

Area schools, county and city discuss fueling site

By Judy Finney, staff writer

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, November 7, 2009

The cost of fuel is going up and income from state sources is unreliable. It's a one-two punch that has sent education and other groups dependent upon state and federal funds spinning toward the mat.

A new approach to the problem was discussed in the Lemoore Union High School District's vehicle maintenance garage Thursday evening. Representatives from all Lemoore-area schools, the city and Kings County met to hear plans to build a CNG fueling station.

According to Dwight Miller, LUHSD Superintendent, the plan is to construct a compressed natural gas fueling station on the district's maintenance yard located on Iona Avenue near the Lemoore Municipal Golf Course. The fueling station would be available to all school, city and KART vehicles.

Lemoore City Manager Jeff Britz said Leprino, the huge cheese manufacturing company with two sites in Lemoore, must offset pollutants resulting from the increase in truck traffic in Lemoore. Leprino officials opted to present the city with a \$200,000 check to fulfill this requirement.

There is a string attached to the big check. Leprino stipulated the money must be used through the school districts.

The Leprino offer sent city and LUHSD officials into a huddle. They came up with the idea to build a compressed natural gas fueling station at LUHSD's maintenance yard.

The Leprino money would be matched by school and city funds, much of it coming from grants. The estimated cost to build a slow-fill station is about \$400,000.

Ron Smith, president of Adrianus Resources, Inc., a consulting firm that helps businesses convert and work with alternative fuels, said there are government grants available to help with site construction as well as bus replacement.

"I have written over 800 grants," Smith said. "They are out there, but who knows for how long. I advise you to get them while they are available."

At the moment, the district has one bus operating on CNG.

Tim Grubb, LUHSD transportation director, said the CNG bus holds its own with diesel and gas buses as far as quality of driving. There is a difference. The CNG-powered bus needs less maintenance.

The plan, if approved by all district boards, would have a slow-fill station built on the 8-acre LUHSD site providing fuel for all Lemoore and area school CNG vehicles. It also could be metered with special cards allowing other vehicles, such as KART busses, to use it.

"Start out small and grow as needed," Smith advised.

The districts are looking at replacing all diesel busses as they age out. Some city vehicles will also be changed to the new fuel.

Daily operational costs for vehicles run on CNG is about half of what it cost to operate diesel and gas vehicles.

"Maintenance has not been a problem," said Kirk Hunter, CEO of Southwest Transportation. He currently oversees approximately 100 buses for Fresno County schools. One-third of his buses run on natural gas.

Smith said vehicles operating on CNG not only are more cost efficient, but have a track record of safety and reliability.

The Lemoore area schools use one site and one set of buses to carry students. The site is on LUHSD property and managed by LUHSD. The unification of transportation has been a cost affective measure for all the schools.

Starting out with just five stations and 10 hoses, the proposed CNG site would handle all school and city vehicles and even, at special times, be used by county vehicles. At first it would not be open to the public.

The hoses would be metered.

Miller said the future could include fast-flow stations that are open to the public.

According to Smith, there is at least \$43 million still available in federal and state grants for the construction of CNG fueling sites and buses.

"Now is the time to get those grants," Smith said. "There are areas within California banning the use of diesel-powered school buses. I foresee that ban covering more area. When that happens, the grants will go away. I don't need to tell you about non-funded mandated programs."

The state requires schools to provide certain curriculum programs for its students. Some of the programs do not come with state-allocated funds, so districts must pay for them from their general funds. They are called non-funded mandated programs.

The city has already approved a resolution requiring a memorandum of understanding with the schools to build the new fueling site.

Britz said the city is interested in an agreement with the schools because it will save fuel, vehicle replacement and maintenance costs, help bring a greener environment to the area and allow one consultant and attorney for every member included.

Miller requested that all school districts discuss the idea and then let him know if they will also sign the memorandum by December.

"I think this is a win-win situation," said Lemoore Councilman Willard Rodarmel.

LUHSD board member Kathy Neves said it was the time to move on CNG fuel, especially with the Leprino money and local grants available.

Proposed KART stops raise questions

By Judy Finney, staff writer

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, November 7, 2009

There were only three Lemoore City Council members present for Tuesday night's meeting, but that didn't stop city government from its getting work done.

With Mayor Pro Tem Mary Hornsby at the helm, the council directed the Lemoore Police Department to apply for a supplemental law enforcement services grant and approved new Kings Area Rural Transit bus signs, benches and shelters. Mayor John Murray and Councilman John Plourde were not at the meeting.

The 2009-2010 Supplemental Law Enforcement Services Fund could provide one-time funding to the LPD of \$100,000. According to interim Police Chief Jeff Laws, the money would be split two ways: \$40,000 toward overtime pay for officers on the beat and \$60,000 toward dispatch center project costs. Currently LPD dispatch services come through the Hanford Police Department.

City Manager Jeff Britz said the city has not adopted any formal plans for a center. One idea that has come before the City Council is to expand the current police department located at Fox Street and Cinnamon Drive to accommodate the call center.

KART has completed a study of bus ridership in Lemoore. Speaking for the agency, Viviana Alapisco explained the number of stops in the new plan and the reasoning behind creating some stops with just a sign and some with benches, while others would receive a 12-foot glass shelter. Alapisco said KART made its placement decisions based on the number of people getting on and off of buses at each site.

Donna Lambert, a neighbor near the proposed G Street at the Lemoore City Water Works shelter site, asked why she and her neighbors weren't allowed to comment on the plan.

"I feel like we are being dumped on," Lambert said. "No one asked us what we thought. We have enough traffic and [pollution](#) already, and now I look out my window and see a bus stopping across the street."

Councilman Willard Rodarmel said he had urged KART to adopt the G Street location because he had trouble with traffic safety issues where the bus was stopping on Lemoore Avenue.

Redevelopment funds of \$100,000 have already been allocated for this project with the Council approving sites, colors and designs on Tuesday night.

Ron Hughes, KART director, said the new signs, benches and shelters won't be in place for at least two or three months.

Senate panel OKs emission caps without GOP

Jennifer A. Dlouhy, Hearst Washington Bureau
In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, November 6, 2009

Washington - -- Democrats on a key Senate committee Thursday approved a plan to impose the nation's first caps on greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global warming, while the seven Republicans on the Environment and Public Works Committee boycotted the 11-1 vote.

The committee's approval is the high-water mark for the legislation this year. At least five other committees are expected to weigh in on the issue before Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., can merge their proposals into a single global-warming bill for floor debate.

Bill backers also have to find a way to navigate any measure around a host of regional concerns and their advocates on Capitol Hill - including senators from coal-reliant regions and others concerned that legislation will encourage U.S. refiners to move operations overseas.

The challenges were underscored Thursday by the no vote cast by Sen. Max Baucus of Montana, a moderate Democrat whose support is viewed as crucial for the legislation.

Baucus was the lone Democrat voting against the bill. The committee's Republican members skipped the vote in protest over what they said was an incomplete analysis of the proposal's costs.

Baucus said he objected to the measure's mandate that by 2020, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions be 20 percent less than they were in 2005. Baucus wants a less-rigorous 2020 emissions reduction of 17 percent - with the option of raising it to 20 percent only if other countries impose similar limits.

Like a separate House-passed climate bill, the Senate measure co-sponsored by Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and John Kerry, D-Mass., would require an 83 percent reduction by 2050.

Boxer, the environment committee chairwoman, emphasized that her panel's approval was just one early step in a long legislative path.

"As a landmark bill moves - not an easy bill, but a landmark bill - at each stage, you have to find a new sweet spot," Boxer said. "And each stage requires a little bit of a different emphasis. And that is played out as everybody gets involved."

Under the rosier of scenarios for bill supporters, debate on global-warming legislation likely would not begin until next year. And Sen. John Rockefeller, D-W.Va., said this week that "some people are talking about not doing it until after the 2010 election."

A partisan standoff stalled the legislation most of this week. Boxer ultimately pushed the bill out of her environment committee by relying on a rarely used interpretation of panel rules that allow legislation to be sent to the full Senate even without minority party members.

Committee Republicans, led by James Inhofe of Oklahoma, objected to the move they dubbed the "nuclear option."

Inhofe said he was "deeply disappointed" by Boxer's decision to violate the "long-standing precedent of the committee." "We have not been able to find a time when a bill has been marked up without minority participation," Inhofe said.

Climate negotiators seek deal instead of treaty

Katy Daigle, Arthur Max, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, November 6, 2009

Barcelona, Spain -- With the U.S. Congress struggling to agree on sharp cuts in greenhouse gases or how to fund them, European officials said Thursday they were striving for a political agreement instead of a new treaty to allow the United States and other rich nations to make commitments that are not legally binding.

The revised thinking was an implicit admission of defeat: The two-year timetable for crafting a landmark treaty will miss its deadline, and that failure threatens to deepen the distrust between rich countries and poor nations reeling from drought and failing crops caused by persistently warmer weather.

The treaty had been due to be completed in December at a 192-nation conference in Copenhagen, Denmark.

European and U.N. officials are now suggesting a political deal, rather than a legal accord under which industrial countries would commit to firm targets for reducing emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and allocating funds for poor countries, while developing countries would specify their plans for low-carbon growth.

Such a deal would not be legally binding, but would carry the authority of world leaders who would come to Copenhagen to sign off on it. Nations would agree to stick to their promises while they continue negotiating the details of a treaty, taking as long as another year.

The delay is significant. The only instrument for controlling carbon emissions, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, expires in 2012. Unless a new treaty is in place by then, no regulations will exist.

Despite the troubled passage of U.S. legislation, delegates at the U.N. talks in Spain had not given up hope the Obama administration will bring specific pledges to the final round of negotiations in Copenhagen.

Legislation working its way through Congress would reduce U.S. emissions by about 4 percent below 1990 levels. The Europeans and developing countries have complained, however, about the Washington's "low ambitions."

Former Vice President Al Gore, who won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize along with the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for highlighting global warming, suggested the United States may not need the legislation to pass to help secure a global agreement next month.

TVA prepares to start smokestack scrubbers

By Duncan Mansfield, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, November 6, 2009

Kingston, Tenn. (AP) -- Smokestack scrubbers will eliminate most of the sulfur emissions from the coal-fired Kingston Fossil Plant, but they will also produce a new waste stream for a site still engaged in a \$1 billion cleanup from a massive ash spill.

"It is a tradeoff. In order to clean the air up, you create a landfill," the Tennessee Valley Authority's Ron Nash said Thursday during a tour of Kingston's new \$500 million scrubber complex.

"But it is still better to clean the air. We all breathe the air. It is not a choice," said Nash, who heads the scrubber program for all 11 coal-fired power plants operated by TVA, the nation's largest public utility.

Sulfur dioxide is a greenhouse gas produced by burning fossil fuels, like coal.

It contributes to the haze and acid rain that limits mountain vistas and is killing foliage in the nearby Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

It also contributes to respiratory illnesses, particularly in children and the elderly, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Scrubbers remove the sulfur by venting flue gas through a limestone slurry shower. The limestone reacts with the sulfur and creates gypsum — a stable, nontoxic material that can be recycled.

The first of two scrubbers will go into operation next week at Kingston. The second will start in April.

Together, the scrubbers will eliminate 95 percent of Kingston's sulfur dioxide emissions, Kingston Maintenance Manager Bob Rehberg said. The plant generated around 50,000 tons of sulfur dioxide last year.

All the public will see from Kingston's new 400-foot smokestack will be wispy water vapor.

However, the scrubbers also will be producing some 300,000 to 400,000 tons of gypsum byproduct annually. Gypsum can be used as an additive for wallboard and concrete, but the material is expected to pile up at the plant until the economy improves and the housing industry picks up, creating a demand for gypsum.

TVA has permits to let the gypsum landfill cover 50 acres up to 200 feet high. But Nash said those plans have been vastly scaled down since TVA committed \$2 billion to convert all coal operations from wet storage to dry storage in the aftermath of the Kingston coal ash spill last December.

He said Kingston's scrubbers will get an additional \$25 million "dewatering facility" in about two years that will further dry and wash the gypsum for resale. It could be a model for other TVA plants.

TVA has spent around \$6 billion since the late 1970s reducing emissions of sulfur dioxide, particulates and smog-forming nitrogen oxide. Still, TVA is facing a deadline to do more.

A federal judge has ruled in a lawsuit brought by the state of North Carolina that TVA must significantly reduce pollution from four coal-fired power plants affecting North Carolina's air quality by December 2013.

The nine-boiler, 1,700-megawatt Kingston plant is one of the four cited plants and will meet the deadline. So will the Bull Run plant near Knoxville, which put its scrubber online in 2008.

Meanwhile, the Widows Creek plant in north Alabama has scrubbers, but needs other controls and suffered a leak in its older-design gypsum facility shortly after the Kingston ash spill.

And TVA has concluded there isn't enough time to install pollution controls for the fourth plant — John Sevier in northeastern Tennessee. While the plant's fate is undecided, TVA is building an \$820 million gas-fired power plant on the site to provide cleaner power for that end of TVA's seven-state service territory.

Knoxville-based TVA serves nearly 9 million consumers in Tennessee and parts of Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia.

Creating a Landfill to Have Cleaner Air

By the Associated Press

In the N.Y. Times, November 7, 2009

KINGSTON, Tenn. (AP) — Smokestack scrubbers will eliminate most of the sulfur emissions from the coal-fired Kingston Fossil Plant, but they will also produce a new waste stream for a site still engaged in a \$1 billion cleanup from a huge ash spill.

"It is a tradeoff," Ron Nash of the Tennessee Valley Authority said during a recent tour of Kingston's new \$500 million scrubber complex. "In order to clean the air up, you create a landfill."

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Fines for burning on winter Spare the Air days

By Kelly Zito, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Monday, November 9, 2009

For the second winter in a row, Bay Area residents who burn wood, fire logs and pellets on high-pollution days run the risk of earning citations and fines from local air regulators.

Using the same rationale that prompts it to address ozone pollution on hot and still summer days, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is expecting to issue 15 to 20 winter Spare the Air alerts between now and Feb. 28.

On those days, it will be illegal to operate fireplaces, pellet stoves, woodstoves and outdoor fire pits. Violators are subject to a warning letter, followed by a \$400 fine for a second infraction. Those who rely on fireplaces and woodstoves as their only sources of heat are exempt from the rule.

Regulators say wood smoke is the largest source of winter pollution in the Bay Area, which is home to 1.4 million fireplaces and woodstoves. With 1 out of every 7 residents suffering from a respiratory ailment, the agency said the alerts protect public health.

"In the winter, we see days with cold, still air, which traps smoke at the levels where we all breathe," said Kristine Roselius, a spokeswoman for the air district.

The agency also is trying to comply with federal benchmarks on air quality. Currently, the region fails to meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards for fine-particle air pollution.

Such particulates, which come from sources as varied as power plants and cars, can become embedded in the deepest portions of the lungs, increasing the risks of asthma, lung disease and other ailments.

In the summer, auto emissions are the major source of particulate matter - hence the district's encouragement to use public transit on unhealthy air days.

In addition to sending inspectors into the field on winter Spare the Air days, the air district is relying on neighbors and others to report wood-burning activities on unhealthy air days.

Last year, the agency received more than 1,400 complaints across the nine-county area. The largest portion of the complaints - 27 percent - came from Marin County. Contra Costa County was second, with 16 percent of the complaints.

Warning letters were sent in 254 cases. Marin County and Contra Costa County were tied for the highest number with 55 each.

After the warnings and \$400 fines, ticket amounts increase. The fine depends on the severity of any subsequent infraction - the duration of the burning and the proximity to a school or nursing home.

Last season, the air district imposed only one \$400 fine. As awareness of the campaign increases, however, the district expects to issue more warnings and fines.

UCLA conference spotlights firms' eco-friendly concepts

Start-ups and Fortune 500 companies attend the event hosted by Opportunity Green.

By Richard Verrier, staff writer

L.A. Times, Monday, November 9, 2009

Every week, Alex Velez and Nikhil Arora collect 2,000 pounds of used coffee grounds from Peet's Coffee & Tea outlets near their UC Berkeley haunts and take them to a warehouse in Oakland.

There, in a damp indoor farm, the college friends grow gourmet mushrooms that are sold at local Whole Foods Markets. Just a few months out of business school, they're on track to make more than \$200,000 in their first year.

The budding entrepreneurs' efforts were among 25 start-ups spotlighted during the third annual sustainable business conference hosted by L.A.-based Opportunity Green in partnership with UCLA's Price Center for Entrepreneurial Studies. The event held at UCLA drew nearly 600 participants, including 45 companies displaying the latest green products and technologies.

"We want to broadcast to the world that there are viable and highly profitable business opportunities that are environmentally responsible," said Mike Flynn, co-founder of Opportunity Green, whose company holds green industry forums around the country.

During the two-day conference that ended Sunday, executives from Fortune 500 businesses and start-ups shared their experiences on developing green products and sustainable practices.

At the smallest level, there were Arora and Velez, who recycle the rich, dark coffee grounds in

place of wood shavings and sawdust used by some mushroom growers.

"We figured, why use wood-based products to grow mushrooms when there was so much wasted coffee grounds out there?" Arora said. "Our goal is to transplant this urban model to every city in America."

At the other end of the spectrum was giant Clorox Co., which last week announced that it would phase out the use of chlorine in its U.S. bleach manufacturing facilities.

"Even a 100-year-old company can not only reduce their carbon footprint, but they can grow by meeting the sustainable needs of consumers and customers," said Beth Springer, executive vice president of Oakland-based Clorox. Springer touted the company's new line of plant-based household cleaners and efforts to reduce energy costs by selling concentrated liquid bleach, among other steps.

Nike executive Lorrie Vogel and Michael Hopkins, editor in chief of MIT Sloan Management Review, described Nike's sustainability efforts, including recycling millions of sneakers into sports playing surfaces.

Despite the recession, green companies continue to attract investment dollars in L.A., which has been trying to build a clean-tech industry cluster to boost jobs and cut pollution.

In the second and third quarters of this year, venture capital firms invested \$335 million in 16 deals involving L.A.-area clean-tech companies, including such businesses as those that sell irrigation controllers and those that make energy efficiency and monitoring systems, according to YouNoodle Inc., a San Francisco company that provides a range of services for start-up businesses.

"There is a huge amount of capital flowing into the green technology space," said Sean Gourley, co-founder of YouNoodle, which helped organize a competition at the Opportunity Green forum to recognize top start-ups.

Among them is HUMAN Healthy Vending, a Los Angeles company that makes energy-efficient vending machines stocked with healthy snacks.

A fitness buff and part-time personal trainer, company founder Sean Kelly got the idea for the business when he was studying at Columbia University and became frustrated by junk food sold in most vending machines.

After 18 months of research, Kelly recently began selling eco-friendly vending machines with LED lighting and extra insulation. He sold 80 this year and expects to sell an additional 1,000 machines in 2010 to offices, health clubs and schools. The machines are built in Corona.

"Our mission is: We bring nutrition to people," said the 26-year-old entrepreneur, whose firm employs 10 people. "I like to say we're making vending machines sexy and cool."

GOP's Graham steps out on a limb on climate change

James Rosen - McClatchy Newspapers

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, November 7, 2009

WASHINGTON — When it comes to combating global warming, Sen. Lindsey Graham is right where he loves to be — ahead of the curve, in the mix on a major issue, at the table for high-level, bipartisan talks behind closed doors.

Graham, a South Carolina Republican, is working with Democratic Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts and independent Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut to craft a climate change bill.

They face the dual challenge of overcoming widespread GOP opposition and withstanding relentless attacks by Big Oil and allied energy interests.

"Our goal is to create a vision that not only will help this planet — which I think is in peril — but will create millions of new jobs for Americans who need them, and help us become energy independent to make us safer," Graham told a crowded Capitol Hill news conference Wednesday.

Kerry, Lieberman and Graham held private meetings with Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former EPA chief Carol Browner, now President Barack Obama's top adviser on climate change.

"We will be working closely with the White House over the course of the next weeks, with a view of trying to pull together ... a piece of legislation that we hope could get the 60 (Senate) votes necessary to pass" and avoid a filibuster, Kerry said.

Graham has tried to woo other Republicans with warnings that the Environmental Protection Agency will impose draconian regulations if Congress fails to act.

And he's stressed the national security threat of continuing to import oil from hostile Middle East countries.

"I think most Americans — Republicans, independents or Democrats — really feel uncomfortable with the fact that our nation sends a billion dollars a day overseas to buy foreign oil from some countries who don't like us very much," Graham said.

"Part of this initiative is to create a vision for energy independence and marry it up with responsible climate control," he said.

Graham had GOP partners in his previous bipartisan initiatives on immigration, judges and other issues.

Now, in accepting cap-and-trade limits on carbon emissions, Graham stands alone — though he says "a handful" of Republican senators back him but aren't ready to make public commitments.

In a move that stunned some of his GOP Senate colleagues — and angered many of his constituents back home — Graham joined Kerry last month in publishing a New York Times op-ed column on global warming.

The two senators sketched out a rough deal: Republicans would accept a cap-and-trade system of lowering carbon emissions in exchange for Democrats signing off on more nuclear power and expanded offshore drilling for oil and natural gas.

"We speak with one voice in saying that the best way to make America stronger is to work together to address an urgent crisis facing the world," they wrote.

For partnering with Kerry, a liberal who ran against President George W. Bush in 2004, Graham endured shouts of "Traitor!" and other verbal abuse at a recent town hall meeting in Greenville.

A Washington group with oil industry ties ran TV and radio ads against Graham in South Carolina, compelling the senator to marshal a show of support from business, military and business leaders in the state.

"Lindsey has been visionary and courageous," Kerry told McClatchy. "He's playing a very important role and showing real leadership."

Graham's initiative with Kerry is aimed at producing a more moderate measure with new allowances for drilling and nuclear energy.

"If I can create legislation that would allow this country to stop buying so much foreign oil and make us safer — plus find a solution to the carbon pollution hurting our planet — that would be a good use of my time," Graham told McClatchy. "If that costs me my job, it would be well worth it."

Graham added: "But I don't think it will cost me my job."

Odd Couple

While six Senate committees develop various climate-change bills, Democratic Sen. John Kerry and Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham have outlined a plan to bridge differences among the panels and between their parties.

The Kerry-Graham package would set up a cap-and-trade system allowing polluters to buy carbon-emission credits from firms that cut their output.

The senators' plan, described in a newspaper column, has several key features:

- _ It sets maximum and minimum prices for the carbon credits.
- _ It streamlines the permit process for new nuclear power reactors.
- _ It authorizes expanded offshore oil and natural gas drilling.
- _ It considers a "border tax" on imports from countries with weak environmental standards.

County prison hospital plans under fire

by Ross Farrow/ San Joaquin News Service
Tracy Press, Friday, November 6, 2009

The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, Stockton City Council and Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce have voted to sue two state agencies over a hospital for prison inmates planned for south Stockton.

The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday morning to sue the state, and the Stockton City Council voted later that afternoon to sue, both citing detrimental impacts the project could have.

The prison hospital, for medical and mental health patients, is designed for 1,734 beds and 3,000 employees at Arch and Austin Roads, about 2 miles east of Highway 99.

The hospital is expected to have 75 to 100 people visiting inmates daily and will be surrounded by a 12-foot-high electrical fence to secure the area, along with eleven 45-foot-high guard towers every 700 feet, according to the state.

State officials announced their plans to build the hospital on state-owned property in Stockton on Oct. 20. Construction of the

\$1.1 billion project is expected to begin in 2010 and last two years.

The county claims that two agencies — the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and California Prison Health Care Services — failed to adequately address several issues in the hospital's environmental impact report, according to Deputy County Counsel Mark Myles.

"The question is whether or not the state of California and the California Prison and Health Care Services have sufficiently complied with (the California Environmental Quality Act)," Myles said. "That's the issue."

The environmental report fails to address topics like traffic, how the hospital would affect surrounding areas and other county services, and how it would affect air quality, Myles said.

"It's a broad perspective," he added.

One of the most significant impacts outlined by the state EIR is an increase in demand for local hospital services, which would result in decreased service and increased waiting times for area patients.

The document also reports that the hospital would hurt local businesses and property values, spread urban decay and cause potential shortages in qualified employees to work at the prison hospital and existing county medical centers.

According to state officials, however, the prison hospital could be a local boon.

Luis Patino Jr., spokesman for California Prison Health Care Services, said in a written statement that the prison project would give the economically depressed county a jump-start.

"The people of the Central Valley need jobs, not more lawsuits," Patino said. "The project can pump hundreds of millions of dollars worth of jobs and economic activity into the Stockton area, both during construction beginning in 2010 and for many years thereafter."

The Stockton hospital is one of up to seven prison hospitals planned throughout California, with 5,000 beds to be available for medical patients and another 5,000 for mental health patients, according to the report.

State officials are ready to work with elected local elected officials and business leaders about their concerns, Patino said. The lawsuits are bound to interfere with productive dialogue, he added.

The EIR also states that about 70 acres of the 144.2-acre site is designated as "important farmland," which state officials consider to be "a significant and unavoidable impact."

The report adds that there will be significant environmental impacts, but they are in conjunction with major growth planned in Stockton.

The hospital, along with planned residential growth, will have significant effects on traffic, air quality and possible climate change caused by greenhouse gases.

Study: Nitrogen pollution worsens in Rockies lakes

By Judith Kohler, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, November 6, 2009

DENVER—Airborne nitrogen pollution from vehicle exhaust and farm fertilizer is turning algae in the alpine lakes of Rocky Mountain National Park into junk food for fish, a study says.

A similar phenomenon is occurring in Sweden and Norway, according to the study of about 90 high-elevation lakes set to be published in the journal *Science* on Friday.

Arizona State University professor James Elser, the study's lead author, said the effect of airborne nitrogen on once-pristine lakes is greater than previously believed. The nitrogen's

sources include vehicle exhaust, fertilizer used on farms and livestock feed lots and power plant emissions.

More nitrogen can reduce long-term lake biodiversity because algae become poor food for other microscopic organisms and, ultimately, fish. The algae are high in nitrogen, but low in phosphorous and less nutritious.

Previous studies have documented rising nitrogen levels in Rocky Mountain National Park, 70 miles northwest of Denver.

Elser likened the algae to junk food. "It's like eating marshmallows all day and expecting to grow. You can't do it," he said Thursday.

The fish in the park include the rare greenback cutthroat trout and other trout species.

The next step is to study how changes in algae populations are affecting the rest of the ecosystem, Elser said.

"This is filling in some of what we didn't know before," said Jill Baron, a scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey and adjunct professor at the Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory at Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

Baron has studied air pollution levels in Rocky Mountain National Park since 1981. Her research prompted Vaughn Baker, the park's superintendent, to push for efforts to cut the pollution.

Along with changes to the algae, park biologists blame nitrogen for an increase in sedges, compared to other grasses and flowering plants known as forbs.

"One of the main reasons this park was established was for the protection of tundra and alpine areas," park biologist Jim Cheatham said.

Rocky Mountain National Park has 60 peaks higher than 12,000 feet. It is home to elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, bears and eagles.

This year, the National Park Service reported increases in nitrogen-rich ammonium that could change ecosystems in 16 parks across the country.

A 2007 plan signed by state and federal officials and Rocky Mountain National Park aims to reduce airborne nitrogen levels over 25 years. Researchers said then that nitrogen levels were 20 times more than normal.

"We're admitting that we could never reach the natural levels" because of development elsewhere, Cheatham said.

The plan aims to cut nitrogen levels in half, said Mike Silverstein, manager of planning and policy for the Colorado air pollution control division. The nitrogen comes from nitrogen oxide, whose sources include vehicle and power plant emissions, and ammonium, whose sources include livestock feed lots, farms and water treatment plants.

Studies show the pollution is coming from the Denver area and northeast Colorado, one of the country's largest agricultural areas, as well as other states, Silverstein said.

Officials hope to cut nitrogen to 1.5 kilograms per hectare, or 2.47 acres. The current average is 3.1 kilograms.

Silverstein said state and federal efforts have reduced pollution from power plants and vehicles and plans are in the works to cut emissions by another 100,000 tons of nitrogen oxide per year in Colorado over the next 10 to 15 years.

Ammonium isn't regulated, Silverstein said. But state officials, Colorado State researchers and the agriculture industry are exploring ways to change farming practices to cut emissions

[Merced Sun-Star commentary, Sunday, November 8, 2009:](#)

Schwarzenegger's legacy - What can governor do in his last year?

By Daniel Weintraub

Gov. Schwarzenegger is one of the least popular governors in California history. His relationships with the Democrats who control the Legislature are lousy, and his rapport with his fellow Republicans is probably worse.

He is under constant attack from interest groups on the left and the right, and his policy agenda has been skunked in two special elections in the past four years.

With only 14 months left in his second and final term, he looks like the lamest of lame ducks, with few allies, little leverage and slim chances of accomplishing much as his political clock ticks down toward zero.

But if Schwarzenegger has the will, there are still ways for him to get things done. The job of California governor is a powerful one, and Schwarzenegger still has assets, including his worldwide celebrity, at his disposal.

He has the power to sign and veto bills, delete individual items from the budget, appoint people to key jobs and change state government through executive orders. Regulators he chooses and can replace still hold sway over vast swaths of state policy and the economy.

And while he has to deal with a Democrat-dominated Legislature, Schwarzenegger could find a warmer reception there than other outgoing governors because, as a naturalized citizen, he cannot run for president, and he seems almost certain not to seek any other office. He therefore poses little threat to Democrats as a potential competitor.

Schwarzenegger hasn't said yet what he hopes to accomplish in his final year in office. But conversations with aides suggest that he will use those last months as a way to try to nail down many of the policy initiatives he began earlier in his tenure. On the environment, education, prisons, infrastructure and political reform, the governor has no shortage of unfinished business.

If Schwarzenegger does go out with a flourish, there would be precedent for it. The last time California had a lame duck governor, Republican Pete Wilson in 1998, he wielded his powers aggressively to the end.

Wilson placed measures on the ballot that passed after he left office. And he used his line-item veto to blue-pencil \$1.5 billion from his final budget, then offered to restore some of the money if legislators would help him achieve some of his priorities. John Burton, the Senate leader at the time, called it "extortion." But Wilson did get some of what he wanted.

"A governor's power over the budget does not go away in his final year in office," says Joe Rodota, who was Wilson's deputy chief of staff. "He always has that."

Rodota advised Wilson on how to maximize his executive powers, and when Schwarzenegger took office six years ago, the aide prepared a primer on the powers of the position for the rookie politician. That notebook might come in handy now that Schwarzenegger is looking for every opportunity to make the most of his weak hand. A recent Field Poll showed that only 27 percent of registered voters approve of the job he is doing. That's a record of futility surpassed only by Schwarzenegger's immediate predecessor, Gray Davis, just before the Austrian-born actor ousted Davis in a 2003 recall election.

Schwarzenegger took a major step last week that could set the stage for greater cooperation with the Legislature in the weeks ahead. He and bipartisan majorities in the Assembly and Senate agreed on a historic water deal that is designed to ensure the state's supply into the future while restoring and preserving the fragile and threatened Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The agreement includes \$11 billion in bonds to help pay for water recycling, drought relief, new storage and wastewater treatment.

If approved by the voters next year, the bonds would cap one of Schwarzenegger's most visible legacies: a massive investment in the state's public works infrastructure. In 2006, he helped broker a bipartisan deal to place \$37 billion in bonds on the ballot to repair levees and build more schools, housing and highways. Last year he supported a bond measure to help finance a high-speed train that will eventually carry passengers from San Diego to San Francisco.

The water agreement came after months of intense negotiations that involved not only partisan differences but splits among environmentalists and business interests and geographic divisions between Northern and Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley versus the Bay Area. There is hope in some circles in the Capitol that the connections forged overcoming those obstacles will carry over into negotiations on other difficult issues in the months ahead.

What else might Schwarzenegger do if he has the opportunity?

After water, his biggest unfinished business is probably education reform. Schwarzenegger once said that 2008 was going to be his "year of education," but with the budget in tatters, he set that priority aside.

The state's fiscal situation is hardly any better today, but the governor has formed a tenuous alliance with Senate Democrats that could open the door to some significant changes. That's more likely now that the Obama administration has staked out a centrist path on the issue and is dangling federal funds in front of states that move aggressively to help low-achieving children.

Schwarzenegger is pushing to lift the state's cap on charter schools, which are campuses run by parents and teachers free from most state regulations. He also wants to make it easier for parents to move their children out of troubled schools, and he wants to reward teachers who work in the toughest jobs. The Senate passed most of what he wanted in September, but the legislation died in the Assembly. If the

Legislature does not pass his plan by the time the next budget is resolved, look for the governor to make his proposed reforms part of those negotiations.

Schwarzenegger also found common ground with the Senate on prison reform. He agreed with lawmakers in the upper house on a plan to create an independent sentencing commission to examine the state's criminal justice system with an eye toward maximizing prison space for hard-core offenders while sending criminals with lesser violations to county jails. The Assembly blocked the plan, but Schwarzenegger is still trying to meet a court order to reduce the state's prison population, and this is an issue to which he will probably be forced to return.

The Republican governor is also looking to lock in his environmental legacy. One of his proudest achievements has been the passage of Assembly Bill 32, which set California on a course to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

The Air Resources Board, whose members Schwarzenegger appoints, is working on a plan to create a market-based system for firms to obtain and trade credits that will allow them a certain amount of emissions. The governor believes this is the most efficient way to reduce greenhouse gases without hurting the economy. But Democrats are skeptical of the approach and have always preferred more direct regulation, while one of the Republican candidates for governor, Meg Whitman, has vowed to suspend the law if she is elected. Schwarzenegger will try to have that program as far along as possible so the next governor will find it difficult to undo.

One big question is how much energy Schwarzenegger will put into his final months in office. With the budget mess still grinding him down and his wife and children still living in Los Angeles, many in the Capitol are speculating that the governor will lose interest in the job and let his priorities drift.

His attention has wandered before, and as his aides start to flee to other jobs and as more bad news inundates his office, Schwarzenegger might be tempted to pack it in prematurely. With his record in office already dotted by many difficult defeats, the governor will need all his energy to avoid a final year in which the Legislature repeatedly challenges his authority, or worse, simply tries to ignore him.

But his chief of staff, Susan Kennedy, has been telling friends that she is convinced her boss will keep his focus until the end — and she wouldn't still be working for him if she didn't think that was the case.

"He's the only politician I would ever consider staying for until the very end," Kennedy told me recently. "He's genetically incapable of slowing down."

[Letter to the Sacramento Bee, Saturday, November 7, 2009:](#)

Energy-efficient TVs, please

Re "State wants to curb appetite of energy-gulping televisions" (Business, Nov. 4): TVs are fast becoming the Hummer of the home, guzzling more electricity than any other appliance. The [California Energy Commission's](#) proposed efficiency standards for plasma and high-definition TVs will save California families \$1 billion per year while also preventing more than 3 billion tons of global warming pollution.

Energy efficiency is a no-brainer solution to rising energy costs and the threat of global climate change. We applaud the commission's proposed decision and urge it to adopt the standards right away so that California can continue its long tradition of leading the nation on clean-energy solutions.

Bernadette Del Chiaro, Sacramento clean energy advocate for Environment California

[L.A. Times editorial, Nov. 8, 2009:](#)

Climate change bill is in trouble

Political tactics tie up the Senate version, and efforts to salvage it may be too little too late.

If you think the partisan divide over healthcare reform is ugly, take a look at the animus in the Senate as debate continues on a key climate change bill. So wide is the gulf that long-held Senate traditions on decorum are breaking down. And as Washington fiddles, the Earth burns.

The Senate version of a House bill aimed at capping greenhouse gas emissions was stalled last week by Republicans on the Environment and Public Works Committee, who boycotted the discussion, demanding that the Environmental Protection Agency agree to do a more thorough study of the bill's economic impact. It was an ugly and highly unusual tactic aimed at delaying a bill that has already been thoroughly vetted by the EPA, leaving Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), the committee chair, little choice but to resort to extremes herself. She put the bill, S. 1733, up for a vote Thursday without a single Republican present. That angered Republicans but was even more frustrating for Democrats -- several wanted to amend the bill, but with no one from the minority party present, no amendments were allowed. The bill passed, 11-1.

This doesn't bode well. Wiser heads are working to salvage the legislation, with John Kerry (D-Massachusetts), Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) and Joe Lieberman (I-Connecticut) announcing plans to craft a bill that can attract the 60 votes needed to avoid a filibuster. But Democrats from Southern and coal-producing states are reluctant to sign on, and attracting any GOP votes will be a challenge; many believe the chances are slim that the bill, which sets a cap on emissions while allowing polluters to trade carbon credits, will be approved this year.

Such a failure would be disastrous in more ways than one. With no commitment to cut greenhouse gases in the U.S., it would be next to impossible to get other big polluter nations on board in Copenhagen in December for a global agreement on fighting climate change. Another year's delay will make future efforts more expensive and less effective. With a third of all Senate seats up for election in 2010, it will become even harder to pass controversial legislation.

Climate skeptics would celebrate all this as a victory. They are not swayed by the dire forecasts of the International Panel on Climate Change, nor the endorsements of those findings by the national academies of science of the U.S., Russia, China, Britain and Brazil. Confronted by a crisis whose most terrible repercussions will come after they're dead, they'd rather stick their children with the bill.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, November 9, 2009:](#)

We should be further along in fuel economy

Here's a daunting thought in this age of rapid technological advancement. U.S. vehicle fleet fuel economy has changed little since the days of the Model T.

A recent study at the University of Michigan calculated the distance driven and fuel consumed for the U.S. fleet of vehicles -- including cars, light trucks, buses and heavy trucks -- between 1923 and 2006. The vehicle fleet on U.S. roads today gets a mere three miles more per gallon than vehicles in 1923.

That makes reaching the goal of a 35 mpg by the middle of the next decade seem overwhelming. It certainly will require an attitude change on the part of consumers and manufacturers.

The average fuel efficiency of the U.S. fleet in 1923 was 14 mpg, where it stayed for more than a decade, according to the researchers. From 1935, however, fuel efficiency began a steady decline, dropping to a low of 11.9 mpg in 1973. The 1973-'74 OPEC oil embargo then triggered a wave of innovation, and fuel efficiency of the U.S. fleet increased to 16.9 mpg by 1991.

But then it leveled off. From 1991 to 2006, fuel efficiency of the U.S. fleet increased by less than 2% -- to 17.2 mpg. So why aren't we seeing greater improvement, given that some of the newest cars today get close to 40 mpg?

One issue is mind-set. Over the years, the bulk of improvements to vehicles have been in comfort, styling and safety, and less in fuel efficiency (think of the traditional inefficient belt-driven pumps that most cars still have). Another issue has been the shift away from cars to light trucks, mainly SUVs, for personal transportation. Yet another part of the problem is the number of older vehicles still on the road.

The researchers believe it's better to focus on getting a 15-mpg vehicle to 16 mpg, which would save 50 gallons of fuel a year for a vehicle driven 12,000 miles a year, than on getting a 40-mpg car to 41 mpg, which would save only 7 gallons of fuel a year for the same driving distance.

Ford's Model T innovation -- creating an economy car for people of modest means -- deserves another look. American consumers, at a minimum, deserve that choice.

[MediaNews editorial in the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, November 6, 2009:](#)

Editorial: Pay-as-you-drive insurance

PERSUADING MOTORISTS to voluntarily drive less and thereby reduce gasoline consumption, air pollution, traffic congestion and motor vehicle accidents is a concept that deserves public and private support.

California Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner agrees. To that end, he has released regulations allowing mileage verification for pay-as-you-drive green insurance policies.

Insurance premiums in California are currently based partly on miles driven as estimated by drivers. However, insurers do not have the authority to adequately verify motorists' estimates. As a result, insurers are not willing to substantially reduce premiums based on unverifiable mileage data.

The new regulations released by Poizner would give insurers several options for verifying odometer miles, including using their own agents, smog-check stations, Department of Motor Vehicle records, automotive repair shops or a technological device that could be placed on a policyholder's vehicle.

The idea is not new. A year ago, insurers in Texas began offering six-month policies based on distance driven, ranging from 1,000 to 6,000 miles.

Poizner did not mandate any insurance policy terms. Instead, he has left it up to insurance companies to fashion their own plans and submit them for approval. He believes that the best way to motivate change is through competition and innovation. We agree.

Insurers could, for example, offer policies based on a specific number of miles driven and then give rebates to motorists who drive less or additional fees to those who drive more.

With insurance savings for reduced driving being offered, there would be considerable incentive for people to use their cars less. Also, people who already drive few miles per year could save on their insurance.

A study last year by the Brookings Institution on pay-as-you-drive insurance policies concluded that driving would drop by 8 percent nationwide — and oil consumption by 4 percent — if all motorists participated.

Also, the study estimated that two-thirds of U.S. households would save money — averaging \$270 per car — under pay-as-you-drive insurance policies.

Unlike flawed schemes to tax motorists by the mile, pay-per-mile policies would be voluntary options. That means insurance companies would have to offer policies attractive to consumers. Besides, Poizner said his office would not approve policies that were not good for consumers.

With a weak economy, many Californians are looking for ways to cut expenses. Lowering insurance costs by driving less is likely to have significant appeal, helping consumers save money while they improve the environment.

Now it's up to insurers to devise attractive policies that accomplish those goals.

[Letter to the N.Y. Times, Monday, November 9, 2009:](#)

Grass-Fed Beef Emissions

Nicolette Hahn Niman ("The Carnivore's Dilemma" Op-Ed, Oct. 31) is simply wrong in suggesting that grass-fed beef produces less methane than feed-lot meat. It is the other way around, with grass-fed animals producing up to three times more methane.

It may be true that in some trials scientists have found ways to reduce methane emissions from cattle, but until these methods are in widespread use, they are simply not relevant to the consumer choices we face.

In any case, globally, only 8 percent of all meat is produced in natural grazing systems, and there is little available unforested land suitable for such systems. To replace factory-farmed meat without further tropical forest destruction is impossible.

Hence the call to cut down or eliminate meat-eating, especially beef, should be supported by everyone concerned about the future of our planet.

Peter Singer
Geoff Russell
Barry Brook
New York, Nov. 3, 2009

Peter Singer is a professor of bioethics at Princeton University and the author of "The Ethics of What We Eat." Geoff Russell is the author of "CSIRO Perfidy." Barry Brook is a professor of climate change at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses US company faces lawsuit due to pollution. AES, one of the largest electricity companies in the world is accused of emitting over 50,000 tons of toxic ashes into the air and causing terrible birth defects and different types of cancers. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Demandan a empresa de EEUU por contaminación

Se le acusa de verter miles tóxicos en una playa y provocar defectos de nacimiento

Mar Gonzalo / EFE

La Opinión, Saturday, November 7, 2009

NUEVA YORK.—La eléctrica estadounidense AES, una de las mayores del mundo, ha sido acusada en un tribunal estadounidense de causar tremendos defectos de nacimiento, patologías pulmonares y otros graves problemas de salud en República Dominicana con el vertido de 50,000 toneladas de ceniza tóxica.

"Representamos a varias familias que han tenido hijos con terribles heridas y que en algunos casos han muerto debido a la exposición a arsénico, mercurio, plomo y otros metales pesados a través de cenizas de carbón vertidas en una playa de la República Dominicana" hace seis años, informó ayer la abogada Diane Paolicelli, del despacho neoyorquino Levy Phillips & Konigsberg.

La demanda, interpuesta el pasado miércoles en el Tribunal Superior de Delaware (EEUU) por once demandantes, acusa de ocho delitos a la empresa, que precisamente ayer presentó sus resultados del tercer trimestre del año y no atendió de forma inmediata las peticiones de información por parte de Efe a este respecto.

Entre esos delitos, se le acusa de violar los derechos humanos, cometer negligencia con resultado de muerte, estafar, realizar declaraciones falsas y actividades arriesgadas e inusualmente peligrosas y provocar daños emocionales intencionados.

Paolicelli explicó que AES, una de las 500 empresas más grandes del mundo según la revista Fortune, tenía una planta en Puerto Rico donde quemaba carbón y las autoridades de la isla "le dijeron que no podía verter allí el residuo, que lleva varios metales pesados asociados a problemas médicos en el nacimiento y varios tipos de cáncer".

"Debían sacarlos de Puerto Rico, así que vieron sus opciones y, dado que es caro deshacerse de ellos, decidieron simplemente verterlo en República Dominicana, en playas de Samaná y Manzanillo, sin protección alguna, con lo que la gente de la zona respiró esas cenizas venenosas", relató al letrada.

Para ilustrar la gravedad de los problemas médicos detectados, Paolicelli apuntó que, por ejemplo, su despacho representa a "un niño que nació sin brazos, a otro que nació con los intestinos fuera del cuerpo y a la madre de otro que desarrolló en el útero deformaciones craneales, que básicamente tenía dos cabezas".

"Si una pequeña aldea tiene todos estos problemas, deducimos que tienen que tener mucho que ver con los residuos vertidos ilegalmente (entre 2003 y 2004) y que aún siguen allí", añadió.

Lo que busca la defensa de los demandantes son compensaciones para los afectados, para que puedan tener acceso a diagnósticos y tratamientos de sus enfermedades, dice el texto de la demanda.

Paolicelli explicó que seguramente, "aunque no lo sabemos con certeza", admitió, parte de los residuos vertidos fueron retirados cuando República Dominicana ganó un caso contra la compañía a la que reclamaba 80 millones de dólares por daños y perjuicios a la soberanía nacional y al medioambiente, economía, salud y bienestar de los pueblos afectados.

Finalmente en marzo de 2007, el país aceptó recibir 6 millones de dólares de la empresa, que tiene 132 plantas generadoras y 25,000 empleados en 29 países, para la limpieza de las cenizas en los manglares de Manzanillo (en la localidad de Montecristi) y Samaná, ambas en el noreste del país.

Con sede en Arlington (Virginia), AES ganó 185 millones de dólares durante el tercer trimestre del año, lo que supone un incremento interanual del 27.6%, mientras que en el conjunto de los nueve primeros meses del año acumuló un beneficio neto de 706 millones, un 44.8% menos que en el mismo periodo de 2008.

Según la documentación presentada ante los tribunales, a finales de 2003 y principios de 2004, la planta termoeléctrica que operaba AES en Guayama (Puerto Rico) depositó en Montecristi y Samaná unas 50,000 toneladas de residuos compuestos de arena, agua y cenizas compactados a altas temperaturas.

Paolicelli explicó que esta demanda trata de lograr compensaciones para los seres humanos afectados, ya que la presentada por las autoridades dominicanas en 2006 se refería a daños medioambientales.

Concretamente, el Gobierno dominicano atribuyó a los residuos de AES la destrucción de los manglares de Manzanillo, la muerte de centenares de palmeras en Samaná y la contaminación de unas aguas tropicales donde las ballenas jorobadas acuden cada año para aparearse.

"Después de que se vertieran las cenizas tóxicas y los residentes empezaran a quejarse, AES hizo reiteradas declaraciones falsas a los medios de comunicación y al público asegurando que los residuos depositados en la Bahía de Samaná frente a la playa no eran tóxicos ni nocivos para la vida o la salud y que incluso tenían aplicaciones beneficiosas", asegura la demanda.