State targets Central Valley Concrete

Suit says company gets a leg up on competitors by ignoring air, water laws.

By Scott Jason
Merced Sun-Star, Monday, April 21, 2008

California Attorney General Jerry Brown has filed suit against Central Valley Concrete asking that it be fined thousands of dollars for air and water quality violations that have allegedly occurred in the past three years.

The 35-page complaint, filed April 2 in Merced County Superior Court, alleges that the Merced-based concrete company ignored environmental laws and was put at a competitive advantage as a result.

The company could offer better rates to customers because it didn't have to spend money to comply with regulations, the lawsuit alleges.

Brown, the former two-term governor and Oakland mayor who was elected attorney general last year, has said protecting the environment is one of his top priorities and has attacked and sued the Bush administration over its policies. Now, his office has focused on Merced.

Central Valley Concrete, on Highway 59, runs ready-mix concrete plants, has a fleet of delivery trucks and also operates an automotive painting business.

It's been in business since 1981, according to its Web site, and has three Merced facilities, two in Stanislaus County and one in Madera County. It ships concrete from Fresno to Modesto, and Los Banos to Mariposa.

After learning of the lawsuit Thursday from the Sun-Star, the company didn't return repeated phone calls on Friday for comment.

The Attorney General's Office is asking that a judge stop the company from any work that would break environmental regulation and also be fined anywhere from $2,000 to $75,000 a day for each past violation.

The first hearing in the case is scheduled for September.

The allegations include operating without the proper permits from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, not training employees to properly handle hazardous material and failing to keep records of when the company disposed of dangerous liquids, such as oil, antifreeze and solvents.

The company also illegally disposed of or destroyed 500-gallon to 1,000-gallon containers that held hazardous material, according to the court filing. It didn't specify what was happening at the various divisions through the Central Valley.

The Deputy Attorney General on the case, Brett Morris, didn't return phone calls for comment Friday.

Since 2007, Central Valley Concrete has received five violation notices from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Merced County Department of Environmental Health and the water board.

A violation notice from Feb. 28, 2007, found that the company's trucking facility didn't have the necessary permits from the air board to run a sand-blasting operation.

A couple months later, the Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources told the company it was violating state code because it wasn't following regulations in dealing with hazardous waste at its Turlock facility.

Earth Day Shootout

End of Community Composting?

By Valley Voice Newspaper Staff Writer
Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, April 21, 2008

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY - It's all a bit too mulch. The mission to recycle compost and cut waste is on a collision course with the equally green goal – to clean up the Valley's air.

The San Joaquin Valley Air District, under the gun to cut volatile organic compounds – a contributor to ozone – has drafted tough new regulations on composters of organic wastes like the green waste clippings. That's the stuff you dutifully recycle in your green waste trash cans in Visalia, Tulare and Porterville – just to name some cities.

The draft rule has the potential to make composting so expensive the few private companies in the Valley that recycle our green waste might choose to go out of business.

That would leave cities and counties back to square one – back before 1990 when the state mandated local jurisdictions recycle at least 50 percent of their waste stream by the year 2000.

After years of a successful public education program, there are conflicting messages in the Valley causing public confusion over what are good green practices and what are not.

Case in point, this past weekend where The Fresno Bee pointed out that planting trees may be causing more pollution than cars.

Today, Tulare County is proud of its 52 percent diversion rate largely thanks to widespread cooperation in recycling compost and diverting what was about 30 percent of the waste stream going to our landfills.

Two local companies – Wood Industries and Tulare County Compost and Biomass – take most of the green waste from Tulare County cities and turn it into soil amendments that improve the fertility of the soil. Sounds like your basic green ethic in action?

Yes, but the state Integrated Waste Management Board wants us to do more. It says 10 million tons of compost and other organics are still going to the state's landfills and 13 million tons of woody debris as well that need to be diverted by 2020. This will require 50 to 100 new composting facilities.

Enter the Valley air board that has a green mission of its own – reduce VOCs (volatile organic compounds) starting in 2012 or face a potential penalty from the EPA. The air board says it needs to cut emissions from composting facilities to reach its emission goals.

To meet the deadline, the air district is in the process of adopting new rules on composting operations, but the critics say it is moving too quickly to examine other alternatives or reconsider its assumptions. Overall, the composters argue the district should look at lower-priced solutions to cut emissions than demanded by the air board staff – enclose all open air composting facilities.

"That would add a $10 million price tag to my own operation," says Kent Kaulfuss of Wood Industries in Visalia.

"We just couldn't afford to operate anymore," leaving the City of Visalia without one of its two green waste operators.

Composters and the state Integrated Waste Management Board itself point to a recent study done by the city of Modesto that suggests a far lower emission problem from green waste than the air district's analysis by a 3-to-1 factor. In turn, because the air district believes composting facilities emit three times the VOCs than the Modesto study suggests, the air board measures to curtail the expected pollution problem are far tougher.

Kaulfuss says the district, in its eagerness to find pollution to cut that will help it meet its EPA emission goal, uses each composting plant's maximum permitted volume instead of what is actually produced. In his own case, the district estimated his Visalia compost plant produced 120,000 tons of green waste – the permitted number – instead of what he regularly produces – 20,000 tons. Of course, the pollution level appears to be far larger. Between the high emission

factor and the decision to quantify the maximum production numbers the air board staff suggests a far bigger problem than may be out there.

John Jones, operation manager for Tulare County Compost and Biomass, says if the rules as drafted were implemented, it would “make composting very expensive” and he expects a compromise plan to help some. Jones' company takes green waste from Visalia, Tulare and Porterville.

Organic material accounts for about 30 percent of the state's waste stream, says a 1994 Waste Management Board report.

“We're extremely concerned that the new rules will mean these compost companies could go out of business,” says county Assistant Director for the Resource Management Agency Britt Fussel. That could mean the end of “all that effort we made to educate the public – recycle and reuse – in Tulare County.”

The air board has responded to comments that its emission factor is too high, saying it will further examine the Modesto study and others in an April 10 document. A second series of public comment meetings on the issue is taking place this month.
Farm industry rep Manuel Cunha says they object to the air board staff decision that originally covered just composting – now expanded to all “organic” waste that includes farm spreading of nut hulls, manure, food waste and other materials. But, he has been told recently that the district brass “will sit down with us” to examine the scope and assumptions before moving forward any further.

Besides composters, the new rules affect farmers as they spread walnut or almond shells or chipped orchard wood on their land, forcing them to tarp the land affected within three hours. That would likely mean the need to add large diesel-fueled machinery – more trips, more pollution – as an unintended consequence. For feed operators, they would need to tarp feed within three hours. Manure spread on land would need to tarped and incorporated into the soil within 48 hours.

“This draft rule affects canneries, dehydrators, land spreaders, feed operations and farmers who spread any organic material on their land,” says one critic.

Also at risk are small town volunteer composting programs like the one in the city of Corcoran, says one resident. Instead of a volunteer drop-off program, the additional labor costs to cover the branch clippings dropped at the site within three hours will make it unlikely this program and scores of others around the Valley will survive.

“If the air board makes this all too expensive – people will just go back to illegal dumping – mostly on farm land,” worries Cunha.

West Park Tuesday showdown

Patterson Irrigator, Friday, April 18, 2008

The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors is expected to decide Tuesday whether to continue negotiations with a developer who plans to transform Crows Landing's defunct air base into a massive industrial center.

PCCP West Park wants to turn the Crows Landing Air Facility into a 7.5-square-mile business park that’s connected to the Port of Oakland via rail. A recent study commissioned by West Park predicts the project will generate about 34,200 on-site jobs and 3,000 construction jobs at build-out in 30 years.

West Park plans have drawn opposition from government agencies on the West Side, with Patterson City Council leading the charge. Detractors claim the increased traffic and loss of farmland will pollute the air and destroy the West Side way of life.

WS-PACE.org, a local group that’s formed to oppose the project, expects to bring hundreds of opponents to the meeting in which PCCP West Park LLC will appear before supervisors.

In February 2007, supervisors voted 3-2 to enter an exclusive negotiating period with West Park that will expire Tuesday. If supervisors vote to stick with West Park and agree to a memorandum of understanding, the developer will finalize development plans and legal documents and will begin an extensive environmental review process. If supervisors vote to end the partnership with West Park, the county will either seek another company to develop the base or use a previous consultant to design the project and go through the environmental review process before seeking a developer.

Exeter gets two natural gas buses

BY KIMBERLINA ROCHA
Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, April 21, 2008

Two school buses that run on compressed natural gas and are equipped with seat belts will be picking up Exeter-area students next month.

The Exeter high school and elementary school districts were each awarded a $94,904 grant from the California Department of Education to make the upgrade. The new buses will be making their way on streets as early as May 1, district officials say.

More eco-friendly

Two buses that were built in 1986 will be replaced by the eco-friendly buses, which boast a more sophisticated emissions control system.

Compressed natural gas produces fewer air pollutants than does gasoline or diesel, studies show.

The buses also meet the state law, which came into effect July 1 last year, where new buses must be equipped with lap-and-shoulder seat belts.

"This means a lot," said Chris Mano, business manager for both districts, of the grant. "These buses are far more environmentally-friendly and have greater fuel efficiency and provide safety across the board."

Transportation Director Lowell Hicks said the buses will need to be inspected before they are sent to the Exeter school districts.

Hicks said the buses could have 13 seats on each side. Each bus could seat up to 55 students. The buses feature tinted windows, two roof hatches and emergency doors that have alarms.

The districts transport about 600 students a day, Hicks said.

Tulare County fights to save railroad tracks

Company wants to sell its rails as scrap metal

BY HILLARY S. MEEKS
Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, April 21, 2008

Lindsay-based Tulare Frozen Foods saves $500,000 a year by using trains to carry 50 million pounds of frozen vegetables as far as Texas, Florida and New Jersey.

That savings could soon disappear if San Joaquin Valley Railroad officials abandon nearly 40 miles of Tulare County track. The railroad company, owned by Rail America, has for the second time filed a federal request to abandon a 9.2-mile segment from Exeter to Strathmore and a 30.57-mile segment from Strathmore to Jovista.

The company's apparent intention is to sell the track as scrap metal, said Paul Saldaña, chief executive officer of the Tulare County Economic Development Corporation.

"We think this is just the first of several abandonments that they'll file, not just on our railroad, but probably on other Rail America holdings throughout the United States," Saldaña said. "I think they probably figured we were the easiest ones to pick off."

That would be a mistaken assumption, Saldaña said. Almost every incorporated city in Tulare County, and the county itself, have filed opposition to Rail America's request. The request is pending decision by the Surface Transportation Board.

Calls to San Joaquin Valley Railroad and to Rail America's attorney were not returned.

Effects of abandonment

"This is a significant threat to Tulare County," Saldaña said. "It will rob us of the ability to put companies in that would use rail service in Lindsay, Strathmore, Exeter and Terra Bella."

Tuff Stuff, a company that recently relocated to Terra Bella from Downey, has been watching the abandonment request anxiously. One of the reasons Tuff Stuff moved to Tulare County was the opportunity for expansion - something that might not happen if the rail is abandoned, said general manager Max Lee.

"Freight is an issue that is pressing more and more," Lee said, "because the cost of gas is going up every day."

Tuff Stuff uses low-density plastic polyethylene to make 100 percent recycled products, including farm buckets and dollies. The company, which needs trains to bring in the plastic it recycles, plans to open the Terra Bella operations in August, hasn't considered what it will do if the railroad tracks are abandoned, Lee said.

"We will try to do what we can to stop it," he said. "We would definitely like [the railroad] to stay so we can all grow together."

Abandonment also would be a blow to county efforts to fight air pollution, said Mike Ennis, Tulare County supervisor for District 5, which includes much of the area where the affected tracks are. More trucks would mean more pollution, Ennis said.

Tulare County supervisors and cities in the county have been discussing the possibility of expanding rail service to help air quality, he said.

But companies such as Tuff Stuff and Tulare Frozen Foods would likely use trucks if the San Joaquin Valley Railroad lines are abandoned. Jim Fikkert, Tulare Frozen Foods president, said the company would either:

- Truck its frozen vegetables around the United States.
- Truck them to another site where they'd be loaded onto trains, a process called "transloading."

"Transloading would be a better option than all trucks, Fikkert said, "but it would still have a serious impact on cost."

Tulare Frozen Foods is the only company currently using the South Exeter Branch tracks, Saldaña said, but that's because San Joaquin Valley Railroad introduced a $950-per-car surcharge in 2006.

The surcharge has kept other companies away, he said.

"It's very intentional on their part to drive away the business so they can essentially scrap the rail line," he said. "Their interest isn't in being a railroad company. It's in pulling off the rail and salvaging it."

Tulare County got a consultant from Pennsylvania to see whether the tracks are up to par, Saldaña said. With the exception of some parts south of Terra Bella, he said, the tracks are in good shape.

Area officials don't plan to give up on them.

"I think rail is going to be the future," Ennis said.

The Collegian goes green

By Heather Billings
CSUF The Collegian, Monday, April 21, 2008

The Collegian will be recognizing Earth Day with a week-long series informing the campus community on what Fresno State has done to become more environmentally friendly, how students deal with the Central Valley's air quality and what people can do to make a difference environmentally.

• In today's issue: Kiosks highlight solar energy information, News.
• In today's issue: It's easy being green, Features.
• In Wednesday's issue: Fresno State and the City of Fresno work towards sustainability with their Univer/City partnership, News.
• In Wednesday's issue: Students find it easier to ride a bike than drive, Features.
• In Wednesday's issue: Athletes deal with the Valley's air quality, Sports.
• In Friday's issue: The quality of life in Fresno, News.
• In Friday's issue: Students deal with asthma, Features.
• In Friday's issue: The amount of energy it takes to power the stadiums. Sports.
• Check out The Collegian Online for reports on the Valley's air quality, what students do to go green and an interactive quiz, at
http://collegian.csufresno.edu.
• Look for the "Go Green" logo for additional stories throughout the week.

Bay Area regulators mull carbon dioxide fee for businesses

The Associated Press
In the Contra Costa Times and Modesto Bee, Monday, April 21, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO—San Francisco Bay area pollution regulators are proposing to charge fees to businesses based on how much carbon dioxide they release into the air.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District plans to consider a measure next month that would charge 4.2 cents for every metric ton of carbon dioxide emitted.

The fees would go into effect in July and cover businesses in nine counties.

Agency officials say the estimated annual $1.2 million generated by the program would pay for the monitoring of greenhouse gases.

The top 10 carbon dioxide emitters—including local oil refineries, a power plant and a cement company—would pay about 70 percent of the expected fees.

Agency spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick said most businesses would pay less than $1.

Bay Area businesses may pay fee for emissions

By Kelly Zito, staff writer
S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, April 20, 2008

San Francisco -- Thousands of Bay Area businesses - from boutique hotels to mammoth oil refineries - are poised to pay some of the nation's first fees tied to greenhouse gas emissions under a plan proposed by regional air pollution regulators.

If the proposal is approved next month, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District would charge 4.2 cents for every metric ton of carbon dioxide released, amounting to as much as $200,000 annually on power plant smokestacks in Contra Costa County, or as little as a few pennies a year for a San Francisco apartment complex with a backup generator.

As the national debate on carbon emissions rages and California officials work out the specifics of the state plan to cut greenhouse gases, the district's fee sets the region in the vanguard in the fight against global warming and the effort to track the biggest offenders. Boulder, Colo., last year imposed greenhouse gas fees on consumers and businesses to fund global warming education, energy audits and weatherization.

"These actions provide both models for federal action and reflect a growing desire on the part of the American people to see action on climate change," said Joshua Bushinsky, Western policy coordinator for the Pew Center on Climate Change in Arlington, Va.

The fees on businesses in the nine-county region, which would start July 1, are not enough to deter greenhouse gas production in most cases, critics and supporters agree. Rather, the estimated annual $1.2 million would pay for the cost of monitoring greenhouse gases.

"It's not a fee that would mitigate the effects of carbon - to do that we would be planting trees and buying wind power credits," said agency spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick. "This recovers the cost of the agency integrating climate protection into all of our programs."

The measure is encountering stiff opposition from many of the businesses whose workaday operations entail large-scale carbon dioxide releases - namely, oil refiners and power plants. Their chief complaint rests not on the size of the fee, but on whether the Bay Area plan will undermine wider efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Critics question wisdom

"The broader the scope of these programs, the more chance you have of being successful ... bringing greenhouse gases down," said Tupper Hull, spokesman for the Western States Petroleum Association. "Programs and taxes like this district's amount to a balkanization of the process at a time when we've not yet really determined the best strategies."

In Sacramento, the California Air Resources Board is examining a range of fees to comply with the milestone 2006 state mandate to cut carbon emissions in the state by 25 percent by 2020. The Bay Area air district is careful to say it is collaborating with state regulators and would integrate any state rules into its system.

Currently, the local board regulates particulate emissions from about 10,000 businesses across the Bay Area; roughly 2,500 businesses would be affected by the new fee. Last week, the agency set a May 21 date for a vote. Though vehicle emissions account for more than 50 percent of the total carbon dioxide released in the Bay Area, that does not fall under the agency's purview.

If the business fee passes, the top 10 companies would pay more than $820,000 - or about 70 percent of the $1.2 million total. The fee for the vast majority of businesses would be less than $1, Schkolnick said.

The Shell refinery in Martinez stands to pay the most: for an estimated 4.4 million tons of carbon dioxide emitted (based on 2005 data) each year, the oil firm would owe just over $195,000. Others in the top 10 include the Chevron refinery in Richmond, a power plant in Pittsburg and a cement company in Cupertino.

"Industrial polluters should face financial consequences for contributing to global warming," said Linda Weiner, director of air quality advocacy and outreach at the American Lung Association of California. "As the planet warms, that means more smog, asthma, hospitalizations. This is a very modest fee, but the cost to the planet and health care system will be much higher."

But Hull, of the petroleum association, said the cost of the greenhouse gas fee ultimately hits consumers' wallets at a time they can ill afford it.

"Californians already pay the highest gasoline taxes in the country at the pump," Hull said. "Any tax like this that increases the cost of providing gas to consumers is a concern."

A fee, not a tax

Schkolnick and the board assiduously avoid the word "tax," because that requires a different approval process. For one thing, she said, the program would levy a relatively tiny amount of money, and is designed to fund a greenhouse gas emissions inventory and a way to track the emissions across the agency's jurisdiction.

A "carbon tax" usually refers to one of two primary mechanisms authorities use to directly cut carbon emissions by penalizing high emitters and rewarding low emitters. For instance, European regulators charge more than $30 per metric ton; Boulder's program is closer to the Bay Area's in price: It averages $16 a year for consumers and $3,200 a year for industrial firms.

"Cap and trade," the other approach, sets limits on carbon dioxide emissions and allows companies to trade carbon credits based on amount of production. Both strategies attempt to make burning fossil fuels pricey and reward investment in renewable energy.

Last week, President Bush urged the United States to halt the growth of greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. But with no specific mandates or proposed legislation, the announcement was widely seen as having no teeth.

With the discussion of global climate moving from "if" to "when" - and, specifically, at what point the damage to the planet and society will become irreversible - local officials simply believe they have no choice but to take a bold step toward charging carbon dioxide emitters.

"We cannot wait," Schkolnick said. "Climate change is happening now."

Bay Area businesses could face emissions fee from regional agency

By Felecity Barringer, New York Times News Service
In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Monday, April 20, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO – Air quality regulators in the San Francisco Bay Area appear set to begin charging hundreds of businesses in the region for their emissions of heat-trapping gases.

It's believed to be the first time in the country that any government body would charge industries directly for emissions that contribute to climate change. The regional agency considering the fee, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, would be effectively leapfrogging the continuing debate in Sacramento and Washington over how to control emissions.

The businesses affected by the fee – 4.4 cents per ton of carbon dioxide emitted – range from large petroleum refineries and cement plants to small gasoline stations and industrial bakeries.

The air quality management agency has long had independent authority under state law to regulate businesses that emit conventional pollutants like fine particulates. In establishing a fee, it would be stretching its mandate to include carbon dioxide, methane and other heat-trapping gases.

A representative of local oil refineries said the agency's authority to do this was “questionable” but wouldn't predict whether there would be a court challenge. If the fee is adopted as expected at a May 21 hearing, it would take effect July 1.

At a hearing Wednesday, regulators indicated the fee could raise $1.1 million annually. Refineries, power plants and cement plants would pay nearly 90 percent of total fees. The largest gas stations might be charged $1 a year; the Safeway bakery that supplies bread to all stores in the Bay Area would pay $85 a year.

The biggest emitter of the gases, the Shell oil refinery in Martinez, would have to pay $195,355, based on 2005 emissions of 4.4 million metric tons.

Regulators said the fee was designed to recoup costs associated with developing carbon dioxide controls, such as compiling an inventory of regional emissions. The 850 facilities that would be affected by the new fee already pay a variety of fees to obtain operating permits.

At the Wednesday hearing, Linda Weiner, representing the Bay Area Clean Air Task Force, embraced the fee, saying, “We believe it sets a precedent as the first time that businesses and government agencies would face financial consequences for contributing to global warming.”

But Dennis Bolt of the Western States Petroleum Association said the agency was overstepping its authority and the fee was likely to create duplication and confusion with the suite of climate-change measures being developed by the state's Air Resources Board.

Jack Broadbent, the executive officer for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, said lawyers for the district had been consulting with their counterparts at the Air Resources Board. The board, based in Sacramento, is charged with devising a way to carry out the landmark 2006 law mandating a cutback in emissions of heat-trapping gases.

The nine-county area of the air quality district, which stretches from the wine-producing area of Sonoma County in the north to the expanding suburbs of Solano County in the east and southward through Silicon Valley in Santa Clara County, emits 85.4 million tons of carbon dioxide annually, according to a report by the air quality district's staff.

About half of the total comes from motor vehicles, not regulated by the air quality district.

San Mateo woman to open biodiesel station

By Julia Scott, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, April 21, 2008

SAN MATEO — Austin Mader-Clark used to feel like an outlaw whenever she went to fill up her car with biodiesel at a co-op in Pacifica.

"I had to drive down a dirt road, open a storage container, pop my hood and put jumper cables on my battery to make the pump work," said Mader-Clark, 45. "Basically, it felt like a drug deal."

And yet, Mader-Clark's experience typifies the lengths to which people will go to find biodiesel in the Bay Area — driving dozens of miles out of their way to pump used vegetable oil from a tank in someone's garage or a shed in themiddle of nowhere.

Mader-Clark said she hopes to banish that feeling of marginality with Autopia Biofuels, her vision of what a biodiesel fueling station ought to be. Slated to open for business on Monday, the San Mateo station will boast regular business hours, attendants, a friendly atmosphere and one of the biggest tanks of recycled veggie oil in the Bay Area.

If biodiesel — a low-emissions fuel that can be used in a car's gas tank as an alternative to diesel — is to overcome its "hippie" stigma, it has to appeal to a broader audience, Mader-Clark said — including truck drivers, garbage haulers and bus companies.

"I want to get the 'greens' in their 1983 Mercedes Benz cars, but I also want to get people like me — soccer moms in their (Volkswagen) Jettas and Touaregs," she said.

The simple, airy warehouse on South Railroad Avenue welcomes visitors with a bright yellow floor and ample parking just off the Caltrain tracks, next to a row of car-related businesses. Autopia will eventually offer concessions for sale, mostly organic goodies from local vendors.

No membership is required, unlike the business model used for biodiesel co-ops, which rely on the commitment and dedication of a group of grassroots founders. Such co-ops spring up and fade away at regular intervals across the Bay Area. They are mostly small neighborhood stations set up by "home-brewing" enthusiasts who mix together used kitchen grease, methanol and lye to create biodiesel.

Many of these filling "stations" operate underground, without a business permit, said Nancy Hall, the founder of Pacifica's recently defunct biodiesel co-op. When hers closed, so did a sister facility in Half Moon Bay.

"They tend to be run cooperatively by volunteers, and those kinds of organizations always come down to five or six people in the end. It's not very sustainable," Hall said.

The demise of the Pacifica co-op, however, is attributed to a different problem: the increasing price of soy oil, the basis of the "original" method for creating biodiesel, which involves large-scale soybean farming and processing plants across the United States.

Autopia's biodiesel won't come cheap, either. Mader-Clark obtains her used veggie oil from Blue Sky Biofuel in Oakland, a grease-collection service whose product wholesales for about $4.60 per gallon including taxes and delivery fees. Customers of Autopia can expect to pay between $4.90 and $5 per gallon as a result.

Nevertheless, Mader-Clark is confident Autopia will meet a growing wave of interest as one of only two legitimate biodiesel stations on the Peninsula.

"I'm getting phone calls and e-mails asking, 'When are you opening?' There's definitely a demand," she said.

For all the used veggie oil available from restaurants in the Bay Area, refined biodiesel is in short supply. Berkeley's BioFuel Oasis is one of the most long-lived suppliers, with plans to open a full gas station at the corner of Ashby and Sacramento this spring. BioFuel Oasis also is the place where Mader-Clark, who used to work in a legal publishing house, took a series of classes in the business of selling biodiesel.

In San Francisco, Peoples Fuel Cooperative offers mobile fueling, while a single public pump exists in San Jose and one company has a station in Santa Cruz.

Pacifica plans to open a three-million-gallon biodiesel production plant in 2009, but in the meantime, Peninsula customers stop off at MB Garage in San Mateo, which offers two small tanks with a limited amount of soybean-derived biodiesel.

"I can't wait for her to open because I want to buy my biofuel from her!" MB Garage owner Janet Migliore said with a laugh.

"They'll do well," she added. "There's a ton of customers out there. People have 250-gallon tanks on their trucks and that's too big for me."

Mader-Clark said she looks forward to the day when biodiesel is offered alongside diesel and gasoline at regular fuel stations. Until then, she hopes other Bay Area residents concerned about tailpipe pollution will make the switch to biodiesel.

"The other biodiesel stations and I, we don't see each other as competition," she said. "We see each other as infrastructure."

Schwarzenegger urges Congress on emissions

'Washington is asleep at the wheel, and we can't wait for them'

By Frank Davies, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, April 19, 2008

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Frustrated by the paralysis in Washington over combating climate change, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and officials from 17 other states signed a pledge Friday to pressure Congress and the next president to quickly adopt aggressive limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

"Washington is asleep at the wheel, and we can't wait for them," Schwarzenegger told a large crowd at a Yale University climate conference that included three other governors, the premiers of two Canadian provinces and officials from Mexico and Europe.

The 18 states represent more than half the U.S. population, and state officials said the declaration would help build momentum toward national adoption of emissions controls similar to

what California and other states already have adopted. More states will soon join, predicted Terry Tamminen, an adviser to Schwarzenegger and former director of the California Environmental Protection Agency.

Besides California, the states signing the pledge Friday were Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Virginia and Washington.

Schwarzenegger, a featured speaker at the event, showcased his feel-good environmentalism and business sensibility, insisting "the environmental cause would be unwinnable without technology and capitalism."

"That shift is happening, and it's not a fairy tale," the Republican governor said, adding that support from Republicans and business leaders for emissions controls was crucial.

A big supporter of John McCain, Schwarzenegger has fought the Bush administration over several high-profile issues, including the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to block the state's bid to set its own tailpipe emissions standards.

The governor praised the three remaining presidential candidates and said much would change in January, when a new president takes over: "President McCain, President Obama, President Clinton — all three candidates would be great for the environment."

The conference was held at Yale to mark the 100th anniversary of President Theodore Roosevelt's conference of governors that helped launch the modern conservation movement and greatly expand the network of national parks and forests. Several participants said that, just as Roosevelt did in 1908, it was important to blend idealism and pragmatism in fighting global warming.

Gov. Kathleen Sibelius of Kansas, a Democrat, highlighted one goal of the states' declaration — that an effective state-federal partnership must build on the agreements and compacts that states have already signed.

The Western Climate Initiative, for example, signed last year by California, six other states and three Canadian provinces, sets a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.

State leaders said the timing of the conference was important to counter the impact of President Bush's announcement Wednesday that he still resists mandatory emissions controls.

"This keeps the momentum going, and will take on a bigger life as other governors sign on," said Mary Nichols, chairman of the state's Air Resources Board, who spoke at the Yale Law Center. "This also generates some counter-pressure on Congress to get moving on national legislation."

Bush called for a national goal of stopping the growth of greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, but critics say that voluntary target falls far short of what many scientists say is needed to prevent damaging climate change.

In their report last year, scientists of the United Nations climate panel warned that carbon dioxide and other emissions must begin to drop by 2015 to avert serious damage.

The Senate is expected to take up an ambitious climate bill in June that has the goal of stopping the growth of greenhouse gas emissions in 2012 — 13 years before Bush's goal. Obama, Clinton and McCain say they support the earlier target, and the trading and selling of carbon credits to help meet that goal.

But the declaration the states signed Friday does not take that for granted: "We will reach out to major presidential candidates as a means of shaping the first 100 days of the next administration. We have no time to lose."

R.J. Pachauri, the head of the UN climate panel, said in a speech that he often cites the actions of California and other states when he travels the world and is asked about the Bush administration and its policies.

"I say, 'Look at California,'" Pachauri said. "That saves my skin, because otherwise I'd have to say something critical and that would get me in trouble."

Schwarzenegger clearly relished the high-profile setting as a chance to persuade hundreds of officials and students that environmental goals can only be reached "if they are not powered by guilt." He warned that sometimes, environmental concerns can delay large-scale renewable energy projects, such as massive solar power plants in California's Mojave Desert.

"If we can't put that in the Mojave Desert, I don't know where the hell we can do it," he said, as Yale students cheered.

"What we have is a case of environmental regulations holding up environmental progress," Schwarzenegger said. "We have to make some trade-offs. I think both the environmental activists and their opponents cannot let 'perfect' become the enemy of 'possible.'"

Judge sacks Oakland plastic bag ban

Bay City News Service
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, April 18, 2008

A judge who reviewed an Oakland ordinance that would have banned plastic shopping bags has told the city to bag it.

In an injunction against the ordinance that he issued late Thursday, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch said that the city failed to conduct a full review of how the ban would affect the environment.

The Oakland City Council approved the plastic bag ordinance last July 17 and it was scheduled to go into effect on Jan. 17, but city officials delayed enforcing it pending a hearing and Roesch's ruling on a lawsuit filed by the Coalition to Support Plastic Bag Recycling last August.

The group includes plastic bag manufacturers and recyclers and individuals.

A similar ban on plastic bags took effect in San Francisco on Nov. 20 and is still in place.

Oakland City Attorney spokesman Alex Katz said today that his office will ask the City Council next week whether its members want to contest Roesch's ruling or do a full environmental review of the ordinance.

Michael Mills, the attorney for the Coalition to Support Plastic Bag Recycling, said he believes that the city's recommended alternatives, such as compostable plastic bags and paper bags are at least equally as harmful to the environment as plastic bags and possibly more harmful.

Mills said the manufacturing process for paper bags causes air pollution and water pollution and consumes more fuel to truck because they're bulkier and weigh more than plastic bags.

He said they also take up more space in landfills.

In his ruling, Roesch said, "It is because of that evidence in the record and the unanimity of the uncertainty whether paper bags are less (or more) environmentally friendly than plastic bags that the city cannot assert that there is 'no possibility' of any significant environmental effect caused by the ban."

In a statement, Keith Christman, senior director of the American Chemistry Council's plastics division, said, "Like many who have been waiting for this decision, we are pleased with the judge's ruling."

Christman said, "Banning plastic bags would dramatically increase energy use, double greenhouse gas emissions and increase waste. Recycling plastic bags is the right approach and makes plastic bags the environmentally responsible choice."

He said, "We encourage the city to help Oakland residents improve the recycling of plastic bags consistent with AB 2449, California's state-wide recycling program," said Christman."

Christman said, "Plastics are a valuable resource - too valuable to waste -- and we believe effective implementation of the state's recycling program is the best and fastest way to steward environmental resources and reduce litter by recycling these bags."

Mills said internal e-mails between Oakland officials last year indicate that they admit that compostable plastic bags aren't any better for the environment than are regular plastic shopping bags.

Mills said he believes Oakland officials only approved the ordinance for "feel-good public relations spin."

San Leandro draws up 'green' building ordinance

Tough standards would apply to new municipal buildings, major renovations

By Martin Ricard
Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, April 20, 2008

SAN LEANDRO — The city has recently been rolling out a laundry list of "green" initiatives meant to reduce its carbon footprint, from passing a resolution to cut greenhouse gas emissions to evaluating the energy use of all city buildings.

Now the city can add a municipal "green" building ordinance to the list.

Planning staff are developing the ordinance and have been presenting it over the past couple of weeks to Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Adjustments members. The matter will come before the City Council at its May 5 meeting.

The ordinance calls for a mandate to ensure all new municipal buildings and major renovations valued at a minimum of $3 million meet stringent "green building" standards. If passed, the city would join 12 other East Bay jurisdictions in setting new environmentally standards. Officials said $3 million is the minimum because the green standards can be costly and burdensome for some smaller projects.

"It's exciting," city spokeswoman Jane McCrea said. "I think the city is looking to have this help us reduce our carbon footprint, cut down on greenhouse gas emissions and serve as a role model for the community."

Almost every city in the East Bay has a municipal green building ordinance; Alameda, Emeryville and Piedmont don't.

With its proposed ordinance, San Leandro is trying to set a standard for the local building industry. The ordinance would mandate that all new projects meet a minimum silver rating set by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system.

The system has four levels, and silver is the third-highest rating. Platinum is the highest.

McCrea said the ordinance is being established to look especially attractive to private developers, with the hope that they will pick up the mantle and see the benefits of implementing green practices on city projects.

City planner Sally Barros said the ordinance also would help boost the city's status quo because it also has pretty much become industry standard to improve municipal buildings' energy efficiency using the LEED system.

The first project that could see these standards used, McCrea said, is the senior center on East 14th Street, which will cost $20 million.

According to the U.S. Green Building Council, Barros noted, buildings use 39 percent of the country's energy consumption, more than both the transportation and manufacturing sectors.

On a more practical level, she added, people would see an almost immediate benefit from such high environmental standards.

The green building ordinance's main purpose, she said, is to improve the environment for those who work in and use city buildings.

"It's not just about the climate change aspect," Barros said, "but about how people feel about working there."

Environmentalists hope for progress with new president

By Erin Kelly, Gannett News Service
USA Today, Friday, April 18, 2008

WASHINGTON — After eight years with a Texas oil man as president, environmentalists are looking forward to a greener White House.

Whoever wins November's presidential election, environmentalists agree, is bound to be better than President Bush has been on their concerns. He has been dubbed by the League of Conservation Voters as "arguably the most anti-environmental president in our nation's history" for supporting efforts to weaken clean air and water laws and drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Unlike Bush, presumptive Republican nominee John McCain has been a leader in efforts to fight global warming, sponsoring 2003 legislation to reduce carbon dioxide emissions at a time when many in his party were still doubting the existence of climate change. The Arizona senator was by far the most pro-environment Republican to seek his party's nomination for president this election cycle, environmental groups say.

On the Democratic side, New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton has used her position on the Senate environment committee to push for tougher clean air, water and toxic waste laws and stronger protections for children's health. Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, whose oldest daughter, Malia, suffers from asthma attacks made worse by air pollution, also is viewed as a passionate environmental advocate.

"This is the first time in many years that we will have two general election presidential candidates who will be good on the environment," said Jim DiPeso, policy director of the moderate Republicans for Environmental Protection.

One of the most dramatic changes in environmental policy is expected to happen on global warming. All three candidates support laws to force deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. Bush, despite setting some voluntary goals this month to slow climate change, opposes mandatory limits on carbon emissions because he says they would raise energy costs and put U.S. businesses at a disadvantage against India and China.

"I think the great news is that we can actually expect something to happen when a new president takes office in January," said Cathy Duvall, political director of the Sierra Club. "Whoever is sitting in the White House after the election will finally take up and address global warming."

Clinton and Obama both support an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. McCain has sponsored legislation that would reduce those emissions 65% by the same date.

Bush, in a speech Wednesday from the White House Rose Garden, set a much more modest goal of freezing the growth of emissions by 2025 before starting to reduce them.

"When compared to the current administration, the differences that McCain, Obama and Clinton have with one another are relatively small," said Robert Stavins, an environmental economist at Harvard University.

Still, most environmental groups are clearly hoping for a Democratic victory in November. Obama and Clinton, they say, are willing to go further and faster than McCain to stop global warming and have been more consistent in voting with the environmental community over the years. McCain, for example, has voted against renewable energy standards that supporters say could reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil as well as pollution.

Clinton has earned the League of Conservation Voters highest "lifetime score" with an 87% out of a possible 100% on her overall legislative record. Obama is close behind her with a lifetime score of 86%. McCain's lifetime score is 24%, low compared with the Democrats but far above the average for Republican congressional leaders.

"To his credit, Senator McCain has made global warming a priority, but his specific plan falls short of what the science says we need to do," said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters. "The Democrats' plans are far superior in terms of getting the job done."

But pro-environment Republicans say McCain may have the advantage over the Democrats when it comes to persuading Congress to pass comprehensive legislation to reduce global warming. Although Democrats are expected to retain control of Congress after the November election, the Senate still might be shy of the 60-vote majority it needs to prevent conservatives from using a filibuster to kill global warming bills.

"It took a Republican like Richard Nixon to go to China, and a Republican president will be able to accomplish certain things on climate policy that maybe a Democrat couldn't do," DiPeso said.

Whoever does it, it won't be cheap or easy to push America off of its reliance on fossil fuels and onto cleaner, renewable sources of energy, Stavins said.

The solution the Senate is scheduled to take up this June is the creation of a cap-and-trade system in which a power plant or factory that released more greenhouse gases than permitted by law would have to buy allowances for the extra emissions. The allowances would be sold by companies that cut their emissions below the required cap. Over time, the cap would get tighter and tighter so all companies would have to come up with ways to meet the emissions requirements and could not buy their way out of them forever.

Bush has made it clear he will not sign the bill if it passes Congress. But congressional leaders say their efforts will outlast him.

"From all the evidence we have now, if Congress passes that kind of bill next year, all three presidential candidates would sign it," Stavins said.

Port Authority Plans a Web Site to Help Offset Pollution

By Ken Belson
N.Y. Times, Monday, April 21, 2008

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey will announce plans on Monday to become the first tolling agency in the country to set up a Web site where drivers and airline passengers can buy credits to offset the carbon emissions created by the trips they take.

The money from the so-called carbon-offset credits is typically used to plant new trees, build windmills, install solar panels and other measures that may mitigate the effects of emissions from greenhouse gases.

The credits are bought at places like the Chicago Climate Exchange, which barters with companies that produced credits by reducing their emissions and companies seeking to reduce the impact of their emissions.

The Port Authority does not plan to make money off the Web site initially. Instead, it will seek bids from companies that want to build and operate the service on its behalf. TerraPass, LiveNeutral and Driving Green.com are among the many providers that already sell the credits to consumers and companies.

The Port Authority, which will announce the details of its service once a provider is chosen, hopes to follow the lead of airlines like Delta and Continental that have in recent years been helping their customers compensate for the pollution produced by the planes they fly on.

While the Web site is for people who use the Port Authority's bridges, tunnels and airports, the agency itself has taken steps to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases created at its facilities.

In recent months, the Port Authority has pledged to buy carbon offsets to reduce the impact of the greenhouse gases it produces.

It plans to convert Stewart International Airport into the nation's first carbon-negative airport and has built a geothermal-powered building at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Over time, the Port Authority hopes to attract enough customers to its carbon-offset Web site to combine that money with the agency's own credits and invest them together into local renewable energy and environmental cleanup projects, said Anthony R. Coscia, the agency's chairman. The Port Authority could eventually add carbon offsets into the prices it charges at its facilities, he said.

"Since we are right at the center of the largest city in the U.S. and operating a transportation network in that city, if we became a facilitator, we could make a difference," Mr. Coscia said. "We want to create a way so that our money and our patrons' money becomes a deep enough pool of capital to invest in things."

Critics of carbon offsets contend that drivers buy the credits to justify continuing to use their cars. They add that since some of the money from offsets is spent overseas, some people feel it has little direct impact on their lives.

But transportation experts say that carbon-offset programs like the one the Port Authority is planning are better than spending little or nothing to reduce greenhouse gases. They add that tolling agencies now have more interaction with their customers, which gives the agencies more opportunities to work with them on an array of projects including carbon offsets.

"With E-ZPass and electronic toll collection, a lot of tolling agencies feel a lot closer to their customers, and they try to make the driving public feel like the authority is concerned about their customers," said Michael Kolb, a consultant at Traffic Technologies Inc.

Recovering From Wyoming's Energy Bender

By ALEXANDRA FULLER
N.Y. Times, Sunday, April 20, 2008

Wilson, Wyo.-- FOR all its Old West mythology, Wyoming is and always will be a mining state, more roughneck than cowboy. Frankly, in a land of long winters and high winds, there aren't a lot of other economic choices. And a powerful oil lobby reminds us with Orwellian regularity that we owe everything to oil and gas taxes, bullying those who disagree. (In February, a committee of the Wyoming Legislature rejected a spending increase for the University of Wyoming's Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources after institute scientists dared to raise concerns about water produced in coal-bed methane wells.) Even so, the oilier side of our nature has never threatened to unhorse the cowboy entirely, not even now, when the pressure to develop every last seam of energy is end-of-administration intense.

Since 1996, oil and gas companies have leased from the federal government the mineral rights to nearly 27 million acres of land in the Rocky Mountain West, and Wyoming has shouldered the greatest share of that development. In the last decade, oil companies have leased a fifth to a quarter of the state's land — 15.5 million acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management, as well of hundreds of thousands of acres of national forest and private land. If Wyoming were a country, it would be one of the largest coal-producing nations in the world, and its output of natural gas is among the greatest in American history. The argument has never been that we shouldn't provide energy. But is that all we're good for? And what, if anything, should we leave for future generations? These are global questions posed on a local level.

During his second term, President Bill Clinton, under pressure from a Republican Congress, leased out just as much of Wyoming's land as the current administration has to date. The difference was that the Clinton administration enforced laws encouraging the Bureau of Land Management to "manage, protect and improve" our public lands while allowing for other values like recreation, grazing and wildlife habitat. The Bush administration, on the other hand, has lifted every possible impediment to industry.

For example, oil and gas companies are exempt from provisions of the Clean Water Act that require construction activities to reduce polluted runoff as well as from provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act that regulate underground injection of chemicals. The industry is also generously permitted to drill on critical wildlife winter range (close to 90 percent of all their requests to drill on winter range have been granted). Oil rigs are drilling for natural gas on the banks of the New Fork River (the headwaters of the Colorado) and in the foothills of the Wyoming Range. Well sites in many parts of the southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem are so closely spaced that, with roads, gas pipelines and compressor stations, the development is continuous.

Meantime, drug treatment centers and domestic abuse shelters across the state have declared themselves overwhelmed and, in spite of what the oil companies keep telling us, we're far from happy. Wyoming has the uneasy distinction of having one of the country's highest suicide rates. We top the national death toll on the job with 16.8 deaths per 100,000 workers. Wyoming is responsible for by far the highest percentage of deaths on the job in the interior West's oil and gas industry. At public meetings organized by the Bureau of Land Management to announce the development of Wyoming's public lands, oil company executives initially argued to a largely receptive audience that a new boom would be good for the state's economy. Lately, executives have been telling increasingly unhappy communities that domestic drilling is our moral duty, an alternative to sending more soldiers to war. They imply that anything less than full support for the oil companies is un-American. But a bumper sticker on a pick-up truck hints at the truth: "The war is over. Halliburton won."

Meanwhile, cattle and sheep ranchers and hunting and tourist guides have found themselves wondering what has happened to their Wyoming. Wildlife suffers as oil leases overlap with habitat: 14.1 million acres of sage grouse habitat, 3.2 million acres of pronghorn winter habitat, 2.9 million acres of mule deer winter habitat and 1.1 million acres of elk winter habitat. Even most of the state's wild horse herd management areas (the only Wyoming lands on which wild horses may legally roam) are destined for oil development.

Eighty-five water wells in the southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem have recently tested positive for hydrocarbons, indicating that toxic chemicals from drilling have leaked into the water table. Air pollution in the same area was so great this winter that vulnerable residents were warned not to venture outside. Oil companies argued that strong winds would rectify the problem.

They were right to predict a wind of change, but it came in the form of an unprecedented experiment in the art of listening. In the last few months, Terry Tempest Williams, a writer in residence at the University of Wyoming, has taken her students on the road to conduct what she calls "weather reports" in small communities. Addressing packed rooms, Ms. Williams turns the microphone over to the people of Wyoming — a stoical populace whose habitual stance against something they don't like is a tight lip. Astonishingly, they have opened up, voicing their concerns over the rapidity and scale of the oil and gas development.

“One day, I fear I will wake up and all that will be left of Wyoming is a hole in the ground,” one resident of the southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem said.

Oil executives have pushed back. One oilman, State Senator Kit Jennings, took the microphone in Casper and declared that Ms. Williams had demonized the oil companies. He rejected her contention in a local newspaper article that the energy boom had helped drive up the use of crystal methamphetamine in the region and announced that he had demanded that she be fired from the university for her criticism of the industry.

Oil and gas are accustomed to dominating the debate. But Ms. Williams’s forums have created an opportunity for grass-roots rebuttal. Residents, who have so far been cowed by the enormous tax contributions that energy companies make to the state’s coffers, are upholding values not counted in dollars. “My hope is that with our backs against the wall we will finally speak up,” another weather reports participant said.

Maybe Wyomingites, justifiably proud of their roughneck heritage and anxious to keep the oil field work, have realized that this boom isn’t going away soon, and they’d like a little of Wyoming left when the oil companies move back to Texas. “We’re Mother Nature’s bodyguards,” a billboard sponsored by Sportsmen for the Wyoming Range warns. “And yes, we are heavily armed.”

Alexandra Fuller is the author of the forthcoming “The Legend of Colton H. Bryant.”

Modesto Bee, Commentary, Monday, April 21, 2008

Overplanting of ethanol crops is responsible for higher food prices

By DAVID A. RIDENOUR

Move over "Bridge to Nowhere," there's a new poster child of congressional waste and avarice -- "Fuel to Nowhere."

Anytime Congress can find an excuse for shoveling out billions of dollars in pork, it's a safe bet there'll be a stampede of Democrats and Republicans to vote "Aye." Such has been the case with ethanol ever since Congress latched onto the idea that it could be sold as a means of cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Congress already has authorized billions in taxpayer-funded subsidies for farmers who grow corn and the producers who turn it into the fuel that's pumped into your car.

Never mind that ethanol is helping spike food prices. Corn prices have increased by 70 percent since 2005 and the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects they will rise an additional 10 percent to 20 percent this year.

But that's not the half of it. Corn-dependent livestock also are increasing in price. The USDA estimates that corn feed price increases added nearly 9 percent to the price of beef last year. But this doesn't include the indirect costs. U.S. beef cattle herds declined by 338,000 in 2007, increasing beef prices further, in part, because of higher prices for feed, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Ethanol advocates claim that rising corn costs have contributed only modestly to the overall increase in food prices.

They're not being entirely honest, as they're only counting the direct costs of ethanol. They don't count, for example, increases in soybean prices resulting from farmers switching to the more lucrative corn crop. Soybean crops dropped by 11 million acres last year -- much of it used to produce corn.

The corn growers and big ag, flush with newfound cash, have generously increased their campaign contributions, making everyone happy -- everyone, that is, but consumers and taxpayers.

Taxpayers are shelling out billions of dollars while getting nothing in return, making ethanol truly a fuel to nowhere.

Worse, the ethanol program is not reducing greenhouse gas emissions as promised, but increasing them. That's according to two new independent scientific studies published in the journal Science.

One study, by the University of Minnesota and the Nature Conservancy, concluded that further converting the rainforests, grasslands and savannas of Southeast Asia and South America to crops for biofuels will increase greenhouse gas emissions, perhaps for centuries, while destroying important habitat.

A second study, by researchers at Princeton University, came to a similar conclusion, finding that corn-based ethanol would produce twice the greenhouse gas emissions of conventional gasoline over the next 30 years. The recently-passed energy bill is expected to create even greater demand for ethanol, since it requires the United States to ramp up biofuel production to 36 billion gallons by 2022 from 7.5 billion gallons today.

Don't count on Congress amending the energy bill to correct its glaring ethanol mistake anytime soon, though. Rep. Edward J. Markey, chairman of the House global warming committee, dismissed the studies, saying they show "where we are, not where we're going to be." Markey says technological advances will be driven by federal mandates, noting, "Once you set the standard, then it's going to drive where the investment is made, where the breakthroughs are." Since ethanol is 30 percent less efficient than gasoline, those breakthroughs will have to be truly heroic.

Mandating technological innovation has been tried before and failed, as it did in the 1970s with the synthetic fuel program. That hasn't stopped lobbyists from continuing to argue that a federal cattle prod is the best way to force greedy capitalists to accomplish the impossible.

But as Viking King Canute showed his courtiers when he commanded the tide to cease to no effect, the heavens, the Earth and the seas obey only one king. Markey isn't the one.

Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Monday, April 21, 2008

You can't eat ethanol

ETHANOL is a cleaner-burning biofuel that's all the rage in the halls of power, but, as the saying goes, it's not much good for making corn tortillas.

The beauty of ethanol is that its root ingredient can be all-American corn or even wood wastes or wild grasses. The problem, for now, is that science and technology have yet to catch up, so commercially viable U.S. ethanol must come from corn. And that puts your gas tank in competition with your kids' bellies for an increasingly valuable resource.

And here's where we run directly into the principle of unintended consequences.

We're seeing some of them in Haiti and other parts of the Third World, where people are rioting over food prices. Think you have it tough at the grocery? Wait until your governor has to call the National Guard to quell food thefts from fields and warehouses. World Bank President Robert Zoellick warns that 33 nations risk social upheaval over food prices.

How much is ethanol to blame? Some experts say a quarter to a third, others say 10 percent to 15 percent — but there's no denying that the more U.S. acreage pushed into producing corn for ethanol, the higher prices go. Arable land is not a zero-sum game, but one ripple effect is that land converted to higher-priced corn is not available for other crops.

And corn, as we've learned, needs more water to grow than other grains.

C. Ford Runge, a University of Minnesota economist, tells The New York Times that he wouldn't guess how much biofuel production is affecting food prices, with droughts and rising demand also to blame. Then again:

"Ethanol is the one thing we can do something about," he says. "It's about the only lever we have to pull, but none of the politicians have the courage to pull the lever."

Congress, in fact, mandated a fivefold increase in biofuel production in its 2007 energy bill. While some in Congress are getting wise to the unintended consequences, we worry that not enough thoughtful people are steering the debate, especially on the misguided farm bill nearing a vote in Washington.

Renewable fuels are a worthy goal — anything to reduce the amount of oil we must import. But "anything" includes a careful examination of the costs, as well as the benefits, of corn-based

ethanol.

Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Monday, April 21, 2008

'Spray first, ask questions later'

IN CALIFORNIA, something as innocuous as trimming a tree or putting a new facade on a commercial building can trigger a state Environmental Quality Act review.

But state officials are poised to launch a fleet of airplanes to blanket Oakland and the Bay Area with pest-control chemicals — and they want to do it before completing a California Environmental Quality Act review. In other words: Spray first and ask questions later.

This is not only ridiculous on its face, it is an unnecessary risk to public health.

Despite growing opposition from cities, legislators and the public, the state seems determined to spray a new pesticide called CheckMate to get rid of the light brown apple moth, a species that farmers consider a threat to crops.

The state says it will conduct an environmental impact report, but only after planes have rained tons of the spray on our homes, schools, businesses and reservoirs.

Meanwhile, the Department of Food and Agriculture is silent on some of the most basic questions surrounding the plan. The Department can't tell us how much of the chemical it will take to rid the state of apple moths, or how many years the state will continue to spray.

CheckMate, a synthetic pheromone designed to confuse the moths' mating behavior, has already been sprayed in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. Afterwards, hundreds of people reported respiratory problems and other health issues.

State officials insist CheckMate is completely safe for humans,and say the health complaints are probably just a coincidence. They claim there is no evidence spraying caused people to become ill.

Of course, without an appropriate environmental review, there is also no assurance that it didn't. As the Oakland City Council noted in its resolution against the state's plan, spraying pesticide has often caused unintended, unpredictable and serious human health effects.

As it happens, the company that makes CheckMate is owned by a wealthy agri-business tycoon who has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the campaigns of state officials. But that's probably just another coincidence.

Many Californians clearly remember helicopters spraying Malathion to get rid of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly in previous decades. Unfortunately, that fiasco damaged the state's credibility on the issue of pesticides and public health.

It's not enough for state officials to say, "Trust us, it's safe," when it comes to spraying massive amounts of chemicals into our air, water and food.

Oakland and other Bay Area cities are now working on an aggressive legal strategy to postpone the aerial spray program until the state does a real environmental impact study.

The concerns of our state's agriculture industry are real and ought to be considered seriously. This is not about opposing all pesticide use. This is simply about expecting the state to live up to its most basic responsibilities — protecting public health, conducting the public's business openly and transparently, and acting in a manner that prudently balances all of the interests at stake.

We deserve more than just platitudes and colorful brochures. Without an environmental review, Governor Schwarzenegger and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura should put CheckMate back on the shelf.

When they do so, let's hope they consider the warning label: "Keep out of reach of children. Avoid contact with skin, eyes or clothing. Potentially harmful if swallowed or inhaled."

John Russo is Oakland's City Attorney.

Modesto Bee Editorial, Saturday, April 19, 2008

It's Not Easy Being Green

By Kerry McCray

Seems like everyone is going green.

People take canvas bags to the grocery store. They buy organic cotton towels at Target. Heck, even the pope has a plan to offset his carbon emissions.

Yes, everyone is going green. Everyone except us.

The thing is, I thought our family of four was doing pretty well when it came to saving the environment. We recycle compulsively. We grow our own vegetables. We do our best to buy fluorescent light bulbs, local produce and organic products.

I was proud of our efforts. That is until my editor asked my husband, Bee reporter John Holland, and me to "go green" for one week and write about the experience.

Piece of cake, we thought. Organic chocolate cake. We were so green we wouldn't even have to try.

Turns out we were wrong. Here are the highlights of what we have come to refer to as Green Week.

SUNDAY: Weekends are always crazy at our house. There are a million errands to do, and pretty much all of them involve driving the car.

What's wrong with that? It's estimated that, in the United States, about 20 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions come from cars and trucks, contributing to climate change and air pollution.

Still, we need food and we don't want to pay a fortune at the grocery store down the street, so I send my husband to the discount grocery store across town. Meanwhile, I take the kids and make a quick run to yet another store, even further away, in search of organic products the cheap store doesn't carry.

John comes home with seven plastic bags filled with groceries -- another no-no, assuming these bags are made with petroleum. The kids and I return with a few fruits and veggies and a bunch of goodies we could have lived without, like organic granola and tofu ice cream bars.

I passed up asparagus from Mexico, but 5-year-old Rosa talked me into buying grapes from Chile. Oh, and I picked up an environmentally friendly cleaning product. More on this later.

MONDAY: Another banner day for car use. Despite my promises to walk Rosa to kindergarten, I end up driving her four blocks because we were in danger of being late. Again.

On the upside, my husband hangs laundry on the clothesline instead of using the dryer. Does this offset starting up the car? I'll have to ask the pope.

TUESDAY: Rosa notices I am washing dishes with the faucet running.

"Mom, you're supposed to turn the water off when you scrub," she says. "I heard it on TV."

Embarrassed, I shut off the tap.

WEDNESDAY: Finally, I walk to pick Rosa up from school.

And I do something I never did before: I turn off the heat-dry function on the dishwasher. I've read this saves a minuscule amount of energy. Every little bit helps, right?

Oh, and I hang wet towels on the clothesline. My arms ache. I wonder if I really am saving the world.

THURSDAY: I drive Rosa to school again, rationalizing the trip because I have to continue on to work afterward.

A note on driving to work: We live less than a mile from The Bee. John often walks to work, and it wouldn't kill me to walk, too. Except I'd probably be late. Again.

FRIDAY: John walks to work, which is good. I drive Rosa to school, which is not so good.

Speaking of Rosa, she and 3-year-old Annie decide to run the hose in the back yard for -- well, I'm embarrassed to say how long. They make mud puddles to splash in. Fun, but not so eco-friendly when you consider how much water they use.

In the evening, I take time to read the ingredient list on the lotion I use on the kids after their bath. I can't decipher much, but I gather the lotion has petroleum. I slather it on them anyway. Next time I'm at the store, I'll look for a different product, hopefully one with an easier-to-read list of ingredients.

SATURDAY: Instead of packing bottled water from the store, I fill sports bottles with water and give those to the girls to drink at their soccer games.

Later, when researching this story, I learn that some plastic sports bottles have chemicals that can leach into water, harming young children. Well, now I know.

SUNDAY: Yes, I realize I said Green Week, but I didn't have time to use the green cleaner until today.

I clean the girls' bathroom with it, and it works just fine -- no better or worse than the regular kind. Too bad I drove across town to buy it.

In fact, the cleaner experience pretty much sums up what our family learned during Green Week: Our intentions are almost always better than our actions.

Yes, I used green cleaner, but I drove quite a distance to buy it. Yes, we grow vegetables, but we also buy grapes from Chile. Yes, I wash only full loads of laundry, but what good does that do if I let the kids run water all afternoon?

I wonder if the pope has this problem?

Take It Slow
Going green is a gradual process. Make one tiny change every week and you'll be an eco-savior before you know it.

National Geographic magazine offers one "go-green" tip each week. See www.thegreenguide.com/ tips_tools.

For green tips and practices you can implement in your household, school or community, go to www.geocities.com/rainforest/vines/4990.

Time magazine runs a column on how to help the environment. Go to www.time.com/time/ goinggreen.

The average person is responsible for emitting 94 pounds of carbon dioxide every day. It takes four trees, which act as natural air filters, to offset the carbon dioxide each person generates in a month. For more information, or to donate money to plant a tree, visit www.americanforests.org.

For more ideas on green living, visit www.treehugger.com.

Quick Tips

The Smithsonian National Zoological Park offers these tips for a greener lifestyle:

Bring your own bags to the grocery store. Plastic bags often wind up in the ocean and kill marine animals that get tangled up in them or swallow them. Paper bags are biodegradable but are often made from paper that has not been recycled.

Buy rechargeable batteries and, when they're all used up, recycle them.

If you eat seafood, choose it wisely. Did you know that more than 75 percent of the world's fisheries are fully fished or overfished?

Pack a waste-free lunch. Reuse containers and reduce waste. Did you know that one kid's average school lunch generates 67 pounds of waste over a year?

Turn off the water while brushing your teeth, washing your hands and washing dishes.

Take shorter showers (you will save water and energy to heat it, reducing carbon dioxide emissions).

Get a low-flow shower head.

Do only full loads of laundry and dishes.

To learn more, visit nationalzoo.si.edu/publications/greenteam.

N.Y. Times special section, Sunday, April 20, 2008:

A Clear Sense of Emission

By Tess Taylor

Carbon-dioxide equivalents may be the most complicated currency on world markets today. A basic exchange works like this: When a company like the Gap commits to reducing emissions but cannot, or chooses not to, cut the energy used to move clothes across the globe, it finances someone else's green project. Rather than put $100, say, toward reinventing its shipping system, the Gap may spend $20 to plant trees or invest in a clean utility. If a new power plant is needed in India, carbon investments from the Gap and others make it possible to build a more expensive wind farm instead of a coal plant. Win-win, the logic goes: because carbon emissions are a global problem, it doesn't matter where they are reduced. The system of carbon trading exploded after the Kyoto Protocol and in 2006 sustained a $30 billion market representing nearly 1.7 billion tons of traded carbon dioxide. The market extends beyond signatories to include companies that

participate voluntarily. These days, even individual consumers are joining in to pay offset retailers somewhere between $3 and $40 per ton in order to counter the carbon they emit driving to work or just running their refrigerators. But individuals are confronting many of the same uncertainties that companies and countries have been navigating under the Kyoto Protocol. First, how to determine your emissions? There are several calculators on the Web, but they yield different answers. “When you fly, the fuel efficiency of your plane varies,” Jeff Swenerton, a spokesman at Green-e, an offset-certification program, points out. He says that calculators, for example, don’t factor in that “all things being equal, different airplanes of the same model can have wildly different burn rates.” Once you have a carbon figure, which offsets should you buy? Certification isn’t standardized either. Part of the problem is in the measuring: how old should a replanted forest be before it earns credit? What if it gets logged or burns? Another issue: how do certification schemes verify that the projects they invest in add real, new carbon reduction to the market? Should credits subsidize solar power in a city that already gives solar tax breaks? There are social questions too: should certification only make sure that carbon hasn’t entered the atmosphere, or should it include other goals, like sustainable development? Some argue that if a project generates less carbon but disrupts a local community, it forces the poor to take responsibility for the pollution of the rich and reinforces a model of development that created the problem of global warming in the first place. Although it has been muddled by competing standards, the market is maturing. The Voluntary Carbon Standard, created by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and two other nongovernmental organizations, is widely seen as a benchmark of quality assurance, and carbon credits certified by it sell for between $5 and $15 per ton. Credits certified by a competitor, the Gold Standard, sell for between $8 and $40 per ton, while offering additional standards for sustainable community development. “We can’t necessarily rely on a country’s environmental standards as adequate,” says Michael Schlup, director of the Gold Standard. He also adds, “We need to give something to people and places who are giving us emissions reductions safely.” (The V.C.S. recognizes that the Gold Standard offers an added virtue.) Russell Simon, a spokesman for the nonprofit carbon retailer Carbonfund.org who admits the carbon-certification business “really is a baffling market,” says he thinks that a battle over standards can be healthy, but that one or two companies need “to emerge and build trust in their brand of certification.” He adds, “It is a bit like the wars we used to have at the beginning of using the word ‘organic.’ Now we agree what that means.”

N.Y. Times special section, Sunday, April 20, 2008:

Footprint Tracking

By Charles Wilson

To develop a label that lets a consumer know exactly how much CO2 was released in creating a product is an enormous challenge. A modern corporation can have thousands of suppliers scattered across several continents, all producing their own pollution. Despite the obstacles, many companies are trying to conduct carbon audits. Wal-Mart, for example, decided to examine the supply-chain emissions of seven product categories. Timberland is attempting to assess the environmental impact of its shoes and has investigated not only its own emissions but also the emissions of some of its suppliers. The company was surprised to find that transportation may account for less than 5 percent of its greenhouse-gas emissions — while almost 80 percent may come from making the leather, a process buried deep in its supply chain. Cows produce huge amounts of methane, which turns into CO2 in the atmosphere. Because the hide makes up roughly 7 percent of the cash value of the cow, Timberland took responsibility for 7 percent of the cows’ emissions. “The hide is a waste product of the meat industry,” Betsy Blaisdell, manager of environmental stewardship for Timberland, says. “There is some argument about whether we should account for those emissions, but we do.” Calculating a product’s carbon footprint means confronting similar questions about what and how to measure. A program called the Greenhouse Gas Protocol Initiative is developing standards that will allow companies to calculate their indirect emissions with some precision. But reliable carbon labels are probably years away, says Arpad Horvath, an associate professor of engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, who is currently examining the life cycle of some two dozen consumer products. “When people talk

about a universal carbon-labeling program policy," he says, "I tell them they need to hold their horses a little."

Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Monday, April 21, 2008**:**

Relax, enjoy riding a bike to work

It's the night before my first ride of 2008. I purchased my bicycle a few years ago. I'm in my 50s and although I really need to exercise more, I shy away from it when I can.

Along with the purchase of my bike, which is grey and yellow, I also purchased a matching helmet and gloves, padded shorts (a must) and a rack with a good-sized bag that was fitted on the back rack. I have realized that wearing my helmet actually keeps my hair in place (it only flattens it a little). I've grown attached to my gear.

The night before my ride, I pick out my clothes, my riding clothes and the clothes for the office. I have learned my jeans pack better when they're rolled up instead of folded. And the days that I ride, I choose tops that fold or roll easy. My bag holds everything I need to take to work.

Now it's the morning of my ride. I dress in my bicycle clothes and pack my work clothes. I go out to my garage and wait for my bike buddy.

When we first started riding together, she scoped out the best routes for us. I especially like the older neighborhoods with plenty of trees and flowers. It smells so good. Riding with a friend, down a neighborhood street, when the traffic isn't busy, allows you to visit and take it all in.

Once we arrive at work, I relax for 15 minutes or so, freshen up, walk around a little, then change clothes and I'm ready for the day.

My boss encourages the employees to ride as often as possible. There is a shower at work and parking for our bicycles.

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you how I ride my bicycle. It's slow and leisurely. I have fun riding. I ride to exercise and to see my surroundings at a different angle.

In the morning, around 7 a.m., it's so peaceful outside. Everything is still the air is fresh.

As you ride, you experience different scenes, whether you are on a busy street or on a residential block. And I always try to ride very cautiously, looking out for the cars.

Then comes the ride home. It's planned either before or after the 5 p.m. rush. If you want to get your mind off your work when you walk out that work door, riding a bicycle will do just that for you.

As soon as I get on, I feel sort of transformed back in time -- like being a kid again. Most of us rode bicycles as kids, so why not as adults? After my ride, I feel like I have accomplished something (exercise) and had fun doing it.

It's time to slow down and -- you got it -- smell the roses. A bicycle is perfect for that.

Paula Simpson of Bakersfield is a bookkeeper for a local civil engineering company.

Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, April 20, 2008

Four 10-hour days would save gas

Because of fuel costs and much-needed more personal and family time, I think it's time to revisit the idea of a four-day workweek with 10-hour days. So that a company can have full-time coverage, perhaps there'd be groups with Mondays or Fridays off or even Wednesdays off (to play golf!). In one of my careers, when gas reached $1 a gallon, the company implemented such a program. And, of course, we already have carpooling.

I believe it's imperative that we have less cars on our streets, be more green to help clean our air quality and, of course, save fuel costs. I also like the legislation John McCain is introducing to no

longer charge federal taxes on fuel from Memorial Day to Labor Day. That could save us at least 50 cents a gallon.

SHARON MORGAN CHANDLER, Modesto

Modesto Bee Editorial Sunday, April 20, 2008

County should board this train

Despite initial doubts, West Park plan looks feasible -- rail and all

When Stanislaus County finally signs an agreement to turn an old airfield into a modern, transportation-based business park, one thing must be clearly marked: The exit signs.

Without clear, concise language about what must be accomplished and when, about who will pay for it and who won't, about who the partners are and their depth of commitment, the county cannot agree to allow developer Gerry Kamilos to begin the transformation of the World War II-vintage airstrip into a 21st century business and transportation park. In other words, any deal the county signs must contain language that protects taxpayers by providing the county an out.

Fortunately, it appears the county staff has included just such stipulations and requirements in the memorandum of understanding it has prepared for the Board of Supervisors to consider and act upon Tuesday.

In the past year, we have seen unprecedented scrutiny of the West Park plan for Crows Landing by county staff and others, intense negotiations and overt politicking. Now it is time for the board to move forward by approving a memorandum of understanding that will make Kamilos the master developer and endorse his vision of the facility. That will allow work to begin in earnest on a far-reaching and dynamic plan. If fully realized, it will connect Stanislaus County to the Port of Oakland through short-haul rail, provide a hub for the trucking industry and provide air service for corporations who want to be near the Bay Area. The scale of the project is similar to that of creating a university in the middle of Merced County, and the benefits could be comparable.

The Bee did not support the West Park plan when it was presented last year, preferring the smaller Hillwood vision. But county supervisors went a different direction and the state has endorsed the West Park plan by tentatively promising $22 million to help finance the rail component.

Given all that, it is time to move forward -- and that's what the board should do.

Numbers tell part of the story. West Park will cost about $725 million to complete in four phases. When done, Kamilos insists the project will create 36,000 jobs. His studies predict the park will be worth $5.5 billion and pump $2.8 billion into the county's economy each year. Kamilos says the county will get all this for a pittance -- an initial outlay of $200,000, which will be recovered within a few years.

Still, some of the numbers are hard to believe. For instance, the financial feasibility study suggests that West Park will account for 10 percent of the county's total economic activity when finished. Really? Does that mean it will supersede the county's wineries in value? Will the farmers who generated $2 billion in income last year move away? What about all those food processing, service sector and construction jobs? We'll be happy if its value even comes close.

Kamilos has provided a host of studies; buried within them are figures that give rise to concern. The prospect of 12 trains a day in their downtown bothers many in Patterson. But train traffic is far less troublesome than having 141,000 vehicles every day on what now are country roads. Massive roadway improvements will be required to avoid congestion -- and not just around Patterson. Improvements will have to reach back to Modesto and Turlock. And while this project and its signature short-haul rail line likely will improve traffic and air quality over the Altamont by taking some trucks off the highway, it just as likely will worsen the air around Crows Landing, Newman and Patterson.

The environmental impact report will address many such issues in more detail than has been provided thus far and point out where additional mitigation is needed.

Suffice to say, we don't like or trust all the numbers we've seen. But we have come to trust the process with which this was handled. Kamilos was open in putting together and sharing his plan. The county brought in consultants when needed and relied on five of its departments to draft and craft this agreement.

Supervisors will get a document that lays out four stages of development with specific goals and criteria. Beginning each stage is contingent upon completing aspects of the previous stage. And in each phase, county property must be developed either ahead of or concurrently with property Kamilos controls. There are deadlines, as well as specific requirements that Kamilos remain responsible for the project through the buildout. For 20 years, Kamilos will not be able to develop much of the off-base property he controls. The agreement requires mitigation for loss of 3,300 acres of prime ag land and insists on improved conditions for nearby residents. Most important, the memorandum of understanding contains a strong, no-cost exit plan for the county if Kamilos gets off track or does not live up to his end of the bargain.

The county does not appear to have cut Kamilos much slack. The staff has been diligent in asking the hard questions and building stringent requirements into the agreement. They are not relying solely on short-haul in determining whether this plan is feasible.

There are many who do not share Kamilos' vision. But the majority of the board appears to. It likely will vote in favor of the memorandum of understanding by at least the same 3-2 margin that allowed Kamilos to proceed more than a year ago.

Just as good fences make good neighbors, good contracts make good partners. It appears the county staff has crafted a good, strong contract that assures Stanislaus County taxpayers that they will not be paying for anyone's flawed vision, half-completed projects or empty promises.

With such assurances, supervisors should proceed.

Patterson Irrigator, Editorial, Friday, April 18, 2008:

Supes should proceed with caution with West Park

It would be an understatement to say that Stanislaus County supervisors have a historic vote ahead of them Tuesday, as they decide whether to move forward with the PCCP West Park project.

No other project in Stanislaus County has riled up West Side residents in the past several decades as much as the proposed industrial center.

West Park’s 4,800-acre proposal is bigger than the city of Patterson, and its inland port eventually would accept six trains per day from the Port of Oakland, where loads of container shipments would leave and return.

Regardless of the growth patterns facing the West Side’s cities in the next three decades, this project alone would have a monumental impact on the area.

Though a county staff report regarding the project was not available as of press time Friday, county staff has said supervisors will at the very least vote on whether to accept a report of West Park’s activities during the past three months. In addition, they are likely to vote on a memorandum of understanding.

Until the full EIR is available for the public review, supervisors should not enter into anything even remotely binding. They should decide on whether to continue the process with the developer, allowing work to start on a stringent state-mandated environmental review process that would outline potential problems and required mitigation measures. But they should not make any promises.

With all the work that has gone into the development process during the past year, it makes sense to allow more research to be done.

After all, there's been enough spin on both sides of this debate to keep truth-seekers dizzy. The most dependable sources have been consultants who have conducted nonbiased studies, and they say the viability and impacts of the project are not completely known. More work must be done to determine whether or not this is a good match for the West Side as the region changes in future years.

As supervisors take time on Earth Day to ponder the project's impacts, unanswered questions remain.

It is important to know specifically what water sources West Park will use, and what contingency plans will be in place if conveyance systems are shut down because of problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. In addition, it is imperative that the project does not take water away from nearby cities and local farmers.

Impacts from trains must be clearly understood. Concerns about trains blocking access for emergency vehicles traveling to east Patterson are legitimate, but without the impacts of switching and side track operations near Patterson's major crossings, how long a crossing can expect to be blocked at any one time may be overstated by local critics. Local air quality impacts and potential health concerns also must be considered. How will a project of this nature help or hinder development of jobs in Patterson's planned business parks?

Stanislaus County officials must continually hold West Park's feet to the fire. There already appears to be too much insider connectedness between West Park and a couple of supervisors. We need representatives who will ensure accountability for whichever developer and whatever final plan builds out on the Crows Landing Air Facility. We are even concerned about whether the company that will do the EIR has a truly arms-length relationship with all involved parties. If not, will the findings be perceived as legitimate? Perceived conflicts of interest will only muddy the waters.

Having listed those caveats, it still seems wise to let the investigation process continue. Despite the success of the Keystone Pacific Business Park, this region is short on jobs and long on commuters. West Park may be the answer. Or not. Residents will never truly get a scope of the entire picture unless the experts have a closer look and the public has all the information.

Patterson Irrigator, Letter to the Editor, Friday, April 18, 2008:

Supervisors failed people

West Park developer Gerry Kamilos has done his job. The problem is those who were elected to do the will of the people are instead doing the will of the developer. Can't fault Mr. Kamilos for the Stanislaus County board of supervisors' shortcomings.

Mr. Kamilos has an ambitious vision. Unfortunately, it doesn't coincide with those who live in the project area or their way of life. The West Side residents and elected officials have been clear about the reuse of the base for more than seven years. Our vision was 1,527 acres.

The supervisors chose a plan for 4,800 acres. Clearly, Mr. Kamilos did his job well!

The money spent on the county's Crows Landing Air Facility Steering Committee was a waste of taxpayer dollars, as a path was already chosen before the county put out the Request for Proposal for a master developer. Mr. Kamilos was already fast at work doing his job. Can't fault a guy for trying, especially when he's succeeding. But we can fault our elected officials who think it's all right to ignore - and fail to represent - us in the manner in which we are entitled, which is basically not doing the job as they promised. It was wrong to spend our money on a process that they themselves didn't take seriously. It was wrong to proceed with a plan that was outside the scope of the RFP and wrong to disregard the will of the people. We deserve our votes to count, not count against us.

Annette Smith, Patterson City Councilwoman

Patterson Irrigator, Letter to the Editor, Friday, April 18, 2008:

An open letter to supervisors

The West Park proposal for the Crows Landing Air Facility is the wrong project at the wrong time in the wrong place.

We say this not only to express our objections to the project's overall size and the fact that it would pave over almost 4,000 acres of the finest farmland in the world, but more particularly to point out just how inadequate and uninformed the water supply planning is for this project.

Water has become a key issue in the viability of any new development in California, a fact now recognized by state law. This could not be truer than for a development on the West Side of Stanislaus County and south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

After struggling for years to secure a viable water supply for the Diablo Grande project, one would think that the county would have required much greater diligence in this regard at this early stage than what appears in the West Park Water System Master Plan. An assessment of the adequacy and reliability of the project's water supply would seem to be at least as important to the decision making, if not more so, as an analysis of the feasibility of short-haul rail.

Intended to provide "information required for the client and county to better assess the feasibility of the planned development," the plan identifies the project's build-out annual water demand at between 8,000 acre-feet and 16,000 acre-feet, along with the two obvious alternative sources of water supply traditionally available to meet this demand - surface water and groundwater.

Needless to say, that is a lot of water that needs to be reliably available. What the plan fails to recognize are the very serious, ongoing and undoubtedly long-term water supply constraints faced by the West Side and the state.

Local groundwater on the West Side is marginal in both quantity and quality, and extractions sufficient to meet project demands would harm adjacent wells, including those that now supply Patterson and Newman. The water plan acknowledges this, and in addition to recognizing the need for "additional studies to confirm the sustainability of groundwater resources," it states that that the use of groundwater would likely require the development of groundwater recharge basins using a supply of clean surface water.

You should know that most of the surface water available on the West Side in the project area is by way of contracts with the state and federal governments. However, a combination of natural and institutional factors, including a recent court decision requiring new protections for the endangered Delta smelt, have made severe reductions in contract water deliveries the norm and now include the very real possibility of no water deliveries during drought periods.

But more than just a lack of supply as a result of local hydrology, quantities are limited by the large water project's inability to convey available supplies through the environmentally sensitive Delta. The West Park developer has stated that one of the project's main sources of surface water would be through the purchase of water rights from farmers in the northern part of the state. This course of action would not only increase the loss of prime farm ground in another part of the state, it fails to recognize that the capacity of the project pumps needed to convey such a supply are already committed to meeting existing south-of the-Delta water supply obligations.

In other words, buying the water is one issue, but getting it delivered to the project area is quite another.

Any possible solution to this set of water supply problems on the West Side is tied to long-term statewide water supply planning and infrastructure financing and is not likely to result in more adequate or reliable water supplies for many years to come, if at all.

Other complications associated with the use of surface water conveyed by the state and federal projects include obtaining permits to divert, convey and use water in a different area of the state

and addressing the very real possibility of long-term canal outages or other failures of the delivery systems.

In short, at this time, there is no real water in the plan, only speculation and calls for further investigations. It is certainly premature, if not in fact ill-advised, for the county to proceed with such a large-scale, water-dependent project as is proposed by West Park in an area of the county that has no water supply that can be delivered to it for the foreseeable future.

West Side farmers

N.Y. Times commentary, Sunday, April 20, 2008:

Why Bother?

By Michael Pollan

Why bother? That really is the big question facing us as individuals hoping to do something about climate change, and it's not an easy one to answer. I don't know about you, but for me the most upsetting moment in "An Inconvenient Truth" came long after Al Gore scared the hell out of me, constructing an utterly convincing case that the very survival of life on earth as we know it is threatened by climate change. No, the really dark moment came during the closing credits, when we are asked to . . . change our light bulbs. That's when it got really depressing. The immense disproportion between the magnitude of the problem Gore had described and the puniness of what he was asking us to do about it was enough to sink your heart.

But the drop-in-the-bucket issue is not the only problem lurking behind the "why bother" question. Let's say I do bother, big time. I turn my life upside-down, start biking to work, plant a big garden, turn down the thermostat so low I need the Jimmy Carter signature cardigan, forsake the clothes dryer for a laundry line across the yard, trade in the station wagon for a hybrid, get off the beef, go completely local. I could theoretically do all that, but what would be the point when I know full well that halfway around the world there lives my evil twin, some carbon-footprint *doppelgänger* in Shanghai or Chongqing who has just bought his first car (Chinese car ownership is where ours was back in 1918), is eager to swallow every bite of meat I forswear and who's positively itching to replace every last pound of CO2 I'm struggling no longer to emit. So what exactly would I have to show for all my trouble?

A sense of personal virtue, you might suggest, somewhat sheepishly. But what good is that when virtue itself is quickly becoming a term of derision? And not just on the editorial pages of The Wall Street Journal or on the lips of the vice president, who famously dismissed energy conservation as a "sign of personal virtue." No, even in the pages of The New York Times and The New Yorker, it seems the epithet "virtuous," when applied to an act of personal environmental responsibility, may be used only ironically. Tell me: How did it come to pass that virtue — a quality that for most of history has generally been deemed, well, a virtue — became a mark of liberal softheadedness? How peculiar, that doing the right thing by the environment — buying the hybrid, eating like a locavore — should now set you up for the Ed Begley Jr. treatment.

And even if in the face of this derision I decide I am going to bother, there arises the whole vexed question of getting it right. Is eating local or walking to work really going to reduce my carbon footprint? According to one analysis, if walking to work increases your appetite and you consume more meat or milk as a result, walking might actually emit more carbon than driving. A handful of studies have recently suggested that in certain cases under certain conditions, produce from places as far away as New Zealand might account for less carbon than comparable domestic products. True, at least one of these studies was co-written by a representative of agribusiness interests in (surprise!) New Zealand, but even so, they make you wonder. If determining the carbon footprint of food is really this complicated, and I've got to consider not only "food miles" but also whether the food came by ship or truck and how lushly the grass grows in New Zealand, then maybe on second thought I'll just buy the imported chops at Costco, at least until the experts get their footprints sorted out.

There are so many stories we can tell ourselves to justify doing nothing, but perhaps the most insidious is that, whatever we do manage to do, it will be too little too late. Climate change is upon us, and it has arrived well ahead of schedule. Scientists' projections that seemed dire a decade ago turn out to have been unduly optimistic: the warming and the melting is occurring much faster than the models predicted. Now truly terrifying feedback loops threaten to boost the rate of change exponentially, as the shift from white ice to blue water in the Arctic absorbs more sunlight and warming soils everywhere become more biologically active, causing them to release their vast stores of carbon into the air. Have you looked into the eyes of a climate scientist recently? They look really scared.

So do you still want to talk about planting gardens?

I do.

Whatever we can do as individuals to change the way we live at this suddenly very late date does seem utterly inadequate to the challenge. It's hard to argue with Michael Specter, in a recent New Yorker piece on carbon footprints, when he says: "Personal choices, no matter how virtuous [N.B.!], cannot do enough. It will also take laws and money." So it will. Yet it is no less accurate or hardheaded to say that laws and money cannot do enough, either; that it will also take profound changes in the way we live. Why? Because the climate-change crisis is at its very bottom a crisis of lifestyle — of character, even. The Big Problem is nothing more or less than the sum total of countless little everyday choices, most of them made by us (consumer spending represents 70 percent of our economy), and most of the rest of them made in the name of our needs and desires and preferences.

For us to wait for legislation or technology to solve the problem of how we're living our lives suggests we're not really serious about changing — something our politicians cannot fail to notice. They will not move until we do. Indeed, to look to leaders and experts, to laws and money and grand schemes, to save us from our predicament represents precisely the sort of thinking — passive, delegated, dependent for solutions on specialists — that helped get us into this mess in the first place. It's hard to believe that the same sort of thinking could now get us out of it.

Thirty years ago, Wendell Berry, the Kentucky farmer and writer, put forward a blunt analysis of precisely this mentality. He argued that the environmental crisis of the 1970s — an era innocent of climate change; what we would give to have back *that* environmental crisis! — was at its heart a crisis of character and would have to be addressed first at that level: at home, as it were. He was impatient with people who wrote checks to environmental organizations while thoughtlessly squandering fossil fuel in their everyday lives — the 1970s equivalent of people buying carbon offsets to atone for their Tahoes and Durangos. Nothing was likely to change until we healed the "split between what we think and what we do." For Berry, the "why bother" question came down to a moral imperative: "Once our personal connection to what is wrong becomes clear, then we have to choose: we can go on as before, recognizing our dishonesty and living with it the best we can, or we can begin the effort to change the way we think and live."

For Berry, the deep problem standing behind all the other problems of industrial civilization is "specialization," which he regards as the "disease of the modern character." Our society assigns us a tiny number of roles: we're producers (of one thing) at work, consumers of a great many other things the rest of the time, and then once a year or so we vote as citizens. Virtually all of our needs and desires we delegate to specialists of one kind or another — our meals to agribusiness, health to the doctor, education to the teacher, entertainment to the media, care for the environment to the environmentalist, political action to the politician.

As Adam Smith and many others have pointed out, this division of labor has given us many of the blessings of civilization. Specialization is what allows me to sit at a computer thinking about climate change. Yet this same division of labor obscures the lines of connection — and responsibility — linking our everyday acts to their real-world consequences, making it easy for me to overlook the coal-fired power plant that is lighting my screen, or the mountaintop in Kentucky that had to be destroyed to provide the coal to that plant, or the streams running crimson with heavy metals as a result.

Of course, what made this sort of specialization possible in the first place was cheap energy. Cheap fossil fuel allows us to pay distant others to process our food for us, to entertain us and to (try to) solve our problems, with the result that there is very little we know how to accomplish for ourselves. Think for a moment of all the things you suddenly need to do for yourself when the power goes out — up to and including entertaining yourself. Think, too, about how a power failure causes your neighbors — your community — to suddenly loom so much larger in your life. Cheap energy allowed us to leapfrog community by making it possible to sell our specialty over great distances as well as summon into our lives the specialties of countless distant others.

Here's the point: Cheap energy, which gives us climate change, fosters precisely the mentality that makes dealing with climate change in our own lives seem impossibly difficult. Specialists ourselves, we can no longer imagine anyone but an expert, or anything but a new technology or law, solving our problems. Al Gore asks us to change the light bulbs because he probably can't imagine us doing anything much more challenging, like, say, growing some portion of our own food. We can't imagine it, either, which is probably why we prefer to cross our fingers and talk about the promise of ethanol and nuclear power — new liquids and electrons to power the same old cars and houses and lives.

The "cheap-energy mind," as Wendell Berry called it, is the mind that asks, "Why bother?" because it is helpless to imagine — much less attempt — a different sort of life, one less divided, less reliant. Since the cheap-energy mind translates everything into money, its proxy, it prefers to put its faith in market-based solutions — carbon taxes and pollution-trading schemes. If we could just get the incentives right, it believes, the economy will properly value everything that matters and nudge our self-interest down the proper channels. The best we can hope for is a greener version of the old invisible hand. Visible hands it has no use for.

But while some such grand scheme may well be necessary, it's doubtful that it will be sufficient or that it will be politically sustainable before we've demonstrated to ourselves that change is possible. Merely to give, to spend, even to vote, is not to do, and there is so much that needs to be done — without further delay. In the judgment of James Hansen, the NASA climate scientist who began sounding the alarm on global warming 20 years ago, we have only 10 years left to start cutting — not just slowing — the amount of carbon we're emitting or face a "different planet." Hansen said this more than two years ago, however; two years have gone by, and nothing of consequence has been done. So: eight years left to go and a great deal left to do.

Which brings us back to the "why bother" question and how we might better answer it. The reasons not to bother are many and compelling, at least to the cheap-energy mind. But let me offer a few admittedly tentative reasons that we might put on the other side of the scale:

If you do bother, you will set an example for other people. If enough other people bother, each one influencing yet another in a chain reaction of behavioral change, markets for all manner of green products and alternative technologies will prosper and expand. (Just look at the market for hybrid cars.) Consciousness will be raised, perhaps even changed: new moral imperatives and new taboos might take root in the culture. Driving an S.U.V. or eating a 24-ounce steak or illuminating your McMansion like an airport runway at night might come to be regarded as outrages to human conscience. Not having things might become cooler than having them. And those who did change the way they live would acquire the moral standing to demand changes in behavior from others — from other people, other corporations, even other countries.

All of this could, theoretically, happen. What I'm describing (imagining would probably be more accurate) is a process of viral social change, and change of this kind, which is nonlinear, is never something anyone can plan or predict or count on. Who knows, maybe the virus will reach all the way to Chongqing and infect my Chinese evil twin. Or not. Maybe going green will prove a passing fad and will lose steam after a few years, just as it did in the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan took down Jimmy Carter's solar panels from the roof of the White House.

Going personally green is a bet, nothing more or less, though it's one we probably all should make, even if the odds of it paying off aren't great. Sometimes you have to act as if acting will make a difference, even when you can't prove that it will. That, after all, was precisely what

happened in Communist Czechoslovakia and Poland, when a handful of individuals like Vaclac Havel and Adam Michnik resolved that they would simply conduct their lives “as if” they lived in a free society. That improbable bet created a tiny space of liberty that, in time, expanded to take in, and then help take down, the whole of the Eastern bloc.

So what would be a comparable bet that the individual might make in the case of the environmental crisis? Havel himself has suggested that people begin to “conduct themselves as if they were to live on this earth forever and be answerable for its condition one day.” Fair enough, but let me propose a slightly less abstract and daunting wager. The idea is to find one thing to do in your life that doesn’t involve spending or voting, that may or may not virally rock the world but is real and particular (as well as symbolic) and that, come what may, will offer its own rewards. Maybe you decide to give up meat, an act that would reduce your carbon footprint by as much as a quarter. Or you could try this: determine to observe the Sabbath. For one day a week, abstain completely from economic activity: no shopping, no driving, no electronics.

But the act I want to talk about is growing some — even just a little — of your own food. Rip out your lawn, if you have one, and if you don’t — if you live in a high-rise, or have a yard shrouded in shade — look into getting a plot in a community garden. Measured against the Problem We Face, planting a garden sounds pretty benign, I know, but in fact it’s one of the most powerful things an individual can do — to reduce your carbon footprint, sure, but more important, to reduce your sense of dependence and dividedness: to change the cheap-energy mind.

A great many things happen when you plant a vegetable garden, some of them directly related to climate change, others indirect but related nevertheless. Growing food, we forget, comprises the original solar technology: calories produced by means of photosynthesis. Years ago the cheap-energy mind discovered that more food could be produced with less effort by replacing sunlight with fossil-fuel fertilizers and pesticides, with a result that the typical calorie of food energy in your diet now requires about 10 calories of fossil-fuel energy to produce. It’s estimated that the way we feed ourselves (or rather, allow ourselves to be fed) accounts for about a fifth of the greenhouse gas for which each of us is responsible.

Yet the sun still shines down on your yard, and photosynthesis still works so abundantly that in a thoughtfully organized vegetable garden (one planted from seed, nourished by compost from the kitchen and involving not too many drives to the garden center), you can grow the proverbial free lunch — CO2-free and dollar-free. This is the most-local food you can possibly eat (not to mention the freshest, tastiest and most nutritious), with a carbon footprint so faint that even the New Zealand lamb council dares not challenge it. And while we’re counting carbon, consider too your compost pile, which shrinks the heap of garbage your household needs trucked away even as it feeds your vegetables and sequesters carbon in your soil. What else? Well, you will probably notice that you’re getting a pretty good workout there in your garden, burning calories without having to get into the car to drive to the gym. (It is one of the absurdities of the modern division of labor that, having replaced physical labor with fossil fuel, we now have to burn even more fossil fuel to keep our unemployed bodies in shape.) Also, by engaging both body and mind, time spent in the garden is time (and energy) subtracted from electronic forms of entertainment.

You begin to see that growing even a little of your own food is, as Wendell Berry pointed out 30 years ago, one of those solutions that, instead of begetting a new set of problems — the way “solutions” like ethanol or nuclear power inevitably do — actually beget other solutions, and not only of the kind that save carbon. Still more valuable are the habits of mind that growing a little of your own food can yield. You quickly learn that you need not be dependent on specialists to provide for yourself — that your body is still good for something and may actually be enlisted in its own support. If the experts are right, if both oil and time are running out, these are skills and habits of mind we’re all very soon going to need. We may also need the food. Could gardens provide it? Well, during World War II, victory gardens supplied as much as 40 percent of the produce Americans ate.

But there are sweeter reasons to plant that garden, to bother. At least in this one corner of your yard and life, you will have begun to heal the split between what you think and what you do, to commingle your identities as consumer and producer and citizen. Chances are, your garden will

re-engage you with your neighbors, for you will have produce to give away and the need to borrow their tools. You will have reduced the power of the cheap-energy mind by personally overcoming its most debilitating weakness: its helplessness and the fact that it can't do much of anything that doesn't involve division or subtraction. The garden's season-long transit from seed to ripe fruit — *will you get a load of that zucchini?!* — suggests that the operations of addition and multiplication still obtain, that the abundance of nature is not exhausted. The single greatest lesson the garden teaches is that our relationship to the planet need not be zero-sum, and that as long as the sun still shines and people still can plan and plant, think and do, we can, if we bother to try, find ways to provide for ourselves without diminishing the world.

Michael Pollan, a contributing writer for the magazine, is the author, most recently, of "In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto."

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses ARB funds for hydrogen vehicles. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Licita California fondos para ideas sobre vehículos de hidrógeno

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, April 18, 2008

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California informó que tiene disponibles cerca de ocho millones de dólares para financiar desarrollo de ideas que ayuden al estado a aumentar el uso de hidrógeno como sustituto anticontaminante de combustible para vehículos de motor.

La referida institución recibirá propuestas en su página de Internet desde hoy y hasta el próximo 13 de junio.

La presidenta de esa oficina estatal, Mary Nochols dijo que el proyecto Carretera de Hidrógeno de California busca al mismo tiempo que impulsar la economía reducir la contaminación.

Por ahora hay unos 22 vehículos de hidrógeno en California pero para dentro de seis años debe haber al menos siete mil 500.