Fresno Bee commentary, Tuesday, May 8, 2007:

PETER E. WEBER: 'Dual path' will get Valley to clean air faster

On April 30, the regional air board approved a "dual path" to clean up the Valley's air, which means setting 2024 as the official, legally mandated cleanup deadline, but simultaneously working to speed up attainment to 2019, perhaps sooner. In a May 2 editorial, The Bee questioned why the "dual path" couldn't be folded into one legally binding path.

"If you have trouble following that pea," The Bee said, "you're not alone." Fair point. It's a difficult pea to follow. Let me try to explain.

As chair of the Air Quality Work Group of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, I've spent the last 18 months deeply immersed in the intricacies of the Federal Clean Air Act. The act requires all air basins with non-attainment designations to submit attainment plans based on EPA-approved forecasting models. Emission reductions must be quantifiable, enforceable, surplus, permanent and based on current technology. If financial incentives are used to get the reductions, money must be in the bank.

In 2004, 15 California air basins were assigned classifications by the EPA for the new eight-hour ozone standard and asked to deliver attainment plans by June 15, 2007. Areas unable to comply with the designated attainment date have the option to request extensions. As it turns out, most areas in California were underclassified. Eleven of the 15 air basins are requesting extensions.

The Valley received a "serious" classification with a 2013 attainment date, a significant underclassification given the fact that the Valley's geography and climate makes ours the most challenging air basin in the country. To achieve attainment, we need to reduce our nitrogen oxide emissions from 624 tons to 160 tons, a 75% reduction, and we have to do so under the rigorous EPA criteria described above.

We can request an extension to "severe" with an attainment date of 2019 or 2021. If it is impossible for us to demonstrate attainment by then, we are allowed to address the shortfall with "future technologies," but only if we request an "extreme" classification with a 2024 deadline. That's the situation in which we find ourselves.

Still come up short

Exhaustive analysis shows that using every practicable measure acceptable to EPA, we are 100 tons per day short of attainment by 2021. The district's plan will cost more than $20 billion and it will get us most of the reductions we need, but we simply do not have the technology today to completely close the gap.

"Come on," you say, "if we can get a man to the moon in 10 years ... ." Fair enough, but remember that EPA places significant constraints on the emission reductions we can claim and insists that the plan must be based on current technology. That's what takes us to a formal, legally approvable path with an "extreme" designation and a 2024 deadline.

But we need not reconcile ourselves to attainment on that date. Indeed, we must commit ourselves to accelerating attainment by doing some things "on the side," as The Bee put it in its editorial. That's where the dual path comes in.

Let me illustrate. Mobile sources account for 80% of the Valley's NOx. Technology is making great strides in cleaning diesel-engine emissions, but the problem is the legacy fleet of vehicles.

The average life of a truck in the U.S. is 23 years. As a Valley resident, you've almost certainly seen tractors that are more than 40 years old.

We can accelerate turnover of that mobile fleet through incentive mechanisms. Indeed, the Air District has proposed programs that would reduce the 100 tons per day emissions shortfall by 40 tons, enabling 1.1 million more people to breathe clean air by 2020, but the cost is about $3 billion. We're working to get that funding, but until we have it secured, we can't count it in the official plan.

Another example is short sea shipping, which could potentially enable us to move thousands of trucks off Highway 99 and Interstate 5 by taking much of the pass-through cargo and moving it by sea. A study of this option is under way. We can make a significant dent in the remaining 60 tons per day gap if we explore this option, find it feasible and build the system. But we cannot today count those potential emission reductions in our official plan.

There are many other examples of things that we can do "on the side." The bottom line is that we are confident we can reach attainment long before 2024. We just can't make that claim in the official plan submitted to EPA.

Peter E. Weber is the chairman of the Air Quality Work Group of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley.

Making the Valley Great

Center has brought cash, attention to the area and helped define the region

By GARTH STAPLEY

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, May 8, 2007

In one decade, the Great Valley Center has done much to define California's fastest-growing region, yet still struggles to define itself.

The Modesto-based nonprofit, nearing its 10th birthday and 10th annual conference, has battled serious financial challenges and soon will say goodbye to its founder and only president.

But the Great Valley Center has established a solid reputation as the go-to place for reliable data, zippy sound bites and general advice, from Redding to Bakersfield and all points between.

Groups ranging from government agencies to the media to Hmong farmers are quick to sing the center's praises, even if its leaders have a hard time describing what it does.

"Think tank" is probably the most-used handle grabbed by policy wonks and reporters trying to efficiently capture the Great Valley Center's essence. But that ignores its impressive legacy as the single driving force building regional consciousness for a huge, largely unconnected area.

And "think tank" gives squirms to Carol Whiteside, the center's supremely quotable outgoing president.

"'Think tank' implies a cerebral, ivory-tower, intellectual experience," Whiteside protested. "Someone said we're a think-and-do tank. We have programs. We do things."

In 10 years, the Great Valley Center has attracted more than $35 million in support, mostly from wealthy private foundations. Whiteside's troops have regranted about $5 million to other groups, trained more than 800 officials and future leaders, and helped to permanently preserve 20,000 acres of valley farmland.

The think-and-do tank put to work serious thinkers and researchers, sponsoring more than80 studies with data to help the valley understand itself as never before. The Great Valley Center also helped secure a $1 billion state commitment to improve the valley's backbone, Highway 99.

When the center lost half its budget and staff to discontinued grants in 2005, it responded by welding a link with the University of California at Merced.

And the center is a rallying point in Gov. Schwarzenegger's California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, as well as the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process, an unprecedented stab at regional planning.

Not bad for a decade's work, many say.

"The Great Valley Center is the one that knits us all together," said David Hosley, general manager of KVIE, Sacramento's PBS affiliate.

Sunne Wright McPeak, born in Turlock and Schwarzenegger's former business, transportation and housing secretary, said the Modesto-based center has "set the stage for the San Joaquin Valley to be California's 21st-century opportunity.

"It's the Great Valley Center," McPeak continued, "which has engaged the leaders of today, trained the leaders of tomorrow and set the stage for the valley to reach its full promise."

Land of the lost

Whiteside, a former school board member and mayor of Modesto from 1987-91, served in Gov. Wilson's Cabinet in the mid-1990s. Every working day, she was exposed to ideas and energy in fast-moving, forward-thinking places. And every time she drove home to Modesto, the valley seemed to be standing still.

Decision makers in Sacramento and Washington all but ignored the nation's bread basket, with soil among the finest on Earth. Everyone knew that the valley was warmer, poorer and less educated than the Bay Area and Southern California, but virtually no one had numbers to illustrate it.

And few could see the benefit of change.

"We were invisible," Whiteside said. "People were saying, 'Where is this place? What are they doing?' And the real problem was, people acted like everything was fine."

Whiteside began developing a vision with one high-minded goal: Help the valley. She would do it by waving a flag to draw attention from elsewhere, and by helping people here to help themselves.

There is limited regional identity and almost no valleywide constituency for or advocacy of valley issues. The valley lacks the mature "sense of self" that will be required to meet the challenges ahead.
— The Great Valley Center Concept Paper, September 1996

In the fall of 1997, Whiteside traded the governor's administration for a staff of two and moved into a small rented space in downtown Modesto with little more than a Rolodex and a Princess phone.

But she had plied connections to secure multimillion-dollar founding grants from the James Irvine, William and Flora Hewlett, and David and Lucile Packard foundations.

The cash allowed Whiteside to hit the ground running instead of spending time and resources raising funds, a common burden of most start-up nonprofits.

In short order, the Great Valley Center began producing unprecedented reports with real data. Its first conference bloomed in the same Sacramento hotel where its 10th conference will be staged this week. And reporters began dialing Whiteside's number for comment on a wide array of valley-centric topics.

Whiteside's staff quickly expanded far beyond the six positions she had envisioned in her concept paper. During the center's glory days in 2003, she employed 30 workers managing dozens of programs with multiple missions.

Most important, Whiteside's board of directors decided, were the center's annual conference, leadership training and reports providing information on many facets of the valley's well-being, or not-so-well-being.

"You can't ever improve unless you know what you're working on," Whiteside said. "All of a sudden, we were defining the valley with real numbers, and people saw we weren't just the 'outer Bay Area.'"

Surveys and studies predicted, among other things, that a population surge will double our number of residents in 40 years. And Whiteside's people were not shy about telling everyone that the valley wasn't close to being prepared for that kind of human tidal wave.

"The Great Valley Center brought our challenges to the front page, and brought us an opportunity to deal with them," said Kirk Lindsey of Modesto, the San Joaquin Valley's lone voice on the California Transportation Commission.

The Great Valley Center's two-day annual conference dispenses pearls of wisdom to about 700 people with varying interests. Keynote speakers have ranged from visionaries and dignitaries from other continents to sports heroes and entertainers.

'Let's talk'

The low-income town of Pixley (population 2,600), along Highway 99 north of Bakersfield, once brought 21 business owners, pastors, high school students and civic leaders. That led to a three-year, $600,000 AT&T technology grant — facilitated by the Great Valley Center — to train 200 families on Internet use, and to put computers in their homes.

The center helped pixie-sized Pixley land an $18,000 grant to encourage young people in leadership training and secured help to strengthen Latino businesses.

"This is a direct result of attending the conference," said Wayne Clark, retired school superintendent and a member of the Pixley Foundation. "It's small enough that people from small communities can mix with people from the corporate world."

Ricardo Córdova, a Stanislaus County Superior Court judge and founding board member of the Great Valley Center, said he is most proud of the center's focus on opening vistas to all valley residents, regardless of political clout.

"The Great Valley Center has really made an effort to reach out to the underserved and minority communities, folks who didn't feel they had a place at the table," Córdova said.

Barbara Goodwin, executive director of the Council of Fresno County Governments, said: "They don't try to just do it for us. They try to get us to do it for ourselves, which is much more efficient in the long run."
Whiteside is convinced that partisan neutrality is a key to the center's success.

She picked her adopted hometown as the center's headquarters to avoid too-close association with lawmakers at the Capitol. And she has carefully downplayed her former role as a Republican mover and shaker.

And while looking for a chief operating officer, Whiteside turned to Mike Lynch, who had helped create a Democratic political machine in the Northern San Joaquin Valley as former Rep. Gary Condit's chief of staff.

"We are not advocates" pushing an agenda, Whiteside said. "It's never been our job to make the decisions."

The center makes a rare exception when issues arise from its research. For example, the center pinpointed a troubling "digital divide" between technologically advanced places and the undereducated valley, then spent years pushing technology advances here.

KVIE's Hosley said the center "is really able to bring folks together in an unusual way so that partisanship is on the back burner, and planning for growth is on the front burner."
Jaime Holt, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman and a Great Valley Center leadership graduate, said the center "has built a reputation as not being biased or slanted. That's been their strength.

"I have seen them take a stand," Holt continued, "but not in an over-the-top, in-your-face kind of way. It's more, 'Let's educate people on the issues.'"

The Great Valley Center's rapid rise never guaranteed its longevity.

Info-rich, cash-poor

Although Whiteside had twisted arms for $35 million in venture philanthropy since its birth, the center's key funders eventually turned their attention elsewhere.

For example, the Packard Foundation became less interested in protecting farmland, a passion of the Great Valley Center, in favor of preserving sensitive habitat. And the Hewlett Foundation leaned toward international issues.

"The focus of the Great Valley Center on addressing economic development and land use was no longer well aligned with our program priorities," said Martha Campbell, vice president of programs for the Irvine Foundation.

Eric Brown, communications director for the Hewlett Foundation, said it had been intrigued by the Great Valley Center's dream, although it never provided a good fit with his group's focus. "We wanted to get the institution off the ground and functioning, at which point we would return to other programs," Brown said.

The hits were devastating.

Layoffs dropped Whiteside's staff from 30 to 15. The center quit its middleman role of channeling grants from large foundations to valley nonprofits. Several other training programs fostering leadership and technology died.

"Unfortunately, some of the large state funders have a very short memory," Holt said.

Whiteside's board of directors agreed not to compromise by chasing new money attached to hot-button issues du jour. For example, hefty grants tied to homeland security sounded tempting, but had little to do
with promoting the valley.

Instead, Whiteside turned to the new UC campus in Merced. Former Chancellor Carol Tomlinson-Keasey agreed to absorb the research-steeped Great Valley Center.

Whiteside and Lynch became UC employees; the center's other workers became contract employees. The university controls the center's finances and new Chancellor Steve Kang will choose Whiteside's successor.

The nonprofit, though, still owns its headquarters in a recently remodeled church, and its board of directors remains in place.

Whiteside acknowledges some pain from "taking a nimble nonprofit and fitting it into a huge institution with a big bureaucracy. It's just a lot more complicated."

Sam Traina, the university's acting research vice chancellor, agreed that "it's taken some time to learn each other's policies and procedures. But so far, it's turned out to be an excellent partnership."

Having solidified the Great Valley Center's reputation and ensured its survival, Whiteside, 64, last month announced her departure when a new president is selected. She'll do some consulting and public speaking, spend time with grandchildren and "have lunch with my 86-year-old mother without having to schedule it."

Enduring legacy

Traina, who is chairman of a search committee, said, "We'll never find a replacement for Carol, but I'm confident we will find a good successor. She has created an amazing organization. I'm absolutely confident that the reputation of the Great Valley Center just by itself will attract some amazing candidates."

Whiteside said in 10 years, her people have accomplished everything envisioned in her concept paper.

"When we started in '97, nobody would even say the word 'region,'" she said. "Without question, now there is a regional consciousness, and it's paying dividends" in broad-based planning efforts and political capital.

"The whole region is functioning at a new level," Whiteside continued. "Before, it was small and subtle. Now it's big and loud."

Said Córdova: "With Carol's leadership, the Central Valley is on the map in terms of decision makers."

But she still hasn't come up with an easily digestible description of what the Great Valley Center does.

"One of the problems we have is, if we tell everything we do, people's eyes glaze over," Whiteside said. "And we never solved that problem."

AT A GLANCE
What: Great Valley Center annual conference: "Our Place in the World 10: New Thinking for a Big Valley"
When: Wednesday and Thursday
Where: Radisson Hotel, 500 Leisure Lane, Sacramento
Cost: $250, or $130 per day
WHAT THEY'VE DONE
The Great Valley Center's top accomplishments, in the eyes of founder Carol Whiteside:
Drew $1 billion state commitment for Highway 99 improvements after five years of work on master plan and business plan
Web site serves as clearinghouse for valley information, drawing nearly 1 million unique visits last year
Helped create four youth foundations — Central Valley Land Trust, International Center for Water Technology in Fresno, Creative Fresno and Butte Pioneers Civic Venture
Of 161 IDEAL leadership program graduates, 36 have run for office, 28 were elected, 72 appointed and 102 serve on nonprofit boards
Helped permanently preserve more than 20,000 acres of farmland

Redwood tops at sucking up exhaust, UCD scientist says

Wind tunnel tests spurred by bad air at Arden Middle School show flat needles absorb 95%.
By Chris Bowman, staff writer
Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, May 8, 2007

The California redwood, known for capturing much of its water supply from coastal fog, also appears to excel at scrubbing vehicle soot from the air, according to a University of California, Davis, scientist.

Preliminary results from a wind tunnel experiment show the flat needles of the coast redwood removing 75 percent to 95 percent of the most harmful tailpipe exhaust particles, Thomas Cahill said Monday in a presentation to the Sacramento area chapter of the nonprofit Breathe California.

"It's an extremely efficient way to reduce air pollution," said Cahill, a retired atmospheric physicist who has conducted several pioneering studies of particle pollution around the world.

Cahill's tree experiment is the latest in a series of studies of Sacramento-area pollution he has led on behalf of the clean-air advocacy group, formerly the American Lung Association.

The volunteer research, now in its fifth year, has focused on vehicle exhaust near Arden Middle School in Carmichael. Built more than 60 years ago, the once-rural school is one of many in the region surrounded by heavy traffic. The school is at Watt Avenue and Arden Way, where traffic averages 60,000 vehicles a day.

Earlier Cahill studies have shown levels of particle pollution next to the school at least as high during the day as those near Interstate 5 in downtown Sacramento, where traffic volume is four times as high.

At the suggestion of the UCD researchers, parent and student volunteers at the Arden school have planted a wall of trees along Watt Avenue to help reduce pollution. Also, the scientists' air monitors have shown a significant drop in particle pollution inside the school, which followed their recommended installation of electrostatic filters and air flow adjustments.

While other studies have shown trees to be effective at suppressing dust along unpaved roads, the latest UCD study is perhaps the first to examine the effectiveness of trees in reducing the "very fine" and "ultra fine" particles of burnt motor fuel and oil, said Greg McPherson, director of the federal Center for Urban Forest Research at UCD.

Such particles are small enough to bypass the body's defenses and lodge deep in the lungs, and have been linked in many studies to deaths of people with heart and breathing problems.

The UCD study found redwood trees to be most effective of three species at removing particle pollutants, followed by the longer needled deodar cedar and the broad-leaf live oak.

Some want polluted Valley air cleaned up sooner

By Leslie Albrecht
Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, May 8, 2007

Plans to postpone a deadline for cleaning the Valley's polluted air drew sharp criticism at Monday night's City Council meeting.

Six residents told the council they disagree with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's new proposal to meet air quality standards by 2023. The original deadline to clean the air was 2013, but the Air District voted to adopt the extended timeline at its meeting last Tuesday.

The City Council has no say in the matter, but Air District Executive Director Seyed Sadredin presented the new cleanup timeline to the council as part of a 58-city tour he's making to promote the plan.

Sadredin told the council that Merced's air is "virtually clean," and that a child born today breathes air that is 50 percent cleaner than 15 years ago.

But the region is still plagued by dirty air, he said, caused in large part by "God-given conditions that we have no control over," such as the Valley's bowl-like geography.

The Air District's new plan to meet clean air standards offers "tough regulations" that will quickly create an unprecedented improvement in air quality, said Sadredin.

He worked to counter criticism that the Air District kowtows to business interests, noting that the new air quality laws will cost businesses $20 billion.

Sadredin also said the Air District must adopt a new deadline now, because failure to do so could cost the region $2 billion in federal highway funding.

Councilman Bill Spriggs thanked Sadredin for his hard work, and said the Bar Area has added to the Valley's air pollution troubles by refusing to provide affordable housing to its residents, which has forced thousands of commuters onto Valley roads.

Councilman Jim Sanders called Sadredin's report encouraging, but sobering. He said the city should consider alternative forms of transportation as it plans for the future.

Residents who spoke were less sunny in their assessments of Sadredin's report.

Lisa Kayser Grant, a member of the Moms Clean Air Network, said she took issue with Sadredin's assertion that Merced's air is "virtually clean."

"We can be very thankful for the improvements over the last 10 years, but we can't pretend we're OK," said Kayser Grant.

She noted that the American Lung Association's 2007 State of the Air Report ranked Merced as the sixth most ozone-polluted city in the nation. Kayser Grant said cleaning the Valley's air by 2013 was still a feasible alternative.

"Every year that we delay air quality results in thousands of cases of human suffering," said Kayser Grant. "Does five years sooner make a difference? Absolutely."

Mary-Michael Rowling of the Asthma Coalition told the council that more than 100 people had attended the Air District's meeting last week, most because they wanted to speak against the new deadline.

Resident Marilynne Pereira urged the council to reject Wal-Mart's plan to build a distribution center in Southeast Merced, because diesel trucks driving to and from the center could further pollute Merced's air.

"Decisions you make don't stop at the city limits," Pereira told the council. "They impact the lives of everyone in the Valley."

L.A. Times commentary, Monday, May 7, 2007:

Sun, surf and smog

Without L.A.'s signature elements, who and what would we be?

By Gregory Rodriguez

JUST IN CASE you missed it, last week was National Air Quality Control Week. That explains why the American Lung Assn. released its new study announcing that Los Angeles is still the smog capitol of the United States.

Not exactly a man-bites-dog story, but some Angelenos may recall that we were actually stripped of that title a few years ago when the Environmental Protection Agency crowned Houston the new pollution king. For me, an asthmatic and no friend to smog, that moment was bittersweet. Because more than anything else, smog is L.A.'s classic signifier. Just as the cult of noir flourished in the underbelly of the city of sunshine, smog has long been the ubiquitous sign that there is trouble in paradise. Who and what would we be without it?

If the great weather is our raison d'etre and space — and, by extension, cars — our birthright, then for the last 60-odd years, smog has been the penance for all that and more. L.A. was the first city to combine plentiful sunshine with enormous numbers of cars traveling long distances every day, which happens to be a good recipe for smog.

As for doing penance: We're the only great city in the world that has had to apologize for its very existence. You know the drill: We're in the desert; we stole the water; we shouldn't really exist. But that sort of environmentalist hand-wringing doesn't just occur in the pages of newspapers and academic tracts, it's part of the everyday morality tale of living in Southern California.

Particularly if you grew up here in the 1960s and 1970s, when the smog was at all-time highs, you're sensitive to the rhythm of pollution, the worst seasons, the worst times of the day and the wind conditions and temperatures that make the toxic haze wax or wane. Smog is the limit to our fun in the sun.

I remember playing whiffle ball as a boy with my cousin, Marcos, when my aunt called us in because of the pollution. Then there were restless days in junior high when we couldn't go out for phys ed. When I got older, I learned to anticipate the end of idyllic, clear blue skies. I know that, after three gorgeous hot dry days with no wind, the smog will return with a vengeance.

Not only has smog been the thunder cloud in the land of silver linings, it's embarrassing. I was in high school when Britain's Prince Philip, speaking in his capacity as president of the International Equestrian Federation, publicly fretted over the effect L.A.'s smog would have on horses in the 1984 Olympics. Ouch.

And the shame of smog worked its way into our social hierarchy. In Glendale, where I grew up, I knew that we had worse air than they did in, say, West L.A., but we could, thank goodness, say it wasn't as bad as it was in Claremont. Meanwhile, Claremonters could feel superior to long-suffering San Bernardinans.

Perhaps in an attempt to grapple with their shame, Angelenos have sometimes tried to look for the hidden benefits of smog. Like the character in the movie "Get Shorty," we routinely credit the bad air for our wonderful sunsets. A decade ago, a UCLA-trained environmental engineer released a study revealing that, although L.A.'s smog clearly has adverse health effects, it also dramatically reduces the intensity of ultraviolet rays.

In 1971, one non-Angeleno economist did a brief cost-benefit analysis of the elimination of smog here. Yes, it would be aesthetically pleasing as well as beneficial to our health, he concluded. It could even lower the prices of some goods. But the eradication of smog, he argued, could also make L.A. a more attractive place to live, thereby encouraging even more migrants, which would only further raise home prices and rents and add to congestion, noise and litter.

I don't love smog, but I admit to appreciating its cultural role in our lives. It was a recurring character in Raymond Chandler novels. "The weather was hot and sticky and the acid sting of the smog had crept as far west as Beverly Hills," he wrote in "The Long Goodbye." It was a menacing presence in Joel Schumacher's 1993 classic film, "Falling Down." And, in real life, it was the symbol of the costs and limits to developing the only metropolis that was built on the promise of the suburban dream. Even more than the 1992 riots, smog was what first forced us to come to grips with the problems of urbanity. And to a great extent we did.

The American Lung Assn. reminds us that our air is far from clean, but we longtimers can testify to how much better it is now than it once was. And that's another legacy of L.A.'s culture of smog. We know from experience that we may not be able to eradicate our problems, but if we really want to, we can collectively improve some of our city's most vexing challenges.

Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, May 8, 2007:

Only acceptable way

Concerning Paula Costis' letter (May 3), this is what I believe she really meant to write: "Teachers actually attempt to inform and educate students" ... of their own personal agendas regarding global warming.

As a teacher, if I had permission to show Al Gore's controversial movie, I would make sure to present both sides of the argument so students could make up their own impressionable minds. Isn't that education's goal, to help students learn to think for themselves?

I would show Gore's movie, followed by classroom discussion. The next day, I would show the British documentary, "The Great Global Warming Swindle," followed by a compare-and-contrast discussion. Then I would separate the class into "agree" and "disagree" groups, allow them to research further, followed by a presentation of their findings in debate format with an unbiased teacher as moderator. This would be a true learning experience, not some regurgitated rant of what a teacher "believes."

Having a child in elementary school, I would consider only this method of presenting the subject of global warming as acceptable. Any other method I would consider as bordering on teacher malpractice, promoting, as writer Michael Chrichton alleges, a false "State of Fear."

Mark Ybarra, Fresno

Letter to the Editor, Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, May 8, 2007:

Fine Chevron

The right to breathe clean air is associated with the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

I'm outraged Chevron took three months to report "400 pounds. of toxic gas" was released by the Jan. 15 fire. That event placed thousands "in shelter" for hours, sent 30 people to the hospital, and made countless others, including me, experience symptoms. "Corroded pipes" should have been removed 20 years ago but were not.

Unbelievably, an oil company's ad in the Times associated cancer and asthma with proximity to these fires. In light of our high rates of these diseases, we must hold them accountable.

At an Air Quality Board meeting on April 17, I learned Shell refinery reduced toxic emissions by 75 percent, while Chevron, who reports $17.14 billion profit this year, has increased theirs by 80 percent!

I urge residents to contact Supervisor John Gioia to demand reparations. He stated he won't fine them since necessary repairs have been made. Yet, on April 23, there was another flaring caused by compressor breakdown.

Contact Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Ask them to demand fines and zero toxic emissions. Support Community for Better Environment for their great work.

Boycott Chevron stations.

Ruth Gilmore, Richmond

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses how Redwood trees can absorb exhaust. For more information, contact Maricela (559) 230-5849.

Descubren en California que el árbol de sequoya descontamina lo que la tecnología no puede

El también árbol sagrado de los cherokis elimina entre 75 y 90 por ciento las llamadas "partículas ultra finas" de contaminación del aire

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA
Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, May 8, 2007

Científicos de la Universidad de California, en Davis, descubrieron que el árbol de la sequoya, llamado redwood en inglés, logra convertir en oxígeno las partículas más finas de la contaminación vehicular.

De acuerdo con el investigador Thomas Cahill, la sequoya combate desde hace decenas de miles de años un tipo de contaminación que los seres humanos son incapaces de controlar aún con todos sus adelantos tecnológicos.

El estudio académico se presentó en la organización California Respira y a nombre de la Asociación estadounidense de salud Pulmonar.

El también árbol sagrado de los cherokis elimina entre 75 y 90 por ciento las llamadas "partículas ultra finas" de contaminación del aire.