Valley air district sues EPA over auto emissions

Modesto Bee, Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, November 15, 2007

FRESNO — Air quality regulators in the San Joaquin Valley are suing the federal government over whether California can impose the country's first greenhouse gas emission standards for cars and light trucks.

The state sued the Environmental Protection Agency last week on similar claims.

Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District say they filed suit as well because smog is a major health concern in the valley.

Air pollution district sues over EPA's blocking of waiver

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 14, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District filed a lawsuit against the federal government Tuesday that seeks to allow California to enforce stricter tailpipe emission standards.

The state filed a similar lawsuit last week after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency failed to grant California's request to regulate its own tailpipe emissions.

Air district officials said reducing greenhouse gases from vehicles will also help reduce air pollution in the valley.

"The San Joaquin Valley's challenge in meeting the state and federal clean air standards is unmatched by any other region in the state," the district's executive director, Seyed Sadredin, said in a press release. "Action by EPA on this matter will yield much-needed reductions in greenhouse gases, as well as smog-causing pollutants, which are a major public health concern for the valley."

Under the federal Clean Air Act, a state has the right to set its own vehicle emission standards if the EPA grants a waiver.

Fireplace use restricted on dirtiest days

Measures to control pollution in place throughout winter months.

By DHYANA LEVEY

Merced Sun-Star Thurs., Nov. 15, 2007

There's one more step to lighting a fire in your fireplace, and it comes before striking that match. First make sure that it's all right to light it at all. The consequences might land you in fireplace school. And, yes, like traffic school, there is a place for people who break the smoke and fire rules.

If Merced County is having a bad air day, that lovely glowing fire or warm wood stove can make the situation worse. Such fires send particulate matter into the air, said Brenda Turner, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "The small particles can get past our bodies' natural defenses, bypassing our nose and normal filters our bodies have, and into our bloodstream," she warned.

This adds to the Valley's pollution problems, which can aggravate asthma and contribute to heart disease.

To cut down on wintertime pollution, for five years the district has set in place the Check Before You Burn residential wood-burning season. It runs from now through February.

This means citizens must check their county's air quality before burning any solid fuel such as wood, manufactured fire logs or pellets.

They can do this by logging on to the district's Web site at www.valleyair.org and checking the daily air forecast. Or call (800) SMOG INFO (800-766-4463). The district also offers e-mail notifications for days when burning is prohibited.

Each county gets its own forecast, which should be updated for the following day by 3:30 p.m., Turner said. Each forecast takes effect at midnight.

If the Air Quality Index rates the air to be "unhealthy for everyone" -- meaning everyone, not just people with health problems, should try to stay inside -- then douse that dream of a romantic fire. It's prohibited.

Burning wood in an open fireplace is discouraged on a voluntary basis when the air quality is projected to be "unhealthy for sensitive groups," which refers to asthmatics and people with heart problems.

There are no burning restrictions today in Merced County. But wood burning is discouraged in Fresno, Kern, Kings and Tulare counties. There are no Valley areas today where wood burning is prohibited.

But if you burn, burn carefully, the district warns.

The Madera-Mariposa-Merced unit of CalFire just released tips for safe home heating. It suggests having your chimney cleaned professionally or renting a flue brush to do it yourself. Use only clean, seasoned firewood, and do not burn trash, plastic, paper or cardboard in the fireplace.

Last season Merced County was prohibited from wood burning for two days -- Feb. 5 and 6, Turner said, adding that counties with larger populations tend to have more of these days. Stanislaus County last season had nine days and Fresno County had 12.

"It's basically the winter equivalent of a 'Spare the Air' day," said Mary-Michal Rawling, program manager of the Merced/Mariposa Asthma Coalition. "The really strong immersion layers we have in the winter trap particulate matter close to the ground."

That's why people should try to avoid using their fireplaces at all times, she continued. "Don't burn unless you have to. It's a really big asthma trigger for people inside the home. Not everything goes up the chimney -- it circulates."

While residents might not be willing to permanently put out their fires, they will be fined for not complying with "burn prohibited" days. The district has inspectors in each county who follow up reports of violators and check for smoke coming out of chimneys, Turner said.

They take a picture of the smoke and send it along with a letter to the resident stating the date the inspector observed them burning. "You are allowed to respond if you feel there was an error," she said. "If you agree you did it, you have an option as a first-time (violator) to attend fireplace school."

There, people learn about why the Check Before You Burn rule is in place and hear tips about safe wood burning in general. The class is free.

Or -- and a surprising number of people chose to do this -- violators can pay a $50 fine, Turner said. The more violations a resident collects, the higher that fine rises.

So in Merced, that old saw about chopping firewood warming you twice can be changed -- here, it can burn you three times.

Crows Landing air base plan wins support

StanCOG votes to submit application for rail funds

By TIM MORAN
Modesto Bee, Thursday, November 15, 2007

Stanislaus County's application for state bond money for a short haul rail system between the Port of Oakland and Crows Landing got the endorsement of the Stanislaus Council of Governments on Wednesday night, despite a large contingent of West Side residents opposing it.

The StanCOG policy board voted 10-4 to endorse the project, encourage staff to participate in preparing the application, and submit the application for the state trade corridor bond funding.

Oakdale Mayor Ferrell Jackson joined West Side representatives in opposing the measure. Patterson Mayor Becky Campo, Newman Mayor John Fantazia and county Supervisor Jim DeMartini, who represents the West Side, also voted against the bond-funding application.

The funding, $26 million from the $2.1 billion infrastructure bond money controlled by the California Transportation Commission and $60 million from the $1 billion in bond money controlled by the California Air Resources Board, would be used to create the rail connection between the valley and Bay Area.

The rail system is the linchpin of a 4,800-acre business and industrial park proposal by PCCP West Park LLC. West Park developer Gerry Kamilos of Sacra-mento is negotiating with the county on a master developer agreement for the project.

Many West Side residents oppose the project, however, because they fear the traffic and safety problems the trains and car traffic to and from the park would cause, and because of the lost farmland and small-town atmosphere.

West Side residents attacked the project from a variety of angles, from air quality issues to water resources, loss of farmland, the use of county land as part of the matching funds for the project, and whether the county's bid process for the project was proper.

"We feel this project is inconsistent with the size and scale of west side communities," said Patterson City Manager Cleve Morris. "We feel this will have a significant effect on the quality of life on the west side of the county."

Objectors pointed to an estimate that the project would generate 141,000 car trips to and from the business park per day and questioned how that could improve air quality.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Executive Director Seyed Sadredin, how-ever, urged the StanCOG board to support the project. Trucks are a major source of pollution in the valley, and the short haul rail system would take many trucks off the road. "We need to do things like this," he said.

DeMartini attacked the way the project has been described, saying that the source of money for the matching funds for the bond money has changed, and support from surrounding jurisdictions hasn't materialized.

"I don't know how StanCOG can put their name on this," DeMartini said.

Campo asked that the policy board at least table the issue until some of the questions could be answered, and Jackson agreed.

Modesto City Councilman Brad Hawn commented that many of the objections raised were issues for a California Environmental Quality Act review.

"We passed millions, billions of dollars worth of bonds, and they will all go to LA because we can't get our act together," Hawn said. "This is about funding. If we don't have funding, we don't have anything."

County Supervisor Jeff Grover noted that the county's population is expected to double in the next 33 years, to more than one million. The county needs to create 100,000 to 150,000 new jobs for those new residents, he said.

"It's our obligation to pull together and make plans for that," Grover said.

The bond money is expected to be doled out by the state transportation commission by June, according to commissioner Kirk Lindsey of Modesto, who at- tended the meeting.

Bullet train battle nears end of line

Report says rail board should approve Pacheco Pass plan next month

By Erik N. Nelson, STAFF WRITER
Contra Costa Times Thurs., Nov. 15, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- The decade-long battle over how to connect the San Joaquin Valley and the Bay Area with a 220-mph "bullet train" may have seen its final skirmish Wednesday, as members of the board mapping out the statewide system said they would settle the issue next month.

The train system should take the Pacheco Pass route, entering the Bay Area near a stop in Gilroy, rather than coming through the Altamont Pass, if the California High-Speed Rail Authority board follows the recommendation presented Wednesday by its staff.

The Pacheco and Altamont routes, and several variants of each, were reviewed as part of an environmental impact study commissioned by the board. It is the last unsettled section of the proposed 700-mile system connecting the state's major cities.

Board chairman Quentin Kopp, a retired San Mateo Superior Court judge, said the board would vote on the route at its Dec. 19 meeting.

While refusing to indicate how he or other members might vote, Kopp was sharply critical of some points made by opponents of the Pacheco alignment.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, made up of Bay Area elected officials, last month recommended the Pacheco Pass route with an added high-speed rail connection from San Joaquin County to commuter rail services in Livermore.

The rail authority's staff recommendation follows the MTC's lead in calling for the authority to "pursue 'regional rail' commuter and high-speed train service via the Altamont Pass between Sacramento/Northern San Joaquin Valley and Oakland/San Jose in partnership with local and regional agencies."

But several speakers at the meeting noted that the pared-down Altamont idea, while presented together with the Pacheco Pass recommendation, would be separate from the overall high-speed program.

"The problem is, it's unfunded on an already unfunded project," said Alan Miller, executive director of the Train Riders Association of California. "It's basically the Pacheco Pass alternative with this political bone thrown out for those who live along the Altamont Pass."

He also questioned the authority's estimate that the Altamont commuter service would cost $1 billion to $3 billion extra. The MTC, he noted, estimated that its dual-route plan would cost an extra $5 billion.

After following its agreed-upon route from Anaheim and Los Angeles and through the Antelope and San Joaquin valleys, the high-speed line should head west across the northern edge of Madera County. Then it will stop at Gilroy, where it turns north to stop in San Jose, then in Silicon

Valley at either Palo Alto or Redwood City and on to stops at San Francisco International Airport and San Francisco's future Transbay Terminal.

Bay Area transportation officials and elected officials have coalesced around the Pacheco route, which was consistently supported by San Jose and San Francisco officials, who were joined by Livermore Valley officials who feared the rail system would need to take large swaths of land and build noisy aerial structures.

Just where to get money for the statewide system, estimated at nearly $40 billion, was also discussed in detail at Wednesday's meeting.

A $10 billion high-speed rail bond measure would jump-start construction of the system if voters approve it in November 2008, but a team of financial experts studying financing for the board presented a lukewarm assessment about seeking other funds from potential private investors and the federal government.

Getting private partners onboard may require a strictly government-funded segment to open and begin earning revenue first, they said.

The most likely candidate for that might be a line from Anaheim, where Orange County officials have put $7 million up to help study high-speed rail, to Los Angeles, followed by the San Jose-to-San Francisco segment, where the route would follow an existing Caltrain right-of-way.

Clovis faces suit over retail center

By Marc Benjamin / The Fresno Bee
Thursday, Nov. 15, 2007

A group opposed to a 492,000-square-foot Clovis shopping area anchored by a Wal-Mart Supercenter has sued the city over its approval of the project last month.

The lawsuit was filed by the Save Our Crossroads Center group, whose members were fighting the shopping center during hearings in September and October. The City Council approved plans for the shopping center last month in a 3-2 vote, following two hearings.

Issues raised in the lawsuit were brought up during hearings by lawyers with the Stockton law firm of Herum Crabtree Brown, which filed the case Tuesday on behalf of Save Our Crossroads Center.

Project developer David Paynter said Wednesday that he has not read the lawsuit, but that "it was expected."

Center opponents contend that the city failed to provide a water supply assessment and did not sufficiently address traffic, health, pollution or noise issues. They also say the project will contribute to decay in the city.

A majority of the City Council said the issues were adequately addressed in an environmental report done for the project.

In 2004, a different group sued in Fresno County Superior Court after the city approved the project. That lawsuit also was filed by Herum Crabtree Brown. They argued that the city relied on environmental data
that were more than 10 years old.

Fresno County Superior Court Judge Wayne Ellison ruled that the city must do an environmental review. Lawyers for Clovis have filed for a "return hearing" in Fresno County Superior Court to see whether the judge approves of the project's environmental report. The hearing is scheduled in February.

Assistant City Attorney David Wolfe said he was hopeful the lawsuit filed Tuesday and the judge's review of the environmental report can be done at the same time.

The Wal-Mart Supercenter anchors the project near Highway 168 and Herndon Avenue. Other stores include Kohl's; Bed, Bath & Beyond; Ross Dress for Less; and Old Navy.

The government is watching your tailpipe

Remote sensors will be on O.C. freeway onramps this week in a hunt for the highest polluting cars.

By PAT BRENNAN
The Orange County Register, Thursday, Nov. 15, 2007

The drivers won't see much - a white van, a camera, a mirror and some other odd-looking equipment - and they won't be stopped. But their cars will be smogged and, if they are heavy polluters, a letter will arrive in the mail.

Specialists with the region's smog control agency are in Orange County through Friday with their remote smog sensors, which shoot beams of infrared and ultraviolet light through the exhaust plumes from the tailpipes of passing cars.

The technology has been in use for years, but for the first time, the agency is not conducting experiments or fine-tuning. This time, they are serious about getting "gross polluters" off the road - that is, as long as the drivers agree.

"This is strictly a voluntary program," said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District. "It's meant to be an adjunct to smog check."

The remote sensor shoots the light beams across a freeway on-ramp into a mirror on the other side. The beam cuts through the tailpipe emissions and bounces back from the mirror.

Equipment aboard the van reads levels of various pollutants - hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides - based on how the light beams are absorbed by the exhaust plume.

Meanwhile, a separate camera snaps a picture of the car's license plate.

If the car is a gross polluter, one that emits 100 to 500 times as much as an average car, a kind of invitation is mailed to the car's owner.

And the deal might be tempting. Car owners can receive up to $500 to make repairs, or $1,000 to scrap the vehicle.

If they earn a low income and are willing to replace their car with a low-emission used car, they can get $2,000.

The problem with the standard smog check every two years, Atwood said, is that many cars might be given stopgap repairs that don' last very long.

Yet the gross polluters emit a disproportionate amount of the smog that hovers over the Los Angeles basin, which includes Orange County.

And a car needn't be visibly smoking to be a gross polluter. "I don't know that I've seen one that was actually smoking," said Atwood, who has observed many of the remote sensing projects in operation.

Governors Pushing Caps on Greenhouse Gases

By JOHN M. BRODER
N.Y. Times, Thursday, November 15, 2007

WASHINGTON, Nov. 14 — Frustrated with the slow progress of energy and global warming legislation in Washington, the nation’s governors have created regional agreements to cap greenhouse gases and are engaged in a concerted lobbying effort to prod Congress to act.

Beginning Monday, three Western governors will appear in a nationwide television advertising campaign sponsored by an environmental group trying to generate public and political support for the climate change legislation now before the Senate.

The 30-second ad features Arnold Schwarzenegger Republican of California; Jon Huntsman Jr., Republican of Utah; and Brian Schweitzer, Democrat of Montana, standing in casual clothes in scenic locations talking about the threat posed by greenhouse gas emissions. The nation’s governors are acting, but Congress is not, they say. “Now it’s their turn,” Mr. Schwarzenegger says.

Separately, in Milwaukee on Wednesday, nine Midwestern governors and the premier of Manitoba signed an agreement to reduce carbon emissions and set up a trading system to meet the reduction targets.
The Midwestern accord is modeled on similar regional carbon-reduction and energy-saving arrangements among Northeastern, Southwestern and West Coast states.

The advertising campaign is underwritten by Environmental Defense, an advocacy group that is pressing for quick action on a climate change proposal sponsored by Senators Joseph Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut, and John Warner, Republican of Virginia.

The Lieberman-Warner legislation would cap carbon emissions at 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and set up a system for polluting industries to trade emissions credits to meet the goals. Like other such bills before Congress, it would provide incentives for research on capturing and storing carbon dioxide from power plants and subsidies to help the poor handle the higher costs of electricity in a carbon-constrained economy.

The bill is now before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The committee’s chairwoman, Senator Barbara Boxer, Democrat of California, said she hoped to bring to bill to a vote of the full committee by Dec. 6. There is no schedule for action after that.

The governors, who did not receive a fee for appearing in the advertisement, say that state leaders are moving to reduce climate-affecting emissions, while the current Congress has so far failed to pass any significant legislation on climate change or energy.

“In state after state, we’re taking action,” the governors say, taking turns speaking. “Now it’s time for Congress to act by capping greenhouse gas pollution.”

In an interview, Governor Huntsman said, “With just weeks left in the legislative calendar there has been no vote yet dealing realistically with greenhouse gas pollution. We in the West are already wrestling with it and setting ambitious targets.”

He said action on the national level, in the form of the Lieberman-Warner legislation or a similar economy-wide carbon cap-and-trade scheme, was preferable to the patchwork system that is being put in place by state governments.

Governor Schweitzer said dealing with global warming was the “greatest imperative” of this and future generations. “We need to find a sustainable, renewable American energy supply so we will not commit the next generation to fight another oil war,” he said.

Mr. Schweitzer added: “Here’s a novel concept for Congress. Do something. Anything. Move.”

Environmental Defense is spending $3 million to broadcast the advertisement, which will appear in 17 markets in 11 states over the next few weeks, said the group's president, Fred Krupp. The ad will also appear during the Sunday morning talk shows on Nov. 25.

The Midwestern governors expressed similar impatience with the slow pace in Washington on global warming and energy issues. They have banded together to set up a regional emissions control program, to expand production of biofuels and to cooperate on environmental and energy infrastructure projects, like an interstate pipeline for moving carbon emissions from power plants to underground storage vaults.

James E. Doyle, the Democratic governor of Wisconsin who is chairman of the Midwestern Governors Association, said that the individual states in his region were all moving independently toward greater energy efficiency and planned to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that it made sense to work in concert.

"In the absence of a federal plan, we have to move forward," Mr. Doyle said, speaking from Milwaukee, where he was the chairman of the energy meeting of the Midwestern governors. "On top of that, this recognizes that, federal plan or no federal plan, the Midwest is uniquely positioned to be a major force in the developing new energy world."

He predicted that sooner or later Washington would adopt a national cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions, but he was not optimistic that it would act before President Bush leaves office.

"I suspect it will require a new administration to come in," Mr. Doyle said. "There's a lot of work to be done to prepare for it. If there comes a national cap-and-trade system, we will have done a lot of the work. If not, we will have one in the Midwestern region on a scale that can work."

North American flora can't absorb continent's greenhouse gas output

David Perlman, Chronicle Science Editor
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, November 15, 2007

The outpouring of greenhouse gases from North America far outstrips the ability of the continent's fields, forests and wetlands to absorb all the carbon in the atmosphere, and the United States alone remains the world's largest emitter of climate-warming carbon dioxide, scientists reported Wednesday.

All told, the burning of fossil fuels by the United States, Canada and Mexico releases nearly 2 billion tons of carbon each year into the atmosphere, and the United States accounts for 85 percent of that total, says the report by the Climate Change Science Program, a research effort by government and private scientists sponsored by the Bush administration.

Until now, many scientists had thought the continent holds enough vegetation to absorb most of the carbon dioxide emissions, but the new report refutes that assumption and warns that the disparity is increasing.

The entire continent accounts for 27 percent of all the carbon dioxide emissions in the world, says the report, but China, where more and more coal-burning power plants go online every year, is already forecast to soon become the world's worst emitter.

"This is the first systematic assessment of America's contribution to the carbon budget in the context of global climate change, and it tells us what we really need to know," said Christopher B. Field of the Carnegie Institution's Department of Global Ecology at Stanford.

Field is the lead author of a section of the report that deals with the carbon cycle - a kind of balance sheet calculating how much climate-changing gas is emitted by North American power plants, vehicles and industry and how much is absorbed by the forests, crops, soils and surrounding ocean waters that constitute what scientists call the carbon sink.

"By burning fossil fuel and clearing forests, human beings have significantly altered the global carbon cycle," Field said.

As a result, he and his colleagues who drew up the report calculated that the continent emits more than three times the amount of carbon dioxide than its varied sinks are capable of absorbing. All the rest stays in the atmosphere and creates the heat-trapping greenhouse effect that has been warming the planet for the past century.

"The conversion of fossil fuels to energy, such as electricity generation, is the single largest carbon contributor, with transportation second," the report said.

As for the lagging ability of forests, parks, soils and green croplands to absorb the carbon, the report is highly pessimistic about the future.

"Carbon absorption by vegetation, primarily in the form of forest growth, is expected to decline as maturing forests grow more slowly and take up less carbon dioxide from the atmosphere," the experts said.

Wildfires that strip vegetation from huge swaths of land also reduce the ability of the carbon sink to function, and Field noted that last month's forest fires in Southern California that blackened 740,000 acres in five counties will have a significant impact on the state's future ability to absorb its output of greenhouse gases - despite California's leadership in green technology and in curbing carbon dioxide emissions.

"That land may recover in 10 or 20 years, and plants may return" Field said, "but there are more wildfires every year, and we haven't prevented them."

As climate continues to warm and droughts increase all across North America, widespread vegetation would die off and leave the bare land useless for absorbing carbon, the report noted.

In Washington last January, House and Senate Democrats accused the Bush administration of censoring the findings of scientists working on an earlier report for the same climate change program, and some of the program's scientists said they had been asked to delete reference to global warming or climate change in their findings.

From his own experience and discussions with colleagues working on the new report, none of that happened this time, Field said. The words "warming" and "climate change" appear in the report's summary
released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

China close to overtaking U .S . in carbon emissions

Inventory shows one plant in Georgia spews more warming gases than all of Brazil

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post
in the Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, November 15, 2007

WASHINGTON — Developing countries — China, South Africa and India — host the world's five dirtiest utility companies in terms of global warming pollution, according to the first-ever worldwide database of power plants' carbon dioxide emissions, while a single Southern Co. plant in Juliet, Ga., emits more annually than Brazil's entire power sector.

The analysis, released Wednesday by the Washington-based think tank Global Development Group, a nonprofit that focuses on how the actions of rich countries affect developing nations, provides a detailed inventory of power plants' greenhouse gas emissions by region across the globe.

The database shows the United States as the world's biggest carbon dioxide (CO_2) emitter and how quickly it will be outpaced by rapidly industrializing nations.

While the United States still produces the most carbon dioxide from electricity generation, releasing 2.8 billion tons of CO_2 each year, China is close to overtaking it, with its 2.7 billion tons. Moreover, China plans to build or expand 199 coal-fired facilities in the next decade, compared with the United States' 83.

Power plants account for 40 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions and 25 percent of the world's.

Frank O'Donnell, who heads the advocacy group Clean Air Watch, called the new analysis "pretty shocking." "If we're serious about dealing with global warming, we are going to have to get a handle on coal-burning electric power in this country," he said.

Duke Energy Chairman and President James Rogers — whose company is the third-largest CO_2-emitting utility in the country and 12th in the world — agreed with that assessment.

"I have a special responsibility to work on this issue because my company's carbon footprint is so big," he said. But Rogers added that the fact that certain regions are more dependent on coal than others means he would oppose any effort to auction off carbon allowances, as envisioned in a new bill authored by Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and John Warner, R-Va.

That could raise rates for Duke's Indiana customers by 35 percent by 2012, Rogers said, and amounts to a tax.

"The whole point of cap-and-trade is to put a price on carbon so we can make good economic decisions in the future," he said. "It's not about punishing people for making decisions 40 years ago."

Upgrading or replacing aging plants is key, O'Donnell said, since 72 percent of the nation's 500 coal-fired plants were built in the 1970s.

Southern Co. spokesman Mike Tyndall said his company's emissions were high "simply because of the size of the plants" and because "we're serving a ever-larger population." While the company opposes a mandatory cap on emissions, Tyndall said, "we're at the forefront of developing new technology to address CO_2 emissions."

The Ohio River Valley, the southeast and Texas rank as the dirtiest U.S. regions in terms of greenhouse gas-emitting power plants.

The Global Development Group study contains some surprises: South Africa's government-owned Eskom ranks as the world's second most polluting utility, with 214 million tons of carbon dioxide releases this year, and Australians emit more CO_2 per capita than any other nation. Germany, where Chancellor Angela Merkel has pushed aggressively for deeper cuts in greenhouse gas emissions among developed countries, ranks as Europe's biggest carbon dioxide emitter from power generation.

David Wheeler, a former World Bank economist and GDG senior fellow who compiled the database, said his research highlights the extent to which both industrialized and developing nations need to cut their carbon dioxide emissions in order to avert drastic climate change.

"It's a question of mutual survival," said Wheeler. "Each side is emitting enough to sink everything."

China sees reduction in coal emissions

from the Associated Press
in the Modesto Bee and Washington Post, Wednesday, November 14, 2007

BEIJING — China said measures to improve the environment by cutting pollution at coal-fired power plants has started to show results, with emissions of a key air pollutant falling so far this year.

Emissions of sulfur dioxide, a main marker of air pollution, fell by 1.8 percent year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2007, State Environmental Protection Administration Director Zhou Shengxian said Thursday in a statement on the agency's Web site.

This compared to a 1.2 percent rise in 2006 from a year earlier. Zhou attributed the decrease to the installation of facilities that cut emissions of sulfur from coal-fired power plants.

"This shows measures to improve environmental quality have worked," Zhou was quoted as saying by the official China Daily newspaper.

China has some of the most polluted cities in the world and many of its rivers and lakes are full of toxic poisons after decades of breakneck economic growth.

The stunning economic growth means it accounted for 58 percent of carbon emissions worldwide in 2000-06, the International Energy Agency said in a report last week.

The environmental concerns extend to next summer's Beijing Olympics, with the International Olympic Committee and others voicing concern about the city's notoriously bad air pollution.

China aims to cut major pollutants by 10 percent between 2006 and 2010, but missed its target last year.

While China is against binding emissions caps, fearing they could harm economic growth, it is looking to technology - such as installations on power plants - to help cut emissions.

Zho said that a measure of water pollution, called chemical oxygen demand, or COD, also fell fractionally.

His report came a day after a commission on China's Yangtze River said the amount of sewage dumped into that waterway rose last year to a record 30.5 billion tons, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

That was an increase of 3.1 percent, or 900 million tons, from the year before, according to Hu Jiajun, a spokesman for the Yangtze River Water Resources Commission, Xinhua said.

Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, Nov. 15, 2007:

Air Resources Board should slow down on deadline change

The state's Air Resources Board will meet today to discuss the plan to extend the deadline for clean air in the Valley until 2024. We urge CARB to slow down.

The proposal to push the Valley into the "extreme" nonattainment category is based largely on calculations that the Valley can't possibly meet the original deadline, and would risk severe sanctions from the federal government for that failure.

In April, when the Valley's air district approved the ozone plan, those calculations showed a shortfall in cleaning up the air -- the "attainment gap" -- of about 100 tons of nitrogen oxides per day. Nitrogen oxides are a building block for the eye-watering, lung-searing smog we suffer every summer in the Valley.

But since then, a task force set up by CARB has found further reductions are possible, lowering the attainment gap to around 49 tons per day by 2017, and 33 tons in 2020. That suggests to us -- and others -- that more work by the task force may result in closing the gap altogether, perhaps allowing the Valley attain clean air years ahead of the proposed deadline.

When the relaxed deadline was first proposed, we were assured that every stone had been turned over looking for regulatory means of closing that attainment gap.

But as the task force's work has demonstrated, that wasn't so. And until it's evident to all of us that there is no more to be reasonably done, we shouldn't throw up our hands and surrender to a long delay.

There's too much at stake. We watch hundred of people die prematurely each year because of our foul air. One child in five in the Valley has asthma. Collectively, we spend an additional $3 billion-plus each year in health care costs because of illness and disease directly attributable to poor air quality.

We've been encouraged by some of the steps CARB has taken under the leadership of its new chair, Mary Nichols. We hope that improvement continues.

CARB owes us all every ounce of effort before throwing in the towel and delaying clean air for the Valley.

Sacramento Bee Opinion Thurs. Nov. 15, 2007

Daniel Weintraub: New index measures greenhouse gas goal progress

By Daniel Weintraub

As California begins its quest to lead the nation toward a big reduction in greenhouse gases, the biggest question facing policymakers and the public is probably this: Can one state fight global warming while still growing its economy?

The new state mandate will require industries to change the way they do business and will almost certainly involve fees or taxes designed to increase the cost of anything that involves burning carbon - the essential element behind the fuel that moves our cars, the gas that heats our homes and most of the electricity that lights and cools our buildings.

If California makes it more costly to do all of these things and more, it risks pushing businesses, and jobs, to other states and countries that have not joined the drive to reduce greenhouse gases.

Not only would that hurt California's economy, it would also defeat the purpose of Assembly Bill 32, the landmark legislation that requires the state to reduce emissions 25 percent by 2020. If economic activity - and the emissions associated with that activity - moves elsewhere, then the state will have harmed its own well-being while doing little or nothing to help the environment.

Noel Perry, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, believes that the Democrats who pushed AB 32 through the Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who signed it, were right when they said that California can have it all. The state can green its economy and grow it, too.

But Perry, as an investor, also has a habit of measuring his assumptions against reality. So he has undertaken a project to assess California's progress toward its challenging twin goals in the coming years.

The California Green Innovation Index is a product of Next 10, a nonprofit Perry founded two years ago to help citizens and policymakers understand the state's long-standing fiscal mess.

That online model, which you can find at www.next10.org <http://www.next10.org>, presents background information and a series of choices players can make to see how to balance the budget with either spending cuts, tax increases or both over the next 10 years.

As its name suggests, Perry's latest endeavor focuses on innovation because he believes technological progress will be crucial to reducing greenhouse gases without slowing economic growth. The index, housed at the same Web site as the budget game, includes 45 measures of environmental progress and economic growth, sometimes comparing both at the same time.

"I hope it will inform the debate in this state and give a factual basis for decision-making," Perry said last week. "We are not advocates. We are trying to put out information that people can trust."

The index measures investment in "green" businesses, clean-technology patents, solar power installations, electricity use and utility bills, and much more. It has data on vehicle miles traveled, gasoline sales and public transit use. It even records how much energy Californians use pumping water - which is responsible for a surprising 20 percent of the state's electricity use.

While the format of this year's inaugural presentation is a bit unwieldy, Perry promises that the foundation will update the index annually and that future versions will include a single chart from which citizens can track progress or the lack of it across the range of measures.

A key measure that sums up the entire challenge is one that compares carbon emissions per million people to the state's economic output. Ideally, the two lines would move in opposite directions.

"We want the economy to grow while we want emissions to decline," said Doug Henton, an economist and Next 10 adviser. "That's it in a nutshell."

Interestingly, that's also pretty much what has been happening over the past decade - even without the state's intervention. California has been using less carbon per person while its economy has been growing.

But AB 32 raises the bar. It requires not just a reduction in carbon emissions per person, but a big reduction in the total amount of emissions, even as the state's population is expected to continue to grow by more than a half-million people per year. And as the innovation index shows, California begins this effort with its residents already producing emissions that are only half the national average and about one-third of the greenhouse gas emissions produced per capita in Texas.

Perry compares the greenhouse gas reduction goals to California's recycling program. In 1989, about 10 percent of the state's waste was diverted from landfills. But state-mandated waste reduction goals spawned an entire industry and new markets for recycled material, and today more than half the state's waste no longer goes to its landfills. Meeting the greenhouse gas goals, he said, can follow the same path, even if it might be more difficult.

"We've got our work cut out for us," Perry said. "AB 32 is a very challenging mandate."

Next 10's index can't settle the debate about whether the latest environmental policies are a hindrance or a help to the economy. But it will be a valuable resource for people on both sides of that divide who want to debate the issue with facts and not just assumptions and ideology.