‘Tis the season

April brings asthma concerns to the forefront

By Brandon Santiago

CSUF The Collegian, Friday, April 25, 2008

Her throat keeps getting tighter and she can’t stop wheezing. In a panic she thrusts herself awake and crawls around in the dark late at night looking for the only thing that ease her suffering — her inhaler.

“Some people wake up from having night terrors, I wake up from having an asthma attack,” said Katyann Garcia, a senior theatre arts major, who is also a severe asthmatic.

“It’s terrifying, it’s like my lungs are getting smaller and can’t open and my body is just going down,” Garcia said. “It’s like someone is strangling me.”

According to the California Department of Health, Garcia is one of 4.5 million Californians who suffer from asthma, a condition that has no cure but its symptoms and triggers can be lessened if more efforts were taken towards going green.

The reasoning why going green relates to asthma is that the same things polluting the air and damaging the environment are the same things that cause and trigger asthma symptoms.

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) said Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways. It causes the inside walls of the airways to become inflamed or swollen.

This inflammation in turn makes the airways extremely sensitive to allergens and irritants. When the airways get irritated, they get narrower and less air flows through to the lungs, causing symptoms like wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and trouble with the ability to breathe.

NHLBI also said the most common irritants triggering symptoms besides allergens are air pollutants, such as cigarette smoke, scented products, paints, household cleaning chemicals and car smog.

These in turn, are all things that can be lessened or even prevented by going green said Kay Busby, nurse practitioner for the Student Health Center and former allergy and asthma specialist at the Aminian Allergy Institute.

“If more people were more environmentally conscious, the lives of asthmatics like Katyann Garcia would be much easier,” Busby said.

Busby has been treating Garcia at the health center for a while now, and Garcia is glad to have found out that there is even an asthma treatment program at Fresno State.

“It’s a relief to know there is something right on campus, because with asthma you need immediate response,” Garcia said.

Busby said that asthma is the leading reason for students and faculty to miss work or class, so it was definitely necessary to have a program on campus.

She said they do diagnostic testing using peak flow meters and spirometry to see the severity of the condition. They prescribe inhalers and medications to alleviate symptoms. All of which is more convienent and readily available for students at the health center as opposed to an allergy or asthma institute that is off campus.

But she also said their treatment program is somewhat unique because they do more follow up and also aim to educate their patients on how to prevent symptoms and future attacks.

“We want people to know and not just asthmatics, that limiting the use of household chemicals, certain plastics and using electricity to cook not only helps the environment but makes it healthier to breathe,” Busby said.

Busby knows that going green isn’t the answer to the growing epidemic of asthma because there are other factors involved, such the geographic location of the Central Valley and quick changes of the weather. She also wants to reitierate that there is no cure for asthma, but with proper treatment, the symptoms can stop occurring so frequently.

Garcia as an asthma sufferer just wishes more people would start listening and start being more environmentally responsible.

“Stop mowing your lawns in the middle of a hot day, don’t wash your clothes at peak hours and stop polluting the air, please,” Garcia said. “Because personally, I like to breathe and I can’t if you don’t follow through.”

Less resistance to regional planning

City, county leaders discuss cooperative valley solutions

By GARTH STAPLEY
Modesto Bee, Monday, April 28, 2008

FRESNO -- City and county politicians putting aside selfish interests for the good of a region really is possible, such leaders in the San Joaquin Valley heard Friday at a landmark conference.

Some bristled at the idea of giving up traditional control over growth patterns to give the valley a fighting chance at curbing climate-changing carbon emissions.

But many leaders of several dozen cities and eight counties gathered at the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Executive Forum said they are warming to the concept of regional cooperation to solve tough problems such as traffic and air and water pollution.

"It's going to take moral courage of elected leaders to do the right thing," said Turlock City Councilman Kurt Vander Weide, reporting on a group discussion with other officeholders throughout the fast-growing valley.

A few other regions, including Sacramento and San Diego, have tasted success despite deep initial cynicism.

Marty Tuttle, former executive director of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, said people are more willing to compromise "when they know there is a comprehensive strategy to deal with growth."

Time-honored local control over land use decisions proved to be the "big elephant in the room" during the Sacramento region's blueprint process, Tuttle said. Leaders there finally got beyond it through constant reassurance that they wouldn't give it up altogether, and would make better decisions if armed with more solid information about what was going on in the rest of the area.

The same could work for the San Joaquin Valley, whose leaders are a year or two behind in the same process of producing a blueprint, or regional cooperation plan, Tuttle said.

"What's good for Fresno is good for Stockton, and what's good for Stockton is good for Modesto," he said. "You're all in it together."

Gov. Schwarzenegger sent his director of planning and research, Cynthia Bryant, to deliver a similar message.

"I understand you're fiercely independent," Bryant told the crowd. "You don't want anyone telling you what to do. That 'can-do' attitude is what I love about California.

"But the challenge is so great, I don't think you can do it alone," she continued. "To remain independent, you're going to have to work with the state, other entities and most importantly, each other."

She quoted from the governor's recent speech in Eureka, where he said: "Sacramento is not where the action is. We coordinate. On the local level is where all the answers are."

Gregg Albright, deputy director of the California Department of Transportation, said, "We recognize that the valley here is absolutely critical" to California's future. "If we don't proactively approach this and think about where we're going to go, I can tell you, the future is going to be ugly."

Regional approach to emissions

Much of the day's fireworks sprang from a presentation on Senate Bill 375, which would require that regions adopt emission reduction targets to address climate change.

William Craven, chief consultant to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water, said local government would not give up land use control and that the bill would not affect projects in the pipeline. It passed in the Senate but bogged down in the Assembly while its author, Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, negotiates with cities, counties, regional transportation planning agencies and the building industry.

"The process is often brutal but is working in this instance," Craven said. "I think it's generally recognized as a good effort."

Fresno City Councilman Jerry Duncan noted that the bill so far has drawn support only from Democratic legislators. "To me, that doesn't come across as a real bipartisan effort," Duncan said.

And Kern County Supervisor Jon McQuiston said, "I'm not surprised the environmental groups are not opposed; I'd almost say they couldn't have written it better."

Los Banos Councilwoman Anna Brooks reminded the audience how building approvals by one agency can affect another. Plans for 5,000 new jobs, and no homes, in Coyote Creek Valley would enrich that area, leaving her city with the costly burden of housing new employees, she said.

"Does it make sense to create more greenhouse gas emissions by people having to travel over the hill (to work)?" Brooks said.

Some leaders agreed that land use conflicts are taking center stage as regions throughout the state draw up blueprints.

"The genie is out of the bottle," Tuttle said. "Land use is now a key focus of public policy."

David Hosley, president of Modesto-based Great Valley Center, said, "The state has always had conflict with local governments on land use. Because of greenhouse gas and all the things going on with global warming, planning has become sexy. No one in Sacramento knows planning. You (local leaders) know it here."

The forum drew officeholders from Ceres, Atwater, Merced, Turlock and Modesto, though no supervisor from Stanislaus County attended. No local agency was better represented than Patterson, which sent three of its five council members.

Patterson Mayor Becky Campo said a controversial proposal to transform the former naval airbase at Crows Landing into a hulking industrial park has heightened her group's awareness of the value of cooperating with neighbors. Her council vehemently opposes West Park's plan but has been unable to stop it.

Criticism from Stanislaus County's West Side came "too little, too late," Campo said. "If we had been in the loop from the very beginning, maybe things would have been different and we wouldn't be fighting it. It's kind of unfortunate."

Air war: Government agencies fight the battle for healthy breathing

By Dhyana Levey
Merced Sun-Star, Monday, April 28, 2008

To some, air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley means playing peek-a-boo with the mountains -- some days you see them, many days you can't.

For others, it means the threat of serious health issues, such as asthma and heart disease.

Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program associate with the Merced/Mariposa Asthma Coalition, has a 4-year-old daughter, Satya, who developed a chronic cough and must take twice-a-day medication for her breathing problems. That's one reason Kelly-Ortega became a front-line soldier in the battle for cleaner air.

Jennifer Smith, a project manager at UC Merced, said her 2-year-old niece has been using an inhaler since she was 16 months old.

Smith and her husband, Dennis, didn't even realize how bad the air was in Merced until they moved here from North Dakota eight months ago, "I've met so many people with respiratory problems," she noted. "I notice the difference. You can just see it in the air."

And that's just one of many quirks about the state of the air here, said Paul Cort, staff attorney with Earthjustice, a nonprofit public interest law firm.

Although pollution is a recurring problem in the Valley, and although it affects many people, everyday folks don't know that much about it.

Efforts by federal, state and regional agencies to address the problem also fall short, Cort and other lawyers and activists contend.

But the feds and other air police maintain that they're taking steps to reduce ozone and particulate pollution. Chief among the enforcers are the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, California Air Resources Board and the Environmental Protection Agency.

A hearing by the air district's board at its Fresno office Wednesday will consider approving a plan to reduce PM2.5 -- ultrafine particulate matter. It would guide regulations to allow the Valley by 2014 to meet 1997 air standards set by the EPA.

Is enough being done?

"That doesn't mean nothing will happen between now and 2014," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's pollution control officer and executive director. "Measures kick in during the meantime."

Based on past efforts, 39 percent of the Valley -- including most of Merced County -- already meets those 1997 clean air standards, he said.

And on Monday the air district announced that the EPA proposes to declare that the Valley has attained health standards for reducing PM10 -- another slightly larger type of fine particulate pollution.

Activists disagree with these findings, arguing that Valley air isn't getting cleaner at a reasonable rate.

Cindy Broughton, who runs an advertising business in Merced, hasn't done much research on the issue. But she knows what she sees and breathes from the air. "It seems to be out of control," she said, adding that although she hasn't been diagnosed with asthma, she often suffers shortness of breath.

You can see the murky khaki-colored pollution hanging in the air, hiding the mountains, she said, and she often smells the thick, greasy odor of exhaust.

The air district is only trying to meet an old and outdated standard to fight the problem, say groups such as Earthjustice and the Asthma Coalition. The district isn't making regulations

stringent enough to address not just mobile sources of pollution, such as diesel trucks, but stationary sources, such as industry and agriculture.

"We want them to push the boundaries," said Mary-Michal Rawling, program manager of the Asthma Coalition. "Ideally, a plan that would adhere to the 2006 standards. I'm not implying they are doing nothing, but they need to be more aggressive."

Litigation from the trucking industry -- which will have to spend thousands upon thousands of dollars retrofitting trucks to curb more emissions -- slowed the EPA's passing of 1997 standards. This delayed other air-quality agencies' plans.

Although the standard eventually passed, the trucking industry continues to worry about how harmful all the costs of the regulations could be to their business.

Regardless of the economics and the EPA's delay, agencies still aren't working as hard as they should to clean up the air, Cort said at an April 14 workshop in Merced.

That evening he and other speakers explained the ins and outs of particle pollution and how it affects local residents.

What is particle pollution?

Particulate matter is classified by its size. The smaller the particle, the deeper it can penetrate into the human system.

Ultrafine particulate matter -- PM2.5 -- is so small that about 30 particles can fit on the width of a human hair. They can sneak deep into the lungs and launch into the bloodstream, aggravating asthma, contributing to heart disease and causing premature death.

A large source is nitrogen oxide, 80 percent of which comes from such mobile platforms as big trucks, Sadredin said.

PM10, which consists of coarse fine particles, comes mainly from stationary sources, such as fireplaces and food processing -- "basically, everything other than trucks, vehicles," he said.

A key component in the Valley potentially meeting PM10 EPA standards is the air district's fireplace regulations with "no burn" days. And a way to further control the air quality could mean stricter regulations, with 30 or more "no burn" days a year, Sadredin added.

However, activists simply don't believe some of the air district's data stating the air is getting cleaner according to national standards. Earthjustice is even challenging the district's position with litigation.

And the regional air district depends too much in its PM2.5 plan on a truck emissions-reduction rule to be set by the state air resources board, according to the Asthma Coalition and other clean air groups.

The activists think local air defense outfits should enforce stricter standards that prevail throughout the Valley. Los Angeles has gotten much more attention for its bad air, Cort said.

The truck rule doesn't go into effect until 2014, but the air should be cleaner sooner, they say. Besides, there are more ways ultrafine particulate pollution can be addressed. The controls are focused on nitrogen oxide, while sources of volatile organic compounds should be further regulated.

Stationary sources, such as boilers, which generate power and steam for a variety of industries, and dryers, which dry such products as fruit, contribute to the problem.

And there are ways to further regulate that equipment, Alvin Valeriano, a contractor for the nonprofit International Sustainable Research Center, and a former air district employee, said in March.

What's the plan?

Like the statewide rolling blackouts earlier this decade -- except with a positive intent -- different parts of the Valley will enjoy cleaner air at different times. Today, the yardsticks for pollution reduction are 2011, 2013 and 2014, with each year showing more residents breathing less polluted air.

Fans of Buck Owens and Merle Haggard may not like it, but "the last place will be Bakersfield," Sadredin reckons. "Generally, the south end is where the pollution travels."

That blue-sky blueprint builds off the air district's plan to clean up ozone pollution by 2024. However, activists are also unhappy with the ozone plan, asking for the air to be cleaned up sooner.

Whatever roadmap for scrubbing particulates and ozone from Valley air is drawn up, it ultimately must get the EPA's stamp of approval.

What can you do?

Cort encouraged Merced County residents to attend the Wednesday hearing in Fresno. Getting up to speed about the issue and supplying input form key parts of the strategy.

And anyone elected to office who's making decisions about the subject must also become knowledegable, said John Carlisle, a Merced city councilman. Dirty air has plagued Merced for a long time -- but cleaning it up still isn't a high enough priority.

The city could be doing more, but politics can get in the way, he said: "There's a lot of conflicting feelings, financial issues. In their hearts people want to do the right thing, but they don't want it to cost anything."

One action residents can take is to change their minds -- and behavior -- about public transportation, said Merced County supervisor candidate Casey Steed, who attended the April 14 pollution workshop with Carlisle. "Get people out of the mindset that public transportation is just for those without vehicles," Steed admonished.

It's true that harmful pollution pours out of cars, but especially heavy trucks -- the largest source of diesel pollution, said Don Anair, vehicles analyst for the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists: "It's not good stuff to breathe, and we know that each time we are behind a truck." If only more could be done to fight this pollution, clean air activists urge.

Climate change adds twist to river restoration

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
Monday, April 28, 2008

The best hope for cold-water chinook salmon to survive global warming may be near sweltering Fresno -- in the San Joaquin River, where salmon have been extinct for 60 years.

That's the latest twist in the long-running debate over restoring the San Joaquin, a project that will begin in less than 18 months.

Farmers, forced by legal settlement to give up irrigation water for the project, are skeptical about the claim. They see global warming as a reason to reconsider the half-billion-dollar restoration. Warmer conditions will kill the restored fish runs, they say.

But fishery experts say San Joaquin salmon would tolerate climate warming better than salmon in cooler places, such as Northern California.

The reason: The highest of the High Sierra would continue to provide the cold water that salmon must have to survive in the San Joaquin. Northern California has the lower end of the Sierra and, scientists predict, eventually won't have much of a snowpack, eliminating a lot of cold water.

"The restored San Joaquin may be an important place for the survival of salmon in the next century," said fishery biologist Peter Moyle of the University of California at Davis.

The back-and-forth over restoring the river has been unfolding for decades, with debate focused mostly on a troubled, 149-mile section of the San Joaquin between Fresno and its confluence with the Merced River.

Global warming came into the picture last year when a report from a worldwide panel of experts said about 40% of the salmon habitat in the Pacific Northwest could be lost during climate change.

If the San Joaquin is revived, as is planned over the next decade, it would have the southernmost salmon fishery in North America.

And the San Joaquin Valley is expected to warm up faster than the Pacific Northwest or Northern California.

This prompts some farmers to question the wisdom of trying to return salmon to the San Joaquin.

"Does it really make sense to spend this money and restore salmon down here?" asked Chowchilla-area farmer Kole Upton.

But Moyle, an authority on California's native fish, said it is a very good idea for spring-run salmon. The fish will move up the river from the ocean in spring and spend summer in deep, cool ponds near Friant Dam before spawning during fall.

The release of cold snowmelt from Millerton Lake in summer should keep the ponds cool enough for salmon even as the climate warms up, Moyle said.

The undercurrent of this discussion is political, as it has been all along.

Farmers agreed in 2006 to cooperate in the restoration only because they were losing a marathon lawsuit over the issue. They remain worried about the $2.5 billion agriculture economy that the river helped to create on the Valley's east side.

Now, they're committed to give up an average of 19% of their river water each year to reconnect the San Joaquin with the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Some of the water losses will begin next year. The first salmon are supposed to be in the river by the end of 2012.

Congress continues to work on a bill to fund about $500 million of the restoration. Much of the money is needed to rebuild the river channel for better flows that will help fish.

Farm officials have long doubted whether salmon could be restored on the San Joaquin. General manager Doug Welch of the Chowchilla Water District was involved in river studies several years ago. He said the restored salmon runs may not live long enough to experience global warming later in the century.

"The temperature will not be suitable for salmon," he said. "It will just get too warm when you get downstream."

Knowing there is a gloomy forecast for cold-water fish, such as salmon and steelhead, the restoration now looks like an even worse investment to many farmers.

But they don't speak publicly about it, saying privately that they fear they will trigger a movement to dissolve the 2006 settlement.

They do not want to see a federal judge decide how much water they must give up.

Upton, a Chowchilla district board member and a former negotiator in the settlement, has lost faith in the agreement. He does not fear the prospect of going back to court. Global warming plays a part in his thinking.

"I'm very concerned about investing in bringing back these fish if we're just going to lose them later on," Upton said. "As a society, we need to consider the best way to invest this money. That's something we need to talk about."

He said it would make more sense to forget about the salmon and restore about 85 miles of the river to Sack Dam, north of Firebaugh. That would at least help other fish species, such as trout, that are already in the river, he said.

He suggested spending more money on existing salmon restoration programs to the north, on the Merced, Stanislaus and Tuolumne rivers.

The most-quoted study in the argument was published last year by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N. network of 2,000 scientists and more than 100 governments.

The panel said salmon and trout in North America are likely to suffer the most harm. Effects could be seen in the Pacific Northwest over the next four decades, the panel said.

North of Fresno, the same possible problems await salmon on such Sacramento River tributaries as Butte Creek, California fishery experts said. The northern Sierra's elevation appears to be too low to support much of a snowpack decades from now, they said.

But the San Joaquin is different, said John Cain, a scientist specializing in river restoration with the nonprofit Natural Heritage Institute, based in San Francisco.

He said the Sierra above the San Joaquin rises well beyond 9,000 feet, with peaks ranging as high as 13,000 and 14,000 feet. The alpine wilderness is easily high enough to keep a snowpack, he said.

UC biologist Moyle said salmon historically developed a higher tolerance to warm water in the San Joaquin. And if temperatures are a little higher, the young fish will grow faster.

"The name of the game for juvenile salmon is to be as big as possible," Moyle said. "The bigger they get, the better their chance for survival in the ocean."

He said a chinook salmon in the San Joaquin can live in water 65 to 68 degrees, and it can survive in water six degrees higher for a short time.

"They move around to find the cooler places during the day, and the water cools down at night," he said. "Remember, they'll only be passing through areas downstream on their way out to the ocean."

But what happens during a prolonged drought? What happens if the water becomes too warm for young salmon to swim down the river to the Pacific Ocean?

Moyle said juvenile salmon could be captured and transported in trucks to the ocean during the worst years. But he said that scenario could develop at any time, even without climate change.

He added that now is not the time for Valley residents to shy away from restoring the San Joaquin.

The healthy river will mean far more than restored salmon runs, he said.

"The river will change from being an eyesore to an asset for the community," he said. "The salmon is the poster child. But you will get more native fishes back -- tule perch, pike minnow, hardhead, hitch and California roach. If you have those fish, you have a thriving ecosystem."

Controlled burns scheduled

By The Record
Stockton Record, Monday, April 28, 2008

WHITE PINES - The high country around Arnold may be smoky for much of the coming week.

The Stanislaus National Forest is planning to start Tuesday on controlled burns that will thin flammable vegetation from 420 acres north of White Pines. At the same time, controlled burns will also be under way on 400 acres near Long Barn on Highway 108.

In both cases, the burns are expected to last five days or so, with part of the burning done each day depending on weather and air quality.

The White Pines burn is about one mile north of White Pines along Summit Level Road. Smoke from that burn may be visible from Highway 4 and will likely drift down area canyons in the evening and early morning.

The other burn is about four miles south of Long Barn in the Tuolumne River drainage near Fahey Meadow. Smoke from this burn will likely be visible from Highway 208.

Both burns are intended to be low-intensity fires that will consume ground level and ladder fuels but leave larger trees undamaged. Such low-intensity fires are considered a natural part of the Sierra forest ecosystems.

Wildfire burns near LA, 1,000 flee homes, fire comes near

By JOHN ANTCZAK
Coalinga Record, Monday, April 28, 2008

SIERRA MADRE, Calif. - Crews overcame a threatening flare-up during the night and worked Monday to halt a wildfire east of Los Angeles that has sent 1,000 people fleeing their homes. Water-dropping aircraft were back in the air Monday to complement ground crews as more than 580 firefighters attacked the blaze. Calmer wind and rising humidity were expected to help, said U.S. Forest Service spokesman Ed Gililland.

The blaze had charred 490 acres Monday, authorities said. Containment had fallen from 30 percent to 23 percent because the burst of wind during the night pushed flames past some containment lines and within yards of several houses.

All of Sierra Madre's schools canceled Monday classes, and at least 1,000 people had evacuated their homes in the foothills. Authorities said no homes had burned since the fire began Saturday.

"This is pretty serious. Some of these areas have not burned in over 40 years," city spokeswoman Elisa Weaver said.

The blaze had been creeping northwest into the Angeles National Forest, Battalion Chief Tim Davis of the Forest Service said Sunday.

"It's very steep, inaccessible terrain, and it's very heavy brush," Davis said at a news conference. "Very difficult and arduous labor for these crews. You can't get bulldozers into the majority of where these fingers of fire run."

Two firefighters were treated for minor injuries, authorities said.

The blaze stranded 50 wedding party guests at a ranger station from Saturday until they were airlifted out by helicopter Sunday afternoon, Weaver said.

Investigators had not yet determined the cause of the fire.

A service of the Associated Press(AP)

Environmental Cost of Shipping Groceries Around the World

By Elisabeth Rosenthal
N.Y. Times, Sat., April 26, 2008

Cod caught off Norway is shipped to China to be turned into filets, then shipped back to Norway for sale. Argentine lemons fill supermarket shelves on the Citrus Coast of Spain, as local lemons rot on the ground.

Half of Europe’s peas are grown and packaged in Kenya.

In the United States, FreshDirect proclaims kiwi season has expanded to “All year!” now that Italy has become the world’s leading supplier of New Zealand’s national fruit, taking over in the Southern Hemisphere’s winter.

Food has moved around the world since Europeans brought tea from China, but never at the speed or in the amounts it has over the last few years. Consumers in not only the richest nations but, increasingly, the developing world expect food whenever they crave it, with no concession to season or geography.

Increasingly efficient global transport networks make it practical to bring food before it spoils from distant places where labor costs are lower. And the penetration of mega-markets in nations from China to Mexico with supply and distribution chains that gird the globe — like Wal-Mart, Carrefour and Tesco — has accelerated the trend.

But the movable feast comes at a cost: pollution — especially carbon dioxide, the main global warming gas — from transporting the food.

Under longstanding trade agreements, fuel for international freight carried by sea and air is not taxed. Now, many economists, environmental advocates and politicians say it is time to make shippers and shoppers pay for the pollution, through taxes or other measures.

“We’re shifting goods around the world in a way that looks really bizarre,” said Paul Watkiss, an Oxford University economist who wrote a recent European Union report on food imports.

He noted that Britain, for example, imports — and exports — 15,000 tons of waffles a year, and similarly exchanges 20 tons of bottled water with Australia. More important, Mr. Watkiss said, “we are not paying the environmental cost of all that travel.”

Europe is poised to change that. This year the European Commission in Brussels announced that all freight-carrying flights into and out of the European Union would be included in the trading bloc’s emissions-trading program by 2012, meaning permits will have to be purchased for the pollution they generate.

The commission is negotiating with the global shipping organization, the International Maritime Organization, over various alternatives to reduce greenhouse gases. If there is no solution by year’s end, sea freight will also be included in Europe’s emissions-trading program, said Barbara Helferrich, a spokeswoman for the European Commission’s Environment Directorate. “We’re really ready to have everyone reduce — or pay in some way,” she said.

The European Union, the world’s leading food importer, has increased imports 20 percent in the last five years. The value of fresh fruit and vegetables imported by the United States, in second place, nearly doubled from 2000 to 2006.

Under a little-known international treaty called the Convention on International Civil Aviation, signed in Chicago in 1944 to help the fledgling airline industry, fuel for international travel and transport of goods, including food, is exempt from taxes, unlike trucks, cars and buses. There is also no tax on fuel used by ocean freighters.

Proponents say ending these breaks could help ensure that producers and consumers pay the environmental cost of increasingly well-traveled food.

The food and transport industries say the issue is more complicated. The debate has put some companies on the defensive, including Tesco, Britain’s largest supermarket chain, known as a vocal promoter of green initiatives.

Some of those companies say that they are working to limit greenhouse gases produced by their businesses but that the question is how to do it. They oppose regulation and new taxes and, partly in an effort to head them off, are advocating consumer education instead.

Tesco, for instance, is introducing a labeling system that will let consumers assess a product’s carbon footprint.

Some foods that travel long distances may actually have an environmental advantage over local products, like flowers grown in the tropics instead of in energy-hungry European greenhouses.

“This may be as radical for environmental consuming as putting a calorie count on the side of packages to help people who want to lose weight,” a spokesman for Tesco, Trevor Datson, said.

Better transportation networks have sharply reduced the time required to ship food abroad. For instance, improved roads in Africa have helped cut the time it takes for goods to go from farms on that continent to stores in Europe to 4 days, compared with 10 days not too many years ago.

And with far cheaper labor costs in African nations, Morocco and Egypt have displaced Spain in just a few seasons as important suppliers of tomatoes and salad greens to central Europe.

“If there’s an opportunity for cheaper production in terms of logistics or supply it will be taken,” said Ed Moorehouse, a consultant to the food industry in London, adding that some of these shifts also create valuable jobs in the developing world.

The economics are compelling. For example, Norwegian cod costs a manufacturer $1.36 a pound to process in Europe, but only 23 cents a pound in Asia.

The ability to transport food cheaply has given rise to new and booming businesses.

“In the past few years there have been new plantations all over the center of Italy,” said Antonio Baglioni, export manager of Apofruit, one of Italy’s largest kiwi exporters.

Kiwis from Sanifrutta, another Italian exporter, travel by sea in refrigerated containers: 18 days to the United States, 28 to South Africa and more than a month to reach New Zealand.

Some studies have calculated that as little as 3 percent of emissions from the food sector are caused by transportation. But Mr. Watkiss, the Oxford economist, said the percentage was growing rapidly. Moreover, imported foods generate more emissions than generally acknowledged because they require layers of packaging and, in the case of perishable food, refrigeration.

Britain, with its short growing season and powerful supermarket chains, imports 95 percent of its fruit and more than half of its vegetables. Food accounts for 25 percent of truck shipments in Britain, according to the British environmental agency, DEFRA.

Mr. Datson of Tesco acknowledged that there were environmental consequences to the increased distances food travels, but he said his company was merely responding to consumer appetites. “The offer and range has been growing because our customers want things like snap peas year round,” Mr. Datson said. “We don’t see our job as consumer choice editing.”

Global supermarket chains like Tesco and Carrefour, spreading throughout Eastern Europe and Asia, cater to a market for convenience foods, like washed lettuce and cut vegetables. They also help expand the reach of global brands.

Pringles potato chips, for example, are now sold in more than 180 countries, though they are manufactured in only a handful of places, said Kay Puryear, a spokeswoman for Pringles.

Proponents of taxing transportation fuel say it would end such distortions by changing the economic calculus.

“Food is traveling because transport has become so cheap in a world of globalization,” said Frederic Hague, head of Norway’s environmental group Bellona. “If it was just a matter of processing fish cheaper in China, I’d be happy with it traveling there. The problem is pollution.”

The European Union has led the world in proposals to incorporate environmental costs into the price consumers pay for food.

Switzerland, which does not belong to the E.U., already taxes trucks that cross its borders.

In addition to bringing airlines under its emission-trading program, Brussels is also considering a freight charge specifically tied to the environmental toll from food shipping to shift the current calculus that “transporting freight is cheaper than producing goods locally,” the commission said.

The problem is measuring the emissions. The fact that food travels farther does not necessarily mean more energy is used. Some studies have shown that shipping fresh apples, onions and lamb from New Zealand might produce lower emissions than producing the goods in Europe, where — for example — storing apples for months would require refrigeration.

But those studies were done in New Zealand, and the food travel debate is inevitably intertwined with economic interests.

Last month, Tony Burke, the Australian minister for agriculture, fisheries and forestry, said that carbon footprinting and labeling food miles — the distance food has traveled — was “nothing more than protectionism.”

Shippers have vigorously fought the idea of levying a transportation fuel tax, noting that if some countries repealed those provisions of the Chicago Convention, it would wreak havoc with global trade, creating an uneven patchwork of fuel taxes.

It would also give countries that kept the exemption a huge trade advantage.

Some European retailers hope voluntary green measures like Tesco’s labeling — set to begin later this year — will slow the momentum for new taxes and regulations.

The company will begin testing the labeling system, starting with products like orange juice and laundry detergent.

Customers may be surprised by what they discover.

Box Fresh Organics, a popular British brand, advertises that 85 percent of its vegetables come from the British Midlands. But in winter, in its standard basket, only the potatoes and carrots are from Britain. The grapes are South African, the fennel is from Spain and the squash is Italian.

Today’s retailers could not survive if they failed to offer such variety, Mr. Moorehouse, the British food consultant, said.

“Unfortunately,” he said, “we’ve educated our customers to expect cheap food, that they can go to the market to get whatever they want, whenever they want it. All year. 24/7.”

Bad Air Days

By Michael Pollack
N.Y. Times, Sunday, April 27, 2008

Bad Air Days

Q. *Now that the weather is warmer, I’m wondering, when is the city’s air most polluted: spring (Achoo!), summer or winter?*

A. The summer, according to the city’s Health Department.

The most severe air pollutants are ozone and particulate matter, and are most prevalent in the summer. Natural pollutants like pollen and other allergens pose less of a health risk and are more prevalent in the spring and fall.

Ground-level ozone, better known as smog, is formed when pollution from vehicle exhaust, power plants and other sources reacts in the presence of sunlight. An abundance of ozone in the air can affect one’s respiratory system and may worsen asthma.

Particulate matter pollution is a complex mixture of microscopic solids and liquid droplets in the air. Some particles are produced by vehicles, power plants and other fuel-burning sources; others are formed in the atmosphere when other pollutants react.

Ozone concentrations are often highest in the afternoon, during the hottest part of the day, and are much lower inside an air-conditioned room than outdoors. Particulate matter is often highest in the early morning, when the air is relatively still.

On poor days, the health risk can be somewhat reduced by avoiding prolonged or heavy exercise, especially outdoors.

Derwood Residents Rally Against Highway

Protesters Survey Denuded Woods in Their Push to Halt Intercounty Connector

Donna St. George
Washington Post, Sunday, April 27, 2008

At the edge of their neighborhood's fallen woods, residents of Montgomery County's Derwood community rallied yesterday against construction of the intercounty connector, saying there was still time to stop the long-debated six-lane highway.

Many of them wearing forest-green T-shirts reading "A Wake for MoCo," they hoisted placards as they spoke out, marched and took aim at Gov. Martin O'Malley (D), whom they blamed for allowing the $2.4 billion highway project to proceed.

They called their event O'Malley's March, invoking the name of the governor's onetime Celtic rock band, and used the theme of an Irish wake. A bagpiper played, and a crowd of 80 people looked somberly upon a swath of cut-down trees, not far from backyard grills and suburban decks.

The site has been slated to become part of the highway.

"We're all stuck paying mortgages in what was a beautiful place," said Connie McKenna, president of the Shady Grove Woods Homeowners Association, which organized the event. "We trusted our government to look out for us. . . . They failed us here on Briardale Road."

More than 12,000 homes, McKenna said, are within 500 meters of the 18.8-mile project. She and other critics say the project will cause environmental damage without relieving traffic. "This highway is going through established communities. It's not a bike path. It's like I-95. It's like the New Jersey Turnpike," she said.

State officials say the roadway, which extends to the Laurel area in Prince George's County, will ease east-west traffic congestion beyond the Capital Beltway. It is scheduled to open in segments, starting in 2010. A federal court recently ruled in favor of the highway, but an appeal is pending.

The state has spent $300 million to plan and design the toll road and buy land for it, and has awarded $1 billion in contracts, officials have said.

Derwood is one of the first areas to be substantially affected by the project, and residents there invited people from other communities to get an early glimpse of what the project will bring. Fellow homeowners came from Olney and Washington Grove, from around Georgia Avenue, from near Colesville Road.

Paul Sevier, 56, said he lost three-quarters of an acre of his Rockville area yard to the highway, and he held a sign to let others know what was at stake in his neighborhood: "1,223 Trees. Sycamore Acres."

Sevier and many others said few officials have heeded concerns about harm to air quality and considered how that will affect children growing up in the shadow of the highway. "I just don't think that's being listened to," he said.

Derwood residents said it made all the difference to see the project as a physical reality rather than a diagram. "I think seeing the actual trees being taken out was a wake-up call that it was real," said Keith Fournier, 32, who lives in Shady Grove Woods.

It has inspired activism in the community, which residents said they hope will spread.

Two elected officials at the event said the project was ill-conceived: Del. Saqib Ali (D-Montgomery) and Montgomery County Council member Marc Elrich (D-At Large).

Elrich said the highway was at odds with the council's recent actions to limit energy consumption and reduce greenhouse gases.

"We took bold steps in one direction, and then we make great mistakes we can't possibly correct in the other direction," Elrich said. He urged residents to get involved and said there was still a chance that "this road will crash and burn."

That is exactly what many in the crowd said they hoped for.

There was Elmer Tse, 13. "I've been in those woods all my life," he said. "It's like a second home to me. Me and my friends, we used to wander them all the time. It's horrible to see them cut down like this."

Another resident, Rich Berg, 63, said he worries about noise, pollution and loss of property value. For 15 years, he said, he has enjoyed the quiet wooded area just beyond his property. "It's going to disappear," he said. Soon, "I'll be able walk out my front door and look at a six-lane highway or a brick wall hiding it."

Sacrifice: An American virtue on rebound

By RON FOURNIER, AP
Washington Post, Monday, April 28, 2008

-- It was a simple question, really, one the debate moderator hoped would lead Republican presidential candidates into a discussion about how much the public was willing to give to benefit the nation. "What sacrifice," she said, "would you ask Americans to make to lower the country's debt?"

Sacrifice is a word that Americans like to associate with their heritage, their ideals and themselves. But these days, it's not a word that comes easily to the lips of politicians with aspirations to the highest office in the land.

"It's absolutely unnecessary to sacrifice," said Ron Paul, setting the tone for the December presidential debate.

"Sometimes it's not so much doing things so that people sacrifice," said Mike Huckabee, promising to slash spending without pain to a single voter. "It's doing them differently."

Nor was Mitt Romney about to ask Americans to give up anything for any cause, much less fiscal discipline. "The sacrifice that we need from the American people, it's this: It's saying 'Let the programs that don't work go.'"

No Mother Teresas there. Whether the candidates misunderstood the question or were afraid to talk honestly about sacrifice in public, their careful answers reflected how most politicians prefer to focus on what they would do for voters rather than what they would ask of us. Like the cereal ad that boasted "eat right, sacrifice nothing," Washington promises us more services AND lower taxes, more war AND no draft, all gain and no pain.

We live in a time, and in a nation, consumed by consuming, a materialistic culture that encourages people to pursue happiness via shopping sprees and save sacrifice for tithing on Sundays and distant do-gooders.

But it would be a mistake to assume there is no stomach for sacrifice _ or its sister virtue, service _ in our society and in our politics. The desire to serve is part of human nature, and a particularly American virtue. History tells us that our selfless instincts flower in troubled times like these, and can be tapped by leaders looking for ways to motivate an anxious people.

Generations of Americans have been willing to die, or risk death, for causes greater than themselves _ to liberate the colonies from Britain; to abolish slavery or, depending on the point of view, preserve the Confederacy; to extend U.S. borders in fulfillment of our manifest destiny; to defeat fascism and curb Communism; and, yes, to dismantle Saddam Hussein's regime.

Whether we're asked to sacrifice individually (join the military, feed the poor, conserve energy) or collectively (mandated national service, cuts in entitlement programs, a tax on carbon emissions), the next president is likely to find the most receptive audience since John F. Kennedy's "ask not" address captivated a generation nearly 50 years ago.

Government data show Americans over the age of 16 are volunteering at historically high rates, with 61 million giving their time to help others by mentoring students, beautifying streets, responding to disasters, and much more.

And social scientists say the so-called 9/11 generation _ the leading edge of which consists of young Americans who were in high school and college when terrorists struck New York and Washington seven years ago _ may be the most civic-minded in the nation's history, in addition to being among most ethnically diverse, technologically savvy and spiritual.

What does sacrifice mean to Kelly Ward? Ask the 27-year-old Harvard graduate and she'll first argue that she's not personally familiar with the concept. Ward runs America Forward, an alliance of public service organizations dedicated to the principle that most of the nation's problems are being solved somewhere _ often by small, community-based nonprofit groups using innovative methods that government could support or copy.

"This isn't a sacrifice because I believe in what I'm doing. I've found what I was created to do, which is to do my part to change the world," Ward says while sipping coffee a few blocks from her Cambridge, Mass., office. "OK, I could make more money, sleep a lot more and have a personal life had I gone into a different line of work. But how's this a sacrifice?"

What does sacrifice mean to Sharon Rohrbach? She says it has blessed her life. After 16 years as a neonatal nurse in St. Louis watching too many newborns leave the hospital and return with life-threatening conditions, Rohrbach took a pay cut to create the Nurses for Newborns Foundation to bring nurses into the homes of poor mothers.

"I think there's something in each of us who wants to make things better for other people," she says. "I get more out of this than I give _ by a longshot."

What does sacrifice mean to James Appleby? "I can be without the pint of blood and help somebody out in a big way," says the pharmacist donating blood at the Red Cross building near the White House. "It's just a sense of duty I have." But he's astonished that anybody would call it a sacrifice. "Sacrifice is soldiers being away from their families," he says. "THAT'S sacrifice."

None of this is new. Saddled with weak and distant governments, early Americans since the settlements at Jamestown and Plymouth leaned on each other to tackle tough issues _ to feed and protect their communities, heal the sick, teach their children, and develop local economies.

The Founding Fathers had altruism in mind when they made the "pursuit of happiness" an unalienable right in the Declaration of Independence. John Bridgeland, former volunteerism czar under President Bush, writes in an upcoming book that the founders were not endorsing momentary pleasures fueled by the pursuit of material goods, "but the satisfaction that comes from a life dedicated to others and causes greater than ourselves."

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his "Democracy in America," reported in the 1830s that America was a giving nation. "Every American," he wrote, "will sacrifice a portion of his private interests to preserve the rest."

Nearly every American president has urged citizens to serve the country and each other. George Washington stated in his farewell address, "You should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness." In his famous "man in the arena" speech, Theodore Roosevelt said the conduct of every citizen matters to the health of the republic. Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Depression to give desperate men new jobs and eroded land new trees. John F. Kennedy created the Peace Corps.

"On your willingness to do that, not merely to serve one year or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country," Kennedy said in 1961, "I think will depend the answer whether a free society can compete."

And then there's George W. Bush.

In his State of the Union address after the 2001 terrorist strikes, Bush challenged Americans to commit at least two years "to the service of your neighbors and your nation" and created one of the largest service initiatives since FDR's CCC. But after the war with Iraq came, he went silent on service.

While an all-volunteer military is fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan _ suffering more than 4,000 U.S. deaths in Iraq alone, tens of thousands of injuries and scores of suicides _ the sacrifice has been largely limited to the troops and their families. No rationing or blackouts that brought World War II to the homefront.

Bush thanks veterans all the time for their sacrifice, but he won't ask Americans to pay higher taxes to foot the war bill. Would it not be a sacrifice to pay more taxes now to protect future generations from mountains of debt?

MSNBC commentator Keith Olbermann mocked Bush in 2007 for calling a troop increases in Iraq a measure of sacrifice. "More American families will have to bear the unbearable and rationalize the unforgivable," Olbermann said, spitting the word "sacrifice" out in disgust. "Sacrifice _ sacrifice now, sacrifice tomorrow, sacrifice forever."

Wartime sacrifice is often uneven. The wealthy could buy themselves proxies during the Civil War, and during the Vietnam War, the well-connected could avoid the draft.

John McCain was held for more than five years as a North Vietnamese prisoner of war. He could have gone home earlier, taken advantage of his status as the son and grandson of Navy admirals. But he couldn't bear to leave behind others who had been imprisoned longer.

Many men, it was suggested, would have punched their ticket home.

"Yes," the GOP presidential nominee-in-waiting said, in an interview. "But I think many men wouldn't have. ... I really do."

McCain was on stage during the December GOP debate, but moderator Carolyn Washburn did not ask him the sacrifice question. Months later, she is still surprised that no candidate seized the moment.

"People," the Des Moines Register editor says, "want to serve."

"When you give of your time to serve your community in some capacity, large or small, you're a patriot in the true sense of the word," says former Sen. Bob Dole, who lost the full function of his right arm in World War II. "You don't have to be shot to make a sacrifice."

Which brings us back to Kelly Ward, the 27-year-old do-gooder, taking her Ivy League education and putting it to use battling the nation's ills, even as she questions whether this represents any real sacrifice.

She is part of an uplifting cultural trend: Young, highly educated, highly motivated people are bringing their best-business practices to the world of national service _ fighting bureaucracies, lobbying government and spending money like venture capitalists to address the nation's most vexing problems. They call themselves social entrepreneurs, and you can find them in the most desperate corners of America.

In many ways, Ward and her peers are more like the Greatest Generation than their parents' Baby Boom generation.

"This is the next reform generation," says E.J. Dionne Jr., a Washington Post columnist and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who has written extensively about public service. "The metaphor I think about are the people who started out in service work in settlement houses before the turn of the last century."

Settlement houses offered social services _ food, shelter and schooling _ for the urban poor and immigrants buffeted by the industrialization of America. Jane Addams was the founder of the settlement movement in America; she spoke of and to young and affluent Americans who yearned to make a difference, and find meaning in their lives.

"The good we secure for ourselves is precarious, is floating in midair, until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life," she wrote a century ago _ speaking for her own generation and another in the distant future, one that hungers to pull together and help one another, to sacrifice and to serve.

The question is whether they'll be forced to continue to do so on their own, or whether the next president will lead them.

Making Ships Green, in Port and at Sea

By James Kanter
N.Y. Times, Sat., April 26, 2008

GOTHENBURG, Sweden — Something unusual is happening in Swedish waters. Crews docking at the Port of Gothenburg are turning off their engines and plugging into the local power grid rather than burning diesel oil or sulfurous bunker fuel — a thick, black residue left over from refining oil.

“I always knew these extremely dirty bunker fuels were helping produce acid rain that falls so heavily over this part of Sweden,” said Per Lindeberg, the port’s electrical manager and an avid fisherman. “I was very happy when we could switch off the ships.”

Similar high-voltage technologies have been introduced at Zeebrugge in Belgium, and in Los Angeles and Long Beach in California. But as at Gothenburg, only a small fraction of ships are equipped with plugs, so the benefits from shore-side electricity so far have been limited.

And despite the growing availability of cleaner technologies, the shipping industry has made little progress toward becoming greener, even as traffic grows heavier on existing routes and new routes open up in the Arctic. Indeed, the most recent efforts to tackle the problem have met resistance — less from the shipping industry, however, than from the big oil companies that supply the dirty fuel.

Shipping is responsible for about twice the emissions of carbon dioxide as aviation — yet airlines have come under greater criticism. Particles emitted by ships burning heavy bunker fuel, described by some seafarers as “black yogurt” for its consistency, also contain soot that researchers say captures heat when it settles on ice and could be accelerating the melting of the polar ice caps.

Health experts say the particulates worsen respiratory illnesses, cardiopulmonary disorders and lung cancers, particularly among people who live near heavy ship traffic.

Ship engines also produce large quantities of nitrogen, which contribute to the formation of algal blooms at sea. Those use up oxygen when they decompose and create so-called marine dead zones in heavily trafficked waters, like the Baltic Sea.

“The sheer volume of pollutants from shipping has grown exponentially along with the growth of our economies and of global trade,” said Achim Steiner, the executive director of the United Nations Environment Program. “Shipping is just less visible than other industries, so for too long it has slipped to the bottom of the agenda.”

James J. Corbett, an associate professor of marine policy at the University of Delaware, is the co-author of a study published in December that attributed 60,000 cardiopulmonary and lung cancer deaths each year globally to shipping emissions and forecast an increase to nearly 85,000 deaths by 2012 under current trends.

With the harm growing increasingly evident, this month the International Maritime Organization, a United Nations body, proposed reducing the sulfur content of marine fuels starting in 2010 on all ships. It also proposed steps reducing nitrogen oxide emissions from engines on new ships from 2011, with the organization intending to adopt all the measures in October.

The organization is continuing to work on separate measures to deal with the more difficult issue of carbon dioxide emissions.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the 27-nation European Union, has said that if the International Maritime Organization fails to make concrete proposals on carbon dioxide by the end of the year, it would consider regulating the matter itself, perhaps by including shipping in the

European carbon trading system. That could oblige ship owners to buy pollution permits from other sectors.

The European Parliament this week passed a nonbinding resolution urging the commission to act "urgently."

The shipping industry has supported the organization's recommendations because they would apply globally and be introduced gradually. But the fuel industry immediately called for a review of the most important element: a global cap on sulfur content of marine fuels of 0.5 percent by 2020 from the current maximum level of 4.5 percent.

That target poses "risks to security of supply and to shippers and truckers," said Isabelle Muller, the secretary general of Europia, an industry group representing BP, Exxon Mobile and other oil companies.

Ms. Muller said the fuel industry would not be able to build refining operations quickly enough and that oil companies would be penalized for doing so, because refining contributes heavily to greenhouse gas output.

According to a study last year for the American Petroleum Institute, it would cost the fuel industry $126 billion over 13 years to invest in equipment and chemicals to replace polluting bunker fuels with sufficient amounts of cleaner diesel to supply the shipping industry.

The study also indicated that the industry would pass on those costs at about $13 to $14 a barrel directly to the ship operators.

Already, Wallenius Willemsen Logistics, based in Norway and Sweden, uses fuels that contain less than half the amount of sulfur that would be required under the proposed International Maritime rules.

"We know customers want greener shipping companies as part of their overall supply chain," said Lena Blomqvist, an environmental and operations expert for Wallenius, explaining why the company was prepared to pay more for cleaner fuel.

Some shipping companies are investing in more efficient marine engines that capture and convert waste heat into more energy, cutting down on fuel use and on emissions at the same time. But of the hundreds of ships currently under construction around the world, only a handful of them include that technology.

Some shippers are running vessels at slower speeds to cut fuel consumption and emissions, carbon dioxide in particular. Other companies are even testing sail power. But those initiatives may be at odds with ever greater levels of speed and reliability.

In Gothenburg, ship crews hook up vessels using the shore-side electricity system with a single giant plug within about 10 minutes of docking. The technology cuts emissions of sulfur, nitrogen and particulate emissions by berthed ships to nearly zero, and cuts engine noise, too.

The system was pioneered in Gothenburg eight years ago after Stora Enso, a Swedish company in the energy-intensive paper industry, asked the port for help to improve its environmental profile. Costs for the system run from 70,000 euros (about $109,000) to 640,000 euros for each outlet and largely depend on how easy it is to connect to a nearby power grid.

In Gothenburg, the costs of the system were shared by Stora Enso, the port and the Swedish government. The electricity comes from the local grid but Stora Enso pays slightly more for "green" electricity generated by windmills.

One factor hindering expansion of shore-side power is the difference in the electrical frequencies of ships. Another factor is the higher cost of electric power compared with bunker fuel, which is not taxed.

So far, calls by the port for tax breaks for on-shore power have failed, disappointing port officials in Gothenburg. But Mr. Lindeberg, the port manager who developed the technology, said the rewards would be as much personal as professional.

Acid rain from sources like shipping has turned many of Sweden’s white sandstone riverbeds black over the last 15 years, he said, and fish no longer thrive as they once did.

“In the past all we needed to do was to throw a net into the river to catch the salmon,” he said. “It’s especially when I’m fishing that I think about the damage.”

Human warming hobbles ancient climate cycle

By Deborah Zabarenko, Environment Correspondent
Reuters, Sunday, April 27, 2008

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Before humans began burning fossil fuels, there was an eons-long balance between carbon dioxide emissions and Earth's ability to absorb them, but now the planet can't keep up, scientists said on Sunday.

The finding, reported in the journal Nature Geoscience, relies on ancient Antarctic ice bubbles that contain air samples going back 610,000 years.

Climate scientists for the last 25 years or so have suggested that some kind of natural mechanism regulates our planet's temperature and the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Those skeptical about human influence on global warming point to this as the cause for recent climate change.

This research is likely the first observable evidence for this natural mechanism.

This mechanism, known as "feedback," has been thrown out of whack by a steep rise in carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of coal and petroleum for the last 200 years or so, said Richard Zeebe, a co-author of the report.

"These feedbacks operate so slowly that they will not help us in terms of climate change ... that we're going to see in the next several hundred years," Zeebe said by telephone from the University of Hawaii. "Right now we have put the system entirely out of equilibrium."

In the ancient past, excess carbon dioxide came mostly from volcanoes, which spewed very little of the chemical compared to what humans activities do now, but it still had to be addressed.

This antique excess carbon dioxide -- a powerful greenhouse gas -- was removed from the atmosphere through the weathering of mountains, which take in the chemical. In the end, it was washed downhill into oceans and buried in deep sea sediments, Zeebe said.

14,000 TIMES FASTER THAN NATURE

Zeebe analyzed carbon dioxide that had been captured in Antarctic ice, and by figuring out how much carbon dioxide was in the atmosphere at various points in time, he and his co-author determined that it waxed and waned along with the world's temperature.

"When the carbon dioxide was low, the temperature was low, and we had an ice age," he said. And while Earth's temperature fell during ice ages and rose during so-called interglacial periods between them, the planet's mean temperature has been going slowly down for about 600,000 years.

The average change in the amount of atmospheric carbon dioxide over the last 600,000 years has been just 22 parts per million by volume, Zeebe said, which means that 22 molecules of carbon dioxide were added to, or removed from, every million molecules of air.

Since the Industrial Revolution began in the 18th century, ushering in the widespread human use of fossil fuels, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen by 100 parts per million.

That means human activities are putting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere about 14,000 times as fast as natural processes do, Zeebe said.

And it appears to be speeding up: the U.S. government reported last week that in 2007 alone, atmospheric carbon dioxide increased by 2.4 parts per million.

The natural mechanism will eventually absorb the excess carbon dioxide, Zeebe said, but not for hundreds of thousands of years.

"This is a time period that we can hardly imagine," he said. "They are way too slow to help us to restore the balance that we have now basically distorted in a very short period of time."

Southwest drought could be cyclical or climate change

By TONY DAVIS
Arizona Daily Star

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) -- The Southwest's current drought could be the start of the Dust Bowl-like future that some scientists have already predicted will come from human-caused warming.

Or, it could just be another in the long line of natural, cyclical droughts in this region dating back 1,000 years.

But one of the nation's leading climate scientists, the University of Arizona's Nobel Prize-sharing Jonathan Overpeck, says he's coming to believe there's "a real likelihood" the drought is caused by global warming. New research at the UA backs that up.

Some other scientists disagree, even as leading climate experts generally agree that someday, global warming will make the Southwest drier.

This drought is already known as the region's worst in more than a century and one of the worst in the past 500 years.

The dispute has implications for Tucson's water supply. The drought has already shrunk water levels in the Colorado River, which furnishes Central Arizona Project water that's pumped to Tucson.

If those believing this drought is caused by warming are right, major shortages could occur much sooner than expected on the river, says Connie Woodhouse, a University of Arizona geography professor who has studied tree-ring records to understand river runoff patterns.

Various studies have already warned that a drying climate could ultimately reduce spring runoff in the Colorado by 6 percent to 45 percent, meaning less water for the Central Arizona Project.

Until now, federal officials have predicted that shortages could start sometime after 2010 but won't be serious enough to cut deliveries to Tucson and Phoenix for another 20 years or more. Before then, non-Indian farmers in Central Arizona would take the big hit.

The leading proponent of the theory that this drought isn't natural says it could have been caused not just by warmer weather but also by the hole in the atmosphere's ozone layer that has been linked to past use of aerosol sprays. The key compounds in those sprays are illegal now, but the ozone hole may not heal for 70 to 80 years.

"Whether it's man-made global warming or a man-made ozone hole, either way, it's more drought for us," says UA climatologist Joellen Russell. She acknowledges that her opinion is based on "cutting edge" research, some still unpublished, and that the controversy may not be settled for decades.

Other scientists, however, say that while the current drought is consistent with what they would expect from global warming, it's too early to blame warming.

One reason some scientists hesitate to blame this drought on warming is that the Southwest has had large "megadroughts" in the past, as shown in detailed tree-ring records studied by UA's Laboratory of Tree Ring Research.

The worst megadrought came for six decades in the 1100s, when the Colorado River's flow was significantly below normal for 25 years, says David Meko, an associate professor at the lab.

All do agree that warmer weather aggravates the effects of drought.

Russell's theory rests on several points. She says jet streams have moved slightly toward the North and South poles over 25 to 30 years, probably because of global warming and the hole in the ozone layer. Jet streams in the upper atmosphere mark boundaries between hot and cold air and affect U.S. rainfall patterns.

This movement contributed to the current drought. That would match the regular pattern where jet streams move north in the winter, and drier, warmer weather dominates in the Southwest.

The jet stream's poleward shifts are caused by global warming or the ozone hole.

If it is a permanent change in the jet stream due to warming, "you'd have drought a lot more often and you'd never really recover from a particular drought," although there would still be some wet years, Russell says.

Jet stream movements toward the poles since 1979 have been documented in University of Washington research. Links between the jet stream movement and droughts are explored in two still-unpublished papers by Russell and the UA's Connie Woodhouse.

Qiang Fu, an atmospheric sciences professor at the University of Washington who helped write the jet-stream-movement study, says he also believes the jet stream is at least partially tied to this drought.

The most crucial connection - the link between climate change and the jet stream - has only been strongly suggested or hinted at in studies.

One study, published in Nature Geoscience journal this year, showed jet stream movement has expanded the tropics north and south toward the poles since 1979 at rates previously predicted to occur in the entire 21st century.

Russell describes that fact as a "smoking gun" backing up her theory.

Not so fast, counters Fu's University of Washington colleague, Atmospheric Sciences professor John Michael Wallace. Because the jet stream is moving faster than predicted, it's more likely that the cause is something else, such as the ozone hole, Wallace says.

Letters to the S.F. Chronicle, Sat., April 26, 2008:

Move California forward on high-speed rail

Editor - Regarding your April 20 editorial, "High-speed rail hurtles forward": High-speed rail is the best environmental alternative to help solve our state's growing gridlock, reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, reduce dependence on foreign oil, and protect prime agriculture land. If we don't build a high-speed rail train, California would need to build 3,000 additional miles of highway and five airport runways to meet future intercity travel demands. The cost of building a high-speed train is less than half the cost of expanding freeways and airports.

The 700-mile high-speed rail route would be the largest transportation project California has seen since the Transcontinental Railroad was built 140 years ago. It would stimulate the economy, at a time we need it most, by generating nearly 300,000 job-years of employment in the construction industry, and 450,000 job-years in related industries. It's a tremendous economic return on the State's investment.

Construction would begin in 2 to 3 years, with the first segment being completed in 2013 or 2014. Assembly Bill 3034, which I authored, demands that all excess revenue from high-speed rail be deposited in California's general fund after satisfying operating, maintenance, construction and financing costs. High-speed rail is environmentally friendly, and economically feasible. Join us as we move California forward.

CATHLEEN GALGIANI, Assemblymember, District 17

Stockton

The keys to success

Editor - Having lived with high-speed rail in London, Paris, and Stockholm for over 10 years and benefited many times from the network in Japan and the mag-lev in Shanghai, I am sympathetic to your editorial of April 20.

At the same time, you fail to mention key elements of Europe and Japans' success: higher gasoline prices, tolls on all intercity freeways in France and Japan, controlled, high domestic air fares until the mid 1990s, and perhaps most important, land-use patterns that placed a large share of all urban residents within 30 minutes of the high speed stations in city centers via metro, rail or in some cases fast buses.

Building the high-speed rail network is indeed a daunting task, but unless fuel prices, land uses, and other factors stimulate rail over car or air travel, the advantages may never materialize and the costs per passenger will be huge.

LEE SCHIPPER, Visiting Fellow UC Berkeley

A time to lead

Editor - Looking across the globe, there is a boom in high-speed rail projects as world population centers, like California, understand their global competitiveness and standing depend on the reliable movement of goods, services and people. California must maintain its economic standing. We must continue to lead in environmentally friendly solutions to transportation. We must jump start our weakening economy with public works projects that provide well paid jobs.

After years of prodding at the station, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is getting on board for a safe, convenient ride. In an era of partisan gridlock in Sacramento, I am hopefully that high-speed rail can provide the needed opportunity to get something done for the people of California.

FIONA MA, Assembly member, District 12 San Francisco

No boondoggle

Editor - Thanks for reminding readers of the $9.95 billion California High-Speed Rail bond measure on the Nov. 4 ballot. Its passage will ensure California's expected contribution of one-third toward the $30 billion cost of the project's initial phase, Anaheim through the Central Valley to the Bay Area, with a matching one-third from the federal government and one-third from private investors.

Your "skepticism" is, however, misplaced. While you mention favorably Assembly Bill 3034 and its "cleanup" inclusion of a ban on any station between Merced and San Jose and provisions to ensure private investment in the project (not merely "in the rail bonds"), you disregard additional AB3034 provisions to prevent any "boondoggle." Not more than 10 percent of the bond proceeds can be used for environmental studies, planning and engineering activities.

The bill's removal of all conceivable legal impediments to private investment in the project, not just the bonds, represents precisely the reason for AB3034.

I'm confident of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's timely support of the bond measure, just as he has publicly proclaimed California's need for institution of 200-220 mile-per-hour high speed rail, with its attendant environmental benefits and explosive speeds, without further delay. It may be ad hominem, but I can guarantee I don't intend public defilement of my public service record regarding taxpayer waste by a "boondoggle."

You are advised accordingly.

QUENTIN L. KOPP, chair, California High-Speed Rail Authority

San Francisco

S.F. Chronicle commentary, Monday, April 28, 2008:

A breath of fresh air in the Bayview

Building an oasis in one of San Francisco's most toxic neighborhoods

By La Constance Shahid

When most people think of San Francisco, they picture a beautiful, happy and healthy place to live. There's truth in that picture, but there are parts of the city that do not live up to that dream. Bayview Hunters Point is one of those places. Some people might call the Bayview a nightmare, but more than 33,000 people call it home. I've lived there all my 21 years.

Let me tell you what it's like to live in the Bayview. In six square miles, we have hundreds of toxic sites and the highest pollution emissions in the city. Thirty percent of my community is under the age of 21, more than in any other part of the city. We are twice as likely to be hospitalized from asthma as other city residents; there are increased rates of diabetes, as well as breast and cervical cancer.

It seems like there is a liquor store on every corner, housing is rundown, drugs are everywhere, police sirens are constantly racing down the streets, and gang violence is nearly inescapable. Having to be cautious of which streets to walk on and which to avoid isn't a way to live freely. It's a way to live in fear.

Too many of my peers live and die with the fantasy of "ghetto life"; they dream of big homes, fast cars, and a multimillion dollar jewelry collection. We know that we're not offered the best in life, but we make do with what we have, and some of us are fighting to make it better. A few of us, the ones hiding in dark corners, have dreams that take us to universities like Howard, Fisk, and Texas Southern. These young people are working hard to make their dreams come true, so that they won't have to worry about living their lives in fear.

Don't get me wrong - Bayview isn't all bad. We've got some of the most beautiful views in the city over San Francisco Bay. Our community is home to the first and only California state park in an urban community, a place where we can find some relaxation and peace. Organizations like Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) exist to give youth a voice and educate our community.

In the four years that I've been an intern with LEJ, I've learned and done so much for myself and my community - from food security to wetland restoration, LEJ has taught me about important things I never learned in school.

LEJ is part of a strong movement advocating for the health of the community, and together we've had some important victories, like getting the Hunters Point power plant shut down. And with the closure of this massive polluter, we have a chance for a new beginning. For years, we've dreamt of a place for Bayview residents to learn about environmental justice issues right here in our own community.

And now, right next to the power plant, we are building the EcoCenter at Heron's Head Park, the first totally off-grid building in San Francisco and the first green education facility for young people in my corner of the city. More than seven years after it was first proposed, we are finally breaking ground.

The EcoCenter will be proof that not everything in the Bayview is as bad as some might think, that we are capable of creating a new future. It will be wonderful for the community to have a space where the youth can come and learn about our history, witness solar and wind power and wastewater recycling in action, and for some, getting an introduction to the possibility of pursuing a "green" career.

The EcoCenter will stand as a symbol of environmental justice and equality - a symbol we really need in the Bayview. Now, we can go to a safe place that will give us the experience of working on social justice issues. We can go to the EcoCenter.

I am often asked why young people need to get involved in the growing environmental justice movement, and my answer is always the same. I once read that youth understand the least, but suffer the most. Youth should get involved with this movement because one day this planet will be ours.

I've learned that this world isn't a great place, and I for one don't want to raise my children in a world full of problems. I want to do what I can to find the solutions. I also want to do what I can to educate others, because we can't expect anyone to get involved if they don't know what's going on. One thing that I've learned while working at LEJ is that when youth come together as one, we can get our voices heard and effect change, and that's the best lesson of all.

La Constance Shahid is a youth intern at Literacy for Environmental Justice and the winner of the 2005 Brower Youth Award.

Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, April 25, 2008:

Working from home cleans air, cuts gasoline use and job stress

The American Electronics Association would like us to do more work from home. This editorial, for example, could have been written in our jammies at the kitchen table.

The electronics association, the nation's largest high-tech trade group, has a vested interest in telecommuting. Its members would love to sell more laptop computers like those that are becoming permanent fixtures on many kitchen tables around the Valley.

But there is also a public interest in keeping us out of the office.

A report the AEA released this week says Americans could save 1.35 billion gallons of gasoline annually if every worker who could work from home did so one or two days a week. The reduced driving would also keep 26 billion pounds of carbon dioxide from being released into the environment.

That's a special concern in the Valley, since vehicle emissions account for the bulk of the pollutants in our dirty air.

"Fewer commuters on the roads means reduced fuel consumption, traffic congestion and air pollution," Christopher Hansen, president of the association, told the San Francisco Chronicle. "It is a win for workers, who can reduce long commute times and strike a better life-work balance."

Companies benefit, too. A recruitment firm that surveyed 1,400 chief financial officers found that half said telecommuting arrangements are the second most effective thing they can offer a potential worker, after a big salary, and one-third of them said telecommuting was even more important than money in attracting new workers.

Unfortunately, mid-level managers are often wary of such arrangements, probably because they fear their employees won't work as hard from home.

Telecommuting experts say the most successful programs start at the top, when a company's leadership sees the advantages and pushes for people to work remotely. So if you would like to work from home and think your job is suited to it, the best way to bring it about is to get a top executive of the company to champion the idea.

Go for it. Clean the air, cool the planet and reduce your stress level. Help your company, and the computer industry, stay in business. All by staying home.

Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, April 25, 2008:

Cheap trick on emissions

Bush administration tries to sneak in clampdown on California, other states.

The Bush administration and its backward-looking allies in the auto industry have opened a new front in their effort to keep California from regulating greenhouse gas tailpipe emissions.

This time they buried a noxious provision in a long-overdue new proposal to improve federal automobile fuel economy standards.

The provision, which would prevent California from enforcing its historic greenhouse gas law, appears on Page 378 of a 417-page document released by U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters -- on Earth Day, no less.

It states in part that "any state regulation regulating tailpipe carbon dioxide is impliedly pre-empted," under the 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act.

All of California's top-ranking elected officials -- Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Attorney General Jerry Brown -- have rightly denounced the Bush administration's pre-emption effort.

In a letter to Peters, Sen. Feinstein notes that Congress added a provision to last year's energy bill to prevent federal pre-emption, intentionally rebuffing efforts by the president to amend the bill in a way that would have limited California's authority.

"Congress did not make the president's requested changes," Feinstein told Peters, "because it would have stripped California of the ability to protect the health and safety of its citizens from the threats posed by climate change."

The president's relentless efforts to stop California from enforcing its environmental laws have been resisted not just by Congress but by the courts as well. The U.S. Supreme Court and two lower federal courts rejected lawsuits filed by auto manufacturers last year, with the support of the Bush administration, that would have overturned the state's global warming law.

So, this newest attack -- pre-emption language tucked into the new fuel efficiency standards proposal -- is an end run around both Congress and the courts.

The new fuel standards proposed would require automakers to manufacture cars and trucks able to achieve an average of 31.6 miles per gallon by 2015, a significant increase in fuel economy standards that have not been raised in two decades. That's good. But it falls short of the standards necessary for cars to meet California's greenhouse gas emission standards. It's estimated that the state rules would require cars to achieve the equivalent of 36 miles per gallon by 2016.

Attorney General Brown accurately describes the Bush rules as a "covert assault" on California's historic greenhouse law. Mary Nichols, chair of California's Air Resources Board, calls it an attack on the state's sovereignty. State officials will vigorously oppose the pre-emption language during the 60-day rulemaking comment period. If they fail to get it removed in that forum, the state will sue -- again.

Even as evidence of global warming's harmful impacts on the planet mount, the auto industry, with help from the Bush administration, continues to oppose reasonable efforts to reduce their products' damaging effect on the environment. It seems this cynical exercise will end only when the Bush administration is no longer in office.

Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Saturday, April 28, 2008

Many reasons to reduce fossil fuel emissions

MediaNews editorial

One hundred years ago, progressive Republican President Theodore Roose-velt launched the modern conservation movement at a conference of governors. Nine days ago, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and officials from 17 other states met to promote tough emissions standards in the face of fierce opposition from a Republican administration that has failed to take sufficient action.

The 18 states represented at the meeting at Yale agreed with Roosevelt that pragmatism as well as idealism must be employed to successfully reduce carbon dioxide gasses, which most climatologists believe are largely responsible for rising global temperatures that could significantly change global climate.

The most effective way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions is to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, particularly oil.

Even if there were no global warming, it would be essential for the United States and other nations to significantly diminish their dependence on oil for a number of critical reasons.

First, new discoveries of oil are not keeping up with world demand, particularly as the economies of China and India grow. As demand continues to exceed supply, prices will continue to rise. In the not too distant future, we could all be wishing we had $4 a gallon gas again.

The high and increasing cost of oil is responsible for most of the U.S. trade imbalance, draining us of hundreds of billions of dollars a year.

Second, an increasing percentage of the oil the United States and other industrialized nations use comes from the most volatile parts of the world.

The world's largest known oil reserves are in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq, hardly bastions of stability. Instead of weaning ourselves from dependence on such nations, we are enriching them with vast wealth and fighting a costly war in Iraq with an uncertain outcome.

Third, reduction in fossil-fuel use reduces air pollution and the health problems that are associated with it.

So if global warming is not reason enough to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by using less petroleum, certainly our health, economy and geopolitical stability are.

Despite all of the benefits of reducing our fossil-fuel use, the Bush administration has consistently fought efforts by California and other states to curb carbon-dioxide emissions.

For six years the Environmental Protection Agency has fought California and other states' right to impose emissions standards that are stricter than the national regulations.

The EPA delayed a decision time and again, finally deciding that the state cannot act on its own, even though it would like to have more advanced emissions controls.

The EPA decision makes no sense and flies in the face of recent court findings, including one by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the EPA has the right to regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

The most recent EPA decision is based on the assumption that new federal emission and fuel efficiency standards are sufficient and that there is no need for states to adopt tougher regulations.

California and other states can move forward in federal courts in an attempt to overrule the EPA. But that would take time. It is probably best to wait until the Bush administration is gone.

No matter who wins the presidential election — John McCain, Barack Obama or Hillary Rodham Clinton — it is likely federal emissions standards similar to the ones in California will be adopted.

It is unfortunate that the federal government of the Untied States has not taken the lead in reducing carbon-dioxide emissions in a reasonable manner that employs science and market-driven economics.

There is no good reason why automobile fuel efficiency cannot be greatly increased. There are also many types of alternative energy sources that can be developed as well as resuming production of nuclear energy.

With oil nearing $120 a barrel, governments hostile to the United States in oil-producing Venezuela and Iran, huge trade imbalances, rapidly increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the air,

the threat of global warming, skyrocketing demand for oil in China and a war in Iraq, one would think there would be sufficient motivation to do all we can to reduce our use of oil.

With some innovative thinking, new technology and investment, the United States can dramatically cut back on oil consumption in the next few decades without harming our standard of living. In fact, it is essential to our economic well-being, health and global relations that we do so.

Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Saturday, April 26, 2008

Environmental thinking for a new century

By VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

Tuesday was Earth Day, and it reminded us how environmentalism has helped to preserve the natural habitat of the United States -- reducing the man-made pollution of our soils, air and water that is a byproduct of modern industrial life.

But now we are in a new phase of environmental challenges, as billions of people across an interconnected and resource-scarce world seek an affluent lifestyle once confined to Europe and the United States.

No longer are the old environmental questions of pollution versus conservation so simply framed. Instead, the choices facing us, at least for the next few decades, are not between bad and good, but between bad and far worse.

One example of where these diverse and often complex concerns meet is the debate over transportation. Until hydrogen fuel cells or electric batteries can power cars economically and safely, we will still be reliant on gasoline or similar combustible fuels. But none of the ways in which we address the problem of transportation fuel are without some sort of danger.

We can keep importing a growing share of our petroleum needs. That will ensure the oil supply remains tight and expensive. Less-developed, authoritarian countries like Russia, Sudan and Venezuela will welcome the financial windfall.

Rising world oil prices ensure that Vladimir Putin, or his handpicked successor, can continue to bully Europe; that Hugo Chávez can intimidate his neighbors; that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad can promise Israel's destruction; and that al-Qaida can be funded by sympathetic sheiks.

The United States, in taking advantage of a cheap dollar, may set records in exporting American goods and services this year. But we will still end up with massive trade deficits, since we are importing every day over 12 million barrels of oil.

An alternative is biofuels. American farmers are planting the largest acreage of corn in over 60 years. But the result is that fuel now competes with food production -- and not just here, as Europe and South America likewise turn to ethanols.

One result is higher corn prices, which means climbing food bills for cattle, pigs and poultry, and thus skyrocketing meat, pork, chicken and turkey prices. Plus, with more acreage devoted to corn, there is less for other crops like cotton, wheat, rice and soy -- and the prices of those commodities are soaring as well.

What, then, is the least pernicious alternative? Unfortunately, for a while longer it is not just to trust in promising new technologies like wind and solar power; for decades to come, these will only provide a fraction of our energy needs.

Instead, aside from greater conservation, we must develop more traditional energy resources at home. That would mean building more nuclear power plants, intensifying efforts at mining and burning coal more cleanly -- and developing more domestic oil, while retooling our vehicles to be more fuel-efficient.

Nuclear power poses risks of proper disposal of radioactive wastes. Coal heats up the planet. But both can also reduce our need to import fossil fuels.

No one wants a nuclear plant in his county. But, then, no one wants to leave the country bankrupt paying for imported fuel, or vulnerable by empowering hostile foreign oil producers, or insensitive to the price of food for the poor.

It is also time to re-evaluate domestic oil production in environmental -- and moral --terms. The question is no longer simply whether we want to drill in the Alaskan wilderness or off the Florida or California coasts. Rather, the dilemma is whether by doing so, we can mitigate the world's ecological risks beyond our shores, deny dictators financial clout, get America out of debt, and help the poor afford food. We may not like oil platforms off the beach or mega-tankers in Arctic waters, but the alternatives for now are far worse.

In the Modesto, Guest commentary, Friday, April 25, 2008

SACRAMENTO BEE: Telecommuters save gas, time and stress

This editorial was written from home, and the American Electronics Association would like us to do that more often.

The association, the nation's largest high-tech trade group, has a vested interest in telecommuting. Its members would love to sell more laptop computers like those that are becoming permanent fixtures on many kitchen tables.

But there is also a public interest in keeping us out of the office. A report the AEA released this week says Americans could save 1.35 billion gallons of gasoline annually if every worker who could work from home did so one or two days a week. The reduced driving would also keep 26 billion pounds of carbon dioxide from being released into the environment.

"Fewer commuters on the roads means reduced fuel consumption, traffic congestion and air pollution," Christopher Hansen, president of the association, told the San Francisco Chronicle. "It is a win for workers, who can reduce long commute times and strike a better life-work balance."

Companies benefit too. A recruitment firm that surveyed 1,400 chief financial officers found that half said telecommuting arrangements are the second most effective thing they can offer a potential worker, after a big salary, and one-third of those CFOs said telecommuting was even more important than money in drawing new workers to their company.

Unfortunately, midlevel managers are often wary of such arrangements, probably because they fear their employees won't work as hard from home. Telecommuting experts say the most successful programs start at the top, when a company's leadership sees the advantages and pushes for people to work remotely. So if you would like to work from home and you think your job is suited to it, the best way to bring about the arrangement is to get a top executive of the company to champion the idea.

Go for it. Clean the air, cool the planet and reduce your stress level. Help your company, and the computer industry, stay in business. All by staying home.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Tulare County fights to save railroads. For more information on this Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

El condado lucha para salvar vías

Compañía quiere venderlas como chatarra

Hillary Meeks

El Sol, Friday, April 25, 2008

La compañía Tulare Frozen Foods, de Lindsay, ahorra $500,000 por año usando sus trenes para transportar 50 millones de vegetales congelados hasta Texas, Florida y Nueva Jersey.

Ese ahorro podría desaparecer muy pronto si la empresa

Ferrocarril del Valle de San Joaquín abandona casi 40 millas de vías en el Condado de Tulare. La compañía de ferrocarril, cuya dueña es Rail América, ha presentado por segunda vez una

petición federal para abandonar un segmento de 9.2 millas que se extiende de Exeter a Strathmore y un segmento de 30.57 millas entre Strathmore y Jovista.

La intención aparente de la compañía es de vender la vía como metal chatarra, dijo Paul Saldaña, funcionario ejecutivo principal de la Corporación de Desarrollo Económico del Condado de Tulare.

“Pensamos que este es solamente el primero de varios abandonos que presentarán, no sólo en nuestro ferrocarril sino que en otras propiedades a través de los Estados Unidos de Rail América”, dijo Saldaña. “Yo pienso que quizás ellos pensaban que nosotros seríamos los más fáciles de eliminar”.

Eso sería una suposición incorrecta, Saldaña dijo. Casi cada ciudad incorporada en el Condado de Tulare ha presentado oposición a la petición de Rail América.

Se está esperando una decisión de la Mesa de Transporte Terrestre sobre la petición.

Las llamadas a los abogados de Ferrocarril del Valle de San Joaquín y Rail América no fueron regresadas.

Efectos del abandono

“Esta es una amenaza significante al Condado de Tulare”, asegura Saldaña. “Nos quitará la posibilidad de traer compañías que usarían servicios de vía a Lindsay, Strathmore, Exeter y Terra Bella".

Tuff Staff, una compañía que hace poco se trasladó de Downey a Terra Bella, ha estado observando la petición de abandono ansiosamente. Una de las razones por la que Tuff Staff se mudó al Condado de Tulare fue la oportunidad de crecer —algo que quizás no suceda si se abandona la vía, dijo el gerente general Max Lee.

“La carga es un tema que está más y más pendiente”, Lee dijo. “porque el costo de la gasolina está subiendo cada día”.

Tuff Staff usa plástico polietileno de baja densidad para hacer productos 100 por ciento reciclables incluyendo cubetas de granja y plataformas rodantes. La compañía, que necesita el uso de trenes para traer el plástico que recicla, tiene planes de abrir operaciones en Terra Bella en agosto y no ha considerado lo que hará si se abandonan las vías del ferrocarril, dijo Lee.

El abandono también sería un golpe fuerte a los esfuerzos del condado de combatir la contaminación del aire, dijo Mike Ennis, supervisor para el Distrito 5 del Condado de Tulare. Ese distrito incluye una gran parte del área donde están las vías afectadas. Más camiones de transporte quiere decir más contaminación, Ennis dijo.

Los supervisores del Condado de Tulare y ciudades en el condado han estado hablando de la posibilidad de extender el servicio de ferrocarril para ayudar a la calidad del aire, dijo.

Pero sería muy probable de que compañías como Tuff Staff y Tulare Frozen Foods usen transporte de camión de transporte si se abandonan las líneas de Ferrocarril del Valle de San Joaquín.

Tulare Frozen Foods es la única compañía que está usando las vías del Ramal del Sur Exeter, comentó Saldaña, pero eso es porque el Ferrocarril del Valle de San Joaquín cobra un recargo de $950 por carro desde 2006.

“Es algo intencional por parte de ellos para desalentar el negocio y así usar las vías como chatarra”.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a wild fire in Southern California requires the evacuation of more than 100 residents.

Un incendio obliga a evacuar 100 casas en el sur de California

Hoy Internet, Sunday, April 27, 2008

Los Angeles-Las autoridades evacuaron a los habitantes de más de un centenar de viviendas en la ciudad de Sierra Madre ante la amenaza del primer incendio de la temporada en California, que seguirá activo al menos dos días más, informaron hoy medios locales.

Las altas temperaturas de las últimas semanas, la falta de lluvia y el viento favorecieron la propagación del fuego que ya asoló un kilómetro cuadrado de las colinas de Sierra Madre, mientras más de cien bomberos de varios puntos del sur del Estado trabajan en su extinción.

El origen del fuego se localizó en el Bosque Nacional de Los Ángeles, en el norte de la Sierra Madre, y amenaza a los residentes de la ciudad Valle de San Gabriel de 11.600 habitantes. Los nervios se apoderaron de los ciudadanos de la villa de Sierra Madre, que pasaron la noche en la calle mientras la Policía acordonaba algunas áreas como medida de seguridad ante la cercanía de las llamas.

Por el momento, no se ha registrado ningún herido por el incendio y desde cerca de la medianoche comenzó la evacuación de alrededor de 100 viviendas en la zona y se habilitó un centro de acogida en una iglesia cercana.

Este es el primer incendio de consideración que ha afectado este año a California donde se han registrado temperaturas récord para esta estación superando los 30 grados, en unas jornadas en las que se declararon otro focos de fuego de menor entidad en la región.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses an increase in eco-homes. New residential urbanisms focus on improving the environment.

Diseñan más comunidades ecológicas

El nuevo urbanismo residencial se enfoca en mejorar el medio ambiente

La Opinión, Friday, April 25, 2008

— Al equipo de planificadores y esposos formado por Andrés Duany y Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk se le considera como fundador de un nuevo urbanismo. Se trata de un estilo de diseño de comunidad que abraza el uso mixto (residencial y comercial) de la urbanización.

Plantean vecindarios amistosos a los peatones y con espacios ricos en áreas verdes, los cuales hacen recordar a los baby-boomers sus vecindarios de juventud antes de que la explosión de suburbios hiciera a todos esclavos del automóvil.

Duany y Plater-Zyberk formularon sus nuevos principios del urbanismo cuando vivían en una de las vecindades victorianas de New Haven, Connecticut, cuando eran estudiantes en la escuela de arquitectura de Yale.

En su vecindario había tiendas en las esquinas, porches en las entradas de las casas y una variedad de estructuras comerciales y residenciales bien diseñadas, lo que plantó la semilla de una idea que ahora se ha diseminado en este país y en otras latitudes.

La nueva comunidad prototípica urbanística es Seaside, en Florida, que Duany y Plater-Zyberk comenzaron a diseñar en 1979 para la parcela de 80 acres costeros del urbanizador Roberto S. Davis. Su plan tomó los mejores elementos de un puñado de ciudades meridionales elegantes como Key West, Charleston y Savannah para crear una comunidad basada en el concepto de vecindarios peatonales autónomos.

Además de 300 hogares, en la comunidad de Seaside hay una escuela, un Ayuntamiento, un mercado al aire libre, un club de tenis, un anfiteatro techado y una oficina de correos —todo lo que cualquier persona podría necesitar en una ciudad, y todo dentro de una simple caminata de cinco minutos—.

Según la organización sin fines de lucro Smart Communities Network, Seaside funciona como una comunidad debido a su diseño. Los pórticos obligatorios son posicionados cerca de las

veredas para que la gente se siente en ellos y propicie la comunicación con los transeúntes sin tener que alzar la voz.

Todas las calles están interconectadas, creando así una red que elimina senderos tributarios y reduce la conges- tión. Las calzadas entrecruzan la comu- nidad para estimular caminar y el ciclismo, mientras que las calles estrechas sirven para reducir la velocidad del tráfi- co. Los frentes de los edificios están a una distancia uniforme de la calzada y las calles son arboladas para fomentar el sentido que se vive en realidad en una comunidad y en un ambiente natural.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the opinion of US citizens should pressure President Bush and his allies in congress to reexamine and change energy policies that have allowed the record increase of gasoline prices.

GASOLINA: Demócratas piden presión ciudadana para que Gobierno regule precios records de hidrocarburos

Impacto USA, Saturday, April 26, 2008

Washington, 26 abr (EFE).- La opinión pública de EE.UU. debería de presionar al presidente de ese país, George W. Bush, y sus aliados en el Congreso para que cambien las políticas energéticas que han permitido precios récord de la gasolina, dijo hoy el senador Frank Lautenberg.

"Sabemos que no hay muchas esperanzas de que el presidente Bush se despierte de repente y vea la luz", dijo el senador de Nueva Jersey durante el discurso radiofónico semanal de los demócratas.

"Pero desafortunadamente sus aliados republicanos en el Congreso siguen respaldándolo con las compañías de petróleo y energía para perpetuar el statu quo y en contra del pueblo de EE.UU.", añadió.

Lautenberg insistió en que los demócratas están intentando cambiar las políticas energéticas, pero afrontan resistencia para llevar sus planes adelante.

Recordó que bajo el actual Congreso de mayoría demócrata se aprobó una nueva ley energética que permitirá, entre otras cosas, mejorar la eficiencia energética de los automóviles, así como invertir más en energías renovables.

Lautenberg destacó que a largo plazo es necesario atajar la especulación en el mercado a la que culpó de los actuales precios récord de los combustibles.

El senador insistió en que la respuesta a más largo plazo radica en reducir la dependencia de EE.UU. del petróleo y apostar por las energías renovables y la mejora de la eficiencia energética.

Añadió que esos cambios se traducirían en "cientos de miles de buenos trabajos", aunque alertó que el impulsar esos cambios será difícil debido al poder de la industria petrolífera.

El portavoz del Comité Nacional Republicano, Danny Díaz, respondió diciendo que las propuestas energéticas de McCain son superiores a las que ofrecen los demócratas.

"El senador McCain ha diseñado un plan que ofrece alivio a corto plazo en las gasolineras así como una estrategia a largo plazo para aumentar la independencia energética del país", apuntó.

McCain pidió recientemente una suspensión temporal de los impuestos federales sobre la gasolina.

Por su parte, la presidenta de la Cámara de Representantes, Nancy Pelosi, y otros legisladores demócratas solicitaron ayer que se abra una investigación sobre los elevados precios de la gasolina para determinar si existe manipulación. EFE

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Earth celebrates a day of awareness.

La Tierra festeja su día con conciencia

Esta celebración nació en 1970 para debatir la necesidad de proteger el medio ambiente
El Tiempo Latino, Friday, April 25, 2008

Con jornadas ecológicas debates y manifestaciones se celebró el 22 de abril el Día de la Tierra.

Esta celebración tuvo su origen en Estados Unidos en 1970, cuando el senador y activista del medioambiente Gaylord Nelson logró reunir a miles de universitarios y propagandistas, colocando la ecología en la agenda política del país. Poco a poco, el festejo se fue extendiendo a otros países.

“Se convirtió en un pretexto para evaluar la problemática ambiental”, comentó Javier Riojas, encargado del Diplomado en Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable de la Universidad Iberoamericana de la Ciudad de México.

El Día de la Tierra es también un evento educativo e informativo, a través del cual se ha logrado, a lo largo de casi cuatro décadas, acuerdos internacionales, nuevas leyes de protección, procedimientos de trabajo y nuevas formas de conducta entre la población.

Para celebrar la fecha, organizaciones tienen contemplados innumerables eventos. La Nasa, por ejemplo, anunció la transmisión en televisión de novedosas imágenes de la Tierra tomadas por astronautas desde el espacio exterior, en formato de alta definición.

Por su parte, la Agencia de Protección Ambiental realizó estos días su exposición anual de diseño sustentable, en el National Mall, en donde se exhibieron trabajos de más de 50 grupos escolares, en busca de soluciones para el medio ambiente.