

Valley gas guzzlers targeted

Air officials update program offering cash for smoggy cars

By Ken Carlson

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, July 11, 2009

As the owner of a 1985 Ford Bronco, which got about eight miles to the gallon, no one suspected Frank Cipponeri of Modesto was part of the green revolution.

Several months ago, he accepted some "green" from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to help him replace the sport utility vehicle with a cleaner car.

With \$5,000 from the air district, plus nearly \$5,000 of his own money, he bought a 2005 Hyundai Elantra. The sedan has a better emission control system and burns less gasoline, getting 20 miles per gallon in town and 27 on the freeway, he said.

"With the Bronco," he said, "we had to doctor it up so it would pass a smog test every two years."

Cipponeri was one of only 45 valley residents to participate in the Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage program last year, which offers cash to retire older, polluting cars. Officials had yearned for a bigger response when they sent 5,000 letters to owners of vehicles that often fail smog checks.

To encourage more participation, officials made changes to the 2009 PASS program rolled out Monday. The district still is sending letters to owners of targeted vehicles, but valley residents from Stockton to Bakersfield can contact the air district to see if their car is eligible.

In the first three days of the campaign, 300 people called the toll-free number, officials said.

Owners may receive \$1,000 to scrap a polluting vehicle or \$5,000 toward the purchase of a newer car.

The air district has \$2 million and will accept applications until the money is spent.

"Not all of the cars will be eligible for the \$5,000 in assistance, but people can apply for both the \$5,000 or \$1,000 incentive," said Kevin Wing, a district air quality specialist. "What we are looking for is to get the emissions off the road."

Looking at smog test results

District officials are not concerned about the vehicle's age or model, but are most interested in how it has performed on smog tests.

Older cars with outdated emission controls may be eligible for the financial assistance, or it could be a newer lemon that frequently requires smog repairs. "We have seen data that most of those smog repairs don't last," Wing said.

Cipponeri said it took about three months for him and his girlfriend, Marie Rhea, to secure the financial assistance to purchase the Elantra. By searching a state database, the air district found that the Ford Bronco was among thousands of vehicles with a history of smog repairs, and sent him a letter in November inviting him to apply for the assistance.

After the retired mechanic applied, the district told him to take the Bronco to a smog station, where a test confirmed it was a gross polluter. The next step was choosing a car that met specified emission standards.

Cipponeri worked with Central Valley Automotive in Modesto to purchase the four-cylinder Hyundai in February. The Bronco was scrapped at a wrecking yard in Stockton.

With about 100,000 miles on a rebuilt engine, the '85 Bronco still had legs but probably was due for more smog repairs, Cipponeri said.

"It was sad parting with it, but it's a great opportunity to upgrade your vehicle and clean up the air," he said.

The program has some stipulations. Owners must agree to keep the cleaner vehicle for three years and fill out simple annual reports for the district.

This year, the PASS program has dropped the emission requirements for replacement vehicles because the regulations were confusing for applicants. The replacement cars, purchased from participating dealerships, must be 2006 models or newer.

Low-income residents have a broader selection, including models as old as 2003, so they are eligible for lower-priced cars.

More than half of the valley's air pollution comes from motor vehicle emissions. Officials hope the revised PASS program will remove more than 1,000 polluting cars from valley roads, although the district had no estimate on the reduction in air pollution. Funded by Department of Motor Vehicle registration fees, PASS is not the same as the federal government cash-for-cars program, which encourages people to trade in their gas guzzlers for more fuel-efficient new vehicles.

Wing said the \$5,000 incentive is reserved for replacing the dirtiest cars. Those who are eligible for the \$1,000 incentive are instructed to take their vehicle to a contracting auto wrecker for a final inspection. If the final step is cleared, the contractor issues the \$1,000 check and crushes the vehicle.

There is no expressed limit on the number of drivable cars people can retire, Wing said. While the program is geared for the public, the district will consider retiring cars owned by businesses.

PROGRAM DETAILS

To be considered for the Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage program, your car must have been registered in Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare or Kern counties for two years and be in drivable condition.

To find out if your car is eligible, call 877-900-5865. Information is also available at www.valleyair.org/PASS.htm.

Your vehicle information is run through a database to see if the car meets basic guidelines.

If it does, you are directed to take your car to a smog station for tests.

Based on test results, a program contractor will let you know if you are eligible for \$1,000 to scrap the car or \$5,000 toward the purchase of a cleaner car.

Owners eligible for the replacement option are directed to participating dealerships to select a 2006 to 2009 model car (2003-2009 for low-income buyers). Owners buying a cleaner car agree to keep it for at least three years and fill out annual reports for the district.

Those eligible for \$1,000 are directed to an auto wrecker for a final inspection. If the car passes, a check is issued and the vehicle is crushed.

Federal recovery funds to help reduce diesel emission in Valley

By Kristina Hacker, Editor

Turlock Journal, Saturday, July 11, 2009

A number of Central Valley school buses and agricultural vehicles will soon be "greener" thanks to the millions of dollars from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant funds awarded to the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District.

The pollution control district was awarded \$4 million to install diesel particulate filters on 190 2001 model year and newer diesel school buses and \$2 million to repower 30 agricultural off-road vehicles with new engines that meet or exceed non-road diesel engine emission standards.

The district's projects were two of over 100 that were submitted by the Pacific Southwest region of the Environmental Protection Agency in their ARRA competitive grant request of approximately \$516 million.

About \$25 million in stimulus funding was awarded to California to reduce diesel emissions. With the \$55 million dollars in funding the pollution control district will receive from program partners for diesel emission reduction, it "makes this a truly significant program for California," said Air Division Director Kerry Drake.

"We have some of the worst air quality in the country, therefore these grants not only boost the economy, but also help protect our residents," Drake said.

The retrofitting school buses project is expected to reduce particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and carbon monoxide emissions, thereby protecting the health of children who ride the buses daily. The 190 school buses chosen to be retrofitted came from across the district and include buses from Livingston Union Schools, Winton School District, Riverbank Schools, Oakdale Joint Unified, Merced River School, Los Banos Unified and Modesto City Schools.

Each school district had previously applied to the pollution control district for funding to upgrade their buses. With the grant award and leveraged funds with Proposition 1B Lower Emission School Bus Program funds of over \$39 million, the district will now be able to move forward with the project.

The agricultural off-road vehicle repowering project is expected to significantly reduce particular matter, nitrogen oxides, and carbon monoxide emissions. The 30 vehicles chosen for the program include vehicles from Turlock, Oakdale and Gustine.

Although the district submitted \$70 million worth of projects and was awarded only \$6 million, the funding is expected to not only reduce diesel emissions in the Central Valley, but also create and maintain jobs for the agriculture and engine manufacturing and sales industries.

The pollution control district is still awaiting word on another grant request of over \$70 million.

"While we're happy with the award we received and with the grant opportunity, we would have been happier with more considering our unique air quality situation (in the San Joaquin Valley)," said Samir Sheikh, the pollution control district's director of the Emission Reduction Incentive Program.

Other state grant awards include \$8 million to the California Air Resources Board to repower eight switch yard locomotives in the Southern California region, \$4 million for replacements and/or engine retrofits for 112 pieces of cargo handling equipment at the Port of Long Beach, and \$2 million to retrofit 81 trucks with diesel particulate filters at the Port of Oakland.

Asthma study finds seasonal surprises

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Sunday, July 12, 2009

A new study confirms that lung problems get worse for Fresno asthmatics in winter when soot pollution increases. But, strangely, the same is not true during the worst summertime smog.

Surprised researchers say they think asthmatics simply stay indoors on hot, smoggy days. But on pleasant winter days when soot pollution sometimes spikes, people spend more time outside.

People with lung problems seem more aware of summertime pollution, said lead researcher Tim Tyner of the University of California at San Francisco-Fresno Medical Education Program.

"I think it means we should educate people more about particulate matter so they will know when it's wise to stay inside," said Tyner, associate director of clinical studies.

Over the last 18 months, Tyner and pulmonologist Jose Joseph, associate professor of medicine at UCSF-Fresno, intensely studied the effects of pollution on nine Fresno residents who have asthma.

Chemist Alam Hasson and biologist Mamta Rawat, both from California State University, Fresno, also participated in the study. The research included a battery of physical tests to identify changes in lung functions and chemicals found in the asthmatics after air-pollution exposure.

The \$250,000 study, underwritten by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, sheds light on a chronic lung problem in one of the nation's worst air basins.

Fresno County is California's asthma capital: Nearly one in three children -- or about 75,000 -- have it, according to one statewide health survey.

Researchers monitored the nine Fresno asthmatics during fall, winter and summer. In warm weather, asthmatics carried portable ozone monitors, so researchers would know how much pollution individuals experienced.

The portable monitors showed personal exposure was much lower than the ozone readings shown by the official air monitors in Fresno, largely because people were indoors much of the time.

But in winter, urine samples showed chemicals related to tiny specks of pollution, called PM-2.5, which are linked to reduced lung function. The chemicals triggered lung inflammation, Tyner said.

The chemicals come from vehicles, wood burning and meat cooking, according to the air district.

"The district is already moving in the direction of better controls of these chemicals," said David Lighthall, district health science adviser.

The district has enforced more wood-burning restrictions on polluted winter days, and new charbroiling rules for restaurants are under consideration. The district also is working on improving a program to retire high-polluting vehicles.

Tyner said researchers were unsuccessful in recruiting men for the study. But he said it was more important to find asthmatics who did not suffer allergies from pets, pollen, mold and dust, which are additional triggers for the ailment. Allergies would have created too much complexity in the study.

The research also included nine other women who did not have asthma. Tyner said the healthy women had fewer problems with PM-2.5 pollution, but they still suffered some narrowing of small airways in their lungs.

To confirm and expand on the findings, the researchers are planning a larger follow-up study involving 80 people -- 40 with asthma, and 40 otherwise healthy individuals.

Caltrans Going Solar in Visalia

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, July 13, 2009

Caltrans announced this month it would install \$20 million in new electricity-producing solar panels at 70 of its facilities around the state, including the new Caltrans maintenance stations in Visalia and Porterville, the rest stop in Tipton and buildings in Fresno, Delano and Lebec.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said the projects would save \$52.5 million in power costs over a 25-year period promoting green energy "at no cost to the taxpayers." The panels will eliminate 2.8 million pounds of greenhouse gases, says the agency.

The project will be financed through issuance of Clean Renewable Energy Bonds with annual payments over a 15-year period. The bonds carry an interest rate of just 1.45 percent.

The solar panels will take care of all or most of each building's electric power needs.

Gardening and other ways to go green

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, July 11, 2009

Living Green is easy. You don't need to live in adobe huts or even drive a solar car.

You don't have to drastically change your lifestyle to be Green. Being Green really just means being smart with your resources. An easy everyday way to be Green is by being more conscious of where you spend your money.

You can make more sustainable choices by just being conscious of what you're buying, where it was made, and what it is made of.

Here are a few tips on how to shop Green.

1. Check Labels. Let us take tomatoes for example. While grocery shopping, you'll find tomatoes either labeled Mexico or USA. According to the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 70 percent of California's tomatoes are grown in the San Joaquin Valley. Imagine the distance trucks must travel to deliver to get tomatoes to your local grocer. Tomato trucks coming from Mexico burn at least 1500 gallons more of gasoline and release about 35,000 pounds more of carbon dioxide in the air. Checking labels is a small way to make a big impact.

2. Farmer's Market. Shopping at farmer's markets you may find better quality and more flavorful foods, but more importantly you help strengthen the local economy. Some items may be a little more expensive, but as explained in *Going Local* and *The Small-Mart Revolution*, every dollar spent at a farmer's market returns nearly 70 cents on the dollar to the local economy, while commercial grocers can return less than 15 cents locally.

3. Backyard Gardens. While this option may be the most time intensive, it can also be the most rewarding. Vegetable gardens have low maintenance costs and zero transportation impacts to the environment. Not only can gardens save you money, they can also help kids to eat healthier. A friend of mine shared with me just last week that his boys hardly ate vegetables. However, ever since his family began a summer garden, his kids can't wait to taste their homegrown tomatoes.

Robert Mijares, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) accredited professional, PE, is an environmental compliance specialist with Quad Knopf, Inc.

Summer energy savings add up

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, July 11, 2009

Demand for electricity can increase as much as 25 percent during summer. According to the California Energy Commission, our state is expected to have adequate electricity to meet this summer's peak demand even if hotter-than-average temperatures occur. This positive outlook is partially due to our state's increased generation capacity (nearly 750 MW more than 2008), and a lower growth in demand reflecting the current downturn in our economy.

But even with a reliable source of electricity, it is still important for all of us to practice energy conservation especially during the summer months.

Why? Save money. Consumers can save 10-30 percent on their electric bills with energy-saving practices and investing in simple energy upgrades. An average California household consuming 6,500 KWh per year can save \$110 to \$330 a year.

Greenhouse gases have been shown to be a primary contributor to climate change; and electricity accounts for 28 percent of California's CO₂ emissions. California has set its sights on reducing its carbon footprint by nearly 30 percent by the year 2020. Our choices to conserve energy will help achieve this goal and slow the effects of global warming.

Energy conservation practices can reduce greenhouse gases, [improve our Valley air quality](#) and will help all of us breathe easier in the summer months.

Making smart choices everyday to reuse, recycle, and opt for low-energy approaches to daily activities can significantly reduce our summertime electricity consumption. Did you know that microwaves use two-thirds less energy than stoves? And loaded dishwashers use less water than washing the same amount of dishes by hand selecting the air-dry setting on your dishwasher can provide even more energy savings. Unplug unused appliances, or those devices that are used infrequently as they continue to draw electricity.

Modify your daily routine to avoid consuming energy during the peak hours of 10:00am 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday. We can also save 1 percent on our energy bills for every degree we increase our thermostat. Those savings can really add up!

If you're looking to make improvements to your home, consider starting with installing programmable thermostats, changing the filters for your air conditioning system, and switching to compact fluorescent or LED light bulbs. Larger investments will give you even more savings: replacing old appliances with Energy Star models, installing a whole house fan, and considering replacing your air conditioning unit. Each of these larger investments can each save 10-15 percent and will increase the value of your home.

Erin Andersen is sales and human resources manager for BMI Mechanical, Inc. and a board member of the Tulare/Kings chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Additional Facts

Sources for energy conservation

For more information, ideas, and incentives for summertime energy conservation, visit these resources:

- California Energy Commission: www.energy.ca.gov
- U.S. Green Building Council: www.usgbc.org
- Southern California Edison: www.sce.com
- Ideal Bite: www.idealbite.com

Tulare/Kings U.S. Green Building Council

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, July 11, 2009

The Tulare/Kings branch of the USGBC is pleased to be partnering with the Visalia Times-Delta on the July 13, 2009 sustainability forum.

The TK branch of the USGBC is a member of the Central California Chapter, which was formed in 2005 based on the desire to network and learn from one another the concept of sustainability and how it impacts the building industry.

In 2008, the U.S. Green Building Council awarded the Central California region full chapter status allowing us to promote a mission to transform the way buildings and communities are designed, built, and operated, enabling an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy, and prosperous environment that improves the quality of life. Locally, the TK branch has a mission to "To accelerate the education and implementation of sustainable development practices."

Kicking off the branch in spring 2008, TK hosted Mike Chrisman, Resource Secretary for the State of California, and over 75 attendees.

"This was a great moment for Tulare and Kings Counties, to have the opportunity to host such an influential, passionate leader in the movement to make the Valley more sustainable," commented TK branch Chairman Robert Mijares.

On a more personal level, the TK branch of the USGBC strives to be a resource for community members locally that want to learn more about sustainability and being green. Monthly meetings are hosted on the first Wednesday of the month at Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group, at 5:30 pm. Topics of discussion include water conservation, [indoor air quality](#), recycled materials and resources, and energy efficiency. You do not need to be a member to attend. For more information, please contact tinfo@usgbccc.org.

Tulare County Association of Governments hires Fresno public relations firm

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, July 10, 2009

The Tulare County Association of Governments has hired the Fresno-based public relations firm Jeffrey Scott Advertising to perform outreach services for it.

The agency will split publicity duties with Visalia's Lockwood Agency, which will continue to handle public relations for Measure R.

JSA's clients include the Chukchansi Gold Resort and Casino, First 5 Fresno County and the Hotel Council of San Francisco. The Lockwood Agency counts Mangano Homes and the Paloma Development among its clients.

The association of governments is made up of elected city and county officials and is charged with planning for the county's transportation needs and overseeing the spending of money from Measure R, the county's half-cent sales tax on transportation.

JSA will be paid \$61,000 per year. It will oversee general public relations, transit outreach [and air-quality involvement for the agency](#), said Ted Smalley, TCAG's executive director.

The Lockwood Agency will be paid \$20,000 per year.

Smalley said 88 percent of the contracts or \$71,280 will be funded through federal dollars earmarked for transportation planning and outreach. The remaining money will come from local transportation funds.

The agency had contracted with the Lockwood Agency for its public relations for the past three years.

Plans to expand power plant run into delays

by Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Friday, July 10, 2009

Plans to expand the Tracy Peaker Plant into a full-fledged power plant may get delayed by six months after federal regulators and local landowners demanded several changes in the project.

Based on a report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, GWF Energy, LLC — the company that owns the peaker plant — needs to figure out how to get its plans in line with the Clean Air Act before it begins construction.

The peaker plant, which lies southwest of Tracy by a biomass plant and a glass factory, has spewed a couple tons a year of nitrogen oxide into the air since it opened in 2003. If it doubles in size to a consummate power plant, as proposed, it would release about 90 tons of the gas, according an estimate by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

GWF Energy applied through the California Energy Commission in summer last year to increase the plant's energy output from 169 to 314 megawatts by capturing steam to power a new turbine. With the addition of a second turbine, the company plans to up the number of hours the plant runs from about 200 or 300 a year to as many as 5,000.

The plant is already permitted by the state to fire up for as many as 8,000 hours annually. After expansion, it would run cleaner but run much more often, according to the company.

State energy regulators last fall began a yearlong review of the expansion plans, but recent criticism from federal regulators, planned housing development Tracy Hills and longtime Tracy landowners, the Tusos family, has slowed progress. Regulators said they expect the 12-month review to turn into one that lasts at least 18 months.

The Tusos and Tracy Hills worry about the visual impact of a bigger power plant, according to letters sent to state regulators. Expansion plans call to heighten the plant's 110-foot towers to 140 feet — something the Tusos and Tracy Hills strongly oppose.

Tracy Hills suggested GWF Energy be required to plant tall trees around the plant after expansion to make it easier on the eyes.

The Tusos said through an attorney that they already had a tough time accepting a peaker plant as a neighbor under the assumption that it would last only through 2033 as they said it was originally advertised.

New plans to make it permanent and expand its size and use threaten the family's "quiet enjoyment" of their 225 acres of adjacent agricultural land, says a statement the family filed with the state in October.

The Tuso family asked the company in its letter to demonstrate why the plant needs to be expanded in the first place and whether the company built the peaker plant only to "get its foot in the door," while all along intending to build a full-sized power plant.

GWF Energy spokesman Riley Jones said that last assertion is untrue and that the company only applied for a permit to expand to keep up with the public's energy demand.

Riley said there should be a public hearing in Tracy sometime in August. The latest documents related to the plant's expansion are available at www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/tracyexpansion/documents/index.

Air panel plans workshops on tougher fireplace burning rules

By Marissa Lang

Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Monday, July 13, 2009

Fireplaces and wood-burning stoves may be the last thing on most people's minds in July, but that's just what city officials want the public to start thinking about.

Come November, if you live in the area, you may be dealing with a newer, stricter set of rules when it comes to burning wood.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District is proposing an overhaul to Rule 421, which limits the use of wood-burning stoves and fireplaces during the winter months on bad air days.

Starting this week, air quality officials will launch a series of five open forums where they will present the proposed changes. The air quality board wants people to weigh in with their comments and recommendations.

"With the current rule, we still have too many unhealthy days," said program supervisor Aleta Kennard.

"At these forums, we'll lay out what we've done with our analysis and what we're considering to change, and give the public an opportunity to respond."

The district wants to revamp its system, which currently allows some exceptions for burning on bad air days. It wants to create a program in which all burning would be prohibited – regardless of the type of stove or the material being burned.

Currently, Stage 1 of the "Check Before You Burn" program bans the use of fireplaces and wood-burning stoves, unless they are pellet stoves or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-certified fireplace inserts or stoves. On Stage 2 days, burning any solid fuel, including wood, synthetic logs and pellets, is illegal.

"On a no-burn day you get a 22 percent reduction in particulate emission, while on a Stage 1 day, when you have exceptions, you only get about a 10 percent reduction," Kennard said.

Rather than a districtwide ban on all burning on those days, some retailers suggest that the district should focus on getting residents to use more environmentally friendly devices.

Mitchell Heller, owner of Custom Fireside, said the city is approaching the issue the wrong way.

He said government should crack down on open fireplaces, providing incentives for residents to use wood pellets or EPA-approved fireplace inserts or stoves.

"I'm not supporting this, because there are two options that they don't have on the table," Heller said. "One, leave the current system we have in place; or two, enact more severe restrictions and rules on open fireplaces, which will make people put in EPA or pellet stoves."

Heller said his customers are required by law to purchase EPA-certified inserts or pellet stoves. The clean-burning appliances emit from 2 to 7 grams of smoke per hour, while uncertified devices emit 60 to 80 grams of smoke per hour.

During the winter, wood smoke combined with calm weather conditions in Sacramento can make the air extremely unhealthy and potentially dangerous, said Brigette Tollstrup, the air quality district's division manager.

"When you burn, you emit particulates," Tollstrup said. "And in the wintertime, we get those calm cool nights where ... the smoke gets trapped low to the ground, causing really bad air."

Officials say exposure to air laden with smoke particulates worsens existing asthma, increases the likelihood of stroke and heart attacks in postmenopausal women, causes chronic bronchitis, and poses a particular threat to children, who take in more air in relation to their size than adults do.

In addition to particulate problems, Sacramento is also ranked seventh-worst in the nation for ozone pollution, according to the American Lung Association.

The air board declares an average of 23 no-burn days per season.

Air quality officials said that if their proposal is approved, the number of complete no-burn days could increase to 31.

That, they said, would ultimately lead to more clean-air days in the future.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District is holding five workshops – three this week and two next week – on a plan to further restrict fireplace burning on bad air days. The rule is in effect locally from November through February.

- Tuesday: 6 p.m., La Sierra Community Center, Room 800, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael
- Wednesday: 5:30 p.m., Tsakopoulos Library Galleria East Meeting Room, 828 I St., Sacramento
- Thursday: 1:30 p.m., Air Quality District, 777 12th St., Third Floor, Sacramento
- July 20: 6 p.m., Chabolla Center, 610 Chabolla Ave., Galt
- July 22: 6:30 p.m., Folsom Community Center, 52 Natoma St., Folsom
- Information: airquality.org or (800) 880-9025

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Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, July 13, 2009

Starting in 2012, new cars sold in California will have to have windows that reflect or absorb heat-producing rays from the sun. The California Air Resources Board adopted the regulation designed to keep cars cooler, increase their fuel efficiency and reduce global warming pollution. According to the CARB, cooler cars mean less air-conditioning thereby increasing fuel efficiency and preventing about 700,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere in 2020 – roughly the equivalent of taking 140,000 cars off the road for a year.

For Boxer, global warming bill is the challenge of a lifetime

By Rob Hotakainen

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, July 11, 2009

WASHINGTON – If the Senate doesn't pass a bill to cut global warming, Democrat Barbara Boxer says there will be dire results: droughts, floods, fires, loss of species, damage to agriculture, worsening air pollution and more.

But she says there's a huge upside if the Senate does act: millions of clean-energy jobs, reduced reliance on foreign oil and less pollution for the nation's children.

Boxer is engaged in her biggest sales job ever. And the stakes couldn't be higher as she faces one of the toughest high-profile acts of her long career: getting Congress to sign off on historic legislation to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

"For Barbara Boxer, it's both the opportunity and a challenge of a lifetime," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch.

As the Senate's top-ranked environmentalist, Boxer heads the influential Environment and Public Works Committee, which began hearings on the issue this week. She's aiming to get a bill passed by her panel by the end of September. For months now, she has been meeting with senators one-on-one and hosting a group of about 30 senators for "Tuesday at 12" meetings to develop a strategy to win 60 votes, enough to overcome a Republican filibuster.

With a House bill already approved, all eyes are on Boxer, who must overcome plenty of skepticism on Capitol Hill among her fellow Democrats.

"It's going to be a tough slog, but I'm excited about it. ... I know that my Republican colleagues are going to try to do everything to stop it and distort it," Boxer said in an interview Friday.

Last year, Boxer's stand-alone bill fell to defeat, but there's a new strategy this year that will make it harder for senators to reject it. Six different committees will have jurisdiction over the bill. Those committee heads have been meeting for months with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, who will help combine their work into one massive bill this fall.

Boxer said the approach is unlike any she's experienced since joining the Senate in 1993. And she predicted that it would simplify passage.

"It's a different dynamic, and it will make it easier," she said in the interview. "There will be so much in this bill. There will be investments in transportation. There will be great opportunities for agriculture. There will be great incentives for energy efficiency. There will be so much in there. There will be help for areas that need flood control. It should have a broader appeal. Having said that, it's all difficult."

But with Reid, the White House and five other Senate chairs leading the push to get the legislation passed, Boxer figures she'll have plenty of help achieving the 60 votes needed to overcome a filibuster.

While vote counts vary, most observers say the fate of the bill will hinge on 15 or so Democratic moderates, many of whom fear that a vote for climate-change legislation could hurt their re-election chances. Boxer is trying to round up some Republican votes to offset opposition from the likes of Democratic Sens. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Ben Nelson of Nebraska.

Boxer has been telling audiences for years that Congress must act – and that it will. After battling with the Bush administration, Boxer now figures she has the best odds ever of getting a bill signed into law.

But it won't be easy.

Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, the top-ranked Republican on the environment committee, predicts Boxer will fail. He said the public will see the legislation as a large tax increase once they understand that they'll ultimately bear the costs of any bill that forces companies to reduce global warming emissions.

"Once the American public realizes what this legislation will do to their wallets, they will resoundingly reject it," Inhofe said at a hearing Tuesday.

Boxer said the legislation will not include any new taxes. And she's portraying Republican opponents as obstructionists.

Aides say that Boxer, who has spent her entire political life focused on environmental issues, is keenly aware that this is her big moment, a chance to cement a legacy that would include

passage of legislation with worldwide impact. Three more committee hearings are set for next week, and a vote by the full Senate could come as early as October. The legislation is expected to be Boxer's top priority for the next four to five months.

Churches tell how they're helping environment

By Troy Anderson, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Monday, July 13, 2009

VALLEY GLEN - Having seen the light, the faith community is "going green."

At least that's what participants said Sunday during the Healthy Air, Healthy Communities Family Fair on Sunday at Los Angeles Valley College.

Sponsored by the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the Valley Interfaith Council, about 40 houses of worship and other organizations gathered for the free, eco-friendly, clean air community event.

Amid a growing movement in the faith community to adopt environmentally-friendly practices, dozens of exhibitors promoted green programs that support clean technology and healthy living.

"The churches are going green," proclaimed Alvin Hopkins, the parish business manager at Saint Anastasia Church in Westchester.

"No more Styrofoam cups and throwing everything away. We recycle our trash," he said. "And we look at products and services we buy and where they are coming from."

One of the more innovative programs is at Studio City's St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, which recently installed a \$48,000 solar roof, with the help of a \$27,000 rebate from the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power.

Now the congregation is raising funds through private and corporate donors and grants to help 10 other charities or houses of worship instal solar panels.

Sun power can help trim electric bills by about a third, said Betsy Meiman, chair of St. Mike's Solar Outreach Project. With an estimated \$750,000 to \$1.25million in savings over 25 years, Meiman said charities could use the extra funds to help eradicate poverty and hunger while also helping improve air quality and the environment.

St. Michael's is believed to be the first church to launch the innovative program, Meiman said.

Pom Pom Ganguli, the public adviser for the AQMD, said the fair is one of a series of events the agency is holding in Southern California to encourage the faith community to take steps to help improve the environment.

Although air quality has improved dramatically in recent decades and the number of annual unhealthy air days has dropped from more than 100 to just a few days now, more than 6,000 people die prematurely each year due to air pollution.

"There are so many things that can be done, from changing energy-efficient light bulbs and purchasing appliances that are energy-efficient to faith communities teaching recycling and reuse," said Rhetta Alexander, vice president of VIC.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, who has served on the AQMD board since 1988, said as a boy being driven along the 10 Freeway, his eyes would water from smog particles.

"Today, we have come a long way, but we still have a long ways to go," Antonovich said.

Assemblyman Paul Krekorian, D-Burbank, said as the chair of the Select Committee on Renewable Energy he is working on policies to move the state to a point in 2020 where 33 percent of all electricity generated would come from renewable sources like solar, wind and geothermal power.