

Letters to the Fresno Bee, Friday, March 23, 2007:

'Do a body good'

Two billion dollars in federal roadbuilding funds risk being withdrawn if the Valley air district's cleanup plan isn't submitted by June 15 (story March 18). On the surface, losing \$2 billion sounds like a tough pill to swallow.

One can live with losing \$2 billion for more roads, which will undoubtedly lead to more motor vehicle use, thereby adding more pollution to the existing mix. Submitting a hasty plan, especially if misguided, will be an even tougher pill to swallow.

District executive director Seyed Sadredin put it quite poignantly saying, "The plan is not valid if we rely on reductions from technology or something else that does not exist yet. It will be rejected or not even accepted, and sanctions could begin 18 months later." There must be a better way and a viable solution that maybe, just maybe, hasn't been offered.

The message is clear and now we have the opportunity to have our voices heard; a chance for us to do something positive regarding our deleterious and worsening air pollution. Attend the public hearing held April 30 at 11 a.m. at air district headquarters. Change will definitely do a body good.

Alan Kandel, Fresno

Don't blame the people

Let's just stop blaming all the people in the Valley for bad air when the true culprits are city governments and planning commissions. Stop the building. We are growing by leaps and bounds, which would be OK if residents could actually afford to buy the houses being built and if we didn't have this air-quality problem.

We will not be able to meet air standards like this. You have to figure that for every new home built, trees that promote good air are being taken out. Also, there are two to four cars per new home -- more, perhaps, for families with teen drivers. This means more pollution, more lawnmowers going and all the road construction to accommodate the building polluting our air.

My daughter has developed asthma because of our air quality. Builders really need to go into the inner city and help people fix up older neighborhoods, offering help or loans that they could actually pay back. It does no good to revitalize downtown when the city around it is falling in disrepair.

Please just stop all the new building and start rebuilding what we already have. Just think about our children and grandchildren being able to breathe.

Jackie Krage, Sanger

Clean air advocates ask feds to reverse Valley air finding

By GARANCE BURKE, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F.Chronicle, Bakersfield Californian, Modesto Bee and other papers, Thursday, March 22, 2007

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- Environmental and community groups filed a petition Thursday with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asking the government to withdraw their finding that air quality in the San Joaquin Valley met federal standards for airborne dust, smoke and soot.

In October, the agency found the valley's air was no longer polluted by PM-10 — minute pollution particles that can cause lung and heart disease — because it hadn't violated the PM-10 standard in three years.

Environmentalists said data from monitors in the Valley's southern edge showed the air had high levels of PM-10 in September and October 2006, so the agency should withdraw the finding.

"The violations showed that the air was very dangerous on those days," said Sarah Jackson, a research associate at the environmental law group Earthjustice. "The EPA is not protecting the public."

The agency's air division is reviewing the petition, said EPA spokeswoman Wendy Chavez, who declined to comment further.

In December, Earthjustice filed a separate suit on behalf of the Latino Issues Forum, Medical Advocates for Healthy Air and three chapters of the Sierra Club claiming the EPA ignored data showing spikes in airborne dust and soot near Bakersfield and Corcoran when it made the October ruling.

The agency should reinstate contingency measures required under the federal Clean Air Act to ensure the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District works to lower particulate pollution, Jackson said.

The suit is pending in the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Planning Commission OKs ethanol plant

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, March 23, 2007

Kern County planning commissioners cheered the construction of an ethanol plant north of Bakersfield Thursday night.

They voted unanimously to support the project and recommend that Kern County supervisors give the plan final approval.

The Cilion company, based in Goshen, Calif., wants to build a 55 million-gallon-a-year plant at Famoso and Highway 99.

The plant would convert corn into ethanol, a fuel additive that refiners mix in gasoline to reduce emissions.

Company president Jeremy Wilhelm said the the location, near Highway 99, a rail line and a corn feed plant, is perfect for the second plant his company plans to build in California.

Corn from a feed plant next to the Cilion facility in Famoso will be used to power the plant, county planners said.

"We pull the sugar out of that corn and make ethanol out of it," Wilhelm said. "The product that is left is wet distiller's grain."

That distiller's grain is used as cattle feed.

"Cows and cars are very important to us," Wilhelm said.

"So this is really a large moonshine still for our cars," quipped Commissioner Ron Sprague.

Nearby water facilities -- including a water recharge area for the Cawelo Water Storage District -- would be protected from spills, said planner Jim Ellis, because the whole Cilion site will be covered by cement.

Air impacts from the plant will be within San Joaquin Valley limits, Ellis said, with the exception of NOx emissions. The applicant has purchased air quality impact credits to make up for the extra NOx the plant will put out, he said.

Then there is the smell.

"These projects can be odiferous," Ellis said.

But he said that there are few residential areas nearby and the chance that people would be troubled by any smells would be minimal.

Commissioner Kay Pitts had questions about the 1,300 tons of distiller's grain that will be produced by the plant each day.

Wilhelm said most of the product will be trucked to dairies within 30 miles of the plant.

Sprague asked how the roads in the area will hold up to the traffic from the 40 grain trucks carrying that grain each day.

The county, Ellis said, is requiring Cilion to repave the surrounding roads.

Cilion's project is one of two ethanol plants currently moving toward construction in Kern County.

The other, a similarly sized plant proposed for Wasco, is being planned by U.S. Ethanol Holdings, LLC and is going through its environmental impact study phase according to Wasco Assistant City Manager Ron Mittag.

California uses around 1 billion gallons of ethanol each year, county staff said, but currently refiners import the product from the Midwest.

There are only four operating plants open in California and they produce a combined ethanol flow of 75 million gallons annually, according to county staff.

"I haven't been as excited about any project since I got on this commission," said Commissioner Wendy Wayne.

Wilhelm said that, once Cilion has county supervisors' approval, the ethanol plant will take 12 months to construct.

It could open in spring or summer of 2008, he said.

Urbanists' group seeks smart growth

Socially responsible development is goal of North Oakland residents

By Quynh Tran, staff writer

Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 23, 2007

Whether it's about building-height limits, historic preservation or the type of retail business, a group of Temescal and Rockridge residents contend that "smart or focused growth" is the strategy for socially responsible development in North Oakland.

"We want guiding principles instead of mitigation measures," said Hiroko Kurihara, co-founder of the Urbanists for a Livable Temescal Rockridge Area.

The 10-member group sponsored a public forum on urban growth on Saturday that featured speakers with specialties in development, regional planning, architecture, and public land trust. The event was attended by about 80 people at the North Oakland Senior Center, 5714 Martin Luther King Jr. Way.

With more than 20 residential developments and 1,300 units in the works, the area is a hotbed of controversy as differences among residents and developers have led to heated community meetings, challenges to projects at the Planning Commission and City Hall, and a demand to correct discrepancies in the city's zoning code and general plan.

Kurihara said the group also organized the forum to provide education as well as an opportunity for residents to know one another.

"Smart or focused growth" is a development strategy that calls for building in existing communities, conserving land and natural resources, located near transit hubs, and be socially equitable, affordable and responsive to diverse communities, said Ted Droettboom, regional planning program director for the joint committee of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Association of Bay Area Governments, and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

"Focused growth is the strategy for all of the nine counties representing the Bay Area," he said.

The Bay Area is plagued by the "drive until you qualify phenomenon," Droettboom said. The high price of housing forces people to live further away from inner Bay Area cities, creating new bedroom communities that require longer commutes and the transportation juggernaut of the Bay Area, he said.

Droettboom said the phenomenon impacts the economic competitiveness of the region and creates a significant financial impact on residents, including those Central Valley families who must spend up to \$6,000 more a year to commute to work.

"Focused growth, hopefully, will result in a more affordable region," he said.

Other outcomes also include a reduction in greenhouse gases, 85 percent of which come from road vehicles, and the need to turn farm land into residential developments, he said.

California also recently passed a state law requiring the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Local groups such as North Oakland Alliance for Sustainable Community and Standing Together for Accountable Neighborhood Development, however, are leery of high-density development with buildings reaching five stories high and towering over their neighboring two-story, single-family homes in the Temescal and Rockridge area.

Muhammad Nadhiri of A.F. Evans Development said density or the set number of units per building is relative.

Developers do find an economic benefit when they have the most efficient use of land because the cost of the project can be divided by the number of units, he said.

However, they also seek to enhance and create optimal design without destroying the area around it, he said.

"Whether it's a single-family house, condo, high density or low density, it comes down to how you relate to your neighbors," he said. "The number of units you add depends on the environment you're in."

The numerous projects in North Oakland are attracting residents such as John Lutz, who moved to Temescal a month ago.

The longtime former Montclair resident said public transportation in the hills was difficult and communication with neighbors was poor. He said he came to the forum to learn about development issues and meet other residents.

Lutz is interested in the North Oakland Cohousing project, where a group of individuals and families plan to build a five-story, 33-unit project near Telegraph and Claremont avenues. The residents would have private homes along with access to common facilities such as children's playrooms, guest rooms, laundry facilities, and a "common house" where residents can cook and eat group meals.

Councilwoman Jane Brunner said she was encouraged that people who had not attended other community meetings attended the forum.

Kurihara, who is a textile artist, said she is committed to the values of smart growth because of her own experiences of being homeless and her work with affordable housing agencies.

"I feel housing is a basic need," she said, "Rather than focus on four- or five-story buildings, we should ask, 'How would this building create what we value?'"

Visalia approves contract for Sequoia National Park shuttles

Contra Costa Times

Friday, March 23, 2007

VISALIA, Calif. - City officials and the National Park Service agreed on a half-million-dollar contract for Visalia to provide shuttle service between major attractions in Sequoia National Park.

The City Council approved the contract for eight buses this week, but the plan has been three years in the making.

The free shuttles will begin running May 23, taking visitors around the park's Giant Forest during the busy summer season that ends Sept. 3.

The buses are scheduled to follow two routes, each leaving every 15 minutes from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. from the Giant Forest Museum to stops that include the General Sherman Tree, touted as the largest living thing on earth, Wuksachi Village and Moro Rock.

The shuttle is part of an effort to restore the Giant Forest -- home to many of the largest giant sequoia trees in the world. An increasing number of driving tourists in the park threaten the health of the world-famous trees, according to park officials.

"Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have been recognized as two parks with some of the worst air quality in the national park system" said Alexandra Picavet, a park spokeswoman.

"Every step we can take to alleviate some of the traffic that adds to that is worthwhile."

Automakers challenging states' emission laws

They say Vermont rules are invalid because only the federal government can set standards. The trial is a preview of a bigger case in California.

By Marc Lifsher and John O'Dell, Times Staff Writers

L.A. Times, Friday, March 23, 2007

A swarm of lawyers hired by the world's automakers is descending on a federal courthouse in the picturesque New England town of Burlington, Vt., to wage a proxy fight against a California law to curb global warming.

The 2002 law, which set stringent tailpipe standards for carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases, has been adopted by 10 other states including Vermont.

None of those emissions standards are in effect yet, but a federal lawsuit by automakers against the Vermont law is being closely watched as a test of states' power to regulate carbon emissions.

"This trial is incredibly important for all parties," said Jim Tripp, an attorney with Environmental Defense, an activist group granted legal permission to participate in the case.

Automakers argue that only the federal government can set fuel-efficiency standards and, by extension, carbon emissions standards for cars and light trucks.

The Vermont case is a warmup for the main event, an identical suit against the California law that isn't scheduled to be heard until this summer.

California is the only state that can devise emissions rules that differ from federal standards. Other states can then choose between the California and federal regulations.

So although a decision in the Vermont case would apply only there, the ruling in the California case, if it goes to trial, would affect every state. A win by the automakers in California would overturn the state's ability to regulate greenhouse gas tailpipe emissions.

Any court decision, however, could be short-circuited in June when the U.S. Supreme Court must decide whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or California has any authority over greenhouse gas pollution.

The Vermont trial starts April 9, and the automakers have filed motions seeking to throw a veil of secrecy over some of the proceedings.

They want to limit media coverage of the trial because they say they need to protect trade secrets.

The Vermont judge, William K. Sessions III, has promised to rule on the confidentiality issue today.

Some industry analysts and environmental lawyers suggest that automakers might be leery that open testimony could reveal which carmakers would be able to meet the tough emissions standards.

"It probably would be embarrassing if it showed that Toyota, for instance, could meet the standards and others couldn't," said James Hossack at market research firm AutoPacific in Tustin.

Rules based on the 2002 law were first developed by the California Air Resources Board in 2004. Measures based on the California regulations have since been adopted by Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and six other states.

Trade groups representing the Big Three domestic car companies, Japanese manufacturers and other international corporations that sell in the U.S. are eager to overturn the Vermont law to avoid facing a multitude of possibly conflicting regulations from all 50 states.

"That could lead to real nightmares in designing and engineering," said David Cole, director of the nonprofit Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich.

But a successful defense of the Vermont law probably would bolster California's chance of defeating the related automaker lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Fresno. The judge in the California case postponed the trial pending the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the EPA's authority.

In both cases, the automakers' demand for secrecy is likely to loom large.

The automakers contend that any information that comes out in court that shows a company's technological advances or weaknesses in meeting fuel-efficiency standards must be sealed.

"Vehicle manufacturers have spent millions and sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars

developing new vehicle fuel-economy technologies in a highly competitive marketplace," the automakers said in a Vermont court filing. "They have gone to great lengths to protect this information from their competitors."

Environmentalists and the states counter that at least some of that information must be available for the public to gauge whether automakers can meet the new carbon dioxide tailpipe standards.

But UC Berkeley constitutional law professor Jesse Choper cautioned that in civil trials, unlike criminal cases, there's no presumed right of access for the media or the public.

Nevertheless, the court will have a lot of leeway in determining what the public and the media ought to be able to look at, said James Spindler, a professor of business law at USC.

"Courts generally will protect businesses' rights to protect their trade secrets, but they have to make a good argument that it is material that should be kept secret," he said.

And most judges "start with a strong presumption that the proceedings before them will be open to public, and in general will make every effort to keep proceedings open even if there are trade secrets or other confidentiality issues," said attorney Brian R. Socolow, a trade secrets specialist and partner at New York law firm Loeb & Loeb.

Although most observers expect the California case to ultimately decide the issues, automakers consider the Vermont case important because it will give them a chance to try out their principal argument that federal regulation trumps the states.

"The issues are the same, and the arguments we make here are the same ones we will make in California," said Charles Territo, spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, one of the two trade groups pursuing the two suits and a third complaint against the state of Rhode Island.

In briefs filed in California and Vermont, the two trade groups have added economic and technology issues to their arguments. The new regulations would force carmakers to raise sticker prices, stop selling many models and lay off tens of thousands of autoworkers, they say.

"States should not be allowed to set their own fuel economy standards," Territo said.

"When they set fuel economy standards, federal regulators consider the cost, the technological feasibility, the impact on jobs, on automobile safety and on the companies themselves," the industry spokesman added.

"None of that was considered in California."

But weighing the automakers' economic concerns against the public's right to know and the state's obligation to protect the environment is a tough balancing act, the Vermont judge said in a hearing this week.

"This is a significant constitutional issue," Sessions said.

Cars, trucks and buses trail cargo ships as air polluters

A study finds that while land vehicles are cutting emissions, seafaring vessels are spewing sulfur oxide 'virtually unchecked.'

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Friday, March 23, 2007

Ocean-going vessels produce greater quantities of sulfur oxide air pollutants than all the world's cars, trucks and buses combined, according to a study released Thursday.

The report by the International Council on Clean Transportation calls for international regulators to move aggressively to curb emissions from "bunker fuel" used by freight vessels that contains an average 27,000 parts per million of sulfur. U.S. standards for diesel trucks and other vehicles limit sulfur fuels to just 15 parts per million to protect public health. One kind of sulfur oxide, sulfur dioxide, can quickly kill if too much is inhaled rapidly. Chronic exposure to lower levels has been linked to respiratory problems.

The report is especially relevant for Southern California. More than 40% of retail goods imported to the U.S. arrive on ships that dock at Los Angeles and Long Beach, often after passing coastal communities in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

"International ships are one of the world's largest, virtually uncontrolled source of air pollution," said Alan C. Lloyd, president of the International Council on Clean Transportation and former secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. "Air pollution from diesel trucks and buses in Europe, Japan, and the U.S. has declined steadily for over a decade. At the same time, air pollution from international ships is rising virtually unchecked."

The council comprises about 20 scholars and current or former air-quality and transportation regulators from the U.S., South America, Asia and Europe. They include Margo Oge, head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's office of transportation and air quality. A spokesman said the EPA had yet to review the report.

The authors relied on peerreviewed air pollution studies, their own work and government pollution and freight data, according to the council's executive director, Drew Kodjak.

The report found that in 2001, heavy-duty diesel trucks, buses and cars burned more than a billion metric tons of fuel, and emitted 2.2 million metric tons of sulfur oxide. The same year, ocean-going vessels burned 280 million tons of fuel, far less, but emitted 3.4 million metric tons of sulfur oxide, about 17% of the global total.

Ships are also responsible for 3.6 million to 6.5 million metric tons of nitrogen oxide, another pollutant.

The report calls on the International Maritime Organization, an independent branch of the United Nations, to gradually cut allowable sulfur oxide levels by 90%, and allowable nitrogen oxide levels by 95%. In addition, they said, international limits should be developed for fine particles of soot and for carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas widely believed to be contributing to global warming.

International Maritime Organization spokeswoman Natasha Brown said that she had not seen the report but that her group had been discussing improved air-quality standards.

The key committee that could approve changes to the international treaty that covers air pollutants from ships will meet in July, but the soonest any changes could take effect would be in 2009, she said. One hundred thirty-nine member nations could be affected if they sign on. The U.S. has not signed the original international pollution controls adopted in 1997.

Brown said that although the international body had been criticized for adopting "lowest common denominator" regulations, they were the maximum achievable by a group of so many nations.

"There's no point in having standards so high that no one will agree to them," she said. "Nonetheless, there is widespread recognition that improvements need to be made" to reduce sulfur oxide and nitrogen oxide.

Noting that ships carry 90% of the world's freight, Brown said it was not surprising that they would have higher levels of some pollutants.

But Kodjak noted the data showed ships were using far less fuel while emitting more sulfur oxide than land vehicles, and "dramatic" amounts of nitrogen oxide.

"No matter how much freight they ship, the technology is available to make improvements," he said. "The reason why there is such a disparity is not because of the amount of freight they move, but because they've largely been unregulated."

The report did conclude that a decade or more might be needed to implement changes in oil refineries to produce cleaner fuel and to install more-effective pollution-control equipment on ships that the international body might approve.

Ships set course as worst polluters

Need for international accord hampers local regulation

By Erik N. Nelson, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, March 23, 2007

ALL THE world's cars, trucks and buses can't compete with oceangoing ships when it comes to releasing acid rain- and smog-making sulfur dioxide, according to findings released Thursday by a group of international transportation and environmental regulators.

The study found that while emissions from road vehicles have declined sharply in recent decades, emissions from large ships have changed little while the volume of worldwide shipping has steadily increased. Those two factors have allowed pollutants from ships, estimated at 6 million metric tons in 2001, to surpass road vehicle emissions estimated at 2.2 million metric tons.

If no stringent international ship-emission regulations are adopted by the International Maritime Organization, the study warns, ship emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides will soon surpass those of not just land vehicles, but all land sources, including power plants, factories and refineries.

"If they'd be more aggressive in adopting

tougher standards, then you'd see some of these emissions reduced," said Alan Lloyd, former head of California's Environmental Protection Agency. Lloyd is now president of the International Council on Clean Transportation, which produced the study.

Unlike squeezing additional controls out of today's relatively clean car engines, getting a large reduction in emission from oceangoing ships could be done fairly inexpensively, says the study, "Air Pollution and Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ocean-going Ships: Impacts, Mitigation Options and Opportunities for Managing Growth."

Reducing nitrogen oxides, for example, would cost \$11 to \$729 per ton of the pollutant, the study found, while eliminating a ton of nitrogen oxides from land based sources in Europe and the United States ranges from \$1,071 to \$14,330. Cutting back on sulfur dioxide from ships costs more than reducing nitrogen oxides, but it's still much cheaper to do on the water than on land, the study says.

The study adds to the body of evidence that has prompted efforts to curb air pollution from ships at the Port of Oakland and other California ports.

"We've actually known for a long time that ships produce the bulk of the goods-related air pollution," said Roberta Reinstein, manager of Environmental Programs and Safety at the Port of Oakland. "Certainly within our little sphere that we're trying to address, ship emissions are the biggest by a long shot."

The port has been working on techniques such as cold ironing, which hooks ships up to the local power grid so they can operate with their engines shut down in port, and powering ships with mobile natural gas-powered generators. A new rule by the California Air Resources Board was to have required ships to use more refined, low-sulfur fuel before they neared California ports, but that rule is being challenged in court. The Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, which took the state air board to court over the regulation, might support the study's recommendations, said Michael Jacob, the association's vice president.

"If there are stricter rules, they should be done on an international level," Jacob said, echoing the argument against the state regulation, that it would foster a "patchwork quilt" of regulations that would be difficult for international shippers to obey.

Last year Congress stopped short of ratifying a new provision to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships that would have allowed countries to create areas where low-sulfur fuel would have to be used, Jacob added, but the new Congress elected in November is reconsidering it.

While the nation may be slow to join such international agreements, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognizes that ship emissions are a "significant problem," EPA spokesman Mark Merchant said.

"There's a concerted effort now to cut diesel emissions, not only from trucks, but also from ports," he said.

Earlier this month, the agency proposed the Clean Air Locomotive and Marine Diesel Rule, which would set tougher emission standards for new locomotive and marine diesel engines.

Read Erik Nelson's Capricious Commuter blog at InsideBayArea.com.

Concerns about plumes could block Hayward plants

By Matt O'Brien, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, March 23, 2007

HAYWARD — Aircraft safety is replacing air pollution concerns as the latest obstacle potentially jeopardizing plans to build two power plants in west Hayward.

High-velocity plumes generated from power plant heat stacks "have a potential to pose a hazard to aircraft" flying to and from the Hayward Executive Airport, according to a letter sent by the California Energy Commission to city officials this week.

Paul Richins, a manager in the state commission's siting division, wrote that the hot, mostly invisible plumes can disturb the stability of the atmosphere above plants, especially in the winter.

"Plumes are thermally buoyant during colder weather and more likely to maintain their vertical velocity at higher altitudes under calm, cool conditions," Richins wrote.

Hayward's busy general aviation airport is a little more than a mile north of where Texas-based Tierra Energy wants to build its 115-megawatt Eastshore Energy Center on Clawiter Road.

San Jose-based Calpine Corp. also wants to build the much bigger,

600-megawatt Russell City Energy Center about a half-mile west of the Eastshore plant.

Both power plants would serve the Pacific Gas & Electric grid. And both plants, if built, are expected to emit plumes that exit from heat stacks at a velocity ranging from 71 to 74 feet per second, Richins said.

For the Russell City plant, the plumes would emerge from two

145-foot-tall stacks near Hayward's wastewater treatment plant on Enterprise Avenue.

For the Eastshore plant, emissions would emerge from 14 stacks that would each be 70 feet tall.

The Russell City plant also would have nine 64-foot-tall cooling towers emitting additional plumes estimated to rise at 34 feet per second. The Eastshore plant would not have any cooling towers and would not emit any visible plumes.

State energy officials began scrutinizing the aircraft safety issues in Hayward because of concerns that have arisen over power plant proposals in the southeastern California city of Blythe.

Charles Hull, manager of the Blythe Municipal Airport, said a power plant was built in 2001 on a site a mile west of his airport. Another power plant is scheduled to be built nearby soon.

There have been no airplane accidents associated with the existing plant, though some pilots have registered turbulence complaints, Hull said. And in colder winter months, the plant sometimes produces a wet column of air.

"It's a very sensitive issue," Hull said. "You can't have an airport all of a sudden consumed by a cloud."

Partly because of those concerns, staffers at the California Energy Commission advised the commission in 2005 against building a second Blythe power plant, saying the location "creates a potential adverse airport safety impact."

The commission, which has final say on whether a plant will be built, allowed the plant a license anyway but placed a condition on the developer to mitigate air safety hazards.

Hull, who also is Blythe's assistant city manager, said the airport established an airfield wind-advisory system that takes wind and temperature measurements. The state also made power plant operators implement various safety measures.

Susanne Garfield, a spokeswoman for the energy commission, said that because of the Blythe plant, officials now have a better understanding of the impacts of thermal plumes.

Greg Trewitt, a Tierra Energy vice president and manager of the Eastshore project, said the company is prepared to work with the Federal Aviation Administration to study and address potential air safety hazards.

"I think the CEC is just making sure it is not a hazard," Trewitt said of this week's letter. "We'll have to work with the FAA and make sure we're not creating any issues with overflying aircraft."

Motor Sports Beat: IndyCars set the pace with ethanol fuel

By Debbie Arrington, staff writer
Sacramento Bee, Friday, March 23, 2007

With its season opener this weekend at Homestead-Miami Speedway, the Indy Racing League gives new meaning to going green.

In Saturday night's XM Satellite Radio Indy 300, the IndyCars begin an era in motor sports as the first major series anywhere to use 100 percent ethanol in competition.

Made from high-starch crops such as corn, this fuel-grade ethanol actually has higher octane (113) than the 107-octane methanol blend that fueled the series last season.

"We are proud to continue our leadership in racing innovation while making history on Saturday night with a cleaner-burning renewable fuel cultivated in the fields of America," IRL President Brian Barnhart said in a teleconference.

The move earned the series praise from lawmakers and environmentalists, who noted the IndyCars could set an example for fans and the vehicles they drive. In passenger cars, ethanol blends reduce tailpipe emissions by almost 30 percent, according to government estimates.

To compensate for any loss of power, the 2007 IndyCars have a slightly larger engine, a 3.5-liter Honda V8 compared to last year's 3.0-liter.

"Honda has done a very good job in making that a pretty seamless change," 2005 IndyCar champion Dan Wheldon said of the fuel conversion in a separate teleconference.

According to drivers, the new engine seems to offer more horsepower in lower gears. That will make a difference on road courses such as Infineon Raceway, Wheldon predicted. The 17-race series returns to Sonoma on Aug. 26.

"There definitely is a lot more power there," Wheldon said. "You have to manage that power a little bit. And that adds another dimension or challenge to driving IndyCars."

Plus it's a good thing to do, Wheldon noted.

"Switching to ethanol is certainly a lot better for the environment," he said. "It does change the way the engine works to some degree, but as a driver I haven't seen much of that because Honda has taken care of that before we actually got on track."

As for the racing itself, Wheldon expects this year's championship race to be just as tight as last season -- but with perhaps a different outcome.

With 475 points apiece, Wheldon tied Sam Hornish Jr., but Hornish won his third IndyCar title off the tiebreaker -- despite Wheldon winning the season finale. Helio Castroneves finished two points back in third with Wheldon's Chip Ganassi Racing teammate Scott Dixon 15 points back in fourth. Going into the finale, all four drivers could have won the title.

"I had that opportunity to win the championship, and I let it slip," Wheldon said, "and that's really what's driving me this year. I'm very, very determined not to let that happen again."

Wheldon started the past two seasons with Miami victories and hopes for a three-peat Saturday. Qualifying is tonight.

Said the British driver, "As you say in America, it's going to be a barnburner of a season."

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses NASA's investigation of the air quality in the San Joaquin Valley. For more information, contact Maricela \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Enfoca la Nasa investigación al aire del Valle de San Joaquín, en California La Nasa proporcionará sus resultados directamente a agencias locales de calidad del aire

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, March 23, 2007

La Administración Nacional de Aeronáutica y el Espacio, la Nasa, en inglés, informó que concentra en el Valle de San Joaquín una investigación sobre calidad del aire que realiza con un avión equipado con instrumentos precisos y en colaboración con la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental.

Un experto en el proyecto, Jim Skyman dijo que el Valle, en la región central norte de California tiene una de las concentraciones más altas de partículas finas de contaminación.

El avión llamado Rey del Aire, un B-200 comenzó la investigación en días fríos, cuando la contaminación fina aumenta, y continuará hasta entrada la temporada de calor. La Nasa proporcionará sus resultados directamente a agencias locales de calidad del aire.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the approval of two dairies in Allensworth, which still requires approval from SJVAPCD. For more information, contact Maricela (559) 230-5849.

Voto a favor de lecherías

Sarah Elizabeth Villacana

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VISALIA - Las más de 100 personas que asistieron a la audiencia del martes con la Junta de Supervisores del Condado de Tulare se sintieron decepcionadas cuando los supervisores dieron su aprobación para la instalación de dos mega lecherías en las inmediaciones de la comunidad de Allensworth.

Dos autobuses habían llegado por la mañana enfrente del edificio administrativo del condado llevando ciudadanos que se oponen a la construcción de dos establos lecheros de 106 acres cada uno cerca de la Autopista 43 y la Avenida 56.

"Aprecio el tener un sitio histórico en el condado", dijo el supervisor Steve Worthley un poco antes de que los votos se llevaran a cabo. "Pero es necesario que nosotros continuemos".

El proyecto de los establos fue propuesto por el dueño de los terrenos Sam Etchegaray e incluye dos lecherías: la Lechería Rancho Phillips y la Lechería Rancho Earlimart las cuales alojarán a 12,250 vacas lecheras en un espacio de 2,692 acres.

Los Supervisores votaron unánimemente el martes para aprobar el Reporte del Impacto al Medio Ambiente (EIR por sus siglas en inglés) para las lecherías Etchegaray; que se adopten planes de mitigación y se apruebe el Permiso de Uso Especial para la construcción de los establos.

Previo a los votos, cerca de dos docenas de personas de la audiencia hablaron a la Junta durante el periodo de comentarios del público. La mayoría habló sobre su oposición al proyecto.

Charles Allensworth, descendiente del Coronel Allensworth que vino desde San Francisco, habló ante la junta en representación de su familia y de la comunidad afroamericana en todo el estado.

"No estoy aquí para protestar en contra de las lecherías sino en contra de su construcción e instalación tan cerca del parque estatal", señaló Allensworth. "Pueden ustedes construir las lecherías en alguna otra parte pero no pueden remover la historia".

George Finnley de Fresno dijo que él es dueño de terrenos en Allensworth y pidió a la junta que tomara en consideración el impacto negativo que las lecherías causarían en el área.

"Ustedes no pueden controlar el aire", dijo Finnley. "No pueden controlar hacia donde va el agua y cuando suceda el flujo, ¿hacia donde irá el agua? hacia adentro del parque".

"Todos nosotros necesitamos comprender las contribuciones que la comunidad afroamericana ha dado a California", subrayó Finnley. "¿Por qué no protegemos el parque no dejando que las lecherías se asienten tan cerca?".

La lechería más cercana estaría a 6,789 pies del Parque Estatal Allensworth, de acuerdo a un reporte de la Agencia Administrativa de Recursos del Condado.

El Presidente de la Junta Allen Ishida y el Supervisor Phil Cox, se dirigieron al público para hacer saber su apoyo al proyecto de Etchegaray.

"El solicitante ha invertido mucho dinero y mucho tiempo", indicó Ishida. "Esto es parte del proceso que asegura a todos ser parte del mismo".

"Pienso que hay suficientes y significantes medidas de mitigación", dijo Cox.

El abogado Timothy R. Grabel habló sobre el Concilio de Defensa de Recursos Naturales (NRDC por sus siglas en inglés) en oposición a las lecherías.

Grabel dijo que el año pasado el NRDC envió una carta a la junta de supervisores en la cual reclamaba que el EIR no había tomado en consideración el impacto que las lecherías ocasionarían en el parque Allensworth.

“Es más, el NRDC comparte las preocupaciones del Servicio de Pesca y Fauna Silvestre de los Estados Unidos y del Departamento de Pesca y Caza de California acerca de los impactos potenciales para proteger los refugios de la fauna silvestre”, mencionó Grabiell refiriéndose al Refugio Nacional de Fauna Silvestre en Pixley.

Una carta del NRDC fechada el 19 de marzo demanda que el EIR no analizó los efectos significantes al medio ambiente en relación con el agua subterránea, el aire, la agricultura y el uso de antibióticos no terapéuticos comúnmente usados en los grandes talleres agrícolas.

Algunos residentes de Allensworth, como Nettie Morrison, dijo sentir que sus voces habían caído en oídos sordos.

“Como un padre cuando habla con sus hijos y que sabe que lo oyen pero no escuchan lo que dice”, dijo Morrison. “Ellos (la Junta) no están en lo que nosotros estamos diciendo”.

Morrison ha residido en Allensworth durante 31 años.

“Allensworth es una comunidad negra y morena”, subrayó Morrison. “No se ven negros ni morenos en esta junta”.

El debate sobre los ranchos Earlimart y Phillips continuará. El proyecto todavía requiere la autorización del [Distrito de Control de la Polución del Aire del Valle de San Joaquín](#) y de la Junta Regional de Calidad del Agua del Valle Central.

Otro factor es el Departamento de Parques y Recreo de California, el cual ha puesto en la lista del Fideicomiso de Terrenos Públicos la compra del sitio del proyecto de Etchegaray. Ambos, el Departamento de Parques y Etchegaray, llegaron a un acuerdo que estará pendiente hasta que en mayo se complete la evaluación del terreno.

El Supervisor del Distrito 5 Mike Ennis, quien ocupó la curul en enero, no ha estado presente en todas las sesiones sobre el proyecto de Etchegaray y se abstuvo de votar el martes.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Thursday, March 22, 2007:](#)

Government must practice energy conservation

By Alberto Torrico

WITH the price of gas creeping over \$3 a gallon, instability rattling throughout the Middle East and scientists predicting dire consequences caused by global warming, Americans are becoming more conscious of the impacts and consequences of our energy dependent lifestyle.

Fortunately, we have options to address these issues.

If we confront, rather than ignore, the causes of global warming, we can choose a new path of action that will reduce our dependence on unstable sources of energy, reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, and improve our air quality.

California is in a unique position to lead the way.

With its eyes on the future, a culture of innovation and a strong emphasis on conservation, California is well-positioned to exert its leadership. As a large user of energy, government has a critical responsibility not only to advocate for energy conservation, but to practice it as well.

From 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday in the Union City Council Chambers, you can learn first-hand what is being done at the state and local levels to build environmentally friendly public facilities.

I will co-chair a hearing of the Assembly Governmental Organization and Business and Professions committees — The Greening of California's Public Buildings.

Presenters from the California Energy Commission, California Environmental Protection Agency, the Division of the State Architect and others, will join with Alameda County and Ohlone College officials to describe progress made to date on the state's Green Building Initiative, carbon reduction strategies and emerging technologies in construction and design.

Amazing work is being done to make our public buildings much more energy efficient, with the goal of reducing energy consumption by 20 percent within eight years.

Yet, I think even more can be done to maintain our state's focus on green buildings and to bring new energy-conserving technologies to market. That is why I introduced Assembly Bill 527, a bill requiring the Energy Commission and state Department of General Services to develop (and adopt) a plan to integrate energy efficient technology into state-operated facilities.

The plan will include, but not be limited to, advancements from the state's Public Interest Energy Research Program, run by the state Energy Commission.

The program has funded work on advanced lighting technologies, the use of ozone-friendly refrigerants in air conditioners, and predicting the energy production of solar energy modules.

The cutting-edge research done by this program will not only grow our energy independence, but can expand California's market in green technologies.

The future health of our environment is being shaped by the decisions we make every day.

On Friday, come spend a few hours and see how that environment may look in California.

Assemblyman Alberto Torrico (D-Newark) is the chair of the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee and represents the 20th Assembly District.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Friday, March 23, 2007:](#)

Open Forum

Global Warming Response — Markets or Taxes?

Coordinate carbon trading markets

By Joe Nation

After years of inaction, governments and others are taking steps to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Yet, as the planet careens toward certain climate change, there is no international agreement to coordinate these efforts. There should be.

The best approach to curbing emissions is the development of a carbon market, sometimes called "cap and trade." A cap-and-trade system limits total emissions, then creates a market where emissions credits are traded. There are numerous advantages to this approach, compared with a carbon tax, which is politically infeasible. A carbon market provides flexibility in meeting emission-reduction targets, and it delivers those reductions in the most cost-effective manner.

The difficulty today is that there isn't one carbon market, but several regional markets that are not well coordinated or linked. One global market would deliver a more efficient market and reduce emissions more quickly. This patchwork of markets will face difficulty in setting common rules for trading.

For example, how do markets agree which emissions credits will be permitted? How can markets with potentially disparate characteristics build confidence among investors, who will fund this emerging low-carbon global economy?

California is designing a carbon market that will launch in 2012. In the Northeast, several states, led by New York, have created the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and aim to hold emissions from power plants at current levels through early 2015, then reduce emissions 10 percent more by 2019.

In the European Union, a market system is already operating. Last year, more than 1 billion tons of greenhouse gases were exchanged at a value of \$24 billion. The second phase of trading,

corresponding with the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol, will begin in 2008 and end in 2012. Europe is also preparing for a third phase of trading starting in 2013.

Confused yet? It could get worse. In addition to this growing number of regional efforts, there are no Kyoto Protocol reduction targets in place after 2012. So businesses and others face tremendous uncertainty as to what any future carbon market might look like. We need to quickly conclude an international agreement that is more aggressive than the Kyoto Protocol.

Kyoto, adopted initially 10 years ago, has not been successful, despite its initial fanfare. Why? The United States bears primary responsibility for its failure to ratify Kyoto or to seek meaningful alternatives. But there are other problems.

Kyoto failed to require emissions reductions in the developing world, especially China, which is now likely to surpass the United States as the planet's top emitter of greenhouse gases in the next two years, not in two decades as thought just a few years ago.

Kyoto's results also have been disappointing. Under Kyoto, the United States was to reduce emissions 7 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2012. Emissions in 2004 were already 16 percent higher. Greece's Kyoto target was an 8 percent cut, but by 2004, emissions were up 27 percent. Spain won't come close to their targeted reduction of 8 percent; instead, overall emissions are up 49 percent. Only two European nations, the United Kingdom, and Sweden, appear certain to achieve their 2012 targets.

At a recent conference, Point Carbon, an information and analytic service, speculated that the United States would not join any post-Kyoto agreement until 2015 and would not become a "full member" of an international agreement until 2018. That time line is much too late. We need to accelerate the launch of a global carbon market.

At current trends, the level of carbon dioxide (in parts per million in the atmosphere) will climb from roughly 382 today to perhaps 412 by 2018, making it far harder to keep global average temperature increases to a minimum. At the same conference, former Vice President Al Gore called for a new post-Kyoto agreement by the year 2010. Gore argues that we simply don't have the time to wait, given the increasingly bad scientific news on climate change. We should do the same in California and set a goal of advancing the start date of our own carbon market to 2010, rather than 2012. Even if the United States fails to act,

California should move up its start date.

In both California and at the international level, we should also establish a trading commitment period from 2010-2030. That will address another problem: Limited investment in emissions reduction projects beyond 2012.

In the end, a reality exists. An international agreement on climate with an early start date and a long commitment period will matter far more than our good work in California. We need that agreement now.

Joe Nation, a former member of the state Assembly, teaches microeconomics and climate change at the University of San Francisco.