Climate change may carry huge price tag for California

About $2.5 trillion of real estate assets in California are at risk, with a projected annual price tag of between $300 million and $3.9 billion, according to a report by UC Berkeley researchers.

By Margot Roosevelt
L.A. Times, Friday, November 14, 2008

Eroding beaches, disappearing snowpacks, subdivisions decimated by wildfires -- climate change in California could be expensive.

For the first time, the costs of global warming's projected effects in the nation's largest state have been quantified: About $2.5 trillion of real estate assets in California are at risk from extreme weather events, sea level rise and wildfires, with a projected annual price tag of between $300 million and $3.9 billion, according to a new report, "California Climate Risk and Response," written by UC Berkeley researchers Fredrich Kahrl and David Roland-Holst.

The final number will depend on how much the Earth warms under various scenarios and whether the nations commit to slashing greenhouse gas emissions.

"This is a good review of existing studies," said Anthony Brunello, a California Resources agency official. "It assesses the real, comprehensive statewide impacts for the first time."

Brunello and other California officials are already busy planning a comprehensive "Climate Adaptation Strategy" to commit the state to concrete prevention measures. Six task forces covering biodiversity and habitat, infrastructure, oceans and coastal resources, public health, water, forestry and agriculture will release adaptation strategies for public comment next month.

"Our report makes clear the most expensive thing we can do about climate change is nothing," Roland-Holst said. But he adds, "This is not a Doomsday report . . . . If we make the right investments, we can avert much of the damage in any scenario."

California is also moving to adopt comprehensive regulations to slash its greenhouse gas emissions by 15% below today's level. But that would only put a dent in the trajectory of climate change, unless dramatic measures are undertaken nationwide and across other continents, according to scientists.

The report covers seven economic sectors and envisions issues such as the collapse of the ski industry, a water-starved hydroelectric system and an increase in warming-related smog. The research was funded by Next 10, a nonprofit set up by high-tech entrepreneur F. Noel Perry.

California may be closer to capping tailpipe emissions

By Michael Collins - Scripps Howard News Service
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, November 14, 2008

After months of battling with the Bush administration, California may be close to getting permission from the federal government to set its own standards for tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks.

President-elect Barack Obama is expected to grant the state a waiver to impose the tough new standards after he takes office in January, reversing a decision by the Bush administration that infuriated environmentalists.

"Obama has said very clearly he would permit California to move forward and enforce its greenhouse gas standards for cars, so we expect that the Bush administration's policies will be reversed in short order," said Frank O'Donnell, executive director of the environmental group Clean Air Watch.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, also predicted that Obama would approve the waiver.

"My expectation is it will be done because he said (during the campaign) he would do it, and I believe he will do it," said Boxer, D-Cailf.

If Obama approves the waiver, the implications will reach far beyond California.

Eighteen other states already have adopted or are in the process of adopting California's standards. The waiver would clear the way for them to impose the tougher standards as well and would force auto manufacturers to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles nationwide.

California's rules, which the state Legislature passed in 2002, would force automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent in new cars and light trucks by 2016. The state can't impose the standards, however, without a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson announced last December that he had decided against issuing the waiver because California did not have "compelling and extraordinary conditions" to set its own standards.

But internal documents obtained by Boxer's committee indicated the EPA staff had concluded that California did, in fact, meet the legal conditions for imposing the new rules and that the EPA was likely to lose if the issue should end up in court.

In January, California and 15 other states sued the EPA over Johnson's decision.

During the presidential campaign, both Obama and Republican John McCain pledged to approve the waiver if they were elected.

It's not clear how quickly Obama would be able to act. The new administration would have to re-evaluate the state's application and then issue a formal finding that it meets all of the necessary legal requirements, said Stanley Young, spokesman for the California Air Resources Board.

The automotive industry would likely sue to block the regulations, "but we feel that the case could be made strongly that California should be granted the waiver," Young said.

Regardless of how long it takes, Obama could signal at the start of his administration that he intends to grant the waiver, "and I would hope that would happen," O'Donnell said.

"I think that would be a very strong signal that he is committed not only to doing something positive on climate change, but making sure that states like California retain their ability to do the same," O'Donnell said.

In another move that many view as a positive sign for California, Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the state Air Resources Board, is believed to be on Obama's short list of possible candidates to head the federal EPA.

Nichols, who served as an assistant EPA administrator in the Clinton administration, "would make a superb EPA administrator," O'Donnell said.

"She understands exactly what is required in that job," he said. "She was in the middle of the biggest political fights of the Clinton era when it came to the EPA. So she understands very well how that agency runs, what its relationship is to the White House, how other cabinet departments may act."

Nichols said in a statement that she would be honored to be considered for a position in the Obama administration.

Study: Global warming could be costly for Calif

By Terence Chea, Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Friday, November 14, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO — California could suffer as much as $23 billion a year in property damage caused by wildfires, rising sea levels and extreme weather events if not enough is done to combat global warming, according to a report released Thursday.

The study by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley seeks to quantify the possible long-term economic damage that climate change could cause in the state over the next century.

Global warming threatens about $2.5 trillion of California's $4 trillion in real estate assets, as well as hundreds of billions of dollars worth of infrastructure related to water, energy, transportation, agriculture, tourism and recreation, the report found.

The properties at risk include homes, buildings, roads, bridges, reservoirs, container ports, airports, power lines, farms, beaches and forests.

Depending on how much temperatures rise, the effects of climate change could cause $3.5 billion to $23 billion a year in annual damage to public and private property in California, according to the report, which projects the economic impact of different global warming scenarios. That estimate includes $300 million to $3.9 billion in annual damage to real estate assets.

"This report is intended to awaken the public and particularly policy-makers to the reality of climate risk," said David Roland-Holst, a UC Berkeley economist who authored the study.

The report, called "California Climate Risk and Response," was funded by Next 10, a Palo Alto-based nonprofit group that sponsors studies related to the state's environment and economy.

Scientists say global warming is leading to rising sea levels, more severe storms, longer droughts, increased flooding and more catastrophic wildfires.

The report urges policy-makers consider the effects of climate change when making decisions about where and how to build new bridges, buildings and other infrastructure. It also calls for more efficient use of increasingly scare water and greater promotion of renewable power sources.

Roland-Holst said California lawmakers should not let the economic crisis shift their attention away from the state's campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and develop cleaner sources of energy.

"California can turn the threat of climate change into an economic opportunity with the right policies and leadership," Roland-Holst said. "This is an investment in our future, in our future growth and sustainability."

Report: State's climate change bill will be huge

By Mike Taugher - Contra Costa Times
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, November 14, 2008

In a time of financial havoc, add this to the list of looming costs: billions in economic losses each year in California if nothing is done to address global warming, according to a new study from the University of California.

More heat-related deaths, shorter ski seasons, shrinking beaches, increased water scarcity and demands for more electricity — to stay cool in a warmer environment — are among the costs California faces, according to the study by UC economist David Roland-Holst.

Roland-Holst said the study was meant to grab the attention of the public and policymakers and make the case that it is far more expensive to do nothing than to prepare for a warmer world.

Nevertheless, he said the state could address the threat because of its wealth and history of innovation.

"This is not a doomsday scenario," Roland-Holst said.

Rather, he said, the state is like a supertanker that must change course to avoid rocky shoals that are still distant.

In addition to the direct costs of lost revenues and expenses to deal with climate change, the report found many indirect economic costs. Trillions of dollars worth of property is at risk of inundation from rising sea levels, flooding and fires — a figure that poses significant exposure to the insurance industry.

Last month, Roland-Holst produced a related report that found energy efficiency policies have saved Californians billions of dollars in the past few decades, money that was put back into the economy and created jobs. The report said similar improvements mandated by the state's greenhouse gas reduction law will also be economically beneficial.

Both studies were funded by Next 10, a Palo Alto nonprofit organization focused on long-term solutions to environmental and quality of life issues in the state.

In doing the study, Roland-Holst gathered scientific information and modeling projections for California's climate in the next 100 years. He looked at scenarios where carbon emissions increase at the same rate, continue to increase but at a slower rate and increase slightly for a few decades and then decline.

Then he analyzed the economic impact of the changing climate on the state's water, energy, transportation, tourism and recreation, real estate and insurance industry, agriculture and public health.

The estimated cost to those sectors if nothing is done are stratospheric but also uncertain.

Power transmission lines will go out more often because of storm damage and hydroelectric plants will have less water to generate electricity. Ports in Oakland and elsewhere and Bay Area airports face potential expenses if the sea level rises significantly.

The study estimated that about $2.5 trillion of the $4 trillion worth of real estate in California is threatened by increase fire risk, sea level rise, flooding and storms.

For the ski industry, snow could become so scarce the industry dies off completely. More likely, the report said, the season is shortened by half and a $500 million industry becomes a $250 million industry.

Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association, said high elevation resorts such as Kirkwood, Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley have a better chance of survival than those at lower elevations.

He referred to the ski industry as, "the canary at the 7,000-foot (elevation) mine shaft."

The study said the threat of climate change could turn into an economic opportunity.

"Just as the Depression inspired the New Deal, World War II induced unprecedented economic mobilization, and satellite envy launched the space program and the IT revolution, California can turn the threat of climate change into a growth opportunity with the right policy leadership," the report said.

Coal plants jeopardized over climate

By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Friday, November 14, 2008

WASHINGTON — The fate of scores of new coal-burning power plants is now in limbo over whether to regulate heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

The uncertainty resulted when an Environmental Protection Agency appeals panel on Thursday rejected a federal permit for a Utah plant, leaving the issue for the Obama administration to resolve.

The panel said the EPA's Denver office failed to adequately support its decision to issue a permit for the Bonanza plant without requiring controls on carbon dioxide, the leading pollutant linked to global warming.

The matter was sent back to that office, which must better explain why it failed to order limits on carbon dioxide. This is "an issue of national scope that has implications far beyond this individual permitting process," the panel said.

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shrader said the agency was reviewing the ruling by the appeals panel, which traditionally gives great deference to agency decisions.

Environmentalists and lawyers representing industry groups said the ruling puts in question permits - some being considered, others approved but under appeal - of perhaps as many as 100 coal plants.

"It's going to stop everything while EPA mulls over what to do next" about how the federal Clean Air Act is to be used to control carbon dioxide, said David Bookbinder, a Sierra Club lawyer. "And that will be decided by the next administration."

Bookbinder led the group's efforts to block the attempt by Deseret Power, a group of six electric cooperatives, to build a second coal-burning generating unit at the Bonanza facility on the Uintah and Ouray Indian reservation in Utah.

Deseret Power, had no comment about the EPA developments.

"In essence this is a punt to the Obama administration. ... All permits in the pipeline are now stymied," said Jason Hutt, a lawyer who represents a number of utilities, merchant energy developers and refineries seeking permits. He said it also would affect permits for oil refinery expansion.

President George W. Bush has made clear that he believes the Clean Air Act should not be used, in permitting new plants, to control greenhouse gases. It is not clear how the Obama administration will address regulating carbon dioxide. The Supreme Court has told the EPA it must decide on whether carbon dioxide endangers public health and welfare, and if it does it must be regulated.

Michael Gerrard, a lawyer not involved in the Bonanza case and author of "Global Climate Change and the Law," said the decision "will embolden the lawsuits" challenging construction of new power plants based on their impact on climate.

"It means that the appeals board recognizes that carbon dioxide regulation of power plants is a very live and open issue. It does not ban them. It puts a cloud over them, by making it clear that this is a real issue," Gerrard said in an interview.

The Utah case has attracted wide interest because of its broader implications.

Among those filing legal papers with the EPA's appeals panel, arguing the permit should be upheld, were the American Petroleum Institute, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Chemistry Council and the National Association of Manufacturers.

Southern Oklahoma benefits from cleaner Texas air

The Associated Press
In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, November 14, 2008

OKLAHOMA CITY—Scientists credit declines in high levels of ozone in parts of southern Oklahoma with clearing air above Dallas and Fort Worth.

Better regulation and increased government funding of cleaner energy have resulted in steadily improving air quality in the Dallas area, said Mark Sather, an environmental scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We do expect over time that the ozone concentrations will continue to decrease," Sather said, "and that will affect southern Oklahoma also."

High ozone levels in the Dallas area averaged 85 parts per billion this year, compared with more than 100 parts per billion a few years ago, according to EPA reports.

Declines have been reported in southern Oklahoma also, according to the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality. For example, high levels in McAlester dropped to about 71 parts per billion this year from 73 parts per billion last year.

Most wind in Oklahoma comes from the south, said Derek Arndt, associate state climatologist with the Oklahoma Climatological Survey. Wind comes from the north sometimes in the winter, but the rest of the year, the breeze comes from Texas.

And that breeze brings pollution, Sather said.

Cities are packed with cars, factories and businesses that generate pollutants. Some pollutants combine with sunlight to form ozone, the main ingredient of smog. Plumes of smog form over large cities, and in Dallas, wind carries the plume north to Oklahoma, Sather said.

Sometimes, the smog plume can be tracked as far north as Tulsa, said Scott Thomas of the Air Quality Division in the state Department of Environmental Quality.

While conditions are improving, Oklahomans are still affected, Thomas said. Residents of rural areas should keep track of ozone levels even if they live miles from the nearest smokestack.

"Conditions are right that they can be affected like anyone else," he said.

UN: Clouds of pollution threaten glaciers, health

By Tini Tran and John Heilprin, Associated Press Writers
In the Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, November 14, 2008

BEIJING — A dirty brown haze sometimes more than a mile thick is darkening skies not only over vast areas of Asia, but also in the Middle East, southern Africa and the Amazon Basin, changing weather patterns around the world and threatening health and food supplies, the U.N. reported Thursday.

The huge smog-like plumes, caused mainly by the burning of fossil fuels and firewood, are known as "atmospheric brown clouds."

When mixed with emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases blamed for warming the earth's atmosphere like a greenhouse, they are the newest threat to the global environment, according to a report commissioned by the U.N. Environment Program.

"All of this points to an even greater and urgent need to look at emissions across the planet," said Achim Steiner, head of Kenya-based UNEP, which funded the report with backing from Italy, Sweden and the United States.

Brown clouds are caused by an unhealthy mix of particles, ozone and other chemicals that come from cars, coal-fired power plants, burning fields and wood-burning stoves. First identified by the report's lead researcher in 1990, the clouds were depicted Thursday as being more widespread and causing more environmental damage than previously known.

Perhaps most widely recognized as the haze this past summer over Beijing's Olympics, the clouds have been found to be more than a mile thick around glaciers in the Himalaya and Hindu Kush mountain ranges. They hide the sun and absorb radiation, leading to new worries not only about global climate change but also about extreme weather conditions.

"All these have led to negative effects on water resources and crop yields," the report says.

Health problems associated with particulate pollution, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, are linked to nearly 350,000 premature deaths in China and India every year, said Henning Rohde, a University of Stockholm scientist who worked on the study.

Soot levels in the air were reported to have risen alarmingly in 13 megacities: Bangkok, Beijing, Cairo, Dhaka, Karachi, Kolkata, Lagos, Mumbai, New Delhi, Seoul, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Tehran.

Brown clouds were also cited as dimming the light by as much as 25 percent in some places including Karachi, New Delhi, Shanghai and Beijing.

The phenomenon complicates the climate change scenario, because the brown clouds also help cool the earth's surface and mask the impact of global warming by an average of 40 percent, according to the report.

Though it has been studied closely in Asia, the latest findings, conducted by an international collaboration of scientists, reveal that the brown cloud phenomenon is not unique to Asia, with pollution hotspots seen in North America, Europe, South Africa and South America.

More specifically, researchers found, brown clouds are forming over eastern China; northeastern Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar; Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam; sub-Saharan Africa southward into Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe; and the Amazon Basin in South America.

The enormous cloud masses can move across continents within three to four days. Although they also form over the eastern U.S. and Europe, winter snow and rain tend to lessen the impact in those areas.

An international response is needed to deal with "the twin threats of greenhouse gases and brown clouds and the unsustainable development that underpins both," said the lead researcher, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a professor of climate and ocean sciences at the University of California in San Diego.

One of the most serious problems, Ramanathan said, is retreat of the glaciers in the Himalaya and Hindu Kush and in Tibet. The glaciers feed most Asian rivers and "have serious implications for the water and food security of Asia," he said.

Monsoon rains over India and southeast Asia decreased between 5 and 7 percent overall since the 1950s, the report says, naming brown clouds and global warming as a possible cause. Likewise, they may have contributed to the melting of China's glaciers, which have shrunk 5 percent since the 1950s. The volume of China's nearly 47,000 glaciers has fallen by 3,000 square kilometers (1,158.31 square miles) in the past 25 years, according to the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Soot winds up on the surface of the glaciers that feed the Ganges, Indus, Yangtze and Yellow rivers, which makes the glaciers absorb more sunlight and melt more quickly and also pollutes the rivers, the researchers say.

But the U.N., which began studying the problem six years ago, still finds "significant uncertainty" in understanding how brown clouds affect conditions regionally, Ramanathan cautioned.

Congress has fast-track power to kill Bush rules

By Rita Beamish, The Associated Press
In the Washington Post, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, November 14, 2008

President-elect Barack Obama will have limited authority to overturn federal regulations approved in the waning months of the Bush administration. But a little-used power offers the new Democratic Congress an early test of how aggressively lawmakers might unravel such rules pushed through by Republicans.

Under a special fast-track authority, Congress could repeal current rules from as far back as May. Many are related to the environment and health. Aside from congressional action, such changes involve a laborious rule-making process that can take years.

The Congressional Review Act of 1996, used just once in the past 12 years, could become a sweeping tool for Democrats against late regulations from the Bush presidency. Environmental activists are compiling lists of regulations they believe Congress should target, including ones covering water pollution at huge farms, pollution control equipment at older power plants and hazardous waste restrictions.

"One of the things to watch is whether there are actions in Congress that reflect a new philosophy that is a different direction than the Bush administration, which has been a pro-industry approach to governing," said Rick Melberth, an expert at the Washington-based OMB Watch, a nonprofit watchdog organization.

Bristling over suggestions the Bush administration was too cozy with industry, the White House has defended its new regulations and cites requirements for increased auto fuel efficiency as "maybe not particularly welcomed by members of the business community."

"We're trying to do them in the best way that protects the interests of the nation," White House spokesman Tony Fratto said at a news briefing.

For pending rules, Obama could freeze them as soon as he takes office in January. Separately, Obama could use his presidential authority to reverse executive orders by Bush on policies such as stem cell research and the gag rule on overseas family planning groups that might advise women on abortion.

"There's a lot that the president can do using his executive authority without waiting for congressional action, and I think we'll see the president do that," Obama's transition chief, John Podesta, said on "Fox News Sunday" last weekend. "I think that he feels like he has a real mandate for change. We need to get off the course that the Bush administration has set."

But once regulations are in effect, only Congress could overturn them, outside the cumbersome rule-making process.

The 1996 law gives Congress expedited authority to shortcut the legislative process. Once a regulation is repealed, Congress would have to approve any substantially similar new rule. The law allows 60 congressional working days to repeal a finalized regulation once it comes to Congress for review. If the House or Senate session ends before a full 60-day review period, a new 60-day clock starts 15 working days after the new Congress begins.

The review period is elongated because Congress takes off August and members adjourn for long holidays or other breaks. That means that depending on when the lawmakers wrap up this year, regulations going back to May could be subject to expedited repeal by the new Congress that will convene in January, said Curtis Copeland, an expert at the Congressional Research Service who has studied the issue.

Lawmakers have asked Copeland to testify at a House Judiciary subcommittee hearing on Tuesday to explain their options under the law.

Major new regulations typically take effect 60 days after they are finalized, meaning those completed before Nov. 20 would be in effect when Obama takes office Jan. 20 and could not be blocked by the White House. Bush's chief of staff, Joshua Bolten, previously directed all federal agencies to issue their final rules by Nov. 1 except in extraordinary cases.

Congress is a different matter. The repeal law makes sense only when one party controls both the Congress and White House, eliminating the prospect of presidential veto. Congress has used it just once, in 2001 when Republicans overturned a Clinton-era rule on workplace ergonomics. The law was enacted by a Republican Congress wary of an over-regulatory bureaucracy.

The chairman of the House committee studying global warming, Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., will consider repealing Bush's rules that he considers egregious, said Markey's spokesman, Eben Burnham-Snyder. Markey has criticized Bush's approach on air pollution, greenhouse gases and endangered species protection.

"Congress has been doing battle with the Bush administration on a lot of these rules," Burnham-Snyder said. "There's both the political will and now the mechanism to assist an incoming administration and expedite the reversal of some of these rules."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., will consult congressional leaders and the incoming Obama administration on the best approach toward Bush's regulations, her aides said.

Targets could include regulations such as one easing hazardous waste restrictions on 1.5 million tons of waste, said Ben Dunham, a lawyer for the organization Earthjustice.

Other candidates could include exemption rules for water pollution permits and regulations on oil refinery emissions, said John Walke, a lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

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On the Net:
Congressional Review Act:http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/laws/small-business/

Study: Valley air an expensive proposition

By Eiji Yamashita
Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Nov. 13, 2008

Air pollution in the Valley is expensive -- far more so than what it would cost to clean it up, a new study released on Wednesday says. The study puts a $6 billion pricetag on the impact of air pollution on the health of the San Joaquin Valley residents -- an estimated cost of $1,600 per person. The figure for Kings County amounted to almost $205 million a year, the same study found.

In other words, researchers say, that's how much the areas could save in health care costs, missed school and work days and lost income from premature deaths if federal ozone and fine particulate standards were met.

Meanwhile, the total saving for South Coast and the Valley -- two areas with the county's worst air quality -- would reach a staggering $28 billion, the study said.

The findings by California State University, Fullerton researchers challenge the argument by truckers and agribusiness interests that oppose proposed new rules targeting big-rigs pollution saying it is too expansive at a time of economic woes.

The $6 billion estimate for the Valley is twice the figure released by a previous study done by same researchers in 2006.

"The bottom line is, there has been a tug of war over what to do about air pollution for decades," said Jane Hall, lead author of the study and a nationally recognized expert on environmental economics and assessment. "There has been a substantial progress made, but we are paying now for not having done enough."

Much of the societal cost stemmed from premature deaths.

To put the numbers in perspective, the study said decreasing air pollution saves more lives each year than eliminating all vehicle fatalities in the Valley as well as South Coast.

"In many California counties, bad air quality contribute to more early deaths than do car accidents," Hall said.

In the Valley, 774 vehicular deaths were recorded in 2007, compared to 812 deaths attributed to respiratory illnesses caused by fine particulate known as PM 2.5, according to the study.

The study also noted that "every resident" of the Valley air basin were regularly exposed to the health-endangering level of air pollution. Ozone and particulate pollution can cause asthma and other breathing problems. Particulate pollution can also increase the risk of heart disease.

Hall and colleague Victor Brajer examined the air pollution levels across two air basins from 2005 to 2007 and applied economic values to health effects caused by air pollution through a peer-reviewed methodology.

"This is a societal value in reducing risk of early deaths," Brajer said. "As a society we do this all the time -- we spend money on railroad crossings to make them safer to cross, and we spend money on air traffic control to make flying safer. There's lots of different ways the society spends money to make things little safer. That's what we're trying to capture."

The study's release Wednesday comes at a critical time, as California's Air Resources Board considers controversial new rules to clean up big-rig pollution.

One rule would force truckers to install filters or upgrade engines, while another would require reduction of green-house gas emissions. The air board is scheduled to vote on the rules on Dec. 11.

The move could cost business owners $5.5 billion over the next 15 years, while air board officials estimate the savings in health care costs would be between $48-$68 billion over the same period, if the regulations are adopted.

"I think (the study) does help paint a broader picture of a context in which that decision and others will be made," Hall said, when asked to comment on the timing of the study's release.

Nevertheless, the study takes no position on the proposed controversial diesel truck rules, Hall said.

"We're not proposing any particular action," Hall said. "We're saying based on the best information that we have, not doing any more than we're doing already is placing a substantial burden on the economy to help the people in these regions."

Hall did, however, acknowledged that the study could be interpreted as "encouraging more urgent actions" to reduce air pollution.

The effects of short-term weather events or wild fires have been evened out because the study examined data averaged over a three-year period, Hall said.

The $90,000 study was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Wood burning ban today, possibly longer

By Sentinel Staff
Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Nov. 13, 2008

Kings County and Hanford received its first wood-burning prohibition day of the season, effectively today and possibly longer. The prohibitions by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District was issued Wednesday afternoon for today due to deteriorating air quality. The daylong mandatory curtailment is in effect to midnight tonight, but could be extended this afternoon when the district makes its next air report.

An extended ban is a strong possibility, as daytime temperatures into the upper 70s as forecast. The prohibition is effective in Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley air basin portion of Kern counties. Fresno County had its first prohibition of the season on Nov. 7.

The prohibition applies to burning wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs, and also to outdoor devices such as chimineas and fire pits. The wood-burning curtailment program, Check Before You Burn, runs each year from Nov. 1 through the last day of February and aims to reduce wintertime particulate pollution by restricting the use of wood-burning devices when air quality is forecast to deteriorate. Forecasts are issued on a county-by-county basis.

When a prohibition is declared, burning any solid fuel in a residential fireplace or wood-burning device is not permitted. There are two exceptions, however:

If the residence does not have access to natural-gas service, even if propane is available.

If burning solid fuel is the sole source of heat for the residence.

Prohibition violations may be subject to fines.
Daily wood-burning forecasts are available daily at 4:30 p.m. at
http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.html.

First 'no burn' day is in effect across Valley

The Associated Press
Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Thursday, November 13, 2008

FRESNO, Calif.—The season's first ban on wood burning is in effect in four San Joaquin Valley counties, part of an intensified effort to reduce particulate pollution in the country's worst air basin.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District enacted the ban Thursday because of deteriorating air quality. The board's new tightened regulations, approved last month, are expected to result in 48 no-burn days through the end of February.

The ban is in effect in Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties and parts of Kern County.

The ban applies to burning wood, pellets, manufactured fire logs and to chimineas and fire pits. Violators can be fined.

Particulate pollution is connected with a variety of respiratory ailments.

Sacramento Bee Editorial, Friday, November 14, 2008

Editorial: Clean air too costly? Not by a long shot

California has the dirtiest air in the country, and two regions of the state, the Los Angeles basin and the San Joaquin Valley, account for the highest levels of pollution.

An estimated 3,860 residents of those regions will die prematurely because of tiny soot particles and smog they breathe. In addition to the human toll, the cost of dirty air to families, hospitals and businesses in those regions totals $28 million annually.

Those are the latest sobering findings of a new air pollution study just released by Jane Hall and Victor Brajer, economics professors at California State University, Fullerton. Their study concludes that dirty air costs San Joaquin valley residents $1,600 per person per year. Costs in the Los Angeles region are pegged at $1,250 per person.

The costs are not confined to those regions. When people suffering from air pollution-related illnesses are hospitalized in Los Angeles or Tulare County, it drives up health insurance premiums for residents elsewhere in the state.

The newest air study comes just as the California Air Resources Board is poised to vote on landmark regulations designed to reduce emissions from heavy-duty diesel trucks. If adopted, the rules would require truck owners to install exhaust filters on their rigs starting in 2010. The rules also would require long-haul truckers to equip their vehicles with fuel-efficient tires and aerodynamic devices that lower greenhouse gas emissions and improve fuel economy.

The new rules will cost an estimated $5.5 billion over 15 years, beginning in 2010 when the rules kick in. The state has provided $1 billion in loans and grants to help pay for the pollution fixes. Still, the economic benefits of the new rules – amounting to $48 billion to $68 billion over that same 15 years the rules are in place, mostly in avoided health care – far exceed the costs.

The Fullerton professors' study validates what the Air Resources Board's diesel truck research has shown. The cost of doing nothing is unacceptable.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses polluting clouds cover parts of Asia. Thick layers of smoke, particles and other chemical substances that extend from the Persian Gulf to Asia threaten the health of millions. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Nubes contaminantes cubren parte del Asia

Por Tini Tran
El Nuevo Herald, Thursday, November 13, 2008

Espesas capas de hollín, partículas y sustancias químicas que se extienden desde el Golfo Pérsico hasta el Asia amenazan la salud y los suministros alimenticios en el mundo, informan las Naciones Unidas el jueves, en lo que califican como la más reciente amenaza al ambiente mundial.

La bruma regional, conocida como un conjunto de nubes atmosféricas marrones, contribuye al derretimiento de los glaciares, reduce la luz solar y contribuye a crear condiciones climáticas

extremas que inciden sobre la producción agrícola, según el informe comisionado por el Programa Ambiental de la ONU.

Las gruesas nubes han oscurecido 13 megaciudades asiáticas incluyendo Beijing, Shangai, Bangkok, El Cairo, Bombay y Nueva Delhi, disminuyendo hasta en un 25% la cantidad de luz en algunos sitios.

Causadas por la combustión de combustibles fósiles, madera y plantas, las nubes marrones también desempeñan un papel significativo al exacerbar los efectos de los gases invernadero para calentar la atmósfera terrestre, dijo el informe.

"Imagine por un momento una franja de tres kilómetros (1,8 milla) de espesor de hollín, partículas y un cóctel de sustancias químicas que se extiende desde la Península Arábiga hasta Asia", dijo Achim Steiner, subsecretario general de las Naciones Unidas y director ejecutivo del programa ambiental de la ONU.

"Todo esto apunta a una necesidad aun mayor y más urgente de observar las emisiones en todo el planeta", afirmó.

Algunas partículas en la nube contaminante, como el hollín, absorben luz del sol y calientan el aire. Eso ha significado un paulatino derretimiento de los glaciares del Himalaya, que son la fuente de la mayoría de los ríos en el continente, dijo el informe.

La Academia China de Ciencias calcula que los glaciares se han encogido un 5% desde la década del 50. Al ritmo actual, los glaciares podrían reducirse hasta un 75% para el 2050, lo que impone un riesgo importante para la provisión de agua en la región.

Las nubes contaminantes también han contribuido a reducir la temporada de los monzones en la India. Los extremos climáticos también pueden haber incidido en la menor producción de cultivos clave como arroz, trigo y frijoles de soya, dice el informe.

Por otra parte, pueden haber ayudado a disimular el impacto del calentamiento global enfriando la superficie terrestre, agrega.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a “green” future for Los Angeles.

Un futuro verde para Los Ángeles

Cumbre de sostenibilidad abordará las ventajas para desarrollar la industria, que podría convertir la ciudad en pionera

Róger Lindo
La Opinión, Friday, November 14, 2008

La tecnología "verde", es decir, la que no ensucia ni contamina sino que por lo contrario promueve la conservación de los recursos naturales, está en el primer plano de una nueva agenda económica en gestación, y Los Ángeles podría convertirse en una de las regiones incubadoras de ese sector. Es decir, si aprovecha la oportunidad.

Este el el tema de la Cumbre de Sostenibilidad que tendrá lugar hoy en el Centro Getty, con la participación confirmada de los directores de las principales entidades de transporte aéreo terrestre y marítimo de Los Ángeles, la Agencia de Desarrollo Comunitario (CRA), ejecutivos de compañías de construcción y recursos renovables, académicos y funcionarios municipales. El encuentro es organizado por el Concejo de Negocios de Los Angeles (LABC).

"Nuestra región ocupa una posición privilegiada para ponerse al frente de la economía verde, pero esto requiere un gran esfuerzo y una fuerte colaboración entre los sectores privado y público", declaró la presidenta del LABC, Marie Leslie. Dijo que la economía está en condiciones de recibir miles de millones de dólares, lo que se traduciría en la creación de ingentes oportunidades de empleo.

Numerosos economistas entrevistados por este diario han señalado que el sector verde es uno de los más promisorios a largo plazo para edificar una economía que provea trabajos bien pagados y que al mismo tiempo sea uno de los pilares de la recuperación económica. El

presidente electo Obama considera que la tecnología verde será uno de los rubros que recibirá más incentivos durante su administración.

Como resultado de la cumbre anterior, la ciudad de Los Ángeles adoptó una iniciativa sobre construcción que requiere que toda nueva edificación un 15% de mayor eficiencia en uso de energía. Un estudio sobre el tema dado a conocer en octubre pasado por la organización no lucrativa Next10 señaló que si la eficiencia energética de California se incrementara en 1% al año y se incrementaran las políticas sobre el clima, ello podría conducir a una elevación del producto interno bruto del estado en aproximadamente 76 mil millones.

El LABC es una organización dedicada a promover los intereses de la iniciativa privada local y informar sobre su impacto positivo en los distintos niveles del gobierno municipal.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses in order to avoid a climate change disaster, we need to act now. The levels of carbon dioxide need to be reduced lower than today's standards in order to avoid a disaster.

Para evitar el desastre climático habría que actuar ya

Si se quiere evitar un desastre climático el nivel de dióxido de carbono debe de ser reducido por debajo del que ya hay hoy en día. Un grupo de científicos propone cómo hacerlo.

NeoFronteras, Wednesday, November 12, 2008

Según un estudio publicado recientemente en Open Atmospheric Science Journal por un grupo internacional de diez científicos, si se quiere evitar un desastre climático el nivel de dióxido de carbono debe de ser reducido por debajo del que ya hay hoy en día.

El nivel de dióxido de carbono está aumentando en el planeta Tierra debido al consumo de combustibles fósiles y a la destrucción de los bosques. Este exceso de dióxido de carbono incrementa el efecto invernadero y está causando un cambio climático. Diversos modelos tratan de predecir cómo se verá afectado el clima mundial debido a estas emisiones. cada uno de estos modelos predice un margen de maniobra distinto.

Los autores de este nuevo estudio aseguran que el nivel de dióxido de carbono atmosférico debería de ser similar a los niveles preindustriales, concretamente menos de 350 ppm (partes por millón). Esto representa un cambio respecto a otros estudios anteriores que sugerían que el nivel peligroso era de unos 450 ppm o mayor. Actualmente el nivel de este gas es de 385 ppm y está aumentando en 2 ppm anualmente.

Según Mark Pagani, uno de los autores, tanto este trabajo como otros trabajos sugieren que hemos alcanzado ya un nivel de CO_2 que compromete la estabilidad de los casquetes polares.

Cómo de rápido responden los océanos y los casquetes polares a este cambio no se entiende muy bien, pero dado el tamaño potencial del desastre Pagani cree que lo mejor sería no aprender la lección de primera mano y ponerse a trabajar ya para evitar el desastre.

El estudio se basa en la disponibilidad de datos mejores sobre la historia climática de la Tierra y en los cambios que se producen en la actualidad, especialmente en las regiones polares. Es decir, los autores usan las pruebas de cómo la Tierra respondió en el pasado a cambios en los niveles de CO_2 junto con los patrones de cambio climático recientes para mostrar que el nivel de dióxido de carbono ya ha llegado a la zona peligrosa.

Las reservas de petróleo ya deben de estar a la mitad, aunque esto depende de nuevos yacimientos por descubrir y de momento no es práctico secuestrar dióxido de carbono de los tubos de escapes de los vehículos. Pero el carbón representa las reservas más grandes de carbono y la fuente más importante de CO_2 atmosférico. Los autores proponen que la única manera realista de cortar las emisiones de este gas es retirar paulatinamente de manera lineal las emisiones procedentes del carbón entre 2010 y 2030, excepto aquel que se pueda capturar y secuestrar.

Según este modelo, si esto se hace así el dióxido de carbono atmosférico alcanzaría un pico de 400 ó 425 ppm y después declinará lentamente. Los autores mantienen que el pico de CO_2 depende de la precisión en el cálculo de las reservas de gas natural y petróleo, de su dificultad de su extracción y de la fracción que no sea extraíble.

Los autores también afirman que la reforestación e impedir la degradación del suelo con prácticas agrícolas sostenibles podrían disminuir el nivel de dióxido de carbono en 50 ppm.

Además desestiman la noción de soluciones de geoingeniería, ya que calculan que secuestrar dióxido de carbono equivalente a disminuir su nivel atmosférico en 50 ppm tendría un coste de 20 billones de dólares.

Aunque saben que la tarea de moverse hacia una era más allá de los combustibles fósiles es hercúlea, los autores afirman que es posible cuando se compara con los esfuerzos realizados durante la segunda guerra mundial. El mayor peligro sería continuar ignorando y negando el problema, cuyas trágicas consecuencias no se podrían evitar.

La parte positiva de moverse en esta dirección es que además se aliviarían otros problemas como el aumento de tormentas tropicales, el aumento de la desertificación, la pérdida de los arrecifes de coral o la pérdida de los glaciares de montaña que proporcionan agua dulce a millones de habitantes.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the burgundy clouds accelerate climate change, according to a report from ONU.

Las nubes marrones aceleran el cambio climático, según un informe de la ONU

El Periodico de Mexico, Thursday, November 13, 2008

Pekín, (EFE).- Las Nubes Atmosféricas Marrones (ABC, siglas en inglés), un fenómeno formado por diversas partículas tóxicas creadas por el hombre, abarca desde Pekín hasta la península Arábiga, con un efecto acelerador del cambio climático, según un informe de la ONU.

El estudio, elaborado por el Programa de Medio Ambiente de las Naciones Unidas y que se dio a conocer hoy en Pekín, concluye que estas formaciones, algunas de ellas con más de 3 kilómetros de espesor, tendrán un impacto directo sobre el medio ambiente, la agricultura y la salud de los habitantes del planeta.

Pekín es una de las principales ciudades asiáticas afectadas por las ABC, compuestas de hollín y otras partículas tóxicas, junto con Bangkok, Dacca (Bangladesh), Karachi (Pakistán), Calcuta, Bombay, Nueva Delhi, Seúl, Shanghai, Shenzhen y Teherán, debido a sus altos índices de contaminación.

A causa de estas nubes marrones, estas ciudades están perdiendo entre un 10 y un 25 por ciento de luz solar desde la década de 1950, según el informe.

La ciudad china de Cantón, por ejemplo, ha reducido su recepción de luz solar en un 20 por ciento desde los años 70.

Además, estas nubes multiplican el efecto invernadero y, con ello, precipitan el cambio climático, ya que partículas como los sulfatos reflejan la luz del sol y enfrían la superficie, mientras que el hollín absorbe esta luz y calienta el aire.

Las ABC actuarán de manera directa sobre los glaciares del Himalaya, fuente de los ríos de gran parte de Asia, hecho que podría acarrear periodos de sequía en la región.

En cuanto a la salud humana, las nubes marrones se traducirán en problemas respiratorios y cardiovasculares cada vez más frecuentes.

Estas nubes marrones también existen en buena parte de Norteamérica, Europa, el sur de África y el Amazonas.