the liquor stores, more than half are within 1,000 feet of a school or park.
- West County youths outnumber the available programs. A survey found 20 programs for youths ages 15 to 20, with 2,409 available spaces. That's enough for 22 percent of the region's youths in the age group. For low-income teens, there are enough slots for 43 percent of the population.
- Half the homes in Richmond, North Richmond and San Pablo were built before 1960, meaning they have a higher risk for lead paint. Ingesting lead-based paint chips or breathing in lead-contaminated dust or soil can increase developmental problems in children.

"These are significant community health issues and when tied together, they have a somewhat severe impact on residents," said Eli Moore, researcher with Pacific Institute.

The report lays out possible solutions, including converting liquor stores into grocery stores or other retail developments, and devising more comprehensive state and regional regulations on air pollutants. The partnering groups plan to lobby for those solutions and call for change from local leaders, advocates said.

The Pacific Institute led a 2002 study on pollution, water contamination, gentrification and other issues in West Oakland. That report found Red Star Yeast Factory was a major contributor of industrial air contaminants, releasing 23,200 pounds of pollutants a year. Community groups and local leaders called for change, and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District decided not to issue the factory a new permit, Moore said. The factory is now closed.

The community groups that worked with the institute on the West Oakland study also formed a nonprofit group with fundraising power.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Monday, June 15, 2009:](#)

### **Earth: More than 2 weeks without a federal violation**

By Mark Grossi

We're on day 15 without a federal ozone violation. Haven't found anything like this June streak in the records.

In 1998, I wrote about a cool streak in Fresno. There were no 100-degree days in April, May or June that year. Through the first 13 days of June, there were only two violations, but it got ugly real quick, even though there were no 100-degree days the rest of the month.

The Climate Prediction Center that year told me a huge Sierra snowpack might have affected low pressure systems to hang around California, keeping things cool. They later admitted they really didn't know.

And that's pretty much where I've arrived. Why is it so nice? No real answer from anybody who is supposed to know this stuff. But it's very clear that weather has a major influence on air quality.

[O.C. Register blog, Monday, June 15, 2009:](#)

### **Health risks from freeways worse than thought**

posted by Gary Robbins, science writer-editor

You don't have to get on a freeway to face health risks. Merely living near one is enough.

So say researchers from UCLA, who have discovered that pollution from cars and trucks travels much farther than they once thought. And the pollution is also much thicker.

This heightened risk comes between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. when most people are either still home sleeping or going outside to exercise, says Arthur Winer, of Laguna Beach, a UCLA environmental health sciences professor who co-authored the study that revealed the risk.

Winer and his colleagues measured pollution as they moved perpendicular to the Santa Monica (I-10 Freeway) in Los Angeles County. They found that some of the pollution traveled more than 1.5 miles from the freeway, or about 10 times farther than scientists once thought.

“Although we do not yet have data for other freeways, the same wider range and higher concentration of pre-dawn air pollution is probably common throughout the South Coast and Orange County because we all share the same weather patterns,” Winer says.

Previous studies showed that during the day, air pollution from freeway traffic can travel up to 100 feet downwind. But in the daytime most people are at work or school and out of the house.

Before sunrise, however, weather patterns in Southern California cause the freeway pollution to become more concentrated in nearby areas. Specifically, lower nighttime temperatures and ocean winds force the layer of pollution closer to the ground. The effect is intensified during the winter.

The phenomenon worries researchers because freeway pollution can enter houses through open windows, potentially causing problems for people who have asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

So what advice does Winer have for coping with this?

“Lots of people jog in the early hours, especially in Orange County,” Winer says. “I would recommend that during those hours, people should not run, bike, or recreate near major freeways, especially if there is a lot of diesel exhaust from the traffic. Also, keeping your doors and windows closed during those hours will help reduce the amount of air pollution that flows into your home.”

– *Story by Ben Young Landis*

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Tuesday, June 16, 2009:](#)

### **Room for Bay Area to grow, smartly**

One of this region's most daunting challenges is to figure out how to accommodate the addition of an estimated 2 million residents by 2035. The discussion of such growth often turns to doom and gloom: more traffic, more pollution, a lower quality of life.

But a new analysis by Greenbelt Alliance, a group with a long history in the region's wars over sprawl, contains a refreshingly upbeat view of the future.

The alliance, building on research of potentially developable sites by UC Berkeley, has come up with what could become a blueprint for planners to guide new housing. It suggests that the region of 7 million people could handle its expected population growth, if it is steered to the right places. The study-recommended sites include shuttered strip malls, vast swaths of parking and vacant lots.

"A lot of people call the Bay Area 'built out' - we wanted to debunk that," said Elizabeth Stampe, a spokeswoman for Greenbelt Alliance. "Has anyone called Paris built out? Cities exist for a long time and are built and rebuilt and change to meet the needs of new generations."

The group identified seen "smart spots" along mass-transit corridors that could accommodate about four-fifths of the growth. The largest concentration of in-fill opportunities was in northeast Santa Clara County, which would handle 26 percent of the new growth, partly by redeveloping old office parks along San Jose's North First Street and downtown.

Another major "smart growth" zone would be the inner East Bay, with its 13 BART stations and abundance of AC Transit bus routes.

While "smart growth" has been a mantra of regional leaders for many years, the reality has been that that new subdivisions continued to pop up on converted farmland on the eastern edges of the Bay Area, where land was cheap, political resistance was light - and the impact on roadways, water and air quality was most severe. Still, local governments and developers rationalized, car-oriented subdivisions with big lots and spacious homes were what consumers desired.

However, the unsustainability of the exurban dream has been thoroughly exposed in this downturn. As Stampe noted, an overlay of the map of areas with the highest foreclosure rates would show a direct correlation with these subdivisions built far from city centers.

The good news is that the analysis presents persuasive evidence that the Bay Area has room to grow while enhancing the region's quality of life - if it's managed wisely.