

Estimates on cow pollution open to debate

SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer

[Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, July 9, 2005](#)

The San Joaquin Valley air district's cow calculations will be on trial Monday, when dairy stakeholders gather in Fresno to discuss pollution from dairy cattle. On June 27, the district declared that each dairy cow produces at least 20.6 pounds of smog-forming gas annually. That makes dairy cows worse for Central Valley air than cars and light trucks, the district said, though it hadn't calculated exact numbers.

If the district is correct, milk cows produce 60 percent more air pollution than previously thought. But the district is wrong, according to dairy industry representatives and environmentalists.

"We think the district is dead wrong," said J.P. Cativiela, spokesman for Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, a dairy lobbying group.

Pollution from individual dairy cows is no more than a fourth of the district's estimate, he said. The district made guesses about incomplete science and included studies that don't apply to California dairy practices, he said. The scientists themselves have made the same point, he said. Environmentalists aren't buying it, either. Double the district's number and you'll see how bad dairy cows are for the air, they say.

"I think the district is being too conservative," said Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, which follows dairy issues closely.

Dairies produce additional gases not included in the studies, he said. The science is still evolving, he said, but public health isn't served by a low-ball number.

Regulators will use their number to figure out how best to curb emissions on new dairies.

Monday's discussion also affects a county investigation into the potential impact of 19 new dairies that want to come to Kern. The Board of Supervisors will use the information to decide, among other things, whether the area's polluted basin can support a surge in cow population.

"The county is definitely watching this," said Lorelei Oviatt, the county planner leading the 18-month study. "If (the amount of pollution per cow) goes to 20, we'll use 20."

Kern is now home to 297,000 dairy cattle. Three dairies with 14,900 cows have been approved but not yet built. The 19 dairies that want to move to Kern have 173,000 cows among them.

Proposed pollution standard angers dairymen

By Seth Nidever

[Hanford Sentinel, July 9, 2005](#)

HANFORD - When clean-air officials give the public a chance to comment on proposed dairy emissions standards Monday in Fresno, they'll get plenty of input - and a lot of it won't be favorable.

Dairy producers are fuming after the district released per-cow pollution estimates nearly double a previous figure.

A proposed San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District standard made public June 27 has each cow putting out 20.6 pounds of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, per year.

Some 700 VOCs react in the atmosphere to form ozone, which damages lung tissue and interferes with cellular function.

San Joaquin Valley ozone pollution is the nation's worst when measured as an eight-hour daily average.

The previous standard - the one that led to an industry lawsuit against the district - was 12.8 pounds per cow per year.

The new number comes after the California Air Resources Board decided June 23 that dairies with 1,000 or more milk cows will have to get air permits.

The law required the board to come up with a cutoff point by July 1, 2005.

But most dairymen were focused on the air district's decision over how - and how much - each cud-chewing animal spews VOCs into the air.

That number determines what mitigation measures they will have to adopt to reduce emissions. It decides how stringent - and expensive - those measures will be.

Dairy producers say 20.6 pounds per cow is out of line.

"(The district) cut and pasted together a series of completely insupportable conclusions based on a hodgepodge of preliminary, unverified data and foreign studies that don't represent California dairy conditions," said Michael Boccadoro, a spokesman for Sacramento-based industry group Dairy CARES.

"We are frankly shocked, stunned and disappointed ... This is a very important decision and they appeared to have bungled it," said Michael Marsh, CEO of Modesto-based Western United Dairymen, the state's largest organization of dairy producers.

Industry figures like Boccadoro and Marsh say the district ignored recent California studies that put the number at about 6 pounds per year. Such studies were initiated in response to an industry lawsuit that challenged the earlier estimate and its implementation.

As part of the lawsuit, the industry agreed to the formation of an advisory group to issue recommendations for a new estimate.

The group came up with estimates from industry groups, university researchers and environmentalists. Those estimates ranged from 5.6 pounds to 38.2 pounds per year.

The lawsuit requires the district to adopt a number by Aug. 1, to be followed by emissions rules and mandatory mitigation measures.

Air district officials say their proposal of 20.6 pounds per year reflects all of the scientific research available. If anything, they say it is too low.

Those who object to the figure say it is guesswork without a solid scientific foundation.

At the heart of the dispute is a sub-category of VOCs called volatile fatty acids, or VFAs. In just about every other category, environmental groups and industry researchers agreed.

But when it came to VFAs, recommendations varied from .7 pounds to 17 pounds per cow per year.

One study considered a benchmark did not include VFAs in its final numbers because the researcher wasn't confident that his measurements were correct.

After measuring exact amounts of compounds in a sealed chamber, UC Davis air quality specialist Frank Mitloehner concluded that each cow emitted 6.8 pounds of VOCs each year - not including VFAs.

Mitloehner did detect VFAs, but he told the air district not to use his numbers.

Mitloehner said they were unreliable because he didn't have the technology to measure how

many VFAs were coming into the chamber and how many were coming out as a result of the cows inside.

Mitloehner said he wasn't sure why the air district decided to use his VFA figures.

The district combined Mitloehner's VFA measurements - which only considered direct emissions from cows under dry conditions - with numbers from wet manure studies.

The result was a total VFA figure of 15.5 pounds per year - a number strongly disputed by the dairy industry.

J.P. Cativiela, a program coordinator at CARES, said he was concerned that the district had even proposed the higher figure.

He said anything above the Mitloehner number of roughly 6 pounds per year of total VOCs was pure speculation.

Such disagreement threatens to spill beyond Monday's public hearing.

According to a CARES press release, Boccadoro will strongly urge the district to reconsider its decision.

CARES is "investigating all options to persuade regulators of the importance of getting the emissions estimate right," the statement read.

The meeting will take place at 1:30 p.m. at 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno.

Airing out meeting

[Modesto Bee, News and Notes, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is having a public workshop Monday on the new proposed dairy emissions factor, which measures how many volatile organic compounds dairy cattle produce. The emissions factor helps determine how many dairies in the valley air basin will require air district permits. The workshop is at the district's Modesto office, 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130, and starts at 1:30 p.m.

So far, area air-pollution levels far below smoggy '03's

By Amy Raisin Darvish

[Los Angeles Daily News, Sunday, July 10, 2005](#)

SANTA CLARITA -- Despite the visible layer of smog that often hangs over the area, air quality so far this year in the Santa Clarita Valley is on par with pollution levels recorded in 2004, the cleanest year in nearly two decades, according to experts.

Credit cooler temperatures and an early start to the rainy season for the reduction in ozone and other pollutants this year, said Joe Cassmassi, senior meteorologist for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

"This year and last, we had some favorable weather conditions," Cassmassi said late last week. "We've seen the June gloom extend into later summer and other conditions that lend to better dispersion of the atmosphere."

At this time two years ago, air quality in the valley was the worst in 10 years, largely because of fires burning in surrounding wilderness and several days of 100-plus temperatures.

This year, however, local air quality generally has been no worse than what regulators call "moderate" and identify as air quality in which "unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion."

During one period in late June and early July of 2003, air quality was unhealthy on nine days, with ozone and particulate levels that posed a health risk not only to unusually sensitive people, but to all children and adults active outdoors.

Ozone is an invisible, reactive, toxic chemical gas that, in the stratosphere, plays a vital role in shielding the Earth from radiation, but that, in the air down at levels where people live, causes health problems, especially for those with asthma and other respiratory ailments.

Particulates -- solid or liquid particles of soot, dust, smoke, fumes and aerosols -- enter and irritate the lungs, as well as the eyes and nasal passages. Unlike ozone, particulate pollution is visible and creates the smoggy "blanket" seen overhead.

The layer of smog that hangs above the Santa Clarita area is partially generated by local vehicles and the growing community, but mainly swept in on easterly ocean winds that pass over greater Los Angeles, Cassmassi said.

"There are three or four natural routes out of the (Los Angeles Basin), and the basin has 15 million people," he said. "It comes up along the 405 and 5 freeways on the way to the desert."

Cassmassi said temperatures are expected to rise this week, and the marine layer will decrease - a combination likely to produce more unhealthful air quality. And as temperatures heat up, fire danger rises.

"We've had a good year so far," Cassmassi said late last week. "But fires are a major short-term impact. Wildfires, from a standpoint of public health, are bad news."

LA area air regulators object to state deal with railroads

By Tim Molloy, Associated Press Writer

[The Fresno Bee, San Diego Union Tribune and Los Angeles Daily News, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Southern California air quality regulators asked their state counterparts not to follow through on an agreement with two major railroads, saying it would interfere with efforts to reduce air pollution caused by locomotives.

The California Air Resources Board announced last month that it had reached an agreement with Union Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway designed to eliminate 20 percent of pollution at rail yards by eliminating unnecessary engine idling and other pollution controls.

But the board of directors for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which addresses clean air issues in all or parts of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, complained at its meeting Friday that the state board reached the agreement without getting adequate input from the public and other regulators.

The board of directors also said the state agreement with the railroads was vague and would not protect the air as well as state legislation or local regulations.

"CARB's agreement, reached in secret without input from the public or other air quality agencies, does not adequately protect public health and will undermine a host of ongoing efforts to reduce locomotive emissions in the Southland and across California," William A. Burke, the district board's chairman, said in a statement. Burke also dubbed one provision in the agreement a "poison pill" because it allows railroads to back out if regulators introduce rules covering the same issues as the agreement.

The board asked CARB officials to hold a public hearing on the agreement before implementing it, and asked its staff to continue legislative efforts to reduce locomotive emissions in the counties it covers.

CARB spokesman Jerry Martin said the board would consider the request for a public hearing. He said state regulators reached the voluntary agreement because federal law largely pre-empts them from regulating interstate pollution sources such as railroads, ships and aircraft.

Adopting such regulations could lead to a lengthy court fight with the railroads that would delay efforts to reduce pollution, Martin said.

"If you live next to a railroad track, that's two or three years of living next to a railroad track with no relief," Martin said.

Even if CARB did go to court to defend regulations, it might not win, he added.

Mark Stehly, assistant vice president for environmental issues at Burlington, said the voluntary agreement would bring change faster than regulations would.

He acknowledged the public and outside regulators were not invited into the negotiations between the state and the railroads, but said outside input would be sought on the health consequences of emissions.

CARB officials said the agreement would require the railroads to improve smoke reduction programs, repair smoking engines within four days and begin maximum use of low-sulfur diesel fuel in locomotives six years sooner than required by federal regulations.

The agreement also calls for the railroads to review rail yard operating practices and evaluate new pollution-reducing technologies.

Ports to Work Long Hours in Effort to Cut Congestion

Containers will start moving from docks to their destinations at night and on Saturdays

By Ronald D. White

[Los Angeles Times, July 11, 2005](#)

If some of the nation's largest retailers have anything to say about it, business at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach will never be the same.

Most of the ports' leading importers say they will shift a considerable portion of their cargo movements to nights and Saturdays. The changeover will begin July 25 when all terminal gates will remain open past regular hours for the first time ever, just as the heaviest trade season kicks into high gear.

The extended hours program, called OffPeak, is the first of its kind at major U.S. ports - and so is the \$40-\$80 "traffic mitigation fee" that will be slapped on each container leaving the ports at other than off-peak hours.

OffPeak represents a significant reshaping of how business is conducted at the twin ports, and much rides on its acceptance by the largest 15 importers, who together accounted for one of every six of the record 13.1 million standard 20-foot containers that moved through the ports last year.

If it works, one of the region's strongest job-creation engines will run more efficiently, daytime freeway traffic will be reduced and the crushing cargo congestion that plagued the ports last summer and fall will not recur.

If it fails, shipping lines and customers will probably escalate efforts to reduce their reliance on the nation's largest seaport complex. And the success of OffPeak isn't assured: The program was delayed several times while terminal operators worked through operational snags, even as they

fielded objections from truckers about the new hours and from importers about the new fees.

"This is hugely important," said John Husing, an economist who tracks the Inland Empire's warehouse and distribution center industry, which is linked to the ports' operations. "For blue-collar workers, the most important shift in Southern California's economy has been the creation and growth of the trade logistics sector."

For decades, the ports have been an orderly world where ships bring in containers of goods that are then transported to rail yards or terminal warehouses for pick-up by trucks. Even though activity inside the two ports continues long into the night, the standard procedure has been to close the gates of the 13 terminals at 5 p.m., sometimes stranding truck drivers who had to wait until the gates reopened at 8 a.m. the next weekday.

That worked until 2004, when cargo volume surged. There weren't enough workers to unload the ships, forcing them to wait offshore. Railroads and terminals were overwhelmed, delaying merchandise deliveries. Idled ships and trucks pumped even more pollution into the air, angering neighbors.

Shipping lines hope that the extended hours, combined with increased hiring at the docks and railroads, will prevent cargo backups and forestall any legislative effort to cap port business.

Starting in two weeks, most terminal gates will be open to truckers from 8 a.m. to 3 a.m. weekdays and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays. A surcharge will be imposed on containers moved between the peak weekday hours of 3 a.m. and 6 p.m. Most gates will be closed Sundays.

Port operators hope that the new peak fees will push 20% of cargo traffic to evenings and Saturdays this year, rising to 40%-45% by year three, according to Bruce Wargo, general manager of PierPass, the group administering the program.

"We need to demonstrate that our industry understands the need to address community concerns . and that is exactly what PierPass is all about," said Tupper Hull, a spokesman for the Pacific Merchant Shipping Assn., which represents shipping lines and marine terminal operators on the West Coast.

Wal-Mart is an example of the potential price of failure.

The Bentonville, Ark.-based retailer, the biggest importer at the local ports, just opened a 4-million-square-foot distribution center outside Houston to handle merchandise for the eastern half of the nation. A large portion of those goods previously came through Southern California but in the future could travel through the Panama Canal to Houston's port.

Wal-Mart wouldn't comment on whether it would use extended hours at the Southern California ports, although a spokeswoman said the Houston distribution center would "help us to diversify to have locations on the East Coast, West Coast and in the Gulf."

But several major companies, including Home Depot Inc., Heineken USA Inc. and Lowe's Cos., are enthusiastic about the extended hours. In fact, most of the ports' other big importers said they would participate in the program to some extent.

"Absolutely. Our plan is to try to do it all at night," said Jaime Martinez, West Coast distribution manager for Ikea North America. Martinez said that an inability to rely on timely deliveries from the ports last summer made it impossible to predict how much warehouse labor would be needed, and when.

Night hours, he added, "should even things out and allow us to operate with a smooth flow."

Sears Holdings Corp. is embracing the program to avoid congestion and the surcharge for moving cargo during peak hours, said spokesman Chris Brathwaite. "It is definitely something we are going to utilize," he said.

Smaller companies also say that the OffPeak program fits into their strategies for avoiding the delays that hurt holiday sales last year.

"It actually works out better for us, since we're out in Rialto now, and we can get freight to Rialto faster in the middle of the night," said Isaac Larian, chief executive of MGA Entertainment, maker of Bratz dolls.

One uncertainty, however, is whether enough truck drivers are willing to work nights and Saturdays to make OffPeak a success, observers said.

The independent owner-operators who do most of the truck hauling to and from the ports take those jobs because their rigs tend to be older, less fuel-efficient and less suited to higher-paying cross-country routes, say the trucking companies who hire them. And these drivers like being home at night.

"We have polled our drivers and none of them want to work past 10 or 11 p.m. at night," said Sara Stetson, general manager of Expedite Truck Lines, a Long Beach firm with about 60 trucks. "They want to be home for dinner, help their children with their homework and they want to tuck them into bed at night."

But Ikea's Martinez and representatives of other major retailers say that they aren't anticipating problems because drivers will be lured by the prospect of avoiding long peak-hour delays, which will mean more work.

One way or another, the congestion problem will provide its own solution, economist Husing said. Booming international trade is boosting port business, with some predicting as many as 15 million 20-foot containers moving through the ports this year, a 14.5% increase.

"Ultimately, if you can't move the traffic off peak on a voluntary basis, it has to be required," Husing said. "There is a point where the congestion will demand it."

Toyota: GM Fuel-Cell Tie-Up Coming Soon

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer
[in the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, July 11, 2005](#)

TOKYO, Japan (AP) -- Toyota's president said Monday a tie-up with U.S. rival General Motors on fuel-cell vehicles is in its final stages - but promised to do his best to beat GM and Ford.

"They are good competition," Katsuaki Watanabe said of General Motors Corp. and Ford Motor Co. in a group interview with foreign media. "We don't want to lose."

Watanabe, 63, whose appointment was approved at a shareholders meeting last month, is taking helm as the Japanese automaker is on a pace to potentially surpass GM, the world's largest carmaker, in global sales.

Toyota Motor Corp. aims to capture 15 percent of the world's market in the years following 2010. Depending on how the rivals fare, that could put Toyota ahead of GM.

Watanabe said it's just a matter of time before details can be hammered out for a deal with Detroit-based GM on fuel cells - a clean technology that is still largely experimental.

Fuel-cell vehicles emit virtually no pollution because they run on the energy produced when hydrogen stored in the fuel tank combines with oxygen in the air to make water.

GM and Toyota Motor Corp. have a longtime partnership that does not involve stakes in each other. They run a plant together in California and have a 1999 pact to share technology. A deal on fuel cell vehicles would be an important expansion of that agreement.

"We are in the final stages of the talks," Watanabe said at the company's Tokyo office. "It's better not to let the talks drag on."

Toyota's continued growth at a time when both GM and Ford are stumbling has set off some concerns here about a possible backlash reminiscent of the trade tensions that emerged about two decades ago.

Watanabe brushed off the idea that Toyota may become the world's top-selling automaker during his tenure, laughing that he hasn't thought about it and he isn't even really expecting it, either.

His main mission is to keep stable growth going without compromising on day-to-day efforts, including improving quality control, training workers around the world and cutting costs, he said.

He denied that fears of a backlash were behind Toyota's recent decision to raise prices on several models in the United States, including the hot-selling Camry compact. Watanabe has a reputation for being both a cost-cutter and price-cutter, so the higher U.S. prices appear to run counter to his overall strategy.

Toyota looked at various factors such as costs, market conditions and profitability to make the decision, and the recent heavy discounting by U.S. automakers was also studied, he said. Toyota decided such discounts weren't appropriate for their own cars, he said.

"We looked at the total picture and made the decision. And we think we can put up the numbers" in sales, he said.

Watanabe - who is a karaoke and baseball fan - said Toyota sees increasing hybrid production as key to expanding global sales.

Toyota is considering making a hybrid pickup truck, and the ideal would be an entire lineup of models in hybrids, he said.

Hybrids aren't as clean as fuel cell vehicles, but they deliver better mileage than comparable gas-engine vehicles by switching between an electric motor and gasoline engine. Although other automakers are selling or developing hybrids of their own, Toyota leads in the sector with its Prius as well as other models it has introduced as hybrids.

Fireworks spike air pollution levels around Valley

Tulare County air unhealthy for about two hours

By Laura Florez, Staff writer

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, July 7, 2005](#)

Tulare County residents not only lit up the sky with fireworks this Fourth of July, they also sent pollution levels in the Central Valley soaring, local air regulators said.

The colorful and dazzling celebrations brought down showers of dust, soot and other tiny lung-damaging particles throughout the Valley.

Tulare County was no exception.

For about two hours, fireworks celebrations in the area caused particulate pollution levels to jump to nearly three times the level at which the air is considered unhealthy.

The numbers of PM 2.5 - tiny flecks of particulate matter that are 2.5 microns in diameter - were higher than those reported last year, said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Although the air cleared up after midnight, Ferreria said, there were lingering effects of the explosions the next day, with elevated levels of PM 2.5.

"If you have asthma, you want to be real careful because you are being exposed to fine particulates. Those can get deeply lodged in your lungs and cause respiratory problems," he said.

Dr. A.M. Aminian, director of the Allergy Institute in Fresno and Visalia, said he saw an increase of patients during the past week and even more people following the holiday weekend.

Fireworks are just one of the contributing factors to the poor air quality, Aminian said, noting bigger contributors are cars and dust from construction.

The tiny flecks of PM 2.5 can contain metals from the coloring of the fireworks.

They are also microscopic - about 30 of them can fit in a cross-section of a human hair. But they can trigger asthma and lead to long-term lung disease. The smaller the particulate matter is in size, the worse it is for your health, said Kelly Malay, an air district spokeswoman.

"[PM 2.5] can get into your lungs and dissolve right into your blood sugar," she said.

It's unusual for the Central Valley to have violations of the particle pollution health standard in the summer.

Normally that's a problem in winter, when fireplaces are adding soot to the air. During the summer, the biggest problem normally is smog, which forms when exhaust and other chemicals bake in atmosphere at high temperatures.

But on the Fourth of July, other places in the Central Valley fared worse than Tulare County, air regulators said.

Bakersfield was the most affected by the pollution. For about an hour, particulate pollution there jumped to nearly 10 times the level at which the air is considered unhealthy.

In Fresno, pollution was three times higher than the health standard.

In Modesto, it was four times higher, and in Corcoran, it was six times higher.

The numbers could be higher next year, depending on how stagnant weather conditions are, Ferreria said.

But while fireworks celebrations played a part in the higher numbers, they aren't something that the district regulates, Malay said.

"It's up to an individual to determine if fireworks are something they are willing to sacrifice," she said, noting that the district did not get any complaints about air pollution on July Fourth.

The Associated Press and staff writer Shannon Darling contributed to this report.

Should leaf blowers be banned?

VANESSA GREGORY, Californian staff writer

[Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, July 9, 2005](#)

A study to measure the impact of leaf blowers on local air quality is under way, two summers after city officials' efforts to regulate the machines stalled. "We really tried to find some evidence that connected the use of leaf blowers with air quality," said Bakersfield City Councilwoman Sue Benham about the 2003 attempt to balance residents' noise and pollution concerns with gardener worries about their livelihood.

"We could not, at that time, find scientific support that these blowers are detrimental to air quality," she said.

The connection between leaf blowers and air quality may become clearer by September, when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District expects preliminary results from the study.

The district contracted with a UC Riverside research group that will study the amount of dust leaf blowers suspend in the air over a set amount of time -- what scientists call "fugitive dust emissions."

"The study is really the first step in seeing how much they contribute valleywide to the particulate problem," said Scott Nester, the district's director of planning.

A 2000 California Air Resources Board report did detail the pollution caused by leaf blower exhaust emissions. A two-stroke gas powered leaf blower -- the popular professional gardener choice -- spews particulates that combine with other gases in the air to form ozone.

But Nester said the new study may be the first in California to measure the amount of dust that blowers stir up.

"You know there's exhaust emissions. You know there's fugitive dust," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen of the American Lung Association of California. "But it's been hard to quantify exact health impacts."

Dust particles are larger than exhaust particles, which means they lodge in the lungs more easily, said Josette Merced Bello, CEO of the American Lung Association of Central California.

"Particulates have been heavily linked to worsening asthma and lung conditions," said Merced Bello. The Central Valley's air has too many of these particulates to meet the state, or the more lenient federal, air quality standards, she said.

Californians have scorned leaf blowers almost since gardeners started using them in the 1970s. The machine that some now view as a pollutant became popular as a way to save water during a drought-plagued decade for the state.

Since then, as many as 20 cities -- almost all on the coast -- have adopted leaf blower bans.

On June 13 Palo Alto became the latest, with council members approving a ban at a packed meeting that pitted mostly Latino gardeners against white residents, according to the San Jose Mercury News.

"They are very important to our members that do maintenance," said Larry Rohlfes, of the California Landscape Contractors Association. "We understand why there's public opposition to them. And there's nothing worse than a discourteous gardener using blowers inappropriately, but there are all kinds of reasonable ways of dealing with blowers short of banning them."

Most bans stemmed from noise complaints, rather than air quality concerns, but that may be changing.

"When it started as a noise ordinance, all people knew about was the noise," said Diane Wolfberg of Zero Air Pollution Los Angeles, a group that influenced passage of L.A.'s ban. "But then they got into air pollution concerns."

Jack Rademacher, a retired engineer who was born and raised in Bakersfield, began his "vendetta" against leaf blowers in the early 1970s.

Over the years, he has written letters to city officials, petitioned the City Council and implored the police to cite leaf blower operators under the city's existing noise ordinance.

"It's a very serious thing as far as I'm concerned with our valley air and the noise and valley fever," said Rademacher.

He said he worries about the gardeners "who don't know what they're breathing" too.

But local landscapers like Chris Parker, owner of Parker's Landcape Services, have trouble imagining work without leaf blowers.

"Well, as far as cleanup's concerned, they cut time down by about one-third," he said. "And they cut down on manpower."

All of Parker's gas-powered equipment meets state exhaust emissions standards, he said.

Leaf blowers, along with other small engine-powered machines like lawn mowers and chain saws, already fall under increasingly stringent exhaust regulations.

These regulations should reduce exhaust emissions from blowers by 90 percent, said Holmes-Gen.

"We're doing all we can, pretty much," said Parker.

Some gardeners have switched to leaf vacuums, but Rohlfes said the cost of blower bans would be a financial burden that gardeners cannot pass on to consumers.

"People are only willing to pay so much for gardening and landscape maintenance," he said.

And Bakersfield residents seem to love their gardeners.

Parker estimated that the city had 500 licensed landscape contractors and thousands more working without a license.

"Sit on any one intersection at anytime of the day and just count the number of trucks," he said.

Residents sometimes call the air pollution district asking for leaf blower alternatives, said spokeswoman Jaime Holt.

"The alternative is a broom and a rake," she said. "But no one ever wants to do the broom and the rake."

State Assemblyman Villines speaks at Small Business Task Force meeting

By Tami Jo Nix

[The Madera Tribune, Saturday, July 09, 2005](#)

California State Assemblyman Mike Villines addressed a group of concerned citizens gathered for breakfast and a town hall meeting on small business Friday morning, which was hosted by Richard and Lynne Kuckenbecker of Kuckenbecker Tractor.

This event and ones like it in Clovis and Fresno make up the data-gathering aspect of Villines' Small Business Task Force.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our state and I want to make sure we are doing all we can to make them successful," Villines said. "Small businesses are part of the American dream and their success is vital to our community."

Issues discussed included minimum wage, workers compensation, tip credit for the hospitality and food service industries, taxes and fees.

"One of the issues that is completely appalling to me that has already passed both the assembly and the senate is a new requirement that every single bullet must have a serial number and I will have to keep track of every number on every bullet," said Rochelle Noblett, owner of Pete's Sport Shop. "The reason behind this is to take away our second amendment rights.

"The other bill calls for a micro-imprint on every firing pin on every weapon so that it leaves the serial number of the gun on the bullet," she said.

Noblett said the person who authored this bill has no idea how guns are manufactured and doesn't know how easy it is to change the firing pin on a weapon.

Manufacturers will quit shipping firearms and ammunition to California because they are too expensive and too much trouble to sell here, she said.

According to Villines, the assembly member to author these and other anti-gun legislation, Paul Koretz, has made it his mission to defend animals and to get rid of the guns in California.

"That is why he serves in the legislature," Villines said.

Noblett urged everyone in the meeting to write letters to Governor Schwarzenegger asking him to veto these bills.

Copies of the information about these bills are available on the counter at Pete's Sport Shop, or can be sent by fax by calling 673-5951.

Villines said this information is also available on his website.

City Council member Steve Mindt, who works at Georgia Pacific, spoke on the subject of "Intermittent Leave," as provided by the Family Medical Leave Act laws. State and federal guidelines of this provision are so broad it makes it easy for someone to take advantage of the law, he said.

An employee with the proper medical documents can take off work at any time, leaving a diminished work force unable to achieve its goals or make production deadlines, and make a big (negative) impact on a company, he said.

"There needs to be some restrictions," Mindt said. "I really support the FLMA laws when they are applied correctly."

Clay Daulton, president of the Madera County Farm Bureau, addressed the subject of water discharge permits.

"People tell me all the time they are getting out of farming because of the heavy government regulations," Daulton said.

Chemical use reporting and restrictions were put in place to make the water safer. With the water discharge permits, another layer of bureaucracy is added for the farmer to contend with.

"The air quality regulations keep changing and becoming more odious," Daulton said. "The next generation of diesel engines will need to emit air cleaner than we breathe."

He also said that he can no longer drive cattle on roads he owns because of development in the foothills. He referenced the workers compensation laws as burdensome.

"Fire is natural and it is becoming illegal," Daulton said. "Fire is being ruled out. How can we have agriculture without fire to clean the ditches and get rid of the parts of the plants we don't need or want?" he asked.

Daulton said plowing under isn't always the answer because of disease.

Carl Jansen addressed the group and said that legislators say they don't raise taxes, but levy fees instead. He also said the condition of the roads need to be improved.

Assemblyman Villines promised to use data gathered from this meeting and the others to improve his district.

Can we fool Mother Nature

By PAUL ELIAS - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

[Modesto Bee, Saturday, July 9, 2005](#)

Researchers use transgenic Indian mustard plants to soak up dangerously high selenium deposits caused by irrigation in the Central Valley.

On the site of a former hat factory in Danbury, Conn., a stand of genetically altered cottonwood trees sucks mercury from the contaminated soil.

Still others are engineering trees to retain more carbon and thus combat global warming.

The gene jockeys conducting these exotic experiments envision a future in which plants can be used as an inexpensive, safer and more effective way of disposing of pollution.

One example is the work of University of California at Berkeley researchers, who are tweaking the genes of the Indian mustard plant to clean up selenium deposits in the valley.

They've planted small plots of their creations near Fresno last year, and say that the results are promising.

Selenium is naturally occurring but becomes toxic when high-density pockets form because of water flow. Selenium poisoning can stunt growth and cause brain disorders, among other health risks.

"This is a really good way to bring new resources to solve environmental problems," said Berkeley scientist Danika LeDuc.

"But first, we do have to increase public confidence in the technology."

"Trees are really made for this. ... We just have to trick them to do what we want them to do," said Richard Meagher, whose University of Georgia students went to Danbury in 2003 as part of the most advanced, open-air experiment in the United States involving trees genetically engineered to eat pollution.

Biologists for decades have been trying to exploit the genetic mechanisms that let microscopic bugs survive in polluted places where most living things die.

But simply dumping engineered bugs on polluted sites has its dangers and drawbacks. Elements like mercury can't be broken down into harmless bits like oil, so researchers have turned to engineering plants to draw pollutants out of the ground.

Meagher uses genes from *E. coli* that enable the common bacterium to live amid mercury. He's spliced them into a variety of plants in the laboratory, where he says his results are dramatically positive.

Meagher's team planted about 45 engineered cottonwood trees in a polluted lot. The trees are expected to treat the mercury as a nutrient and draw the toxic element from the soil with their roots.

Some of the mercury is expected to vaporize into the air while most is stored in the tree. After several years of growth, the trees will be cut down and incinerated.

Meagher expects to see results from the Danbury experiment later this year. He figures hundreds of trees per acre would need to be planted to be effective. But if his removal method works, Meagher estimates that the cost of cleaning an acre of mercury-laced soil will plummet from about \$2 million to \$200,000.

Meagher agrees with critics who argue that his solution isn't ideal — but he says that the trees beat the current clean-up method of digging out contaminated sites and dumping the tainted soil into toxic dumps.

Still, some potential allies are wary.

The Sierra Club and others fret that grimebusting plants and their unnatural, industrial-strength cleaning genes will contaminate naturally growing relatives. Promises that researchers are engineering sterility into the trees don't calm their concerns.

"I'm a pediatrician, and I can tell you birth control doesn't work 100 percent of the time," said Jim Diamond, the Sierra Club's biotechnology expert. "I don't see it working in trees, either."

Businesses get some help on Crows Landing

By BLAIR CRADDOCK - BEE STAFF WRITER

[Modesto Bee, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

Merchants on Crows Landing Road have a long list of problems they want addressed.

"Vandalism. Broken windows. Stealing stereos from cars" were the first words on one list compiled by local business owners during a meeting Thursday night with sheriff's deputies from Stanislaus County.

"Trash from outside (and from) taco trucks," the list went on. "Sale of illegal drugs. Fights and there is no rapid response. [Bad odor](#) from the nearby tallow plant. "Etc., etc., etc.!"

Sheriff's deputies Nick Navarrette and Noel Vento, who recently began a three-year assignment to a community policing program that covers Crows Landing Road, said during the two-hour meeting at Shackelford Elementary School that they'll work with the merchants to reduce those problems.

"The only way we can do this is with the support of the community," Navarrette said. "You guys have a lot of potential, a lot of power to make a lot of change, but we have to work together."

The Sheriff's Department arranged Thursday's meeting to listen to merchants' concerns and ideas for improving the area, said Sheriff's Lt. Rob Jackson.

In a first step, five business owners volunteered to work with deputies for a beautification committee.

Roberto Mendoza, president of Mendoza's Auto Sales, volunteered to donate \$5,000 to the cleanup effort.

Also, Navarrette announced the arrest of a man who had been allegedly entering restaurants and snatching customers' food off the tables.

There are other problems merchants want solved, including prostitution, junk dumped in alleys, truant school children, gangs, used-car sales clogging the streets and animals sometimes left to die.

"People who don't want their puppies abandon them here. Poor animals," said Adela Cordova, owner of Adelita's Jewelers, in Spanish.

The Sheriff's Department is planning another meeting Sept. 20 at 7 p.m. at Don Juan's Foods on Crows Landing Road. Crime prevention and graffiti removal will be topics.

Jorge Elizalde, owner of El Tio Auto Sales, said he's hopeful that the merchants and deputies, working together, can improve the area.

"I'm happy to hear solutions, not only complaints," Elizalde told the deputies. "I'm happy to see you guys here."

U.S. Appears to Win Global Warming Debate

By Thomas Wagner, Associated Press Writer

[in the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

GLENEAGLES, Scotland (AP) -- Leaders of the world's wealthy nations appeared to bow to U.S. pressure on climate change, issuing a watered-down declaration Friday that avoids setting targets or timetables for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

But in his final speech at the G-8 summit, Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that the G-8 countries and five of the world's largest emerging economies - China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa - had agreed to work together to counter global warming.

He said they would meet Nov. 1 in Britain to discuss the effort to "slow down and then in time reverse the rise in harmful greenhouse gas emissions."

Blair later said climate change could not be tackled without proper support from America, China, and India.

"If it is impossible to bring America into the consensus on climate change we will never ensure the huge emerging economies like China and India ... are part of the dialogue," Blair said at the end of the G-8 summit. He added that Russia has agreed to make climate change a major priority when it takes over the G-8 presidency next year.

French President Jacques Chirac has called the declaration a partial victory and said it ensures "indispensable dialogue" and unity in tackling the thorny problem.

Faced with the dangers represented by climate change, "only coherent action can have a chance to change things, and this coherent action supposes a real union," Chirac said at a news conference Friday. "In reality, this has been the success of the summit."

U.S. officials had lobbied against the inclusion in the G-8 communique of any specific reduction targets, as called for in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The United States is the only G-8 country that has refused to ratify the Kyoto treaty, which President Bush said would have "wrecked" the U.S. economy.

The seven G-8 members who ratified the protocol are bound by its reduction targets, and some countries had hoped to use the summit to get the United States to make a similar commitment.

Environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth International, WWF International and Greenpeace called the Group of Eight major industrialized nations to task Friday for failing to seriously tackle climate change, and blamed Bush for the impasse.

"The G-8 leaders did not agree on a single concrete action to address climate change," said Philip E. Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust. "President Bush did not budge one inch from the intransigent position he has taken on global warming ... and the White House staff worked nonstop for months to water any possible deal down."

A draft of the final Gleneagles statement obtained Friday by The Associated Press says "climate change is a serious long-term challenge that has the potential to affect every part of the globe" and that the world's increasing use of fossil fuels such as oil and gasoline are a main source of the problem.

The world leaders pledge to "act with resolve and urgency to meet our shared and multiple objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving the global environment, enhancing energy security and cutting air pollution in conjunction with our vigorous efforts to reduce poverty."

No specific actions or deadlines are set.

The final draft statement only mentioned the Kyoto Protocol once, saying: "Those of us who have ratified the Kyoto Protocol welcome its entry into force and will work to make it a success."

France and others had hoped to include a reference in the declaration promoting the Kyoto Protocol and stating how to proceed when it expires in 2012.

Blair said after meeting with Bush on Thursday that differences between the United States and other industrialized nations over Kyoto would not be resolved, but he hoped to build consensus on how tackle global warming. Blair also had stressed the need to move on from Kyoto.

But China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, which attended the summit, issued a joint statement Thursday endorsing the Kyoto Protocol and urging developed countries such as the United States to "take the lead in international action to combat climate change by fully implementing their obligations of reducing emissions."

Bush, Blair at odds on global warming

Jim VandeHei, Paul Blustein - The Washington Post
[In the San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

Gleneagles, Scotland -- President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair failed on Thursday to reach agreement on international efforts to combat global warming, even as they showed immediate solidarity in the London attacks that overshadowed other issues.

On the first full day of meetings by the world's major industrial powers, Bush and Blair emerged from breakfast at this highlands golf resort hotel to tell reporters that a new international pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could be at least seven years away.

"We're not going to negotiate some new treaty on climate change" at the annual economic summit of major industrialized nations, Blair told reporters. "What this is about is seeing whether it will be possible in the future to bring people back into consensus together. Can we do that? I don't know, but it's important that we at least begin a process of dialogue that allows us to make progress on this."

The meeting brought together the leaders of the Group of Eight -- the United States, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Japan and Russia. China and India, two of the world's emerging economic giants, were involved in the climate change talks. The presidents of Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa also were present. In a series of private talks, the leaders also focused on issues surrounding Iraq and aid to Africa.

Blair, the summit host, was struggling to win U.S. approval of his international agenda and lobbied Bush to embrace the mandatory curbs on greenhouse gases contained in the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty on emissions standards that was rejected by Bush. The United States was the only member of the G-8 that did not ratify the 1997 Kyoto treaty.

Bush appeared not to budge Thursday, warning that such mandatory standards could cripple the U.S. economy. "I also strongly believe that technologies and the proper use of technologies will enable the world to grow our economies, and at the same time, be wiser about how we protect the environment," Bush said.

If a consensus is not reached by 2012, when the Kyoto agreement expires, "then we've got a real problem for the future," Blair warned.

Nevertheless, governments at the summit worked on the draft of a joint statement about the warming climate and the dangers of man-made greenhouse emissions. "There is a consensus we need to move forward together," Bush said.

Faryar Shirzad, a top Bush adviser, said the joint statement will include Bush's goal of encouraging new technologies and cleaner-burning fuels immediately, as well as other steps to reduce global warming. The final document, which had been slated for release Thursday, was delayed until today because of the bombings in London. Blair left the Scotland summit to return to London, but planned to be on hand for today's proceedings.

The report of the bombings, meanwhile, dissuaded many protesters in Scotland from engaging in the disruptions and actions that have characterized other such meetings.

The London blasts "really shocked people -- they don't want to get involved in anything confrontational," said Rick Syers, a recent graduate of England's Sheffield University. Julie Keller, 23, a Norwegian student living in Brighton, agreed: "There's a big focus on being very peaceful, and getting the public to realize we have nothing to do with what happened."

Similar sentiments were echoed by other residents of the makeshift "eco- camp" in Stirling, Scotland, identified by police as the base for the most militant protesters who have mobilized against the summit at Gleneagles.

On Wednesday, several hundred protesters attacked cars and shops in the early morning hours; others formed human chains that shut down major roads, while still others scaled the fence surrounding Gleneagles during a march -- all of which ended in violent clashes with police. But on Thursday morning, camp residents said, they met to discuss the implications of the events in London, and after about three hours of debate a broad consensus was reached, although a few groups dissented.

David Hotvedt, 24, a German student designated as a media spokesman, summarized the conclusion: "Because of the terrorist attacks, most of us have agreed there will be no direct action taking place," he said. "Everything will be of a peaceful nature, and there will be no confrontations with police."

He emphasized that "98 percent" of the residents were inclined to nonviolent protest anyway.

Lawmakers take some of the air out of 'hydrogen highway' plan

By Paul Rogers

[San Jose Mercury News, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

In a setback for one of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's centerpiece environmental efforts, state lawmakers on Thursday approved barely half the money the state Environmental Protection Agency had said was needed to start building a "hydrogen highway" across California.

Lawmakers hammering out the state budget in Sacramento approved \$6.5 million for the system of non-polluting hydrogen cars and fueling stations beginning Jan. 1.

Some Democrats questioned the expense. They raised concerns about whether the money would be better spent on schools, and whether taxpayers or private companies will own the hydrogen fueling stations the money will help construct. Republicans also questioned whether the technology for hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles is viable.

The administration sought to put the best face on the news, although it jeopardizes Schwarzenegger's goal of having up to 100 hydrogen fueling stations in California by 2010.

"It is still moving forward," said Jon Myers, a state EPA spokesman. "The \$6.5 million we got is enough to get us going. We're still going to be able to start building stations."

The measure approved Thursday calls for construction of "up to three demonstration hydrogen fueling stations in the state."

Six weeks ago, the Schwarzenegger administration released its "Hydrogen Highway Blueprint." That document recommended spending \$10.7 million a year during the next five years, for a total of \$53.5 million.

The money was to be used for 50-50 matching funding with private companies to build a network of stations clustered around the Bay Area and Los Angeles. Because 39 hydrogen stations already exist or are planned soon, 61 new stations, at a cost of about \$1 million each, would need to be built by 2010, the report says. The money also was to be used for incentives of up to \$10,000 a vehicle to help car companies build vehicles that emit only water vapor from their tailpipes.

Since 2004, Schwarzenegger has pushed the "hydrogen highway" as a way to help California speed a national transition from oil and reduce smog and greenhouse gases.

General Motors, Toyota, Honda and others already have a few hydrogen vehicle prototypes on U.S. highways, leased to government fleets or universities. None are for sale yet to consumers, although Honda leased the first one to a family in Torrance last week for \$500 a month.

"We are looking at doing several more leases, but it has to be convenient for people to have somewhere to fill up," said Andy Boyd, a spokesman for Honda.

Many experts say widespread use of hydrogen vehicles is 10 to 20 years away, as technological challenges such as fuel storage and driving range are worked out.

About 90 hydrogen vehicles are on California roads now in demonstration projects. The Schwarzenegger blueprint sets a goal of 2,000 by 2010. But legislators are clearly not on board with the idea yet.

"There were concerns that the technology was not quite there yet," said Republican Senate leader Dick Ackerman of Tustin.

Democrats said they want the stations owned by the public, not Shell, BP or other companies who have expressed interest in building stations.

"I'm willing to make the public investment, but not so Chevron can make a profit," said Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg, D-Los Angeles. "It can invest its own money."

EPA's Myers said, "I don't think it has been determined yet who will own the stations."

Environmentalists said they will look to the federal government for more funding.

"Am I disappointed? Yes," said Roland Hwang, vehicles policy director for the Natural Resources Defense Fund in San Francisco. "We do understand there are a lot of competing priorities. But the urgency to cut global warming pollution and reduce our oil dependency is so great that this is a prudent investment."

Governor gets hydrogen plan

By HANH KIM QUACH and JOHN GITTELSON

[Orange County Register, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

SACRAMENTO - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plans to put money into "hydrogen highways" caused a hiccup in the otherwise smooth passage of the new \$117.5 billion state budget Thursday.

Lawmakers raised questions about one spending item— \$6.5 million for leasing 12 hydrogen-powered vehicles for the state fleet, three hydrogen fueling stations and hydrogen technology research — at a time when other programs are being cut.

"Even as an environmentalist, it's really hard to put \$6.5 million into anything when you haven't got any money," said Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg, D-Los Angeles, who ultimately voted for the legislation.

The measure, which was part of a supplemental budget bill, couldn't get the required two-thirds vote, but it passed after lawmakers downgraded it to a majority-vote bill. The change means only that it will take effect Jan. 1 instead of immediately after being signed.

After that, the state budget bill, SB77, also passed easily seven days into the fiscal year. The budget:

- Increases school funding by about \$3 billion but falls \$3 billion short of what was owed to schools under last year's budget deal.

- Spends \$1.3 billion on roads from a fund that has recently been raided to pay for other state services.
- Repays local governments \$1.2 billion one year early for money the state owed them as a result of changes to the vehicle license fee in 2003.
- Raises fees by \$219 million but doesn't raise taxes.

Budget writers also returned to a plan to cut in half – to \$50,000 from \$99,000 – the salaries of members of the California Medical Assistance Commission. Assembly Democrats removed the pay cut from their version of the budget in June, but it was restored in final negotiations. A Register investigation published May 22 showed that the commission met 19 times last year to negotiate Medi-Cal contracts with hospitals and other health-care providers.

The governor took a strong interest in the hydrogen highways proposal during budget negotiations; it was one of the few negotiations in which he personally participated, said Senate Republican Leader Dick Ackerman of Irvine. "It was important to him," he said.

There are about 100 hydrogen vehicles on California roads today. Schwarzenegger's hydrogen highways proposal would increase that number to 2,000 vehicles by 2010. The administration is seeking private money to help build up to 100 fueling stations in the state. Hydrogen-powered vehicles, with virtually no emissions, are the cleanest-running vehicles.

Sen. Debra Bowen, D-Redondo Beach, opposed the proposal because, she said, the technology remains inefficient. The former chairwoman of the Senate Energy Committee said electric-powered hybrid cars would be more energy-efficient and not require the kind of new infrastructure that a hydrogen highway would.

"I'd rather refund \$6.5 million to the California Highway Patrol," Bowen said.

Dan Sperling, director of UC Davis' Institute of Transportation Studies, said in an interview, however, that the state's spending is key.

"One of the principal roles of the state is to create the incentive and motivation for the companies to invest in this technology," Sperling said.

"It indicates the state is interested and committed to pursuing this hydrogen vision and figuring out how to do it right."

Reassessing 'what if' factor at state's nuclear power plants

December tsunami prompts scientists to review all risks

Keay Davidson, Chronicle Science Writer

[San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, July 11, 2005](#)

Six months after the mega-tsunami in the Indian Ocean, fears of a major tsunami on the California coast are spurring scientists to reassess the possible impact on nuclear power plants.

PG&E is planning to spend \$500,000 in a new effort to assess how two worst-case scenarios for tsunamis -- the "apocalyptic model" and the "decades-of-terror model," as the utility's top geoscientist, Lloyd Cluff, calls them -- would affect the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant near San Luis Obispo and the decommissioned Humboldt Bay nuclear plant near Eureka.

The 2,300-megawatt Diablo Canyon plant supplies 10 percent of California's electricity. The small Humboldt Bay plant closed for refueling in 1976 and was never restarted. However, like Diablo Canyon, the Humboldt Bay plant still has large amounts of highly radioactive, used nuclear fuel in a storage pool.

"We will model this with the best tsunami models that exist to decide whether we need to do any more (upgrading) with these two facilities" to guard them against tsunamis, Cluff told the state Seismic Safety Commission at its June 23 meeting in San Francisco.

A third nuclear plant, San Onofre, is north of San Diego and is operated by Southern California Edison. Officials there said they are confident the plant is safe from tsunamis. Unlike PG&E, they plan no reassessment of their tsunami risks.

Ever since the dawn of commercial atomic power a half-century ago, utilities have repeatedly faced a challenge: to convince federal regulators that nuclear plants could withstand Mother Nature's assaults.

Plant designers and operators had to imagine how the plant reactors and their spent fuel would withstand disasters ranging from hurricanes to tornadoes to quakes and airplane crashes. The key goal is to keep the highly radioactive nuclear fuel inside the reactor and storage pool, rather than let it escape into the environment.

PG&E decided to shut Humboldt Bay after being convinced that during a major quake, the pool's spent fuel rods would fragment and fall to the bottom of the pool. At best, the result would be a major mess for the utility to clean up. At worst, some anti-nuclear activists claimed, water would drain from the pool and the rods would catch fire, unleashing radioactive poisons into the atmosphere.

In May, Cluff and fellow scientists visited Sumatra to investigate how utilities there weathered the waves. Cluff, who is also former chair of the Seismic Safety Commission, told The Chronicle his initial impression is that PG&E's nuclear plants would withstand even a horrific tsunami.

He is reassured by the performance of a cement plant in Sumatra that survived the tsunami. The Diablo Canyon plant is at least 100 times as tsunami-resistant as the cement plant, while Humboldt Bay is at least 10 times as resistant, he estimated.

Still, "we're doing this (reassessment of tsunami risks) just to make sure," Cluff said.

The actual computer modeling will be done under contract to PG&E by Paul Somerville of URS Corp. in Pasadena. Other institutions assisting PG&E with the study are the U.S. Geological Survey and the Tokyo Earthquake Research Institute in Tokyo.

The December tsunami has spurred international concern among nuclear plant operators on coastlines, because during the catastrophe, a high wave hit the Madras Atomic Power Station at Kalpakkam, India. The plant was safely shut down and suffered no damage. That event unnerved the International Atomic Energy Agency, which plans to hold a scientific workshop in August on flooding hazards to nuclear plants.

In the Sumatran tsunami in December, the highest waves were "more than 30 meters (98 feet) high," according to the U.S. Geological Survey. However, Cluff's team found that right next to the Sumatran cement plant, the waves were as high as 38.9 meters or 128 feet.

The Sumatra tsunami offers scientists a wealth of new information about how tsunami waves propagate through oceans and down coastlines. To date, the physics of tsunami waves have remained somewhat mysterious, which has made it difficult to forecast their potential hazards.

For example, in April 1992, scientists were surprised when a quake near the California coast caused a small tsunami that included unusually high, slow-moving edge waves. Paradoxically, these waves were twice as high at Crescent City as they were at a point only one-third the distance from the epicenter.

Their slow rate of travel also raised the possibility of an oceanic version of a sneak attack. In future quakes, edge waves "might arrive unexpectedly at coastal communities several hours after the initial tsunami waves have subsided," researchers at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other institutions said in a 1995 study.

Cluff said his study will include an analysis of the possibility of tsunami edge waves on the California coast: "It's a phenomenon that is not well understood," he said.

The tsunami study comes as PG&E is preparing to move the two plants' spent nuclear fuel rods out of their cooling ponds and into dry cask storage containers, which are thought to be safer.

At Diablo Canyon, the nuclear plant is 85 feet above sea level. The dry casks will be placed uphill at a site 320 feet above sea level, possibly by 2007.

In a pre-Sumatra tsunami study, Cluff's team estimated that in a worst- case scenario, the waves at Diablo Canyon due to a storm, tsunami or other event might rise as high as 36 feet above sea level. The new study will determine whether that estimate remains valid.

At Humboldt Bay, which is about 30 miles north of the southern end of the Cascadia subduction zone at Cape Mendocino, a particularly active seismic area, the nuclear plant is 12 feet above sea level. The dry casks will be moved to an above-ground site nearby that is 44 feet above sea level.

In a pre-Sumatra tsunami study, Cluff's team estimated that in a worst- case scenario, the waves at Humboldt Bay might rise as high as 42 feet above sea level. Again, the new study will reassess the validity of that estimate.

Possibly by 2008, the fuel in dry casks at Humboldt Bay will be encased in a buried bunker, so that it could survive even a blow from a tsunami wave that threw a boat at it. The bunker's steel-reinforced concrete walls will be 3 feet thick.

At the June 23 meeting of the Seismic Safety Commission, Cluff outlined two worst-case scenarios for future tsunamis in California. The extreme-worst case, or "apocalyptic model," assumes a magnitude-9 quake involving a simultaneous rupture of the Cascadia subduction zone and the adjacent Little Salmon Fault in the Pacific Northwest. Experts believe such an event could trigger a massive quake akin to the 1700 temblor that unleashed tsunami waves down the coast and across the Pacific.

"This earthquake on Cascadia is, from some people's view, overdue, or is soon to come," Cluff said. "It will be big -- and it could be as big as the Sumatra earthquake."

How soon might it strike? "The average recurrence, depending on how you play the numbers game, is from 250 to 800 years, and the long-term average is about 300 years -- and it's been over 300 years," Cluff said. "So we know we're getting close to a big earthquake in the Pacific Northwest."

Cluff showed the Seismic Safety Commission a photo of how high the tsunami could rise at the Humboldt plant, based on a pre-Sumatra estimate of 42 feet. He noted that officials at Humboldt Bay previously have speculated about the possibility of putting a Zodiac-type inflatable boat atop the reactor plant, just in case employees need to escape during a tsunami.

Cluff's team is also investigating a second, less extreme scenario, which he called the "decades of terror model." That scenario assumes the possibility of multiple, less extreme quakes that occur over a few decades, each of which might trigger a tsunami.

In 2000, the USGS gave Cluff the John Wesley Powell Award, the USGS's highest award for achievement by a private citizen. He has run PG&E's geosciences department since 1985 and is director of its Earthquake Risk Management Program.

As for San Onofre, Southern California Edison spokesman Ray Golden said officials there are confident that the plant is safe. Golden said that in previous studies, officials concluded the worst that could happen was a 16- foot wave generated by a quake on the Newport-Inglewood Fault that runs 5 miles offshore from the plant. The plant is 30 feet above sea level.

Carpet magic: fuel source

By Greg Bluestein, Associated Press
[in the Los Angeles Daily News, Saturday, July 09, 2005](#)

DALTON, Ga. -- Here in the "Carpet Capital of the World," the vast manufacturing plants that supply almost half the nation's carpet also pump out reams of wasted scraps that eventually wind up in landfills.

Next month, the world's largest carpet maker plans to do something about the problem, opening a one-of-a-kind power plant that will be fueled by the 16,000 tons of overruns, rejects and remnants it turns out every year.

Shaw Industries Inc. hopes the \$10 million plant, which will power one of its main factories, can help the company save the \$2.5 million a year that would have gone to buy fuel oil.

If the project proves successful, its designers expect it will reverberate throughout the industry and particularly this northwest Georgia town, where the rolling hills are dotted with carpet factories, warehouses and discount outlets.

"Everybody is watching, and we've been looking for years to find a way to convert waste carpet that makes sense," said Howard Elder, research director for competitor J & J Industries.

But Elder quickly added that others will only follow suit if the alternative energy makes economic sense. "I wouldn't think the minute it comes on and appears successful it will proliferate in tens."

The plant's engineers say the process is environmentally sound, emitting roughly the same amount of pollution as natural gas. In addition to carpet scraps, the plant will burn the 6,000 tons of sawdust the company produces every year from the manufacture of wood flooring.

The Carpet and Rug Institute says 4.7 billion pounds of carpet is dumped in U.S. landfills each year, filling up almost 1 percent of the country's total landfill space.

To the man who helped persuade his company to embrace the idea, it all makes sense -- especially in light of rising oil costs.

"Why pay someone to dig it out of the ground and pay someone else to put it in the landfill?" asked Gary Nichols, Shaw's corporate energy manager, noting that most carpet is made from plastics and other oil products.

Sure, changing waste carpet into energy might seem like a shoo-in for the carpet industry. A pound of carpet has roughly the same energy potential as a pound of coal, Nichols said.

But years of failed attempts and bad news in this close-knit carpet town have long discouraged industry leaders from taking the next step. Since carpet is made from plastic materials, it often melted, ruining some conversion attempts. Other endeavors failed when the process proved too toxic to meet air pollution standards. Word that a carpet-incinerating boiler exploded in nearby Cartersville years ago didn't help matters.

Yet as energy costs rose, the dusty premise that waste carpet could be used to fuel production suddenly became more viable, and Nichols pleaded for years with the company's hierarchy to take another look at converting waste carpet into energy.

The result: Shaw Industries joined with engineers from Siemens Building Technology to design a plant they think perfects the once-faulty conversion process.

Now a shiny, high-tech plant stands in contrast behind the old factory it helps power -- a gray, sprawling building that once made parachutes for WWII paratroopers.

When the power plant goes on line later this summer, truckloads of carpet will be stacked three stories high in a cavernous warehouse, waiting to be sent through an imposing shredder. The remnants will then be shipped to the gassifier, which is much like an oven and converts the scraps into a synthetic gas. The gas is then pushed through two pollution-controlling processes before it's funneled to the factory, where it can be burned much like natural gas to help create 2 million yards of new carpet each year.

Shaw, a privately held subsidiary of billionaire investor Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc., has 30,000 employees and recorded annual sales of \$4.66 billion in 2003, the most recent revenue data available.

"This process has very far-reaching ramifications," said Clark Wiedetz, a Siemens business development manager. "It's the first of its kind, and the interest even during the last 15 months has been incredible."

Most of that interest has come from Shaw's competitors, who regularly ask about the project, Nichols said. "Right now, everybody's skeptical."

To the carpet industry, the new plant is a "win-win situation," said Bob Peoples, executive director of the environmental group Carpet America Recovery Effort and an environmental sustainability expert. "This is a major step forward. This is one potential solution to the landfill problem we face."

If successful, the technology's biggest proponents look to be landfill operators.

"Everybody supports it," said Harvey Levitt, operations manager for the city of Dalton's solid waste authority.

"I just hope it works."

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, July 11, 2005:](#)

Air quality big concern

Are the people living in Kern County expected to wear an oxygen mask?

A recent article in The Californian stated that Kern County is considering approval for 19 dairies to move here with more than 82,000 cows.

Do members of the Board of Supervisors realize that Kern County is surrounded by mountains and the flow of air is confined in the valley.

The air pollution can be seen on Highway 58 as you come to Bakersfield from Tehachapi. It is a brown haze over the valley.

We have two major freeways that have thousands of trucks and automobiles that travel these freeways daily and contribute to the bad air in the valley.

Bakersfield's population has exploded by thousands, putting more cars on the road.

What will the air quality be with thousands of more cattle in the area?

■ PAUL KNIGHT, Bakersfield

[Stockton Record, Editorial, Friday, July 8, 2005](#)

Is bad-air data a bunch of bull?

The San Joaquin Valley's air is some of the dirtiest in the world.

Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, isn't exactly gassed about the notion cows, not cars, are primarily at fault.

Cardoza objects to a new San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District report claiming dairy-farm gas, not gas-powered vehicles, is the No. 1 contributor to toxic air between Lodi and Bakersfield.

It's no wonder Cardoza, frustrated by the scientific shortcomings of government regulators, is ready to become a maverick Democrat and support revision of federal environmental regulations.

"Anyone who tells you California dairies are producing more harmful emissions than cars and trucks is misinformed," Cardoza told The Record.

While a member of the California Assembly, the second-term Congressman wrote Smog Check II, legislation designed to equalize responsibility for the Valley's bad air.

Cardoza still is trying to be impartial. Blaming dairy farmers -- a \$325 million industry in San Joaquin County -- doesn't pass his fairness test.

He takes particular exception to a 12-member Dairy Permitting Advisory Group's report on organic gases released during dairy operations. It recommends a "dairy-emission factor" of 20.6 pounds per cow per year, increasing a limit of 12.8 pounds.

These numbers are significant because air board officials could demand expensive on-site modifications from dairy farmers.

At present, 430 dairy farmers must apply for air-quality permits -- not unlike industrial facilities -- because they're considered major polluters.

Cardoza said previous studies directly contradict these recent findings.

The bovine effect is scheduled to be aired out at 1:30 p.m. Monday at San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District offices in Fresno with a live television linkup to Modesto.

Given the Valley's overall population growth -- and the dramatic increases in the volume of Bay Area commuters -- it's hard to believe cows cause more pollution than motor vehicles.

At Monday's meeting, current data should be balanced with previous studies -- making sure auto emissions are measured fairly -- and common sources of information should be established.

If Cardoza and dairy farmers think air-district data is a bunch of bull or cow, how can they be expected to go along with proposed remedies?

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, July 10, 2005:](#)

Solar shakedown

Unions threaten much-needed energy bill with wage demands.

If ever there were a time for California to embrace solar power, it's the summer of 2005. Oil tops \$60 a barrel. The power grid is fragile. Californians are short of sustainable electricity, yet they have barely tapped the plentiful rays of the sun.

Solar's future is bright, but in the bowels of the Legislature, business remains murky. There, labor unions are demanding that private contractors pay "prevailing wages" to workers who install solar panels as part of SB 1, the governor's legislation to help provide solar energy to 1 million homes.

Industry unions have won important victories for their members in recent years, but in this case, they are going too far.

The prevailing wage demand could kill SB 1. All state construction projects must now pay prevailing wages. Now the unions want those wages -- effectively union wages -- to apply to any large-scale development that receives a state subsidy. It's a costly precedent, one that would destroy the basic economics of the governor's plan.

If they were forced to pay prevailing wages, solar industry leaders say it would drive up the total cost of a photovoltaic system by 15% to 40%. Homeowners would be less likely to opt for solar panels. California citizens, including union households, would be deprived of a technology that could create 3,000 megawatts of clean power by 2018. As everyone in the energy business knows, solar already struggles to compete. Solar doesn't pollute like coal-powered plants or pose the terrorist concerns that liquefied natural gas terminals do. It doesn't create long-lived waste from nuclear reactors or kill birds as wind turbines do.

Yet these factors are often ignored when businesses and governments evaluate the higher costs of solar. Union leaders threaten to tip the balance against this technology by insisting on prevailing wages. And they are pressing their demands just as a compromise is within reach.

Under the governor's plan, large-scale developers would be required to offer solar as an option to new homebuyers, just as they offer tile floors and granite countertops. A typical two-kilowatt system would cost about \$15,000. The state would offset that investment with a \$5,000 rebate, financed through surcharges on electric bills, plus a \$1,000 tax credit.

In recent months, SB 1 authors Sen. Kevin Murray, D-Los Angeles, and John Campbell, R-Costa Mesa, have worked to fix numerous concerns about the bill. To win over consumer groups, they recently agreed to place a \$2.5 million cap on the total subsidy, ensuring that ratepayers are protected. To appease unions, proponents agreed to let only contractors with the highest-trained electricians install solar systems, instead of electricians with licenses specifically for solar.

These were major concessions, but apparently not enough for the unions. They are holding out for prevailing wages, which is what derailed SB 1 last year.

The unions should do what's right for all Californians. If they don't, a historic opportunity for clean energy will be lost.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, July 10, 2005:](#) **George, Urata named to board**

Clean air activist Linda Urata and retired Cal State Bakersfield administrator Jim George have been named community members of The Californian's editorial board. They will serve six-month terms. Urata and George replace Bakersfield attorney Jose Benavides and community activist Michelle Beck on the board.

A native of Pennsylvania, George received his bachelor of arts degree in history from Westminster College in 1965 and his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin in 1970.

In 1970, he moved to California, where he joined the Cal State Bakersfield faculty as an assistant history professor. He held various academic and administrative posts, retiring this year as the university's provost and vice president for academic affairs. He remains on the faculty to teach a limited number of courses.

He and his wife, Bobbie, who retired after 28 years as a counselor at Cal State Bakersfield, have four grown children Shelly Johnson, a Bakersfield teacher; Christy Cates, a member of the University of California, Irvine, staff; Jason George, a dean at Foothill High School; and Gretchen George of San Francisco, who is pursuing an advanced degree in nutrition. The Georges also have four grandchildren.

Jim George also has been involved in community activities including membership in the West Rotary Club of Bakersfield, Vision 2020, Stockdale Country Club and Salvation Army advisory council.

Urata grew up in the Marin County community of Corte Madera. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in history and math.

She and her husband, Kirk, moved to Bakersfield, where he opened the TJ Maxx store. He now teaches math and science at East High School.

Urata has been involved in Project Clean Air since 1992. She is the coordinator for the San Joaquin Valley Clean Cities Coalition.

The Uratas have three daughters -- Grace, a junior at West High School; Sarah, a freshman at West High School and Claire, a second grader at Charles H. Castle School.

The addition of community board members to the editorial board began in 1988 with the appointment of former City Councilman Art Rockoff and now retired Bakersfield College professor Helen Gordon.

In addition to Rockoff, Gordon, Benavides and Beck, former community board members have included: Suellen Anderson, Oscar Anthony, Wilhelmina Anthony, Victoria Araujo, Manuel Arriola, Bill Baker, Sheryl Barbich, Teri Bjorn, Jade Bolton, Martin Castro, Morgan Clayton, Glenn Cole, John Collins, Sheryl Davenport, Gloria Delgado, Lynn Edwards, Dr. Hans Einstein, Jennifer Floyd, Ray Geigle, Lou Gomez, Melissa Grahek, Jeff Green, Susan C. Hersberger, Joan Herman, Janis Jones, Lewis Jones, Ethel Landers, Pauline Larwood, Tom Larwood, Sue Luft, Aliza McCracken, Magna Menendez, Michael Miller, Chester Moland, Rich O'Neil, Bob Ortiz, Bill Perry, Cynthia Pollard, Bob Price, John Pryor, Susan Reep, Larry Robinson, Cornelio Rodriguez, Gina Rodriguez, Vincent Rojas Jr., Steve Ruggenberg, Glenda Rust, Alvin Sandrini, L. Dee Slade, Geri Spencer, Richard Stiern, Terrie Stoller, Esther Torres, Sheryl Santos, Janice Smith, Dick Taylor, Chuck Wall, Daphne Washington, Wendy Wayne and Bill L. Williams.

Adding community board members to six-month terms on the editorial board was started in an effort to help keep The Californian in touch with the various communities within the community of readers the newspaper serves.

Other editorial board members include Ginger Moorhouse, publisher and chairman of the board; Richard Beene, president and chief executive officer; Executive Editor Mike Jenner; Editorial Page Editor Dianne Hardisty; Deputy Editorial Page Editor Chris Bagdikian; Associate Editor Ed King; and editorial writer Tracey Cowenhoven. Californian executives serve rotating terms on the board.