

In The News 06-14-07

Spare the Air today

Modesto Bee, Thursday, June 14, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued its first Spare the Air advisory of the season today. People who live in Merced County and south are advised that their air quality is expected to deteriorate. Residents should limit outdoor exertion, especially from 3 to 7 p.m., when ozone levels usually are highest. Residents also are asked to postpone emission-causing activities that contribute to deteriorating air quality. Officials suggest:

- ? Sharing a ride, taking public transportation, walking or biking instead of driving
- ? Linking your trips by doing all your errands at one time
- ? Postponing the use of gas-powered lawn equipment
- ? Using an electric briquette igniter instead of lighter fluid
- ? Using water-based paints and solvents instead of oil-based ones.

Daily Spare the Air forecasts and tips on how to Spare the Air are available at the District's Web site, www.valleyair.org <<http://www.valleyair.org>> and the district's toll free number, 800-766-4463.

Smog season hits Kern region

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 14, 2007

This season's first Spare the Air Day has been declared for Thursday for valley portions of Kern County.

Spare the Air days are called when air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

The designation is made by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the agency that regulates air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

On these days, residents in affected areas should limit outdoor activity, especially between 3 and 7 p.m., when smog levels are the highest.

Ozone, the main component of smog, can aggravate respiratory problems and trigger asthma attacks. Children, the elderly and people with respiratory conditions are especially vulnerable, but when ozone reaches high levels, everyone is at risk.

Typically 20 to 40 Spare the Air Days are called from June through September, the smog season.

Residents are also encouraged to do what they can to reduce the level of harmful emissions going into the air on Spare the Air days. Some ideas suggested by the air district include:

- Carpooling, taking public transportation or walking or biking instead of driving.
- Trip-linking (doing all your errands at one time).
- Not using gas-powered lawn equipment.
- Using electric briquette igniter instead of lighter fluid.
- Using water-based paints and solvents instead of oil-based products.

Daily Spare the Air forecasts can be found on the air district's Web site at www.valleyair.org or by calling 1-800 SMOG INFO. The information will also be published on *The Californian's* weather page.

Don't sweat the hot weather

Temps high; air quality low

By Nick McClellan, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, June 14, 2007

The heat is on in the Valley.

Temperatures topped 100 degrees in Visalia Wednesday and are expected to climb higher today, said Cindy Bean, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

The rising mercury is also having an effect on Valley air pollution. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District declared its first Spare the Air Day of the season on Wednesday.

Air-pollution forecasters say Tulare County will reach an air-quality level today of 135, which is unhealthy for sensitive groups, including those with lung disease or heart disease. Adjacent Kern County is expected to reach 150.

Motorists are advised to reduce their driving by car-pooling or by taking advantage of alternative transportation. Use of gas-powered lawn equipment or outdoor barbecues also is discouraged during Spare the Air days.

Spare the Air days also were declared for Kern, Kings and Fresno counties Wednesday.

Some temperature relief can be expected over the weekend, however. Bean said a high-pressure ridge that has contributed to the rise in temperatures should be pushed off Friday by a low-pressure system from the Pacific Northwest.

Saturday's forecast calls for a high of 95. Sunday temperatures are expected to top out at 94.

What to do on a Spare the Air Day?

- Carpool, vanpool or use alternative transportation;
- If you must drive alone, do all your errands at one time (trip link);
- If you barbecue, use an electric briquette starter instead of lighter fluid or better, use a propane or natural gas grill;
- Avoid using gas-powered lawn care equipment;
- Use water-based, not oil-based, paints and solvents;
- Bring your lunch to work to avoid a midday trip.
- Try not to top off your gas tank when filling up. When the pump stops, any further pumping will either flow into the gas station's vapor recovery system in the pump or the gasoline will evaporate into the air, contributing to ground-level ozone levels.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Web site, www.valleyair.org
<<http://www.valleyair.org>>.

Lawsuit against EPA is vowed

Governor says state has waited too long for emissions ruling.

By David Whitney - Bee Washington Bureau
Sacramento Bee, Thursday, June 14, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said Wednesday that a lawsuit to force the federal government to permit California to move forward with its tough vehicle emissions is now "inevitable."

Earlier, California Attorney General Jerry Brown, a Democrat, pledged that a lawsuit would be filed in October against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency unless it issued a Clean Air Act waiver allowing California to force new cars and light trucks to meet stricter emissions standards than federal law requires.

The Republican governor told EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson in a letter Wednesday that a lawsuit is now a virtual certainty. It followed Johnson's testimony before an ad hoc House of Representatives global warming panel on Friday in which he said he wouldn't decide on the state's application until the fall of 2008.

California is the only state that's permitted to have tougher laws than the federal government to control air pollution under the Clean Air Act, but to do so it must have a waiver. Once issued, other states are free to adopt the California standard. So far, at least 13 other states have enacted, or soon will enact, laws following California's lead on greenhouse gas emissions.

The state's waiver application has been pending since 2005. The state gave notice in April that it would file a lawsuit in October unless the agency made a determination on the waiver by then.

Since then, the Supreme Court has ruled that the EPA is obligated to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. The agency has held an administrative hearing on the state's application, but the only pronouncements have been Johnson's testimony that a decision is at least another year away.

Schwarzenegger said there is no wiggle room left for the Bush administration.

"The EPA must grant California's waiver," the governor wrote.

"There is simply no legal justification to do otherwise."

The California law would require auto manufacturers to meet emissions standards lowering tailpipe emissions of carbon dioxide to 1990 levels by 2020.

The California standards recently have been in jeopardy of being overturned on legislation proposed in the House by Democrats from states with heavy coal production or a domestic auto industry presence.

The fight has stalled a House panel's vote on the draft legislation for at least a week.

Commute continues to be solo motoring

For many in region going to and from work, public transit or carpooling isn't an option, so...

By Lori Weisberg, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Thursday, June 14, 2007

Rising gas prices have done little to dissuade San Diego drivers from commuting alone to work in their cars, mirroring a travel pattern favored by most commuters across the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

For San Diego County, the trend has actually become more entrenched over time as the proportion of solo commuters has grown from 74 percent in 2000 to 78 percent in 2005.

Old habits - and Americans' love affair with their gas-guzzling vehicles - die hard, acknowledge transportation experts, who say it could be many years before painfully long and more costly journeys to work persuade commuters to carpool instead or take public transit.

"It's a battle because we don't build transit systems the way we build highways," observed Paul Jablonski, chief executive officer of the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System. "Look at the Coaster. Interstate 5 runs parallel to it; you have a straight shot down the coast and five lanes in both directions. So we put a passenger train on an old freight line, but we can't do frequent trips because it's mostly one track and it doesn't run fast.

"Until we have systems that are competitive with each other, people will opt for what is most time-efficient, and in a lot of circumstances, the car is," Jablonski said.

Not surprisingly, among large cities, it's the older ones with well-established transit systems that have the greatest percentages of commuters who regularly use public transportation.

In San Diego, the share of transit riders was a mere 3.5 percent in 2005, far below Portland, Ore., at 13.3 percent and San Francisco at nearly 33 percent, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, which was released yesterday and documents Americans' commuting patterns during 2005.

Where San Diego does stand out is in its share of workers who telecommute. Among large cities, it had the ninth-highest percentage of people reporting that they work from home, at 4.6 percent.

Locally, transit agencies have documented a gradual decline in overall ridership since 2001, although in the past year the number of weekday riders countywide has started to climb. Where there were 304,000 transit riders on any given weekday in 2005, that number jumped to 318,000 in 2006, the San Diego Association of Governments reported. In addition, trolley usage has risen steadily.

And there are still other signs that some San Diego County commuters may be willing to start shedding their attachment to solo commuting. Especially telling is the public's growing interest in shared vans and car pools, suggesting a deepening frustration with the recent sharp rise in fuel prices, SANDAG spokesman Garry Bonelli said.

The county's average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline was \$3.25 yesterday, down from May's record high, but still higher than the \$2.36-a-gallon price recorded in June 2005.

Perhaps because of rising gas prices, the regional planning agency has seen a marked increase in the number of people taking advantage of its program that matches interested carpoolers who have similar schedules and live and work near one another. The number of inquiries shot up from 175 a month last November to 450 in recent months.

Steve Rapp, who works downtown and lives in La Jolla, says he's saving thousands of dollars a year in parking and gasoline costs by taking the bus and trolley to work each day.

The extra 20 minutes of commute time it takes to complete his 25-minute bus ride and 10-minute trolley ride more than compensates for the cost savings, said Rapp, chief technology officer for Nicholas Applegate Capital Management. His bus stop is only a three-minute walk from his Bird Rock home, and the trolley is almost always there when he arrives at the Old Town station, he said.

"I haven't put a tank of gas in my car for three months," said Rapp, who drives a BMW convertible. "It's sweet not to go to the gas station and throw down \$42. It's an alluring car to drive, but it's not alluring enough to make me want to cough up several hundred dollars a month."

Partly to blame for the continued dependence on the automobile are San Diego's sprawling land-use patterns and people's longing for an affordable home of their own. As aspiring homeowners have moved farther out into the suburbs and into neighboring Riverside County, travel times on freeways have grown, traffic congestion has worsened, and the ranks of solo commuters have grown.

"I don't have any other option," said Cynthia Casse, who commutes at least an hour each way in her SUV between her home in Temecula and her job in Encinitas. "Public transportation isn't an option, and there's no one to carpool with."

Casse said she and her husband moved to Riverside County three years ago to find a home they could afford, and although they pay more for gas, their mortgage payment is still much less than what it would be in San Diego County.

"It's very unusual to come across a person in my area who doesn't commute a long ways," said Casse, district manager of the Automobile Club of Southern California's Encinitas office. "But I'm in the market for a car that has better gas mileage. It costs me \$80, \$85 to fill up my gas tank. It's very discouraging."

While gas price spikes happen over relatively short periods of time, it can take decades to alter commuters' travel behavior, pointed out Hamid Bahadori, transportation engineer for the Automobile Club.

"When you see a drastic spike in gas prices, it's not as easy for people to change their place of residence or their jobs," he said. "And in California, we have Proposition 13, which protects people's property taxes. So, if you've been living in a place for 10, 15, 20 years and enjoying lower property taxes, just because gas prices go up, you're not going to all of a sudden give up those low property taxes."

While San Diego County allocates a half-cent of the sales tax for transportation improvements, including roads, freeways and public transit, there will never be enough money to solve the congestion problem, experts say.

"We've always said you can't build your way out of traffic congestion," SANDAG spokesman Bonelli said. "If I could put eight more lanes on I-15 tomorrow, we'd have free-flowing traffic tomorrow, but 18 months, two years down the road, we'd have bumper-to-bumper because there's less expensive homes in southwestern Riverside County and most jobs are still in San Diego County."

Feds consider tightening regulations on smog limits

EPA finds current allowable levels still dangerous to children, elderly

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, June 14, 2007

Federal air quality regulators are about to decide whether to propose a stricter health standard for smog--an action that would push the Bay Area and many regions across the nation to do more to clean up their air.

Facing growing scientific evidence that the current limits are too weak to protect children, the elderly and asthmatics, the Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to disclose by June 20 whether it intends to enact a new standard for smog, also known as ground-level ozone.

The EPA now requires regions to meet an eight-hour limit of 0.08 parts per million of ozone in order for the air to be considered safe.

Setting a stricter limit with a lower maximum means many regions would need to find ways to cut pollution from industries, cars, equipment engines and consumer products, or risk loss of federal highway funds.

"New evidence is telling us that smog is more harmful than previously thought. It can even shorten lives," said Janice Nolen, assistant vice president of the American Lung Association. "Scientists are telling us that people can be harmed even if the air meets the current standard."

Her group was among several environmental organizations that sued the EPA to get it to promise a decision by Jan. 20 on the adequacy of the current standard.

The EPA last reassessed the ozone standard in 1997, but putting the current standard in place was slowed by lawsuits from industry.

In December, a federal court of appeals in Washington, D.C. ruled the EPA was giving too much time to many regions to meet the eight-hour smog standard.

EPA officials on Wednesday were not tipping their hand on their upcoming decision. It will be announced by the June 20 deadline, they said.

Agency scientists and administrators recommended in a report that EPA consider lowering the 0.08 ppm standard to a range "somewhat below 0.08 ppm to down to at least as low as 0.06 ppm."

In the report, the EPA employees concluded that "the overall body of evidence clearly calls into question the adequacy of the current standard in protecting sensitive groups, notably including asthmatic children and other people with lung diseases, as well as all children and older adults, especially those active outdoors, and outdoor workers."

The report says smog is associated with a variety of lung and cardiovascular ailments, including asthma and bronchitis attacks, and possibly even the risk of shortened lives.

In a separate report, 23 scientists on an EPA advisory committee unanimously recommended that the agency consider lowering the limit to a range of between 0.07 ppm to 0.06 ppm.

Frank O'Donnell, director of Washington, D.C.-based environmental group Clean Air Watch, said he foresees a conflict shaping up where industrial and business groups worried about pollution control costs oppose a stricter standard.

"It's shaping up a classic case of science versus politics," O'Donnell said.

Representatives for national trade groups representing automakers and oil refineries said Wednesday they did not have a comment about the possibility of a stricter ozone standard.

O'Donnell said new measures to curb air pollution will cost money. However, he said the nation has a track record of being able to absorb pollution control costs that have reduced smog levels considerably in the past three decades.

Pollution regulators say it's too early to say exactly how they would make more pollution cuts if a stricter smog standard is ordered.

The Bay Area's air pollution agency would consider seeking federal permission to get credit for emission cuts from its Spare the Air campaign asking motorists to drive less on bad air days, said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the agency.

To promote Spare the Air this year, public agencies will offer free public transit rides on as many as four days.

Because Spare the Air is voluntary, however, the EPA hasn't allowed the Bay Area to count any pollution reductions in the region's official smog control plan.

"This is the kind of thing we would look at institutionalizing if we had more tons of emissions to reduce with a new standard," Broadbent said. "We would have to look very long and hard at sources to make large reductions. We're looking at small numbers, now."

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is reviewing a proposed rule that would require restaurants with charbroilers to reduce pollution vented into the air during grilling of steaks and hamburgers.

The Bay Area violated the ozone standard on 12 days last year even though it has some of the cleanest urban air in America, district officials said.

More violations would have been recorded in the region if a stricter standard had been in place last year, officials added.

In Southern California's biggest air district last year, there were more than 80 days of excessive smog.

Stealth bill to boost fees flies through the Assembly

Drivers would pay more to fund research to develop cleaner fuels

Matthew Yi, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, June 14, 2007

Sacramento -- Legislation by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez to increase fees on California motorists by nearly \$167 million each year to pay for cleaner air breezed through the Assembly with little debate and even less fanfare.

The legislation, AB118, in part is Núñez's answer to voters' defeat in November of Proposition 87, a proposed \$4 billion tax on oil production over a decade that the speaker supported as a way to jump-start development of environment-friendly fuels to replace gasoline.

Prop. 87 arguably was the most contentious initiative on the ballot. Both sides-- primarily big oil versus Hollywood mogul Stephen Bing -- spent a combined \$156 million in television and radio ads that began months before the election.

AB118, on the other hand, zipped through the Assembly on June 5 with less than two minutes of debate on a largely party-line vote of 48-29. The bill is now in the hands of the state Senate.

"When bills get rushed through without much public debate, the public's opportunity to weigh in ... is limited," said Ned Wigglesworth, a policy advocate at California Common Cause.

A spokesman for Núñez, D-Los Angeles, said a lack of debate is a result of the bill enjoying support from a wide variety of groups.

"You're looking at car manufacturers, the Sierra Club, the American Lung Association and everybody in between who supports this legislation," said Richard Stapler, Núñez's spokesman.

The bill is a much-needed first step in implementing the goals of last year's landmark legislation to fight global warming by cutting carbon emissions by 25 percent by 2020, Stapler said.

The greenhouse legislation not only has supplied Núñez with significant political capital, but it also has brought worldwide fame for the speaker, who was invited to take part at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, earlier this year.

Southern California Assemblyman Michael DuVall -- the lone Republican to voice his opposition on the Assembly floor last week -- said that, given many of his GOP colleagues' vocal opposition last year to Prop. 87, he thinks many didn't see a need to voice that opinion again.

AB118 is "an old issue with a different title," he said.

Still, some taxpayer and consumer groups raised objections to the bill and the lack of meaningful debate.

"Clearly when you're increasing the costs of driving, you should spend some serious time debating the consequences of it. Rushing it through the Legislature doesn't benefit anyone," said David Kline, a spokesman for California Taxpayers' Association.

But in crafting the bill, Núñez has been quietly meeting with numerous interest groups since earlier this year and has found support from three dozen organizations, including the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, the American Lung Association, the Sierra Club, the State Building and Construction Trades Council and the Western States Petroleum Association.

The goals of AB118 are similar to those of the failed Prop. 87. The bill would provide funds for alternative fuel research in universities and private firms; give grants or loans to help companies produce and distribute new fuels that would cut greenhouse gases; and provide subsidies to consumers to buy alternative fuel vehicles.

Under AB118, the California Air Resources Board and the California Energy Commission would be responsible for doling out the funds. Prop. 87 would have created a new state agency for that task.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two is how funds for the programs would be raised. Prop. 87 would have required oil companies to pay a new severance tax on the crude that's pumped in California.

Núñez was a vocal supporter of the initiative, arguing that it's time for the hugely profitable oil industry to chip in.

But Prop. 87 was defeated at the polls after a barrage of television and radio advertisements by oil companies argued that consumers ultimately will face higher prices at the pump.

Stapler said a major problem the Legislature faced in trying to impose a new tax on oil companies is that the move would require a two-thirds vote.

"We can't pass anything through the Legislature that's a tax without the Republicans' support," he said.

But a fee increase would require only a majority vote in each house of the Legislature before the bill heads to the governor's desk.

The increases in fees would go into effect Jan. 1, 2008, and continue for seven years, raising an estimated \$166.8 million each year in additional revenue.

"The bill is too tenuous in our view," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. "You don't have specific projects in mind ... and this is a knee-jerk reaction by those in control of the California Legislature to raise taxes. These folks will never have enough money for their pet projects."

WHO: Environment Woes Killing Millions

By VERONIKA OLEKSYN, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, June 13, 2007

VIENNA, Austria (AP) -- Tackling air pollution, contaminated drinking water and other environmental problems could save millions of lives annually around the world, the World Health Organization said in a report Wednesday.

The study said that Afghanistan and the African nations of Angola, Burkina Faso and Mali are among the countries most affected by environmental troubles.

In 23 countries, more than 10 percent of deaths can be traced to two risk factors: unsafe drinking water and indoor air pollution caused by the burning of so-called solid fuels - wood, cow dung or coal for cooking, the WHO said.

The report also highlights that more developed countries are not immune to environmental health risks.

In 53 countries in Europe, for example, an estimated 1.8 million deaths could be prevented each year if more efforts were made to create a healthier environment.

WHO said its results were based on 2002 data from national health authorities, reviews of scientific literature and expert surveys. It also encompasses data collected by the WHO.

The report said as many as 13 million deaths could be prevented yearly by reducing the environmental risks. But WHO officials stressed the report was a preliminary estimate of how environmental factors affect health.

"We would be very glad if these country-by-country figures are used as the basis for a discussion on effective countermeasures," said Susanne Weber-Mosdorf, the WHO's assistant director-general for sustainable development and healthy environments.

Simple water purification methods could decrease the rate of diseases such as diarrhea that affect many children, Weber-Mosdorf told a news conference in Vienna.

Around the world, children under five years old make up 74 percent of deaths from diarrhea and respiratory infections, the WHO said.

Thirty-seven children die each day of water-related diarrhea in Europe, mostly in eastern and central parts of the region, according to WHO. The WHO suggested that using gas or electricity for cooking, improving ventilation or keeping children away from smoke could reduce the number of deaths.

Shipper APL announces new technology to curb port pollution

L.A. Times, Wednesday, June 13, 2007

Oakland, Calif. (AP) -- Global shipper APL Ltd. on Wednesday unveiled what the company called a cheaper, simpler way to curb diesel emissions from ships docked in ports by allowing vessels to plug into shoreside power without expensive retrofits.

APL engineers have devised a system that would let container ships attach a single 3-inch power cable from the port to onboard engines rather than the 10 cables currently required, according to the company.

Ships have traditionally relied on their diesel engines to provide power to the ship while loading and unloading cargo. A recently developed technology known as "cold-ironing" enables newer ships to shut down their engines and get electricity from cleaner sources on shore, curtailing air pollution.

But with most of the world's container fleet built before the technology was available, shippers have been reluctant to outfit vessels with cumbersome cold-ironing equipment, company officials said.

APL's new approach to cold-ironing would cost companies just \$225,000 per ship, more than \$1 million less than the current cost of fitting cargo ships for cold-ironing, APL Americas President John Bowe said in a statement.

The Singapore-based firm plans to test the new technology next month at the Port of Oakland, where community activists and residents have long complained that diesel emissions from ships and trucks have led to higher rates of asthma and other ailments in poorer neighborhoods surrounding the port.

If the tests prove successful, the company plans to incorporate the system into all six APL ships that regularly call at the Port of Oakland, eventually expanding its use more broadly throughout the fleet.

Vessels using APL's system should be able to connect to shoreside power at ports worldwide, Bowe said.

Democrats Push Coal-to-Liquids Energy Plan

By Steven Mufson, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post Wed., June 13, 2007

A group of Senate Democrats from coal-rich states is drafting an amendment to proposed energy legislation that would provide as much as \$10 billion in federal loans to pay for capturing and storing greenhouse gases produced by plants that would turn coal into liquid transportation fuels or chemicals.

Concerned about the growing likelihood that a majority of senators will back a coal-to-liquids program to satisfy the powerful coal industry and to reduce U.S. reliance on oil imports, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) has pressed colleagues to ensure that such a program would address not only energy security, but also climate change concerns.

Bingaman, who opposed a coal-to-liquids measure that Republicans proposed in committee, "has been very clear that he is unwilling to look at one without looking at the other," a committee spokesman said.

Environmental groups oppose coal-to-liquids programs because, they say, such technology produces twice as much greenhouse gas as conventional petroleum-based motor fuels, and because they say it would greatly expand destructive coal mining.

Meanwhile, two House committees working on an energy package delayed sessions that had been scheduled this week, but Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the House would still come up with a bill by July 4.

The postponements were prompted by disputes that pit two key Democratic constituencies-- blue-collar unions and liberal environmentalists -- against one another. A source close to the House leadership said that some members wanted to see what emerges from the Senate, which took up its own energy package yesterday.

The House Ways and Means Committee sent a one-line e-mail to its members saying that the meeting scheduled for today to draw up tax provisions for an energy bill "has been postponed until further notice." The Energy and Commerce Committee's energy and air quality subcommittee put off a session until next week in order to "work out some issues within the committee," a staff member said.

Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), chairman of the subcommittee, has supported a measure that would boost coal-to-liquids projects. Boucher has proposed another provision that would undercut the ability of states such as California to set tougher standards for vehicles' tailpipe emissions of greenhouse gases.

Pelosi and many other Democrats oppose both those positions. The heads of 14 leading environmental groups issued a letter yesterday saying a liquid coal provision would be "a poison pill that would make any bill totally unacceptable."

A spokesman for Pelosi said the speaker met with Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles B. Rangel (D-N.Y.) and was enthusiastic about his proposal, which is likely to extend some existing tax incentives for biofuels and create a "green bond fund" that would provide loans for energy projects with environmental benefits.

Despite the delay, Pelosi vowed that the House would adopt some kind of energy legislation before the July 4 recess, even if other energy measures are introduced later.

The Senate, meanwhile, took up its version of an energy bill, embracing an amendment that would fix targets for deep reductions in oil imports that the executive branch would have to meet. It also adopted an amendment to promote job training for "green collar" jobs that involve installing energy efficiency or "clean energy" equipment.

Much of the maneuvering on the bill was taking place away from the Senate floor.

Sen. Carl M. Levin (D-Mich.) is working on an amendment that would blunt the impact of a proposal that would effectively raise average motor vehicle fuel efficiency to 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

Levin has proposed softer requirements on light trucks, which include sport-utility vehicles, minivans and most pickup trucks, than rules already endorsed by the Senate Commerce Committee. The proposal would also give automakers more time to meet new standards and give the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration more authority to set new rules.

The proposal could contain a provision that would free automakers from the new rules if they promised to put more fuel-efficient vehicles on the road.

Other Democrats said they would stick with the tougher standards. Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.) said that he thought there were enough votes to defeat a move to weaken the fuel-efficiency provisions. On the Senate floor, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) said the Senate had "bent over backwards" to accommodate the automobile industry. She said the standards were reasonable and achievable with current technology.

Separately, environmental groups said they were pleased with revisions to the Senate measure, made last Friday, that removed provisions that would have prevented the Environmental Protection Agency from allowing California to set its own standards for carbon dioxide emissions from automobile tailpipes.

Federal aide's phone message prompts probe

Rep. Waxman says the call to a congressional office warning of California's clean-air efforts is 'highly inappropriate.'

By Richard Simon, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Wednesday, June 13, 2007

WASHINGTON - A voicemail that criticizes California's attempt to impose new limits on vehicle emissions touched off a congressional investigation Tuesday into whether a federal official improperly worked to thwart the state's efforts.

The message, left by an aide to the secretary of Transportation on a congressional staffer's phone message system, found its way to Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles), an investigatory pit bull who has championed clean-air legislation.

Waxman, who is chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, promptly launched a probe, calling it "highly inappropriate" and possibly illegal for an agency official to be lobbying members of Congress.

The voicemail is the latest twist in the state's fight to secure a waiver from the Environmental Protection Agency to mandate stronger vehicle emissions requirements by 2009. Under the Clean Air Act, California is allowed to set stricter anti-pollution rules, but only if the EPA approves.

In a letter sent Tuesday to Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters, Waxman wrote: "It is especially problematic on an issue that is pending for a decision before the administration and that is supposed to be decided based on an independent assessment of the merits."

The Department of Transportation's acting general counsel responded that the action in "no way violated anti-lobbying restrictions." The department counsel said that agency officials only "communicated the potential implications" of any federal government decision to grant California permission to implement its emissions law.

Federal law bars agencies from trying to influence how members of Congress vote on legislation.

According to Waxman, Heideh Shahmoradi - the Transportation secretary's special assistant for governmental affairs - left a message warning that if California receives the waiver, "it could lead to a patchwork of regulations on vehicle emissions which could have significant impacts on the light truck and car industry."

Shahmoradi then asked whether the congressional aide's boss would be interested in commenting on California's request or "reaching out to your governor's office for them to submit comments to the docket, since this would greatly impact the auto facilities within your district." Waxman's staff declined to identify the congressional office that received the call.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's spokesman, Adam Mendelsohn, said: "If this is true, it's very problematic. This waiver is critical to protect California's environment and should not be politicized."

Waxman asked Peters to provide his committee with all documents relating to communications between her department and congressional offices regarding California's request and any related communications with other federal entities, including the White House. He also asked her to make Shahmoradi available for an interview by the committee staff.

Rosalind A. Knapp, the Department of Transportation's acting general counsel, said that the restrictions prohibit lobbying intended to encourage third parties, members of special interest groups or the general public to contact members of Congress in support of or opposition to a matter.

"These restrictions do not apply to direct contacts between executive branch officials and members of Congress, nor do they apply to contacts concerning matters pending within the executive branch," she said.

Department officials contacted members of Congress "to inform them of the pending petition so they could consider providing formal comments to EPA," Knapp wrote Tuesday in a letter to Waxman, explaining that the department "communicated the potential implications that a waiver might have on the current nationally uniform regulatory scheme for fuel-economy standards."

Waxman and officials from California and other states are battling Rep. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, over draft legislation that would prohibit California and other states from taking tougher action than Washington to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

Cleaner skies may be on Oakland port's horizon

Company says new vessel test will identify more toxic emissions

By Sonya Hubbard, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, June 14, 2007

OAKLAND - If all goes well during an innovative test in the Port of Oakland on July 18, ships will spew far fewer toxic emissions - welcome news for nearby residents who suffer from high rates of asthma and other health problems related to air quality.

The test at the nation's fourth largest port will significantly reduce pollutants from ships, such as nitrous oxide, sulfur oxide and diesel particulants, announced shipping giant APL, the world's eighth largest container shipping company.

APL's test will use a process known as "cold ironing" or "alternative marine power." Cold ironing is when a ship turns off its own power and uses power from a source on the shore. Mariners coined the term to describe old steam engines that shut down, cooled off and became, literally, cold iron.

Although the Navy has used cold ironing in order to do maintenance work and save fuel, what distinguishes APL's test is that it will use liquified natural gas to generate electricity for the ship.

Last week, PG&E tested emissions from a prototype generator and measured significant reductions in pollutants. Nitrous oxide levels fell almost 95 percent, particulate matter decreased nearly 100 percent, carbon dioxide levels declined more than

40 percent, and sulfur oxide emissions were completely eliminated.

"This is an exciting project for us. It's really cutting edge," said Jack Broadbent, Executive Officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "If it works here, it has the promise to work in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Houston ... everywhere."

The Port of Long Beach also is testing the cold ironing process, but it will be using power off the grid and connecting it to the ship.

Pollution caused by commercial shipping vessels is not a new problem, but to date efforts to reduce emissions have produced modest results.

In March 2007, the International Council on Clean Transport issued a report that identified ocean-going ships as a greater source of air pollution and greenhouse gases than vehicles. The fuel used by ships has an average sulfur content of 27,000 parts per million, compared with 10 to 15 parts per million for the fuels used by land-based vehicles in the world's most developed nations.

Principals at Wittmar Engineering and Construction, Inc., based in Signal Hill- a city near Long Beach - developed APL's new technology in 2002. Partners Dana Markle and Eric Witten got the idea after working in the oil industry.

"Whenever you have an oil platform offshore, you're taking the natural gas that's coming out of the ground with your oil production and making electricity," Markle said. "We're never in a situation where there's electricity coming in from the grid."

"And we said, 'Why can't we do that with ships?' We kept hearing air quality districts talk about wanting to reduce the pollution from the ships. So we came up with a design and got a patent on it. We filed for the patent in 2002 and received it in August of last year."

Wittmar and APL collaborated with a number of partners to develop the technology. One of those partners developed the idea of running a single high voltage cable from the LNG generator and connecting it through the ship's bow thruster transformer to the main switchboard.

Leroy Griffin, assistant fire marshal for the Oakland Fire Department, said the project will especially benefit the residents of West Oakland, who have long suffered from higher than average asthma rates and other health problems. But he said that the fire department must analyze all aspects of the new technology.

"We also have to look at safety," Griffin said. "We don't want to eliminate one problem and create another one at the same time."

"We're adding another element of risk by bringing in tanks. Methane is colorless and odorless, so there's always the potential for a leak or another problem. But my fire department is very experienced with working with innovative technologies. We worked with AC Transit last year to install a hydrogen tank and compressor. We've been running six buses and several cars for the last year without any problems."

Brian Constable, vice president and chief operations officer for APL Maritime Ltd., said that the process of retrofitting the APL fleet could be done by the end of this year at a cost of approximately \$225,000 per ship.

"In a 35-day voyage, once we have all the equipment, we can retrofit each ship without taking it out of service," Constable said.

APL, a subsidiary of Singapore-based Neptune Orient Lines, moves 120,000 containers through Oakland's port each year.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, June 14, 2007:](#)

Last chance for rail system

Tell state's leaders how important high-speed rail is to state's future.

Funding for California's proposed high-speed rail system is still very much up in the air, as a conference committee in the Legislature seeks to resolve differences in the state budget between the Assembly and

the Senate versions. Now is the time for supporters of high-speed rail to let their representatives know how much this project means to those of us in the Valley, as well as the entire state.

It's a crucial moment. Despite many fine words of support, especially in a commentary he wrote for The Bee on May 4, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger put a piddling amount of money -- less than \$1.2 million -- into the budget for high-speed rail. That level of funding would mean the effective end of high-speed rail in California.

Both houses of the Legislature added money, though not the full \$100 million or so the project really needs this year. Still, the \$40 to \$50 million they seek to spend would keep the project alive, and allow studies and other work to continue. The governor's paltry sum would mean the cancellation of contracts for various studies and an abandonment of environmental work already done.

That would mean the end of the project. It would also mean that the \$40 million or so already spent on the proposal would be utterly wasted.

The governor might also veto any higher amount the Legislature includes in the budget. That, too, would be the kiss of death for high-speed rail.

It's difficult to sort out what's going on here. The governor speaks compellingly of the need for high-speed rail in the state, but he won't fund it. He's called for a "full financing plan" that includes private funds before he'll support moving ahead with a \$9.9 million bond measure scheduled for next November's ballot. At no time in the past has he required such a funding plan for any other state public works project or bond measure. Why the higher hurdle for high-speed rail?

There is plenty of conjecture surrounding that and other questions. There is other evidence that the governor's enthusiasm for transit of any kind is pallid, despite his newfound fervor for reducing greenhouse gases and his constant drumbeat about the need for "vision" to be restored to the Golden State.

Others suggest that he is surrounded by people, on his staff and at state agencies such as Caltrans, who simply don't get it. They know how to build highways. They don't understand trains, or don't care.

If that's our vision for the future, we're in trouble. Building more highways and expanding airports was a compelling vision 50 years ago. It won't work now.

State studies have said that building enough new airport and highway capacity to meet the needs of the expected population growth in California would be three times as costly as building a high-speed rail system. It would also make air pollution worse; high-speed rail would help improve air quality.

Republicans in the Legislature -- including Assembly Minority Leader Mike Villines of Clovis -- generally support the governor in his backhanded efforts to stymie high-speed rail. That's a curious position to take.

The project has widespread bipartisan support, especially here in the Valley, which is so important to the state Republican party. If this project is killed, whoever's fingerprints are on the murder weapon is likely to pay a steep political price.

The real victims, of course, would be the people of California, who would be left with an increasingly decayed, outmoded and polluting transportation system, and no hope of seeing anything better to take its place. Some vision.

[Fresno Bee editorial, June 14, 2007:](#)

Clean air commitment

Valley's attainment of standards must be pushed vigorously.

The state Air Resources Board appears ready to approve a Valley air district plan that would push back deadlines for cleaning up the Valley's air until 2023. We've opposed that delay, but it seems there's little anyone can do to derail it.

When the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District approved the shift to the "extreme" nonattainment of federal standards last month, it came over the objections of many in the community, including The Bee. But the air district staff and its board saw things differently, and their view prevailed.

Now the ARB is in town, meeting this morning at the Valley air district's headquarters in Fresno, where its expected that the local plan will win approval. It must then be endorsed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

So it's time to shift the focus. Both the Valley air district and the ARB have promised to beat the extended deadline in most of the Valley. That commitment must be kept.

The ARB is committed to a series of initiatives that will address so-called mobile sources of air pollution, which local air districts cannot control. Those efforts must be pressed forward, in the face of political opposition that's bound to be strong, if we are ever to see clean skies in the Valley again.

There have been many gains in the struggle for cleaner air, but we're not there yet. Keep the pressure up.

[Letter to the L.A. Times, Thursday, June 14, 2007:](#)

A selfish habit

Re "Keep the home fires burning," Opinion, June 12

Erika Schickel misses the point that the release of pollution through smoke, carbon dioxide and other noxious gases is indefensible. Try living downwind from someone burning. You can't open your windows, turn on your heater (which draws in air from the smoky outside) or sit outside and enjoy your yard. One person's enjoyment of burning will limit your rights to breathe otherwise cleaner air and use your property without becoming smoked out. A selfish, polluting habit is the real issue here. Support clean air, not delusional polluters.

Mario Voce, Chairman

Environmental Quality Control Board, Seal Beach

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, June 14, 2007:](#)

Bring back courtesy

A thought has been banging around in my head for a long time. It's this: getting stuck in block-long stop and go lights, more stop than go, and usually only a block apart, traffic backed up in all directions.

Has it ever occurred to the City Council to consider synchronizing traffic lights? Everything I read about this subject, the cities who use it have been very pleased with the results, starting with New York. The flow of traffic was speeded up. It also cut down on extended stops at traffic lights, thereby decreasing pollution.

Has such an idea ever occurred to our City Council? I'm sure such a radical idea is usually greeted by our politicians with a list as long as your arm as to why they can't do it. You know, no money and it will never work, etc. I also saw, in a recent paper, a very good letter about our local discourteous, selfish drivers. The letter writer sure was right.

The drivers I have noticed fitting the writer's descriptions are mostly young women driving with a cell phone stuck in one ear and talking a mile a minute and driving with one hand.

Do all these bad drivers go to a rude school before they get their license?

I learned to drive in Los Angeles in the early 1930s and as I remember drivers were models of courtesy compared to lots of what we got in Bakersfield today.

GRIFFITH SUTTON-JONES, Bakersfield