

In The News 06-01-07

[Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, June 1, 2007:](#)

A Valley voice

A Fresno County supervisor, Judy Case, joins state air board.

Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case has joined the California Air Resources Board, and that's good news for the Valley. Case was appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on May 26. She had sought the position energetically, and now will take up her seat -- pending state Senate approval -- as the board's representative from the Valley air district.

Case will be one of only two members from the Valley on the state board, along with Dorene D'Adamo, a Modesto lawyer who is also a senior policy adviser to Rep. Dennis Cardoza. The 11-member board is dominated -- surprise, surprise -- by members from the Bay Area and Southern California, despite the fact that the Valley has one of the worst air pollution problems in the nation.

Case will also bring her expertise as a nurse to the state board. That's useful, since bad air costs the Valley more than \$3 billion each year in additional health costs.

CARB has powers beyond those of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, of which Case is also a member. The Valley district has no authority to regulate emissions from so-called "mobile sources," which form more than half of the Valley's air pollution. That power rests with the state and the federal government, which are often distracted by other demands or indifferent to the needs of the Valley.

We have differed with Case in many instances during her tenure on the Valley air district board, and that may continue. But our differences on some specific issues don't diminish our belief that her appointment to the state air board will be good for the Valley. We need all the help we can get as we fight to clean up our air.

Both sides oppose rules

Pesticide proposals draw criticism from farmworkers, growers.

By Sarah Jimenez / The Fresno Bee

Friday, June 1, 2007

TULARE -- In an effort to prevent pesticide drift incidents, state regulators are proposing new permit conditions on two fumigants known to cause eye and respiratory irritation.

But farmers, farmworkers and pesticide reform activists said those recommendations aren't the answer during a Wednesday night workshop in Tulare.

Farmers said they comply with current standards and are doing their best to prevent drifts.

They said the proposed conditions would make treating their crops difficult.

Farmworkers and activists questioned how the permit conditions would be enforced because they don't believe current standards are followed. Some called for a ban on fumigants.

The workshop -- hosted by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation -- was one of two held Wednesday in Tulare to gather public comment from people across the state.

The measures would add further controls on the use of metam-sodium and metam-potassium, used on tomatoes and a variety of vegetable crops, including carrots, potatoes and peppers.

The pesticides -- used before crops are planted -- break down into a volatile gas that can cause eye and respiratory irritation, according to the state Department of Pesticide Regulation.

The fumigants are applied through irrigation systems, injection in the soil or spraying the surface.

A permit from a county agricultural commissioner is required.

State pesticide regulators are proposing eight measures, including acreage treatment limitations, buffer zones for sensitive areas and posting warning signs near adjoining agricultural property.

Farmers at the evening workshop said they already adhere to buffer-zone requirements. They also said limiting how many acres could be fumigated at one time, and waiting periods between applications, would prolong the process.

Farmworkers and activists also questioned the acreage application, saying it would mean several uses of fumigants on the same property. They said they supported posting warning signs. They asked that the signs be in big print and in Spanish and English.

About 70 people gathered at the Spanish-English workshop at the Tulare County Agricultural Building.

Among those was Irma Arrollo, a Lindsay resident and president of community group El Quinto Sol de America, who said she was frustrated current regulations weren't followed by some farmers.

Armando Galvan, farm manager for Five Points Ranch in Fresno County, said fumigant use is already closely monitored. He and other farmers questioned whether the conditions would duplicate procedures already in place.

He said he and other farmers are concerned for their employees and neighbors and they work to protect communities.

Lupe Martinez, with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said he commends farmers who follow rules but said some don't comply.

"We can have the most restricted permits and paperwork filed," he said. "But what really counts is what's done in the field."

Public comments on the measures will be taken until June 30-- a first for the state department.

In the past, recommendations were given to county agricultural commissioners without a formal public comment process, which isn't required.

Comments, including those from the workshop, will be considered before the state department puts permit conditions into effect this fall. Formal statewide regulations are expected next year.

State to tackle discord over open-burning law

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 1, 2007

State air officials will weigh in on a disagreement between Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and valley air regulators over a new air rule meant to end open burning in agriculture fields.

Florez and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District have gone back and forth for the past two weeks over the strength of the rule, which resulted from a series of air quality bills Florez got passed in 2003.

The bills were the first to enforce air restrictions on agriculture, an industry largely excluded from such regulation until that point.

Florez contends the district's rule is too friendly to the ag industry because it includes loopholes that allow orchard burning to continue in a majority of cases. He also criticized the air district for ignoring a stipulation in the law that would require state approval before creating any exemptions for burning.

"I think it's a skepticism we have with the (district), which has a propensity to be industry friendly and not kid friendly," Florez said of his desire to have the state review the rule.

Air district officials said they stand by the regulation and feel confident it will withstand scrutiny by state officials. However, the district has agreed not to issue permits for burning until the state signs off on the regulation.

The rule, adopted in mid-May, prohibits burning trees removed from orchards and requires farmers to compost the trees or send them to a biomass facility. Exemptions until 2010 were made for certain crops and for all orchards less than 20 acres in size because no alternative disposal method exists or the alternatives were cost-prohibitive, said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director.

Florez said an analysis by his staff showed that the exemptions would allow a majority of burning to continue. But Sadredin said their calculations were inaccurate. According to Sadredin, burning would continue in only a small percentage of cases.

"We're confident with the work we've done," Sadredin said.

A subcommittee of the California Air Resources Board is expected to review the rule in the next three weeks.

Residents speak on challenges, future of city

By James Burger, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 1, 2007

Roads, gangs and bad air bubbled up as Bakersfield's most troubling challenges Thursday night in a union hall in southwest Bakersfield.

Heidi Pliska, a mother of two and student at Cal State Bakersfield, came out to the community brainstorming session not expecting to say much.

She was there for her child, adolescents and family studies class.

"I thought that I was going to be in the background," she said.

But she found herself speaking up.

"I live in the Alta Vista area," she said. "So much of our money is being put into rapid growth. There's not enough attention to older neighborhoods."

Irene Cook, Pliska's professor, said she wanted her students to attend the event because they are the future leaders of Bakersfield.

Her assignment to them -- participate.

"I'm hoping they'll see that their input can make a difference," Cook said.

Changing the future of Bakersfield is what the Thursday meeting was all about.

People in the room couldn't magically prevent gang violence, build new freeways or clean the air just by giving their opinion.

City's futures are ruled by complicated plans.

But Thursday was about letting a group of moms, students, business leaders and regular joes-- 64 strong -- tell city and county planners how they want the Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan changed to make the city better.

It was the last in a series of Vision 2020-guided community workshops that collected input on the bedrock local law that governs how Bakersfield grows.

Women outnumbered men by about two to one.

Donna Carpenter, 44, who runs a civil engineering firm, had some theories on why. Women tend to be nurturers and caretakers, she said. And they're often more involved in their communities.

They believe changes can be made.

"A lot of men I talked to (about the meeting) just go, 'Oh, that's all decided,'" Carpenter said.

Participants at the meeting were broken into five groups and they brain-stormed good things about Bakersfield, the challenges the city faces and some solutions that could be tried.

The groups generally came to the same conclusions on Bakersfield's weaknesses or challenges. Air pollution, traffic, and gangs and drugs topped most lists.

Kern County Planning Director Ted James said input from average folks is vital to crafting Bakersfield's future.

"People out there that live in this environment are the ones who are perceptive about their community," he said.

Their thoughts and concerns will be used to craft a picture of Bakersfield that will become the starting point for the yearlong process of rethinking Bakersfield's future.

Pliska said she was surprised to find she was enjoying herself -- and surprised to find that people agreed with her.

"They really made it easy to get involved," she said.

-- Californian staff writer James Geluso contributed to this report.

State approves dairy gas deal

Bakersfield company will trap methane from manure

By Ryan Schuster, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 1, 2007

A Bakersfield-based company has become the first in state history to receive California Public Utilities Commission approval for large-scale conversion of dairy waste into natural gas.

Bakersfield-based BioEnergy Solutions received PUC approval a week ago for a 10-year agreement it signed with Pacific Gas & Electric Co. late last year to sell the utility natural gas collected from cow manure at dairies.

The company plans to cover existing manure holding areas at dairies to trap methane gas created when cow manure breaks down. Carbon dioxide is to be removed from the gas and pressurized and transported to PG&E through natural gas pipelines.

"This is really a landmark deal," said David Albers, founder and president of BioEnergy Solutions. "We are excited to be at the forefront."

Construction on the company's first biogas system on third-generation dairyman Albers' Vintage Dairy in Fresno County is expected to start in the next couple of weeks. Albers said he expects gas to be in the pipeline by the end of the year.

Albers said he is in discussions to add other locations, some in Kern County, and expects to have the system installed at as many as 50 farms within two years.

Albers, who is also a Bakersfield attorney, said he expects to receive approval to modify existing permits on his family farm from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board -- which he characterized as the only remaining roadblocks to the project.

BioEnergy Solutions, a subsidiary of American Dairy Parks LLC, claims its system can cut a dairy's methane emissions by as much as 70 percent.

Dave Warner, director of permit services in the Fresno office of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said earlier this year that BioEnergy Solutions' system would be better for the environment than digesters used to help dairies create their own power. Warner said that the technology would reduce small amounts of ozone-harming pollution and would control the escape of greenhouse gases.

Earlier this year Warner said that the system may help dairies come into compliance with a rule adopted a year ago by the air control district, regulating confined animal facilities at dairies with more than 1,000 cows.

The agreement may also help PG&E meet a state requirement to have 20 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2010.

"We are not only bringing clean energy to our customers but we are also reducing the amount of methane from these communities, which is being reused," said PG&E environmental communications manager Keely Wachs. "We are also providing a new source of revenue for farmers. We think there are huge benefits to California."

Wachs said PG&E is also working with another company seeking PUC approval for a similar plan to convert dairy waste.

"It really makes sense because it comes from dairy waste," Susan Carothers, a PUC spokeswoman, said of the BioEnergy Solutions approval. "We should see more companies starting up in the Central Valley because of all the dairies there."

Dairy buffer zone takes slower track

By Jake Henshaw, Sacramento Bureau
Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, June 1, 2007

SACRAMENTO - A bill intended to create a buffer zone around Allensworth State Historic Park moved onto a slower track Thursday in the Assembly.

Assembly Bill 576 by Assemblywoman Wilmer Amina Carter, D-Rialto, would create a 2.5-mile protective zone around the park, which backers said would prevent possible odors, water contamination and other negative effects from a proposed dairy in the area.

Carter amended her bill to reduce the number of votes required for passage from two-thirds to a majority.

Proponents say the upshot of the change is that the bill wouldn't take effect until Jan. 1 if it is passed and signed into law. The previous version of the measure would have taken effect immediately upon enactment. Carter said she amended the bill because she wasn't certain the original would garner two-thirds of the 80-member Assembly.

"I was not sure and I'd rather get the bill passed than to be holding it off," she said. "This is a very important bill and it deserves immediate attention."

Carter added that she didn't expect the amendment to open the way for the dairies, which have been approved by the county, to get into operation before the bill takes effect.

"There are several lawsuits pending going on a separate track," Carter said.

She also said that discussions are still under way on some sort of possible settlement of differences over the future of the park and dairies.

"I think I'm going to be successful" in preventing the dairies from operating near the park, she said.

Dairy project supporters, including local county and business representatives, said Carter's bill threatens local control.

Proposal to clean SoCal air would limit wood-burning fireplaces

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Bakersfield Californian and other papers, Friday, June 1, 2007

LOS ANGELES- A cozy fire can make for a romantic evening. It can also make you sick, air quality officials say.

So to help reduce harmful pollution and meet federal emissions standards, air quality regulators have proposed a ban on wood-burning fireplaces in all new homes in cities across Southern California. They also seek to ban wood-fueled blazes in all fireplaces on winter days when pollution spikes.

The fireplace rules are part of a plan that also would seek to reduce soot from diesel engines and ozone smog. The South Coast Air Quality Management District's board is expected to vote on the proposal Friday.

"This plan addresses new federal health standards with a very aggressive and fasttracked pollution control program," said AQMD Executive Officer Barry Wallerstein. "We must aim high to tackle one of the most serious public health threats in our region."

Air district staffers say a daily reduction of 192 tons of nitrogen oxides, an ingredient in harmful particulate pollution, is needed across the region to meet the Clean Air Act requirements, and that 7 tons of that could come from restrictions on fireplaces.

Regulators say unsafe levels of fine particulate pollution are responsible for 5,400 premature deaths and 2,400 hospitalizations a year in Southern California-leaving no target, including fireplaces, too small.

But critics, including homebuilders and real estate agents, say the regulations could hurt sales.

"A fireplace-especially a beautiful fireplace, and what people normally mean by that is a wood-burning fireplace-it's the thing people like to have" when they buy a home, said real estate agent Barbara Burner, who works for Century 21 in Thousand Oaks.

Jane Carney, a Riverside attorney and AQMD board member, said there aren't any easy rules left to help reduce fine particulate air pollution.

There are "pretty obvious adverse impacts of wood smoke on pollution. If you stand close to a wood fire and breathe, you can feel it in your throat and lungs," she said.

She noted alternatives are available, including natural gas logs.

Air pollution regulations on fireplaces have been adopted in an estimated 50 countries, air districts of cities across the West, John Crouch of the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association, told the Los Angeles Times.

There are an estimated 1.9 million homes with fireplaces in Southern California out of about 5 million total housing units, regulators said. The proposed ban would affect all new homes in Los Angeles, Orange and portions of Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Environmentalist Tim Carmichael, who heads the Coalition for Clean Air, said it's important to take every step to clean the air, but it would be difficult to enforce any sort of ban.

"Could you really get people to stop doing this?" he said.

The air pollution plan also includes measures aimed at reducing paint thinner emissions and gas station and refinery leaks. Truck-only lanes on the 710 and 15 freeways and electric rail lines from Los Angeles' Westside to Ontario airport and from the ports to Inland Empire warehouses also have been proposed.

If the overall plan is approved, another vote is scheduled for September to finalize the fireplace regulation.

Trucking group opposes plan limiting SoCal port access

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, June 1, 2007

LONG BEACH, Calif.- Members of a trade group representing harbor-area trucking companies said they oppose regulations that would allow only newer, lower-emission rigs access to marine terminals.

Members of the California Trucking Association said Wednesday that the plan violates federal interstate commerce laws and undermines trucking deregulation rules established in 1980.

"The ports do not have the authority under federal and state law to come into an industry and completely change the business model," association member Patty Senecal said. "It's an attempt at the city level to re-regulate interstate trucking and interstate trade."

The association may sue if the plan is implemented this summer, but members prefer to reach a compromise with regulators, Senecal said.

Port authorities defended the proposal, which is supported by environmental and labor organizations.

Port of Long Beach operations chief J. Christopher Lytle said the actions are needed to help improve air quality in the nation's smoggiest region.

"What we've put forward is a good plan," he said. "It's aggressive, but it's designed to clean up trucks and improve the air."

Free rides

Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Thursday, May 31, 2007

The ACE train will offer four one-way rides between now and July to cut down air pollution and lure new riders. By Jennifer Wadsworth

Press file photo - The Altamont Commuter Express is one of several transit entities that will promote use of public transportation on "spare the air" days by giving out free one-way rides on select days.

Commuters can ride Altamont Commuter Express free one way on four days from June through the end of summer.

The exact dates for these "spare the air" days will remain unannounced until the day before, depending on weather conditions and air quality.

The Bay Area Air District keeps an eye out for unhealthy smog levels, and when conditions are right, it announces the next spare the air day.

Public transit districts follow suit by giving out free tickets. Free passes will only be offered before 1 p.m. on designated days.

"The program is really for people who want to try public transit for the first time," said ACE spokesman Thomas Reeves.

Ridership increases only slightly on spare the air days, according to Reeves, but there is a significant number of people who want to try public transportation and take advantage of the free ride.

Last year's spare the air incentives helped nearly 10 percent of the Bay Area's drivers cut down on at least one car trip.

BART, Caltrain and Bay Area ferries will also offer free rides those days.

The air district subsidizes participating transit systems depending on the increase in passengers.

The \$8.5 million budget for the free-ride days, which started four years ago, is disbursed among 29 transit operators in the Bay Area and Central Valley region. About \$1 million comes from the air district's budget, and the other \$7.5 million from federal money set aside to reduce pollution.

"The purpose of this is to cut down on driving," said Bay Area Air District spokesperson Karen Schkolnick.

Schwarzenegger signs greenhouse gas deal with British Columbia

By Jeremy Hainsworth, The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 1, 2007

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, as Schwarzenegger wrapped up a three-day visit to Canada.

The pact, known as the Pacific Coast Collaborative to Protect Our Shared Climate and Oceans, commits the two jurisdictions to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work on the development and implementation of clean technologies, but is not legally binding.

The deal signed Thursday commits both areas to work together to protect the waters off the Pacific coast of North America, a significant portion of which are bordered by the state and province.

A major part of the agreement is the commitment to build a so-called hydrogen highway between British Columbia and Baja, Calif. to foster the use of zero-emission vehicles. The collaboration, which also includes Oregon and Washington, is a previously agreed-to plan to build fueling stations along the highway, so that by 2010 a hydrogen-powered vehicle could travel that route.

Schwarzenegger praised President Bush's proposal Thursday urging 15 major nations to agree by the end of next year on a global target for reducing greenhouse gases.

"That means they are acknowledging the global warming," Schwarzenegger said at a news conference. "I think that is a really great step forward in the right direction."

Schwarzenegger earlier criticized the American and Canadian federal governments that have been hesitant to adopt the 1997 Kyoto Protocol requiring industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2012.

Canada was a signatory to the deal, but announced in April that it would not meet its Kyoto commitments and released a new plan to reduce greenhouse gases.

"We have to show leadership," he said. "If we are waiting for them to do the same thing, it would never happen."

The governor's comments came as Bush sought to blunt international criticism of the U.S. record on climate change.

Bush called for a series of meetings to begin this fall, bringing together countries identified as major emitters of greenhouse gases that are blamed for global warming. That list would include the United States, China, India and major European countries. After setting a goal, the nations would be free to develop their own strategies to meet the target.

The United States has refused to ratify the landmark Kyoto protocol. Developing countries, including China and India, were exempt from that first round of cuts.

The MOU with British Columbia, similar to one he signed earlier this week with the province of Ontario, is not legally binding and imposes no obligations on either California or B.C.

Because no other state has adopted California's emissions caps, the agreements are largely symbolic, and their effects, if any, are years away.

The Republican governor has also struck deals with several other U.S. states and one in Australia, drawing concern from Democrats in the California legislature who originally crafted California's landmark global warming law. They worry the governor is using the agreements to help shift the emphasis of the law from strict regulation toward an emission trading system favored by businesses that could weaken it.

The agreement signed Thursday also provides for the sharing of information on coastal resources and health including monitoring and management of marine protection areas and synchronization of environmental protection at Pacific ports.

"By working in partnership with California and other coastal jurisdictions, we can continue to lead in sustainable environmental management and improve the quality and impact of oceans research," Campbell said.

Currently, the states of Washington, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and B.C. are partners in the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative. The Canadian province of Manitoba has also expressed interest in signing, Campbell said.

Schwarzenegger has gone on a string of trade missions, including to Mexico, China and Japan. Later this year, he plans to go to India.

Bush proposes long-term global goals on emissions

Initiative stops short of mandatory cuts

Michael A. Fletcher, Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post
In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, June 1, 2007

Washington -- President Bush sought Thursday to take the initiative on global warming talks in which the administration had previously been a reluctant participant, offering to begin negotiations aimed at having the world's most prolific polluters agree on long-term goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The proposal, which Bush introduced in a speech outlining his priorities for the Group of Eight summit in Germany next week, signaled a shift in the administration's oft-criticized approach to combatting global warming while offering what the president called a "new framework" for addressing the issue.

While the president is still not backing a mandatory cap on carbon dioxide emissions, he made clear that he would like the United States to play a major role in shaping global environmental policy after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

"In recent years, science has deepened our understanding of climate change and opened new possibilities for confronting it," Bush said. "The United States takes this issue seriously. The new initiative I am outlining today will contribute to the important dialogue that will take place in Germany next week."

The White House said Bush's proposal had received positive reaction from several European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has called for more prescriptive measures for limiting global warming. Still, environmentalists and their supporters in Congress criticized Bush's proposal as a weak substitute for cutting greenhouse gas emissions through binding rules.

Bush's speech came as several members of the Group of Eight have been pressing -- despite U.S. opposition -- for specific cuts in greenhouse gases as part of the June 6-8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany.

The German proposal calls for limiting the worldwide temperature rise this century to 3.6 degrees and cutting global greenhouse gas emissions to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, both of which the administration rejects as impractical.

By contrast, Bush is calling for a new set of talks intended to bring a broad group of nations, including China, India, Brazil and members of the European Union, to negotiate an array of goals to cut greenhouse gas emissions after 2012. This new discussion, which would run parallel to the existing U.N. framework that produced the Kyoto Protocol, could include specific reduction goals as well as voluntary measures.

Bush refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which required industrialized nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels by 2012, calling the plan -- which excluded many fast-growing countries, including India and China -- unworkable.

Instead of binding targets, the Bush proposal would call on the 15 nations responsible for 80 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions to set what his top environmental adviser called "aspirational goals" for cutting emissions. Individual countries could meet those targets through a broad portfolio of actions, from increasing gas mileage standards to the deployment of cleaner energy-generating technology.

"Each country will develop its own national strategies on a midterm basis in the next 10 to 20 years on where they want to take their efforts to improve energy security, reduce air pollution, and also reduce greenhouse gases," said Jim Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

While some European leaders appeared impressed with Bush's proposal, it came under heavy fire from key members of Congress.

"It is vitally important for America and this president to re-engage internationally on this issue and agree to targets for reducing heat-trapping pollution," said Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., chairman of the House select committee on global warming. "Instead, all President Bush is willing to do is engage in fruitless discussions until the very end of his administration."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, just back from a climate change fact-finding trip to Greenland and European capitals, said getting nations to set voluntary emissions targets was not enough to reverse warming of the planet.

"Today's announcement fails to respond to the severity of the crisis that most of the rest of the world has long since recognized," said the San Francisco Democrat.

Virtually without exception, environmentalists questioned why Bush had devised a plan that lacked mandatory cuts.

"The president is not offering commitments and he's not asking for commitments, and without them we won't get the job done," said Elliot Diringer, director of international strategies for the Pew Center on Global Climate Change. "The administration has done all it can to squelch discussion of future climate commitments. This could keep them off the table until the end of this administration."

David Doniger, climate policy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said Bush will have no credibility with the countries he wants to bring to the table unless he's committed to specific limits to cap the United States' own contributions to global warming.

"The president is warming up to throw his opening pitch while business, states and the rest of the world are already at the top of the ninth inning," Doniger said. "It is nothing less than embarrassing that three of the world's biggest oil companies are calling for tougher measures than the White House."

Bush offers to take climate lead

The U.S. and other big emitters would set goals under his plan Critics had pressed him to act, and the G-8 meets soon.

By James Gerstenzang and Richard Simon, Times Staff Writers
L.A. Times, Friday, June 1, 2007

WASHINGTON - On the eve of a major international summit, President Bush proposed Thursday that the United States and the other nations that produce most of the gases responsible for global warming initiate a campaign to limit emissions and set long-term goals for reductions.

The president, who is leaving Monday for a weeklong European trip built around the meeting of the Group of 8 industrialized nations, unveiled a proposal to set an international course to fight global warming, calling for an attack based on clean-environment technology, efficient use of fuel and the conservation of forests, which absorb carbon dioxide.

"The United States takes this issue seriously," Bush said.

The president has long been criticized for inaction on what is now widely seen as one of the most critical issues facing the world. He has rejected limits on emissions, which might hurt industries, and the Kyoto Protocol, which calls for emissions to return to 1990 levels by 2012.

Bush's announcement follows his imposition Tuesday of sanctions intended to pressure Sudan to stem the violence in Darfur and his call Wednesday to dramatically increase U.S. spending on HIV/AIDS. Taken together, the actions - in a slow news week with Congress in recess - suggested a burst of administration energy directed at some of the most troublesome international issues.

On Thursday, neither the president nor senior administration officials presented specific goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Such targets would be set in the next 18 months - a period that would run one month past the election to choose his successor.

As he has before, Bush emphasized technological innovation as the solution. "We need to harness the power of technology to help nations meet their growing energy needs while protecting the environment and addressing the challenge of global climate change," he said.

Some of his most persistent critics praised him for taking on the issue. But they also expressed skepticism, saying that mandatory limits on emissions were the only way to turn around the growing release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases blamed for causing Earth's temperature to rise.

"Gathering the world's largest emitters to discuss global warming is a good idea," said David B. Sandalow, a scholar at the nonpartisan Brookings Institution think tank who dealt with environmental issues at the National Security Council and the State Department during the Clinton administration. "However, relying on voluntary targets for a problem as serious as global warming is a bad idea."

Others said Bush was merely responding to the approaching summit. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the host, had pressed to set limits on global warming that would effectively cut emissions to half of 1990 levels by 2050. U.S. representatives objected to the proposal.

Daniel A. Lashof, climate center science director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, "It seems to me that he felt like he needed to say something before going to the G-8 meeting where Germany and other countries are putting a lot of pressure on the U.S. to get with the program in terms of addressing global warming."

Bush's unexpected initiative drew cautious praise from Merkel. Speaking in Berlin, she said, "What is positive is that we can see from the speech that the U.S. president made earlier today that nobody can ignore the question of climate change."

In an interview with Britain's Sky News, British Prime Minister Tony Blair called Bush's proposal a "huge step forward."

"I think the important thing is - for the first time America is saying it wants to be part of a global deal," he said.

Bush's effort is intended to negotiate an agreement that would replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. The U.S. never ratified that agreement and is not bound by it.

The Bush administration and some Democrats have argued that the Kyoto pact would unfairly put heavy restraints on the U.S. economy while letting India, China and other growing but less developed nations build industries on the increased use of highly polluting oil and coal.

The response of India and China, which are not G-8 members but will take part in some sessions, could be crucial to the outcome of the talks. A senior White House official said China was expected to surpass the United States in greenhouse gas emissions perhaps before the end of this year.

China and India "are still very sensitive to ... committing to long-term objectives," said the official, who spoke anonymously because he did not want to upstage Bush. He said that there would be a "very intensive, very high-level" international discussion in the next six months, but that "trying to pull this off in 18 months will be herculean."

White House officials presented Bush's proposal as the start of a campaign to bring together the United States, the European Union, China, India, Brazil, Russia and Japan, which spew the most greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, as well as other nations, with the goal of establishing a framework for tackling global warming as far out as 2050.

At the same time, individual countries would set their own goals for the next 10 or 20 years. Although they might be binding, those goals would not necessarily be enforceable by international bodies, said James L. Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Bush also wants to start talks with various nations' representatives of key industries, including power generation, transportation and construction - each responsible for large amounts of greenhouse gases.

In addition, he called for trade agreements that would reduce tariffs on technology that could help reduce emissions.

The administration's plan is part of a broader attempt to wrestle with a number of issues tied to the environment and energy. In January, the president unveiled a proposal to increase usage of renewable and alternative fuels to reduce use of petroleum products by 20% over 10 years.

He has been under pressure to order higher vehicle gas mileage standards, impose mandatory caps on power plant emissions, and support legislation to require utilities to generate more energy from cleaner sources.

"Enough talk. It's time for action," Sierra Club Executive Director Carl Pope said in a written statement.

Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), chairman of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, said Bush's plan "just rewarms old ideas." He said that "companies, states and the rest of the world are already engaged in robust discussions and taking real action to cut heattrapping emissions."

California's Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, applauded Bush for agreeing to begin such talks. "The most important thing is speed, to do this whole thing as quickly as possible," he said.

Exporters making waves over ports' clean-air plan

A growers' trade group says a proposed fee would hurt the state's global competitiveness.

By Ronald D. White, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Friday, June 1, 2007

Agricultural exporters complained Thursday that the local ports' clean-air plan could harm the national economy - and California growers in particular.

Under the proposal, all 16,000 short-haul trucks that move goods to and from the wharves at the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports would be scrapped or retrofitted starting next year at a cost of \$1.8 billion. Drivers, the majority of whom are owner-operators, would work for companies that bid on port concession contracts with stiff environmental, equipment maintenance and workplace requirements.

But the Washington-based Agriculture Transportation Coalition, representing most of the nation's export growers, said the costs could be devastating.

"The coalition works to assure that transportation does not render U.S. agriculture uncompetitive.

Unfortunately, the proposed Clean Air Action Plan could do just that," the group said in a letter to port officials, harbor commissioners, and the mayors of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The cost of replacing the aging trucks would be funded largely by per-trip fees of \$34 to \$54 assessed on the licensed trucking firms and partly by state bonds and taxpayer money. Another portion of the plan would impose an exporter-paid \$26 fee on every container of goods moved through the ports to help fund rail and highway improvements. Both measures are part of the ports' joint plan to reduce deadly air pollution from all sources by 45% in five years.

But Roger Isom, vice president of associations representing 60 cotton gins and 1,200 cotton growers in the state, said growers wouldn't be able to pass those costs on to consumers.

"Every producer gets paid the same," Isom said. "It's a world price. We are still in the game in California only because we have higher yields, but that gap is shrinking. You add on this and we either aren't going to grow cotton or we will go to ports elsewhere."

Port officials said that they welcomed the coalition's letter and that the group's concerns would be added to their deliberations.

"We are in the process of collecting input on the clean truck program," said Geraldine Knatz, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles. "We appreciate the information provided by the Agriculture Transportation Coalition and this will be responded to, along with all the other comments received, as we continue to work on the plan."

Numerous studies have shown elevated levels of diesel particulates and other harmful air pollutants on docks and in neighborhoods near truck-laden highways.

The coalition said that it understood the need to clean up the air around the nation's ports, but that officials should keep in mind how quickly markets could shift, such as when West Coast ports were shut down for 11 days during a 2002 labor dispute.

"We produce the finest hazelnuts in the world. They come from Oregon," the coalition wrote. "And almonds and pistachios and dried fruit from California. They are the first choice of Japanese confectioners.

"But when the West Coast ports were shut down," the group added, "the Japanese confectioners got all the hazelnuts, almonds, and pistachios they needed from Turkey."

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Friday, June 1, 2007](#)

Editorial: State agencies need to step up on warming law

State must hold itself to same emissions standards that now apply to industries

The California Air Resources Board greatly expanded its portfolio when the state enacted its global warming law last year. The law gave CARB wide latitude to establish regulations and trading programs so the state can cut greenhouse gas pollution 25 percent by 2020, with an additional 80 percent cut by 2050.

But other state agencies must do their part if this ambitious law is to succeed.

The Public Utilities Commission and California Energy Commission will play key roles in reducing greenhouse gases from power plants and promoting energy efficiency. We will be saying more about this in future editorials.

The Resources Agency must ensure that forests are managed in ways that help absorb carbon dioxide. The Integrated Waste Management Board must work to capture more methane from landfills that now wafts into the air.

All the while, California's state agencies must take a hard look at their own operations. What kind of vehicles are they driving? What type of buildings are they leasing? Is the state holding itself to the same standards it imposes on private industries?

We were expecting some solid answers when the Climate Action Team, made up of the governor's Cabinet secretaries, met in Sacramento on Monday. The meeting featured lots of group hugs, but few specifics on how these agencies, in a mere three years, will meet tough targets mandated by Assembly Bill 32.

How tough? Consider the Department of Business, Transportation and Housing. Over the next three years, this agency must reduce 5.5 million tons of greenhouse gases from vehicles through better land-use planning and transportation design. How? Caltrans now administers about \$5 million each year in grants to help local governments develop "blueprints" -- plans aimed at cutting vehicle trips by placing housing closer to jobs. Yet \$5 million is a blip compared with the billions Caltrans is spending on highways, potentially encouraging more vehicle trips.

Then consider the Department of Food and Agriculture. The department doesn't have regulatory authority over farmers, yet it needs to be actively involved with the task of capturing methane from dairies-- a major source of greenhouse pollution. What is the department's strategy on this? We await answers.

The list goes on. The Department of Water Resources, which moves water over mountain ranges, didn't specify how it will transition to cleaner sources of power. The Department of General Services was fuzzy on plans for reducing emissions through greener state office buildings and cleaner vehicle fleets(although it later provided more details).

To ensure more clarity, all state agencies should immediately join the California Climate Registry and provide a public benchmark of their emissions. To their credit, Cal-EPA, the Energy Commission and PUC and DGS have all signed up.

The governor may also need to apply some personal pressure. Right now, the Climate Action Team is chaired by Cal-EPA Secretary Linda Adams, who is highly capable but lacks authority to police other agencies. Only the governor can do that. If he doesn't, the Legislature will need to exercise its oversight role.