

Wildfires causing Valley air pollution

Regulators alert citizens with respiratory problems

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a cautionary warning for much of the San Joaquin Valley due to two fires in southern California.

The fires — the Zaca fire in Santa Barbara County and the Tar Canyon fire in Fresno County — have spiked particulate levels to 55 micrograms per cubic meter in Bakersfield, or 20 micrograms above the federally accepted level, said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman with the air district.

Though those closer to the fires have more to be worried about, residents in San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties with respiratory problems, such as lung disease or asthma, or heart disease may want to stay indoors if they smell smoke, Turner said.

The immediate threat is small, but heavy winds could send smoke farther north.

To put particulate levels in perspective, fires in a fireplace also elevate the air to about 55 micrograms per cubic meter, Turner said. Fireworks raise the air to extremely high particulate levels. Modesto's fireworks boosted levels to 302 micrograms per cubic meter in July 2006.

However, particulate readings are averaged over a 24-hour period, and levels hit the 55 mark only once Wednesday.

Fires prompt health warning

Special to The Madera Tribune

Wed., Aug. 15, 2007

The air district has issued a warning to San Joaquin Valley residents to be watchful of increased pollution levels caused by two nearby fires.

According to Janelle Schneider, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, there is a possibility that the soot and smoke could come this way.

"As wind directions change it can move the smoke in different places," she said. "We did not see a problem in Madera, but forecasters are saying there's a possibility some of the smoke could drift up this way."

Two wildfires affecting air quality in the valley are the Zaca fire in Santa Barbara County and the Tar Canyon fire in Fresno County. The fires are expected to affect Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings and Tulare counties and the valley portion of Kern counties, with the potential to affect Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties depending on wind patterns, according to district forecasters.

The warning is in effect indefinitely because of uncertainty as to when the fires could be extinguished.

"These fires are producing large amounts of smoke, which is resulting in elevated particulate readings," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the district. "If you smell smoke, you are likely breathing it."

The district's air-monitoring stations in Bakersfield have recorded elevated PM10 measurements this morning and reports have been received of ash falling in Kern County.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Residents of the eight-county air basin are advised to use caution as conditions warrant. People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, as conditions dictate.

Tar Canyon wildfire almost at full containment

By Natalie Ragus

Hanford Sentinel, Wed., Aug. 15, 2007 (PM edition)

Fire officials said today they have begun the process of releasing firefighters and equipment from the Tar Canyon fire in rural Kings County, and full control over the fire is expected by the weekend.

The fire is 90 percent contained within fire lines, preventing its spread, said Calfire spokesman Mike Bowlman.

Full containment is expected by 8 o'clock tonight.

However, in order for firefighters to declare the fire officially controlled, said Bowlman, there are a few "hot spots" and embers remaining within the fire lines that must be put out.

"We'll be keeping resources out there over the weekend, just cleaning up some spots and making sure the lines are intact," said Bowlman. "Just keeping an eye on it basically."

On Friday around 5:30 p.m., the fire broke out in Diablo Canyon about nine miles southwest of Avenal and then spread to Tar Canyon, and has been called the largest blaze in either Fresno or Kings county in several years.

The fire barreled through more than 5,600 acres of countryside, even with 1,340 firefighters, 77 engines, 20 bulldozers and six helicopters from around the state on its heels.

A threatened power grid and an unconfirmed report of asbestos initially had firefighters and officials concerned.

A geologist found only two areas containing natural asbestos, which were nearby firefighting equipment, said Bowlman.

As a precaution, officials pulled 300 firefighters from the line, and had them decontaminated.

However, said Bowlman, the asbestos was in rock, not dust form, and not likely a threat.

Bowlman said firefighters quickly created fire lines around the power grid, which provides power throughout the San Joaquin Valley, and no residents reported a power outage.

Bowlman said the fire has been part of a busy season.

The state's resources were pushed to the brink with Santa Barbara's Zaca fire, which started July 4, which has burned more than 105,000 acres, and is still only 58 percent contained, Calfire officials said.

"Fortunately, we have an abundance of cooperative agreements with several departments," said Bowlman. "California does it well."

Zaca Fire threatens to enter Ventura County

Staff and wire reports

Bakersfield Californian, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

CAMARILLO -- Ventura County fire officials girded themselves Wednesday for the arrival of a 6-week-old wildfire that's burned through more than 100,000 acres of wilderness in adjacent Santa Barbara County.

And smoke from the fire continued to blow over Bakersfield, which has been enjoying unusually cool temperatures because of it, according to the National Weather Service. Bakersfield is usually as hot as Fresno or hotter this time of year, according to meteorologist Carlos Molina. But on Tuesday, Fresno had a high of 99 and Bakersfield hit only 93, and on Wednesday, Fresno hit 99 again, while Bakersfield was at 95, Molina said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an air quality alert Wednesday for south central valley residents, saying that airborne ash from the fire could cause serious health problems, including aggravating lung disease, causing asthma attacks and acute bronchitis. The cautionary statement was put into effect indefinitely.

Meanwhile, in Santa Barbara County, hand crews, fire engines and bulldozers -- many of which had already been at work fighting the blaze across the county line -- were being moved into the expected path of the Zaca Fire, Fire Department spokesman Tom Kruschke said.

"It's like a chess game," Kruschke said. "You keep moving your resources around the board to where the threat is."

The blaze was burning about 12 miles east of the Ventura County town of Ojai, near where last year's Day Fire scorched more than 163,000 acres of brush.

The Zaca Fire was expected to cross into Ventura County sometime this week, either on its own or as part of a backburn operation by firefighters, Los Padres National Forest fire spokesman Robert Rainwater said.

Similar controlled burns along the fire's northern flank this week had kept it from spreading into the Cuyama Valley area, he said.

"Everything is quite secure now, but that still can change in the future," Rainwater said.

Light dustings of ash continued to fall on the city of Santa Barbara, a remnant from Tuesday's explosive burn deep in the wilderness that sent up a vertical plume of smoke visible from over 100 miles away, Rainwater said.

"Even though it was very dry and very hot, there wasn't much wind on the fire and this allowed the smoke to go way up," he said. "It just burned up a canyon and didn't travel very far."

The fire has consumed about 116,714 acres, according to a release from fire officials at 8 p.m. Wednesday night.

The blaze was 67 percent contained, with full containment expected Sept. 7.

Nearly 2,900 firefighters were battling the fire, which has cost \$73.4 million to fight since it was ignited by sparks from equipment used to repair a water pipe on July 4.

Manteca almond grower appointed to ag board

Written by Sarah Ostman

Lathrop/Manteca Sun Post, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

An Agriculture Advisory Board started up by Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, includes longtime Manteca almond grower David Phippen.

McNerney asked Phippen, a third-generation almond grower, to be a part of the board after Phippen spoke to him about limitations of the farm credit system.

"I don't think he (McNerney) has a strong agriculture background — not nearly as strong as the gentleman he replaced," Phippen said. "So I was really pleased he showed an interest in our industry and wanted to start this group."

The congressman created the board to hear directly from people involved in agriculture, according to McNerney spokesman Andy Stone, and to learn what help they need from the federal level.

The board first met June 16, but Phippen was unable to attend the first meeting. Only three of the board's 15 members attended, Stone said.

According to Stone, issues discussed at that meeting included immigration reform and the desire for a guest worker program, a desire to exempt farms from inheritance taxes, the rising cost of fuel and what it means for farmers, and worries about the safety of food imported from overseas.

Phippen said he hopes to discuss more topics with the board in the future, including limitations placed on farmers by the Endangered Species Act and regulations by the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

West Ming gets green light

7,450-home development still faces Shafter's wrath

BY JAMES GELUSO, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

The West Ming project got its final thumbs-up from the Bakersfield City Council Wednesday evening, despite renewed objections from the city of Shafter.

Castle & Cooke's 3.4-square-mile, 7,450-home development had almost been approved in February, but after Shafter sent a letter, the City Council delayed the project. The developer then asked the city to pull the project from the docket until it could answer Shafter's concerns.

As far as Bakersfield and Castle & Cooke are concerned, Shafter's questions are answered.

Shafter isn't so sure.

"Obviously we have serious concerns with the project," said Shafter City Manager John Guinn. But he said his city has 30 days to decide whether to take its concerns to court.

"We'll take that 30 days for sure," he said.

Stan Grady, Bakersfield's development services director, said Shafter's concerns about the Buena Vista Lake shrew aren't really concerns about West Ming. The impacts Shafter fears are really about the West Beltway, he said. And the city's other concerns, about traffic and the water supply, have been addressed, he said.

Kern County also raised concerns about the road mitigation plan, especially the part where Castle & Cooke isn't being asked to make up for extra traffic in some intersections.

Several roads and intersections in Bakersfield will be affected by the West Ming development, but already have as many lanes as they can get, explained Jennie Eng of the city's planning department Wednesday afternoon.

Those roads include:

? Ming Avenue from Ashe Road to New Stine Road.

? Calloway Drive from Stockdale Highway to the planned Westside Parkway.

? White Lane from Wible Road to Highway 99.

? Coffee Road from Brimhall Road to the planned Westside Parkway.

If those roads can't be improved, perhaps the city should be looking at expressways to handle the increased traffic, said Ted James, the county's planning director.

Castle & Cooke is still expected to build lanes on Rosedale Highway and add turn lanes to intersections on Panama Lane, White Lane and Ming Avenue.

Gordon Nipp of the Sierra Club came to the microphone in the time period designated for opposition, but instead heaped praise on the developer. Castle & Cooke, he said, has set a precedent by agreeing to mitigate for its effects on [air pollution](#) and to buy farmland elsewhere to make up for the roughly 2,200 acres of prime farmland that will be converted into homes.

"I'm grateful and I think the community should be grateful to Castle & Cooke," he said.

In other business

The council also gave the final thumbs-up to three major city projects:

The city's planned Sports Village on Taft Highway, between Gosford and Ashe roads. The project is expected to include 16 soccer fields, six football fields and 12 ball diamonds, along with two commercial centers on the corners. The nearby Wastewater Treatment Plant No. 3 will provide reclaimed water to irrigate the fields, and a lake in the complex will hold some of that water.

Skateboarder Ryan Nance asked the council to also consider setting aside a 50-foot-by-50-foot area for skateboarding, which he said is more popular among today's youth than football and baseball combined.

Councilwoman Jacquie Sullivan recommended that a committee consider doing just that.

Recreation and Parks Director Dianne Hoover said construction will likely begin in about five years. The project is meant to help fill the gap that will be left when CSUB builds on soccer fields on its campus currently used for local youth soccer.

? The \$211 million contract for the expansion of the city's Wastewater Treatment Plant No. 3, the largest single project in the history of the city.

? The \$29 million contract for the Highway 178 and Fairfax Road interchange, the first project in the Thomas Road Improvement Program to be approved.
Immigration proposals

Councilman David Couch's controversial immigration proposals were kept in the background at Wednesday's Bakersfield City Council meeting, with only two brief mentions.

Councilman Harold Hanson, who serves as vice mayor, said he will announce the formation of an ad hoc council committee at the council's Aug. 29 meeting and ask interested council members to contact him.

And the proposals drew one citizen comment, from Marvin Dean, who said Couch's heart may be in the right place, but the proposal can only cause tension and bring out biases in the community.

"I don't believe the immigration issue is something we need to deal with on a local level," he said.

Cost of Saving the Climate Meets Real-World Hurdles

By David Farenthold and Steven Mufson, staff writers

In the Washington Post and other papers, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

On the Internet, erasing your role in climate change seems as easy as ordering a DVD -- and cheaper than a cup of coffee a day.

With a click, a credit card and \$99, visitors can pay a nonprofit group, Carbonfund.org, to "offset" a year's worth of greenhouse-gas emissions. Whatever the customer put into the atmosphere -- by flying, driving, using electricity -- the site promises to cancel out, by funding projects that reduce pollutants. Sites such as this one, offering absolution from the modern nag of climate guilt, have created a \$55 million industry that once would have been beyond the greenest of imaginations. The market for "voluntary carbon offsets" now encompasses dozens of sellers and thousands of buyers, including individuals and corporations.

But in some cases, these customers may be buying good feelings and little else.

A closer look reveals an unregulated market in which some improvements bought by customers are only estimated, extrapolated, hoped-for or nil. Some offsets support projects that would have gone forward anyway.

Others deliver results difficult to measure.

Carbonfund.org, for example, has advertised offsets that finance wind farms and tree-planting projects. But some wind farms said the donations haven't led to anything new. And the benefits from some tree projects were unclear enough that Carbonfund.org no longer uses them to back offsets.

"People can feel very comfortable that they're reducing their carbon footprint" by buying Carbonfund.org offsets, Executive Director Eric Carlson said.

Many offset sellers do seem to deliver measurable cuts to pollution. One company, for instance, has been praised for offering customers a chance to support projects in development, effectively guaranteeing positive future impact.

Critics say that offset sellers usually have good motives. But the market is confusing enough that, this month, the said it would look into whether consumers are being adequately protected.

"It's just like the Wild West," said Frank O'Donnell of the group Clean Air Watch. "There are no controls, no standards."

The offset is among the most unusual of commodities. Its substance is intangible, the absence of something. Some pollution would have existed, somewhere, sometime, the seller says, but now it won't.

But the market for the product grew by 80 percent in 2006 alone, according to a report last month from the market analysts New Carbon Finance and Ecosystem Marketplace. That was apart from the Climate Exchange, where companies can trade credits for greenhouse-gas reductions among themselves. That exchange has made efforts to verify that carbon offsets sold represent real pollution reductions.

City aims to 'walk the talk' on 'green' goals

Walnut Creek acquires some alternative-fuel vehicles

By Theresa Harrington, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

Slowly but surely, Walnut Creek is going "green."

The city has established 20-year goals in its General Plan to become more environmentally friendly and is leading by example, purchasing alternative-fuel vehicles for its fleet.

"I think it's great," said Rinta Perkins, the city's clean water manager, who drives one of the city's two Honda hybrid sedans. "We walk the talk."

After the recent purchase of a Honda hybrid sedan and a hybrid Ford Standard Utility Vehicle, 4 percent of Walnut Creek's fleet of 175 vehicles now runs on alternative fuels.

"With everyone talking about sustainability, we're looking at all of our options," said Rich Payne, public services manager. "I would say probably in the last couple years, there's more of an emphasis. Technology is at a point where, for instance, with hybrid vehicles the equipment is more dependable, and so we feel better about doing that."

Walnut Creek began purchasing alternative fuel vehicles seven years ago, when it received a substantial discount on two Ford trucks powered by compressed natural gas, or CNG, through a grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Then in 2003, the city acquired two electric Global Electric Motorcars, or "GEMcars," through a grant from the California State Parks Department, said Todd Trimble, senior recreation supervisor.

"We plug it in every night," said Trimble, who drives one of the truck models regularly in Heather Farm Park. "It works great. We use it for our 'Movies under the Stars' program, because it's light enough that we can drive it around on the grass. We use it to empty trash, for day camps and we use it to get around the park, over to the pool. It's probably not much heavier than a golf cart."

Park maintenance crews use the other GEMcar, Trimble said. The vehicles have two settings: one for turf and the other for road driving. The maximum speed is 15 miles per hour on turf or 25 miles per hour on the road, which is perfect for park driving, Trimble added.

The city purchased its first Honda hybrid in 2005 and was so pleased with its performance it added a second Honda hybrid last week. Code enforcement officer Tom Nichols, who drives the car about 50 miles a day, said he can go that far on about one gallon of gas.

"It's different," Nichols said. "I enjoy it. Every time you stop, the engine goes off. There's a little tachometer and all of a sudden it goes down to zero. It's real quiet."

The police are scheduled to use the new hybrid SUV, which hasn't arrived yet, Payne said. One-quarter of vehicle fleets in cities such as Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles run on alternative fuels, he added.

"We're going to put a lot more emphasis on alternative-fuel-type vehicles in the future as they become available," Payne said. "Right now, the industry is talking about biodiesel."

As part of its commitment to reducing pollution, Walnut Creek participates in "Spare the Air" days by reducing its use of gasoline-powered equipment such as lawn mowers. In addition, the city has earned five "green business" awards from the county, including one for its vehicle fleet maintenance.

"We are a green business shop, which means we use reconditioned motor oil," Payne said. "We send our recycled oil to a refining company that reconditions it and then we buy it back."

Other city departments that have received green business awards are Parks, Reprographics (printing and binding), Leshner Center for the Arts, City Hall and the Police Department.

"To become certified," Payne said, "the operation must demonstrate how they conserve energy and water, recycle and reduce their waste and make sure they don't pollute."

The city has joined the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives, or ICLEI, with the intention of measuring its carbon footprint and coming up with a plan to reduce emissions. Mayor Sue Rainey, who has spearheaded a plan to host an October Sustainability Summit in Walnut Creek, said she's happy the city is purchasing alternative-fuel vehicles for employee use.

"I think it's good for them to explore and do anything we can so we are less carbon-dependent," Rainey said.

DEP: State still needs to lower smog days

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, August 16, 2007

HARTFORD, Conn.—State environmental officials say while Connecticut has made dramatic progress in cutting down on smoggy days in the past quarter century, there is much more work to do.

Figures from the state Department of Environmental Protection show that in 1983 there were more than 80 days when ground-level ozone pollution, the primary component of smog, exceeded federal standards. This year, that number has dropped to 15.

Despite the reduction, which experts say is due in large part to tougher emissions standards for vehicles and industrial polluters, officials say much remains to be done to clean up Connecticut's smog problem.

The state has been out of compliance with federal ozone pollution standards since 2004, according to Tracy Babbidge, the DEP's director of air planning.

Even though statewide ozone pollution has been reduced, the number of smoggy days fluctuates significantly depending on hot weather. If the temperature exceeds 90 degrees, there's a good chance ozone pollution will spike, Babbidge said Wednesday.

"It's not an exact one-to-one," she said. "But we use it as a benchmark. It's the classic case for ozone formation. There are probably other things, but that's the major driver."

In 1999, when there were 28 days over 90 degrees, just over 30 days exceeded federal smog standards, according to the DEP. This year, there have been 16 days over 90 degrees and 15 days with dangerously high smog levels.

The volatile chemicals that contribute to ozone pollution come from many sources, including fossil-fuel-burning power plants, cars and solvents, and react on hot days, producing smog.

While the smog created by power plants in the Northeast has been reduced, industrial pollution still reaches Connecticut from beyond state borders because of wind patterns, according to Paul Miller, deputy director of the Clean Air Association of the Northeast States.

"There are additional reductions that need to happen in the Midwest and in Ohio, in Pennsylvania, in West Virginia," Miller said. "But that's up to the federal government. They've expressed a strong unwillingness to tighten up restrictions on those power plants."

Study defines Valley problems, progress

By Garth Stapley / The Modesto Bee
Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007

San Joaquin Valley people are poorer, fatter, less educated and more exposed to crime compared to other Californians, according to a first-of-its-kind study obtained by The Modesto Bee.

On the other hand, drivers from Stockton to Bakersfield carpool more and wait less in traffic, and buyers and renters find more affordable housing than almost anywhere else in the state, the report says.

Previous smaller-scale studies have suggested similar findings, but none has compared well-being indicators in defined areas across the state like the inaugural California Regional Progress Report.

Its collaborators put the report online for all to see, but could not agree on a public unveiling in late June and have yet to present it to media.

"If we want to measure progress in how we live in California, we have to do it region by region," said Rusty Selix, executive director of the California Association of Councils of Governments. He briefed Gov. Schwarzenegger's office on the Regional Progress Report on Wednesday.

For the report's purposes, the San Joaquin Valley, which is emerging in political clout, includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Tulare, Fresno, Kern, Kings and Madera counties. The Valley's population swelled 16.4% to 3.87 million from 2000 to 2006 -- the fastest growth rate in California.

"We've been the ignored region for the last 20 years," said Merced's Marjie Kirn, who is spearheading a planning effort for the eight-county consortium. "We need to get our act together, speak as a region and get attention at the state level for what we need."

Air quality and underground water, for example, respect no county line. Neither do commute patterns. And one agency's approval of a huge shopping mall certainly can affect nearby cities and even counties.

The California Regional Progress Report found plenty lacking in the San Joaquin Valley, which placed dead last in measures of income, increased fuel consumption, post-high school degrees, obesity rate and violent and property crimes.

The Valley also performs poorly in asthma rates and air pollution, the study says.

Despite historically backward jobs-housing ratios, Valley leaders continue approving more homes and luring fewer employers, and they allow paving of more farmland than almost anywhere else, the study says.

Despite an affinity for subdivisions, leaders aren't keeping pace with affordable housing, the report says.

A few bright spots shined through.

Though Valley wages remain rock-bottom in California, median household income is increasing third-fastest among state regions, the study says. And homes here are among the most affordable in California.

Fox hunt pays off for Visalia BizTalk

By Lewis Griswold / The Fresno Bee
Wed., Aug. 15, 2007

Vicente Fox, who served as president of Mexico from 2000 to 2006, has agreed to be the keynote speaker at BizTalk '07 in Visalia on Oct. 5, elated conference organizers announced Tuesday.

BizTalk is a still-growing regional business conference held at the Visalia Convention Center, and landing someone of Fox's stature ranks as a coup.

Fox, a former Coca-Cola executive, was the first opposition party candidate to be elected president of Mexico after decades of one-party control.

His keynote address is titled "Uneasy Partnership: Mexico and California in the Geo-Political Landscape."

"I hope he talks about immigration," said lawyer Victor Moheno of Visalia, who once heard Fox give a speech in Mexico City. "He's tall, he's a rancher, he's a free-market guy. It's nice when someone like that comes here because it shatters people's stereotypes of Mexico."

Fox was found through a speaker's bureau in New York City, said conference organizer Harlan Hutson. He will deliver his talk in English.

Also at the conference will be Marta Sahagún de Fox, former first lady of Mexico and Fox's wife; Ruben Navarette Jr., a syndicated columnist who grew up in Sanger; and Dominique Dawes, Olympic gold medalist.

Stan Simpson of Visalia, a key sponsor, launched BizTalk after being inspired by the successful Bakersfield Business Conference.

"It's fun to find out what people from other areas are doing," Simpson said.

Last year, in BizTalk's first year, 900 people attended, and twice as many are expected this year.

Early-bird tickets are \$129 at biztalkconnections.com.

THAT'S NOT ALL: Three other high-profile events are taking place at the Convention Center that week.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board will hold its annual symposium on air quality Oct. 3-4.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley will hold a daylong summit Oct. 4.

Tulare County Supervisor Connie Conway, chairwoman of the partnership, said the summit was scheduled to coincide with the air district meeting.

The two groups will hold a joint luncheon.

Finally, the Tulare County chapter of the National Latino Peace Officers Association is hosting the organization's statewide conference on Oct. 6.

ENDORSEMENTS: Visalia Unified Teachers Association has announced its endorsements for the Visalia Unified School District board election in November.

It is backing the two challengers, Bill Fulmer, a teacher in Monson-Sultana, and Adam Valencia, the program coordinator for the Tulare County Office of Education's Reconnecting Youth program.

Three seats are up for election. All three incumbents -- Donna Martin, Larry Jones and Rob Stephenson -- are seeking re-election.

VUTA is "neutral" on the incumbents, said president Karl Kildow. But it's open to reinterviewing the incumbents and making a third endorsement, he added.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007:](#)

BILL JONES: Ethanol is part of the solution, not the problem

Over the years, I've discussed many issues with The Sacramento Bee's Peter Schrag and have always enjoyed our debate of ideas, even when we've disagreed. However, when it comes to ethanol, Peter's commentary is relying on outdated and untruthful rhetoric and misinformation about ethanol.

Volumes of newer research and consensus among leading scientists clearly demonstrate ethanol production has a positive net energy balance, especially with today's innovative technologies. California's ethanol producers use state-of-the-art production practices, which reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 40% compared with conventional gasoline, according to the most recent UC Berkeley Low Carbon Fuel study. A 10% blend of ethanol added to gasoline decreases carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, toxic and particulate matter emissions across the board.

When it comes to climate change and air pollution, ethanol is part of the solution, not a part of the problem.

Here in the Valley, where air pollution is among the state's worst, the current blend of 6% ethanol that's added to gasoline has helped reduce emissions of carbon monoxide, hazardous air pollutants like benzene and greenhouse gases, and has reduced soot or particulate matter emissions by enabling gasoline to burn more efficiently.

A 10% blend of ethanol in gasoline just approved by the Air Resources Board will help the Valley move closer to achieving its federal Environmental Protection Agency emission reduction goals sooner and reduce the public health costs associated with air pollution and climate change. Going to 10% ethanol now will save lives, decrease asthma and reduce incidences of cancer.

In the Los Angeles Air Basin, where high levels of air pollution are legendary, the cleanest ozone years on record occurred from 2004 through 2006. It's not a coincidence that these air quality improvements were achieved when ethanol was introduced into California's gasoline in 2004 as a replacement for MTBE, which was contaminating the water.

In fact, urban air-shed modeling, universally accepted as the most accurate way to predict fuel change impacts on smog formation, continues to project air quality improvements from ethanol-blended gasoline.

It's also important to note that California's ethanol producers have achieved unparalleled efficiencies in energy use, waste reduction, water use and transportation costs. These plants use clean-burning natural gas to produce ethanol that is considerably closer to its markets, thereby reducing transportation costs and environmental impacts.

Additionally, because many of the production facilities are near the largest concentration of dairy cows in the world, producers can ship their wet distillers grain, a byproduct of ethanol production and a highly nourishing livestock feed, quickly and cheaply to local dairies. This results in a more nutritious feedstock and less energy use compared with a typical Midwestern plant, which dries the distillers grains for shipping.

Government support for ethanol pales in comparison with what taxpayers spend on protecting the free flow of oil. The facts show that ethanol delivers a net gain for U.S. taxpayers. In 2006, the federal government spent just \$2.5 billion on ethanol tax credits and received more than \$9 billion in revenues and savings, including a \$6 billion reduction in farm bill subsidies. That's the power of supply and demand at work.

Using corn to produce ethanol does not compromise national or global food security. Price incentives and steady advances in technology are enabling farmers across the world to supply food, fuel and fiber markets. Investment in corn-based ethanol production is laying the groundwork for production of renewable fuels from agricultural wastes and other abundant materials. This will benefit America's rural farm economy today and in the future as our rural economies once again rise to the occasion of meeting our society's needs in terms of food, fuel and fiber.

Because it's produced here on U.S. soil from renewable resources, ethanol does help reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Recent estimates acknowledge that protecting our oil interests in the Middle East accounts for tens of billions of dollars a year in military and related costs and in 2005 the International Center for Technology Assessment put the number at \$113 billion. And the last time I checked, ethanol production facilities didn't require an armed military presence to protect America's energy supply.

The facts about the benefits of ethanol are clear: Ethanol is a cleaner burning, less expensive, renewable fuel that benefits the environment and economy and reduces our dependence on foreign oil.

Bill Jones, a former Fresno area legislator and former California secretary of state, is chairman of the board of Pacific Ethanol.

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007:](#)
Sludge battle 'righteous fight'

The only thing "green" about the way the city of Los Angeles gets rid of its sludge is "money."

The city and its mayor who says he wants to be known as environmentally sensitive, or "green" are only thinking about "money" when they haul about 65 million gallons of sludge a year to Kern County, where it is smeared onto the land.

It's the cheapest way for Los Angeles to get rid of the goo it scoops from the bottom of its sewage treatment plants. It used to dump it into the ocean. But the federal Environmental Protection Agency ordered the city to stop because it was killing the fish.

So now the witch's brew of human waste flushed from the city's toilets, chemicals and drugs tossed down the sink, and Lord-knows-what wastes from industrial plants, is hauled to Kern County.

A steady caravan of trucks haul about 750 tons of sludge a day to Kern County, where it is called "fertilizer" and spread onto "Green Acres Farm," about 5,000 acres owned by the city of Los Angeles.

Like "Greenacres," the 1960s television show featuring inept city slickers who move to the countryside and just don't fit in, the city of Los Angeles and its stinking, polluting sludge don't fit into Kern County.

And that is why Kern County voters last year overwhelmingly passed Measure E, which bans the importation of sludge into Kern County. The ballot measure and ban came after Los Angeles repeatedly rebuffed pleas to relocate its "farm" away from a critical underground water storage facility and urban development.

Kern County voters, sick of gagging on the smells, feared Los Angeles' human and industrial waste would contaminate the ground and water supply.

But a federal judge in Los Angeles now has overturned Measure E, contending the ban discriminates against Los Angeles and violates constitutional commerce protections.

Acknowledging Kern County residents have legitimate environmental concerns, the judge ruled that Los Angeles can keep shoving its filth down our throats.

Kern County supervisors will meet later this month to discuss their next legal move. The voters already have spoken. This is a righteous fight that must continue to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

It is a fight that would end if Los Angeles and other big cities worried more about really being "green" than just saving a buck by dumping on their rural neighbors.

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007:](#)

Keep celebration

It sounds like some people in this city would love their "gated communities" to be enclosed in a biosphere. That way the riff raff's pollution, noise, crime and, yes, fireworks will not bother them at all. God forbid if their neighbor farts and they hear it!

We were one of those families on July 4 at 9:50 p.m. in 94-degree heat with air quality that was "unhealthy for all categories," celebrating the birth of our nation, by setting off our legal fireworks

and socializing with neighbors. I have been setting off fireworks for 48 years with not one injury or fire.

Once a year people can legally set off fireworks and this becomes a central problem to our air quality? Get your head out of the sand. July 4 is the day.

Take pets inside or put them in the garage with water and fans. For 15 years, our two dogs didn't like the noise. We made sure they were comfortable, either in the garage or house, before the activities started. Neither was ever lost as a result of the Fourth of July. They both died of old age.

Turn people in if they are using illegal fireworks. Let the law on the books work for you. I feel sorry for the people who want to stop fireworks on July 4. They are really missing out on living and celebrating life.

Judd Stacy, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thurs., Aug. 16, 2007:](#)

'Outlaw garage sales'

Have you thought about how much air pollution curbside pickups and garage sales cause?

First take a look at curbside pickup. Bi-annually we put our treasures out on the street. Let's say you live in a neighborhood with 50 homes. The treasures go out on Thursday. The cars, vans, trucks and anything on four wheels start coming. By 8 p.m., it looks like Interstate 405 on Friday leaving Los Angeles. This continues until Sunday night.

Look at garage sales. From April to October, seven months times twice a month equals 14, plus a curbside pickup. Now you have 15 weekends that the pollution is out of control. Who pays for it? We do!

Solution: Outlaw garage sales while giving the public a larger tax break for usable items. For curbside pickup, allow only items such as wood, branches and anything that can go into a clean landfill.

Let's all do what we can to help the Valley air quality. It is clear to see we are not doing enough -- just look at the brown air we breathe.

Patti Serpa, Fresno