

Cleric agenda; saving souls, planet

By Colleen Diskin

Stockton Record, May 28, 2005

HACKENSACK, N.J. -- Fletcher Harper is an Episcopal priest who preaches to Jews, Catholics, Baptists and any other congregation who'll offer him the pulpit.

He's trying to convert them -- but not in the usual religious way.

Harper wants to convince the faithful that being a servant of God also means being a steward of the earth. Or, to put it another way, being a good Christian, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist also means being "green."

"When it comes to the environment, we think religious congregations should lead by example," said Harper, executive director of a group known as GreenFaith.

Harper can be found on most weekends speaking from pulpits throughout New Jersey, where he tries to convert the faithful and also persuade congregations to give their sanctuaries what he calls an "environmental makeover."

GreenFaith wants churches to install solar panels and adopt windmills. It wants churchgoers to take stock of their own gas-guzzling and resource-wasting ways and to speak out against what it calls "environmental racism" -- instances when polluting industries seek to locate in poor communities that lack political clout. It tells churchgoers to fight for those communities much the way they might feel a duty to work in a soup kitchen for the hungry.

GreenFaith's message is that taking care of the planet is a moral calling rooted in the traditions and beliefs of most religions.

The mission isn't a new one. Several religious groups, including the Presbyterian, Reform Jewish and Church of Christ denominations -- now have national environmental organizations. In recent years, a national coalition of religious groups has sprung up specifically to address global warming.

But GreenFaith is different from other eco-religious groups because it is attempting to join as many faiths as possible on a variety of environmental causes, said Laurel Kearns, a GreenFaith board member who is a professor of the sociology of religion and environmental studies at northern New Jersey's Drew University.

Some 45 congregations have joined GreenFaith, which has an annual budget of \$350,000. Harper has led the group since 2002, when he was given permission by the bishop to leave his church in Haworth, N.J., and make GreenFaith his ministry.

How successful the group will be at bringing together many faiths remains to be seen. Harper said he has not yet persuaded any Orthodox Jewish, Evangelical Christian or Muslim groups to join.

Some religious groups prefer to form political advocacy organizations within their own faiths, while others have resisted participating in environmental causes because they disagree with the population-control positions some advocacy groups take, Kearns said.

Harper has discovered that his group must carefully navigate the rules of different congregations. Church rules at St Anthony's Orthodox Church in Bergenfield, N.J., for example, would not allow Harper to give his usual sermon from St Anthony's pulpit, said Robin Robinson, a trustee on the church council. But the church has conducted an energy audit of its building and will install solar panels this summer, after discussions with GreenFaith and a solar-energy company.

St. Anthony's is one of 25 area sanctuaries getting solar panels in a program GreenFaith calls "Lighting the Way." GreenFaith also offers grants to congregations to conduct energy audits and encourages others to "adopt a windmill" by buying power from a company offering renewable energy. It explains ways houses of worship can soften their ecological footprint -- everything from

installing a water-conserving tank in their toilets to avoiding chemicals when fertilizing their lawns.

As he finds new houses of worship to address, Harper says, he tries to steer clear of politics and the "liberal" label that some opponents have slapped on the environmental movement.

He said his message will never be delivered in a fire-and-brimstone fashion -- and it won't come with the dire warnings that some environmental groups use when speaking about the health effects of air and water pollution.

"Ironically, I find that many within the environmental movement have, without meaning to, tended to strike a very apocalyptic tone," Harper said. "We believe it is important to use an optimistic and hopeful voice -- but one that is not in any way Pollyanna-ish."

Instead, the group will try to describe environmental problems in religious, moral, ethical and nondenominational language, emphasizing the underlying principle that God gave people the earth as a gift.

Milking the numbers

Exactly how much cows pollute air depends on whose reports you read

By Reed Fujii, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Published May 31, 2005

You might think cows in California are tracked by bar-code scanners.

State statisticians crank out an annual booklet, 55 pages for the 2004 edition, noting amid piles of numbers that California's 1.7 million milk cows produced more than 36.4 billion pounds of milk, or an average of 21,139 pounds per head. That means an average cow, in one year, squeezes out 2,458 gallons of the white stuff.

There's little debate about those figures.

However, there's a great deal of debate and a divergence of opinion over something else cows produce -- a bevy of organic compounds that contribute to the San Joaquin Valley's often eye-stinging ozone smog. At stake is the health of the region's residents as well as the financial future of its rapidly expanding dairy industry.

A panel of experts charged with evaluating dairy pollutants failed to agree in a May 6 report. Instead, they split into three camps, each championing a different calculus of volatile organic compounds that arise from dairy cattle and their wastes.

One group, supported by dairy-industry interests, pegged cow emissions at 16.8 tons a day, which would make dairies the seventh-leading source of smog-producing compounds. That's not as bad as prescribed burning for clearing farm wastes and fire safety, but worse than emissions from off-road equipment such as lawn mowers and construction machines, according to San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District estimates.

Environmentalists, however, argued it should be nearly seven times higher, or 114.3 tons per day. At that level, cows would by far be the No. 1 source of volatile organics in the Valley, exceeding the next three sources -- light and medium trucks, passenger cars and oil and gas production operations -- combined.

A more middling estimate, proposed by professional staffers from the Valley air district, of 39.8 tons per day is close to current accepted estimates and would still leave dairies as the leading source of VOCs.

The committee's three recommendations and their supporting arguments will be presented today in Fresno to Dave Crow, the district air pollution control officer. He is expected, after further public workshops and review, to settle on a single cow-emissions figure by Aug. 1. Ultimately, the number could be used to determine which dairies will need air-pollution permits to operate and the kinds of emission-reduction steps they must take.

Not to muddle the picture further, however, the state's central clean-air agency, the California Air Resources Board, issued a separate May 6 report, proposing that Valley dairies with 1,000 or more milking cows be subject to pollution regulation. That was based on a revised estimate that the dairies generate 23.5 tons per day of smog-producing gases and would peg dairies sixth among emission sources.

Among the reasons for these disparate statistics is that scientists only recently began detailed studies of the types and amount of pollutants from dairies and other farm operations, said Dave Warner, director of permit services at the Valley air district and a member of the district panel.

Agriculture had long been exempt from the federal Clean Air Act, but when the state Legislature removed the exemption in 2003, Warner said, "All of a sudden it became very important to know how much of the emissions came from dairies."

That legislation also set rapidly approaching deadlines for regulators to establish standards and regulations, no matter what science says.

"A lot of the research that is ongoing is not going to be complete before the legislation requires us to act," said Gennet Paauwe, spokeswoman for the state Air Resources Board.

The board plans a meeting June 23 and 24 in Fresno to determine what sort and size of animal-farming facilities will have to enact emission-reduction measures. Those could include beef feed lots, chicken and turkey houses and egg producers, but dairy farms are considered by far to be the biggest source of smog-producing compounds from livestock.

"What's new for the agricultural industry " is they are going to have to go and get their businesses permitted by their local air district and likely take some steps to reduce emissions on site," Paauwe said.

Dairy officials are concerned that regulators could move to impose extremely costly requirements on smaller farms unable to bear the expense, said Michael Marsh, chief executive of Western United Dairymen in Modesto.

He fears a scenario that could, for example, require dairies with as few as 200 cows to install equipment such a manure digester that could cost \$800,000. "Then they can say, 'We've forced farmers to do something,'" Marsh said.

Marsh believes the most credible scientific studies point to dairies producing far less emissions -- at 16.8 tons per day -- than once believed and that less-costly steps, such as changing feed rations or sweeping out feeding and milking stalls more frequently, could effectively reduce air pollutants.

If the cost of pollution controls is, perhaps, \$3 per head, vs. \$4,000 per head, Marsh said, "You're staying in business."

"You've had these groundbreaking studies taking place and the air-district staff essentially " ignored the science," he charged. As for the environmentalists' position, pegging dairy emissions at 114.3 tons per day, "it just doesn't make any sense."

It does make sense if you believe the studies considered by the Valley district committee overlooked or failed to measure significant air pollutants, as does Diane Bailey, staff scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council in San Francisco and also a panelist.

"In some cases, they didn't even try to measure them, and in others, they tried to measure them and those attempts did not prove successful," Bailey said.

Looking forward to today's hearing, she said, "I'll be doing my best to convince Dave Crow to not ignore these constituents that were not included in the California studies."

At the same time, Bailey said she believes there should be some middle ground.

"Many people on the (committee) wanted to present a compromise emission factor and it's unfortunate we were unable to do that," she said.

Somewhere, room must be found to accommodate dairies, a major component of the San Joaquin Valley's economy, said Anthony Presto, air district spokesman in Modesto.

"Obviously, the air district doesn't want to get rid of all the cows. It cannot be done," he said.

It's no more possible than removing all the cars from the Valley. But it is a problem that must be dealt with, Warner said.

"No matter when the number ends up, we're still talking about one of the major sources of smog-producing compounds in the Valley," he said.

And in San Joaquin County, it's a major source of income, too. Milk is the county's No. 1 farm product, valued at about \$325 million in 2004.

Pollution from port gets new attention Operations along docks spew clouds of exhaust

By Mike Lee, STAFF WRITER

San Diego Union-Tribune, June 1, 2005

Every time a cruise ship docks at the Port of San Diego, it brings a bonanza of tourists for bay-front eateries and attractions.

For downtown workers, residents and hotel guests, the floating resorts deliver something less desirable: soot belched by their idling engines.

During a typical visit, a cruise ship can spew as many diesel particles as a few thousand heavy-duty trucks, according to state calculations. Even when docked, cruise ships typically run diesel engines to power air conditioners, washing machines and refrigerators.

Cruise ships, however, are just one contributor to the long-overlooked air pollution of West Coast ports, which are the nation's entryway for Asian goods.

Port officials and ship owners in California are scrambling to curb smog from a variety of sources, from cargo ships and tugs to trucks and trains. Their efforts come in response to lawsuits, legislation and increased research about the dangers of diesel exhaust.

"It's an emerging concern," said Joy Williams, research leader for the Environmental Health Coalition, an advocacy group in National City. "All the indications are that ship traffic along the West Coast is going to increase and ... (air pollution) will be more of an issue."

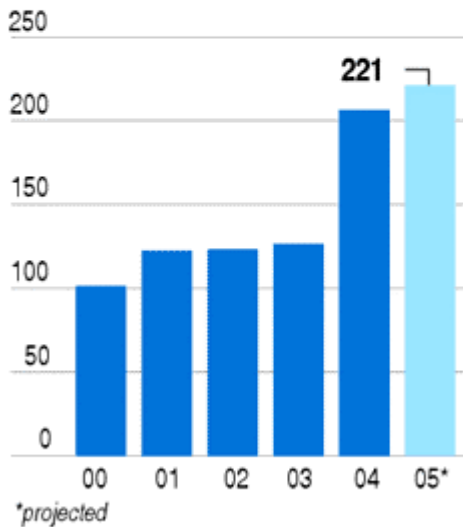
While officials at the Port of San Diego are working to lower air pollution, they also defend their facility as an environmental benefit because cargo ships replace fleets of big rigs that otherwise would haul goods to San Diego from Los Angeles and clog the freeways.

Cruise ship concerns

San Diego's cruise ship dockings have more than doubled since 2000.

Environmental experts say the ships spew huge amounts of air pollutants every time they visit, and statewide efforts are under way to reduce their emissions.

CRUISE SHIP VISITS



SOURCE: Port of San Diego

UNION-TRIBUNE

"We think there is the potential to roughly double our business and double the congestion relief as we continue to grow," said Stuart Farnsworth, maritime program manager for the port.

California agencies are midway through a study aimed at reducing smog-forming emissions while expanding a port system that distributes goods nationwide. Options include using cleaner fuel for ships, adopting more stringent engine standards, phasing out old cargo-handling machines and reducing idling time for engines in port areas, including locomotives.

Such measures haven't been a priority until now because state and county efforts have focused on factories and commuters' vehicles. As San Diego County and other regions struggle to meet federal pollution standards, they're paying more attention to ports. The interest has been magnified by recent research exposing the dangers of diesel exhaust, which California health officials link to cancer and breathing problems.

"U.S. seaports are the largest and most poorly regulated sources of urban pollution in the country," said a 2004 analysis by the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group that has taken a lead role in efforts to clean up California ports.

Little is known about the extent of the air pollution generated by the Port of San Diego, but that's about to change.

Assemblywoman Lori Saldana, D-San Diego, authored a bill this year that would direct the Port of San Diego to inventory its air pollution sources and find ways to reduce them. She's also working with port officials on non-legislative measures that might get the job done faster and cheaper.

The port - which expects to serve nearly 400 cargo vessels this year - aims to have a better handle on its emissions and reduction tactics by the end of 2005, whether or not the bill passes, said David Merk, the port's environmental director.

The cost of the upgrades and who will pay for them have not yet been determined, but the port will probably seek state grants for any major improvements.

Merk said the port already has taken steps toward cleaner air, including supplying power hookups for Dole Fresh Fruit Co.'s refrigerated containers and switching port vehicles to low-sulfur diesel.

Port officials also aided an effort to reroute heavy truck traffic around Barrio Logan, the neighborhood closest to its industrial terminal. Residents say they have suffered from diesel fumes for years.

About 350 trucks use the port's facilities each weekday, and many of the trucks rumble down Barrio Logan's main road, César Chávez Parkway. With help from San Diego, most trucks are expected to be barred from the parkway by the end of the year.

Barrio Logan residents such as Patricia Cuevas, 37, are relieved. She watches semis loaded with new cars and trucks emblazoned with images of bananas chug out of port gates and past her tiny yellow house every few minutes.

said through an interpreter that she's grown accustomed to the smell of truck exhaust but worries about its effects on her children.

"I'll have a restful sleep once they are out of the community," she said.

A major focus of Saldana's legislation is several blocks northwest of Barrio Logan - the port's cruise ship terminal. Port officials expect cruise ship dockings to reach a new high of 221 this year, a number that could hit 300 annually by the end of the decade.

Cruise ships typically stay in port up to 11 hours per visit, running at least one engine to get power for their guests. The state estimates that each ship's stay can account for 1 ton of nitrogen oxide emissions, a primary contributor to ozone pollution. San Diego fails to meet the federal ozone standard on a handful of days each year.

"It's contrary to our goals in San Diego of having a high quality of life to then expand an industry that is continuing to increase air pollution problems," Saldana said. "It's time to use the best available technology to reduce these risks."

The port is months away from deciding on the best pollution-control options. It is tracking ships to see if any of them visit regularly enough to be candidates for "cold-ironing," the term for plugging in to shoreside power.

With cold-ironing, vessels connect to more highly regulated power sources that are part of the regional transmission system. But installing it costs a few million dollars per terminal station and \$500,000 to retrofit each cruise ship.

"This is not just plugging in an extension cord," said Mick Shultz, spokesman for the Port of Seattle, which tested its shore-power facility last month. "This is a major undertaking."

At the International Council of Cruise Lines in Arlington, Va., president Michael Crye said his members are adopting pollution-reduction measures including the use of low-sulfur diesel and smokestack filters. He said dockside power is one option but that it may not gain wide acceptance in places like Southern California that are "power challenged."

"None of the solutions is a panacea," Crye said.

Even so, a coalition of environmental and community groups is pressing state officials for immediate changes, including a mandate to connect all cruise ships to dock power within two years.

"There are lots of ideas out there," said Gail Ruderman Feuer, senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council in Santa Monica. "We just need ports like San Diego to implement them."

Leader demands action on FCC building

Fresno City College science facility will be addressed at meeting.

By Jim Steinberg

The Fresno Bee, June 1, 2005

The president of the State Center Community College District board has suggested that Fresno City College might have to close its Math-Science Building until an independent party can vouch for its safety.

The state Division of Occupational Safety and Health has fined the district over conditions in the building.

In an e-mail to each trustee and District Chancellor Tom Crow, board President Patrick E. Patterson wrote that "it is imperative that some drastic action be taken immediately to resolve the problems regarding the safety of the occupants of the Science Building."

Patterson told Crow to put an action item about the building on the next board of trustees agenda. The e-mail referred to a closed session on the issue, planned for the board meeting Tuesday evening in Oakhurst.

Patterson wrote that he would support closing the building, if warranted, "until an independent party (OSHA preferably) determines what parts, or possibly all, of the Science Building are 'safe for entry and use by our staff and students.'"

Trustees have the option of disclosing some or all of what will occur in the closed session, Crow said.

"The important thing we have talked about all along," Crow said, "is the health and well-being of our students. This is our No. 1 priority."

Ventilation and removal of formaldehyde and other fumes are prime concerns of faculty members in the building who say they have complained for years, well before Crow became chancellor.

Students and staff dissect specimens preserved in formaldehyde. Science faculty members have complained that students, staffers and instructors are exposed to unhealthy levels of chemical fumes owing to substandard ventilation. Work continued Tuesday to improve conditions in the building, primarily on the second floor. Staffers on the first floor said work would progress there next.

In an interview Tuesday afternoon, Patterson said that he, the board and administrators "don't want to see anybody at risk. I don't think anybody has been harmed, and I hope that all the issues are going to be resolved."

Patterson mentioned letters to trustees from faculty in the building and said, "It is important that we do something to make sure everybody is satisfied that the conditions are safe and it is a good working environment."

Patterson said the board knew about and was addressing problems in the building before Cal-OSHA intervened in April. The state fined the district \$20,100 for poor ventilation, inadequate control of hazardous chemicals and regulated agents shown to cause cancer.

In a telephone interview from San Francisco, Cal-OSHA spokesman Dean Freyer spoke about the progress in correcting health problems in the building.

"Our investigators don't feel it is hazardous for people to be in the building," Freyer said. "If they had thought it was, they would have tagged the building. We feel there is no problem because the labs are not being used."

The college is largely idle until six-week summer classes begin June 27.

Shirley Porteous, associate dean of math and science, had not learned of Patterson's notice to the board of trustees when she was called Tuesday.

"My main concern has always been that the building be made safe for faculty, staff and students," Porteous said.

She could not say what condition the building will be in when students show up for classes June 27.

"I don't know what the workers will have completed," Porteous said. "It depends on what the construction workers are able to do."

Workers have been arriving before 7 a.m. each day. Construction continues into the night, Porteous said.

Trustee William J. Smith, a lawyer, said the trustees' Tuesday discussion in Oakhurst about the building will be closed to the public because the district has been represented by lawyers in its dealings with OSHA.

"We've got a black eye," Smith said. Patterson's e-mail "supports the notion that we are concerned. 'Dramatic, drastic' - that's the board's signature on the direction we want to go."

Smith, a district trustee for 21 years, mentioned others' concerns about lines of communication between the chancellor and the board.

"Next week in Oakhurst, things should become clear," Smith said. "We intend to find out everything we don't know about what's going on. If we can't resolve this very shortly, we may have to shut the building down."

Smith said he had been under the impression that problems in the Math-Science Building were "minor and resolvable," and he was shocked by the "out of the blue" OSHA report.

Trustee Dottie Smith wrote a memo to Crow stating that she was confused as to why college administrators did not follow up with Cal-OSHA's Fresno office before denying entry to inspectors from the agency's Concord office last month.

"It appeared we had something to hide," she wrote.

Dottie Smith said the decision to bar Cal-OSHA inspectors was "a bad one." Although Crow later said the inspectors were refused entry because of "a lack of understanding," Dottie Smith said the decision made the district look bad.

"Hopefully, in the future, anything about the safety of our students and staff or any other matter of concern to the public will be researched before a decision is made," she wrote.

D.A. creates environmental unit

3-staff team takes on crime mostly affecting the poor

Jason B. Johnson, Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, June 1, 2005

To tackle environmental crime, which disproportionately affects the city's poorest communities, San Francisco District Attorney Kamala Harris plans to announce that her office has a new environmental justice unit.

With two staff attorneys and a dedicated investigator, the unit will address such cases as a community newspaper's alleged dumping of hundreds of gallons of printer's ink, black marketeers' abalone sales and a bakery that operated while littered with rat and bird droppings.

"Crimes against the environment are crimes against communities, people who are often poor and disenfranchised," said Harris. "The people who live in those communities often have no other choice but to live there."

Harris will outline the unit's creation at a news conference today as mayors from around the world gather in San Francisco for United Nations World Environment Day.

Local activists called on the new unit to get tough on illegal trash dumping, to stage unannounced inspections of worksites, and to improve communications between city officials and the public.

State Attorney General Bill Lockyer spokesman Teresa Schilling said Lockyer believes state and local law enforcement are being forced to take up environmental law enforcement that used to be handled by federal authorities.

"As we deal with a Bush administration that's more focused on rolling back the protections that we've fought for, it's more and more important that we at the state and local level step up our efforts," said Schilling.

Lockyer's office filed criminal charges last month against Kinder Morgan Energy Partners of Houston over a 103,000-gallon diesel fuel spill in Suisun Marsh near Fairfield. The company paid a \$5 million fine and agreed to a series of measures to repair their aging pipeline system and improve their reporting procedures.

"One of the best tools out there to go after polluters is to go after them on a criminal basis," said Schilling.

Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice plans to hold a rally Saturday in front of San Francisco City Hall to highlight health problems in Bayview-Hunters Point. That district has the largest number of families living below the poverty level of any San Francisco neighborhood.

Executive Director Bradley Angel said Harris should push other city agencies also to cite polluting businesses, which unit leader Davina Pukari said she plans to do.

Pukari plans to coordinate with the Bayview Neighborhood Rescue Team, run by the city attorney's office, and with a federal regulatory task force that includes representatives of local police, the sheriff's office, the city Health Department, toxics control officials, Cal/OSHA, and the state environmental protection agency.

Dana Lanza, executive director of Literacy for Environmental Justice, a Bayview-Hunters Point nonprofit, said Harris should focus on individuals and businesses that dump refuse in vacant lots, on train tracks and around the Third Street Caltrain station.

"There are places where you come out and people dump their couches and trash on the sidewalk," said Lanza. "(It) creates an air of unsafety and degrades the quality of life."

The Bayview, home to 34,000 residents, has two power plants, a city diesel bus maintenance shop, San Francisco's main sewage treatment plant, lots of private industry and the former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, a Superfund cleanup site.

The impact of those industries has been a matter of debate for decades. Maurice Campbell, a founder of the Community First Coalition and co-chair of the community advisory board for restoration of the former naval shipyard at Hunters Point, said residents live in a "toxic soup" of environmental pollution.

"The community has been exposed for years to various toxins," said Campbell.

But the unit was formed to go after law-breakers and will not pursue law-abiding industrial concerns, said Pukari, whom Harris recruited from the San Francisco U.S. attorney's office last April. A specialist in environmental law, Pukari began her career in 1992 in Washington with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Pukari said her unit will work closely with community groups to identify sources of criminal activity.

Lanza said residents also would benefit from learning how to report polluters.

"I think part of the problem is that people don't know who to call."

The environmental justice movement began in the late 1980s and has grown in response to the Bush administration's rollback of Clinton presidential directives and its bid to rewrite air pollution laws with the Clear Skies initiative.

While prosecutors in Alameda, Solano and Los Angeles counties have established separate units to handle environmental cases, many other district attorneys assign the work to their white-collar crime divisions. But a team in Los Angeles focuses on pollution in communities that are most affected by businesses that break the law, Schilling said.

Many smaller counties that don't have the resources to aggressively target environmental polluters rely on a nine-member team of prosecutors sponsored by the California District Attorney's Association. The Circuit Prosecutor team covers 30 counties, mostly in Northern California, said Gloria Mas, one of its senior prosecutors. The team, which formed about a decade ago, handles an average of 100 cases a year.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, June 1, 2005:](#)

OPEN FORUM

Building living cities

By William Leddy

Sixty percent of Earth's inhabitants will live in cities by 2030, according to the United Nations -- the same year global carbon dioxide emissions are expected to increase by almost two-thirds of what they are today. By 2025, worldwide energy consumption is expected to grow by 54 percent, while worldwide oil production is predicted to begin declining in 2016.

Today, we are bombarded with such alarming statistics as these, suggesting a perilous future of constantly growing cities, fractured communities, increasing pollution and declining resources. While the specifics of the data might be debatable for some, the underlying realities are not: We live in a time of unprecedented global change. How can we preserve our way of life for generations to come? What will become of cities in the future?

As vividly demonstrated in the events surrounding this week's United Nations World Environment Day, there is growing agreement among environmentalists, urban planners, architects and elected officials that our way of life is simply not sustainable. We use too much energy, create too much waste and generate too much pollution. Urban sprawl forces people into their cars and away from their families and friends, resulting in serious environmental and social degradation, both locally and globally. With only 5 percent of the world's population, the United States consumes a quarter of the world's oil and generates the most solid waste and carbon dioxide.

We cannot, and should not, preserve our present way of life, but we can change it and make it better. Rather than perceiving those ominous statistics as harbingers of a grim, unavoidable future, we should see them as signs of great opportunity to make our cities better places to live -- to rebuild them as "living cities" that support both people and the natural world upon which we all depend.

While there are several names for this approach to revitalizing our cities -- smart growth, sustainable development, new urbanism -- the following are a few key components:

-- Environmentally sustainable, energy-efficient buildings: In the United States, buildings account for 36 percent of total energy use, 65 percent of electricity consumption, 30 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions and 30 percent of waste output. Making new buildings that use recycled, nontoxic materials, recycle their own waste and derive multiple benefits from the renewable natural resources around them -- sun, wind, rain, etc. -- not only reduces their environmental impact, but also creates indoor environments that are healthier, more inviting and economical places to live and work. "Green" design is simply smart design.

-- Adaptive reuse of existing structures: The creative reuse of existing buildings offers the multiple benefits of "harvesting" already built structures, reducing the demand on our overflowing landfills and allowing us all to maintain a stronger connection with our cities' evolving history.

-- Renewable energy resources: We cannot afford to wait 20 years for the much-hyped hydrogen economy to meet our future energy needs. Simpler, less costly technologies, such as photovoltaic solar panels, wind turbines and bio-fuel generators, already exist and could significantly reduce the fossil-fuel consumption and pollution of our cities.

-- Reliable public transportation: Efficient, convenient public transit gets us out of our cars, and into our neighborhoods, reducing congestion, pollution and the use of fossil fuels.

-- Density and the pedestrian city: The desire to make our cities enjoyable places to walk and bicycle isn't a nostalgic urge to recreate an imagined 19th-century Main Street. Creating greater density in our cities, mixing retail and residential uses within human-scaled, tree-lined streetscapes, makes sense at many levels. Thriving pedestrian streets are safer, cleaner and more energy-efficient, and they foster a stronger sense of community than the auto-dominated commercial strips that surround us.

-- Affordable housing: The creation of affordable housing close to public transit lines and workplaces is critical to creating diverse, dynamic cities around the world, not just in such expensive places as the Bay Area. Building a new generation of affordable, resource-efficient homes requires us to rethink the American dream of the mini-mansion with the three-car garage and replace it with more compact, but no less commodious, housing prototypes. Small really is beautiful.

In the ideal, a living city would behave more like an organism than a human construction. It would generate its own energy from the sun and wind, keep its air clean with minimal pollution and abundant vegetation, manage its waste stream and even grow some of its own food. But beyond these practical strategies for revitalizing our cities lies a deeper, more qualitative benefit: re-establishing fundamental connections between each of us, our families, our communities and the natural world around us. By making our cities more environmentally sustainable, we will also make them healthier, more humane and vital places to live.

The United Nations World Environment Day is an excellent opportunity to reflect on these challenges and opportunities and to begin enacting positive change for the future. Our nation has committed enormous intellectual and economic capital to such diverse efforts as exploring space, developing digital technology, curing disease and making war. If we chose to apply the same degree of commitment to making our cities livable and environmentally sustainable for generations to come, ominous predictions for an uncertain future would only sound like clarion calls to innovation. There's no telling what we could achieve.

William Leddy is a principal in the San Francisco firm of Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects (www.lmsarch.com <<http://www.lmsarch.com>>).

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, June 1, 2005](#)

Motorsports park woes

Editors: Neighbors of Merced County, are you aware of the proposed Riverside Motorsports Park? This is a development to be located near Atwater adjacent to the federal prison. It is a multi-racing business to sponsor events year-round, including live concerts. They plan to operate seven days a week and possibly 52 weeks a year.

It is true that some jobs will be created; these will be part-time jobs without benefits, as parking lot attendants. Employees who transfer from other motorsports sites will take the good jobs.

I am sure that everyone is aware of the increased traffic already on the roads between Atwater and Merced. Can you imagine 15,000 more vehicles?

There are numerous articles recently about our bad air here in the Valley. We have the distinction of having some of the worst air in the United States already. Do we need more pollution from all those cars? Air pollution is a contributing cause of asthma and respiratory problems.

Our roads are in a sad state of repair now. How will Fox Road and Shaffer Road handle the added traffic?

The citizens of Atwater must be aware that the city will share your water and sewer services. Are you happy with the water pressures and services now?

Neighbors, take a few minutes and think about what may happen to our quality of life if we sit and do nothing. Write your supervisor and urge them to vote no to the raceway. The board of supervisors will have a deciding vote on this development.

JANET HELMS
Atwater

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, June 1, 2005](#)

Piling on the negatives

Editor: Kudos to the Sun-Star for publishing letters from those in support of, and those opposing, Riverside Motorsports Park.

Razzberries to the Sun-Star for its not so cleverly veiled support of Riverside Motorsports Park in its recent series of articles.

Now for an epiphany on my part. I have realized that the constant refrain that runs through the arguments of those in support of Riverside Motorsports Park is that all the negatives are already here, or were here at one time. So, let's be fatalistic and "pile it on" or "allow it back in."

Mr. Ireland's reminder in his May 27 letter is that we had noise and air pollution when Castle Air Force Base was in operation. He infers since we had it once, it's OK to allow it back.

Mr. Weed's letter on the same date states that, "The pollution and traffic congestion caused by this single raceway will be minuscule compared with that created by the cars from enormous housing tracts this county is allowing to be built." Where is Mr. Weed's data? So, I guess the thinking is, let's "pile it on" by allowing both polluters.

Mr. Weed also seems not to factor in the fact that housing tracts mean local residents have a vested interest in our county. I am reluctant to accept the fact that just because a minimum number of minimum wages jobs will be filled during the racing season, this is evidence of vested interest.

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