

How do you want the county to look 40 years from now? Let planners know

By Ross Farrow

News-Sentinel, Tuesday, June 03, 2008

The community is invited to tell regional planners what they envision for San Joaquin County as part of a regional "blueprint" of the county's future through 2050.

The San Joaquin Council of Governments will conduct a community forum from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. today at the Lodi Public Library, 201 W. Locust St. Forums will also be held in Thornton, Clements and other county locations throughout the month.

The blueprint is intended to be a guide for growth, transportation and environmental challenges through 2050. Eight counties throughout the San Joaquin Valley will develop their own blueprint, which will address topics like urban sprawl, air pollution, congested roadways and loss of open space.

San Joaquin County's population alone is expected to double by 2030 and grow by more than a million people by 2050, according to regional planners.

Once the Council of Governments adopts the blueprint, community leaders and elected officials in San Joaquin County can use the blueprint to help guide their decision-making on regional planning efforts.

[The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) and Great Valley Center are joining the Council of Governments in developing the blueprint.

Meanwhile, members of the Board of Supervisors, who awarded a \$2.1 million contract last week to Mintier and Associates to develop the new county General Plan, said they were concerned that the public will confuse the General Plan, which is the county's land-use bible, with the blueprint.

Kerry Sullivan, the county's community development director, told the Board of Supervisors that the General Plan has more clout than the COG blueprint, although a lot of the ideas in the blueprint thus far are being incorporated in the new General Plan.

Supervisor Steve Gutierrez said he is concerned that three county supervisors sit on the Council of Governments, so that a majority of the five-member board will have already voted on land-use issues on the COG before the Board of Supervisors considers the new General Plan. Supervisors Ken Vogel, Victor Mow and Leroy Ornellas sit on the Council of Governments, as does Lodi City Councilman Larry Hansen.

Lodi-area county blueprint hearings

The San Joaquin Council of Governments, a group of city and county officials along with one member of the public, will host a workshop on the blueprint from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the Bud Sullivan Community Room at the Lodi Public Library, 201 W. Locust St.

Other local forums:

- Thornton: June 17, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Thornton Community Hall, 26590 N. Sacramento Blvd.
- Clements: June 25, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., fire station, 1891 E. Highway 88.

Other forums will be held in Tracy, Lathrop, Ripon, Escalon and Manteca. Two forums have already been held in Stockton and one took place in Linden.

Source: San Joaquin Council of Governments

Contact reporter Ross Farrow at rossf@lodinews.com.

Fumigant rules may tighten

Organic compound numbers higher than first estimated

By Cecilia Parsons

Madera Tribune, Friday, May 30, 2008

San Joaquin Valley growers will have to do more than limit field fumigant use to meet air quality standards for volatile organic compounds in 2009.

Regulators now say that emulsifiable pesticide formulations are adding more volatile organic compounds to the air than originally estimated.

The state Department of Pesticide Regulation initially said that limiting field fumigant applications and restricting the timing and application methods during the peak ozone period of May 1 through Oct. 31 would reduce emissions in the valley air basin enough to satisfy terms of a 2006 court order on air quality.

Finding that formulations for pesticides are included in the mix adds to the complexity of the situation.

Glenn Brank, DPR spokesman, said that field fumigants were targeted first because they produce more than 90 percent of fumigant emissions.

Gabriele Ludwig, technical director for the Almond Board of California, said a number of crops would be affected by the change. Since the limit on the amounts is based on 2007 data on pesticide use, Ludwig said there is nothing growers can do.

"We had no warning this was going on. We were told that with the emissions reductions from fumigants we would squeak by," Ludwig said. "Numbers changed and we had no control over that."

In January, Department of Pesticide Regulation rolled out regulations on soil fumigants for regions of the state with the dirtiest air in an effort to curb pesticide emissions of smog-forming volatile organic compounds during the peak ozone period. The rules limit soil fumigations and application methods during that time to lower emissions.

Ventura County, which is in a non-attainment area for air quality, along with the San Joaquin Valley, also has growers struggling with the limits.

Lower emission methods typically used include covering the soil with tarps, water sealing the ground or applied with drip irrigation. However, if more total acres are being fumigated even low emission application methods may not be enough to achieve the required reductions on emissions.

Recent pesticide use data from 2005 and 2006 reveal that emulsifiable concentrate formulations used in almonds in the San Joaquin Valley contributed significantly to pesticide VOC emissions. Ludwig said growers and pest control advisors are being encouraged to use non-emulsifiable concentrate formulations wherever possible.

Besides almond growers, carrot and potato growers stand to lose the most chemical applications during the May-October season. Almond growers typically apply soil fumigants in the fall, so Ludwig thought they would push that back to November, but the problem is that cooler temps affect the efficacy of the products.

Ludwig said she is encouraging growers to use non emulsifiable concentrate formulas where possible, but there is no financial incentive for chemical companies to reformulate products that are also available in generic form. In addition, companies that sell material worldwide aren't likely to reformulate just for California sales. Ludwig said if that is the case, growers might lose some products.

No other state has California's system for local enforcement of pesticide laws or requires permits to use restricted pesticides.

According to a DPR fact sheet on the new rules, there are 400 biologists working for county agricultural commissioners that enforce pesticide rules locally.

In the parts of the state where air quality standards have not been achieved, DPR will assign each grower an emission allowance that the ag commissioners will include as a condition of the

restricted material permit. It would be a violation of permit conditions if a grower's fumigant application exceeded the emission allowance.

A violation could result in the loss of a permit and possible referral to other agencies for further enforcement action.

Metal recycler to upgrade Redwood City facilities

By Shaun Bishop

Palo Alto Daily News, Tuesday, June 03, 2008

A year after a large fire at a Redwood City scrap yard spewed acrid smoke across the Bay Area, the metal recycler will invest \$5 million in upgrades that officials say will make it better prepared for any future blazes.

Sims Metal will bring in new metal-shredding and sorting equipment and build a new perimeter road as part of a plan approved last week by the Redwood City Port Commission.

The new machinery will replace an older shredder designed in 1989, said Brett Heinrichs, general manager at the Redwood City site.

With the equipment, which includes a computerized control room, workers will be able to process vehicles and other junk more quickly, which should prevent the buildup of large piles of debris such as the 40-foot mound that caught fire in April 2007.

The company also will extract more metals such as platinum, copper and aluminum from each vehicle, increasing profits and lowering the amount of debris headed to the landfill.

"With the metal market so hot, we don't want to throw anything away," Heinrichs said. "It's like throwing money away."

Sims recycled about 362,000 tons of metal last year, most of which was shipped to steel mills in the Far East, said Port Director Mike Giari. A single car generates about a ton of recycled metal.

"With these improvements, we expect them to be able to keep that tonnage up there," Giari said.

Last year's fire, which sent smoke as far as San Jose and Hayward, likely was caused by a spark from a battery or metal rubbing together and igniting upholstery among the scrap, Fire Marshall Louis Vella said.

The fire burned for about 22 hours, mainly because firefighters couldn't form a full perimeter and had to attack it primarily from Seaport Boulevard, Vella said.

"Any plant or piece of property that size, it's always a challenge on how to approach it from different angles," Vella said.

Sims workers had to move some of the debris with excavators to reach the heart of the fire, buried inside the mound of scrap.

Luckily, that pile was near Seaport and not on the other side of the property, where the fire would have been much more difficult to fight, Vella said.

The fire department talked with Sims officials after the blaze and decided a new, 30-foot-wide fire road dotted with fire hydrants would give firefighters better access to future blazes.

The company also was issued a notice of violation and fined \$20,000 by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, said district spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick.

Vella said Sims has been "very open to do whatever it takes" to reduce the fire danger.

Heat of Universal Studios fire lifted pollution

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, S.F. Chronicle and other newspapers, Tuesday, June 3, 2008

UNIVERSAL CITY, Calif.—(AP)—Southern California's air-pollution-control agency says air quality was slightly worse in the immediate vicinity of the fire that burned for 12 hours in the Universal Studios back lot.

But the agency said Monday that surrounding neighborhoods reported normal levels of air pollutants as the fire burned Sunday.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District says the intense heat of the fire carried much of the smoke aloft where it was diluted by cleaner air.

Water pressure blamed for Universal Studios damage

By Greg Risling, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, June 03, 2008

UNIVERSAL CITY, Calif. -Firefighters patrolled fire-damaged Universal Studios early Monday for flare-ups while authorities considered whether the blaze that gutted some of Hollywood's most famous backdrops was made worse by low water pressure.

At one point, Sunday's fire was two city blocks wide, and low water pressure forced firefighters to get reserves from lakes and ponds on the 400-acre property. The blaze was contained to the back lot, but burned for more than 12 hours before the final flames were extinguished.

"The water pressure situation was a challenge," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Michael Freeman said. "This fire moved extremely fast."

County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said authorities would investigate the water problems to see whether they reflect a larger shortfall in the area.

"There's no question that there was a lack of adequate water pressure at least in the perception of a lot of firefighters," he said. "We're going to find out what the problem was."

Universal Studios is a theme park and its back lot is a working studio, complete with streetscapes and soundstages. The fire, which broke out around 4:30 a.m. Sunday, destroyed the courthouse square from "Back to the Future."

The cause of the fire is under investigation. Damage estimates were not available, but costs are expected to move into the millions. The park was to reopen Monday.

A thick column of smoke rose thousands of feet into the air and could be seen for miles. "It looked like a disaster film," said Los Angeles City Councilman Tom LaBonge.

Concerns for air quality due to the acrid smoke and a request from fire officials prompted the South Coast Air Quality Management District to send a chemist to take air samples at the scene, said spokesman Sam Atwood. Results were expected Monday morning.

It was the second fire at the historic site in two decades, leveling facades, hollowing out buildings and creating the kind of catastrophe filmmakers relish re-creating. This time around, thousands of videos chronicling Universal's movie and TV shows were destroyed in the blaze.

But Universal officials said that they were thankful no visitors were seriously injured - though several firefighters suffered minor injuries - and that the damaged footage can be replaced.

"We have duplicates of everything," said NBC Universal President and Chief Operating Officer Ron Meyer. "Nothing is lost forever."

Two mock New York and New England streets used both for movies such as "Bruce Almighty," "Spider-Man 2" and "Transformers" and as tourist displays were a total loss, Los Angeles County Fire Inspector Darryl Jacobs said.

The city streetscape has recently served as a backdrop in television shows like "Monk," "Crossing Jordan" and "House," said NBC Universal spokeswoman Cindy Gardner. A set used for the Clint Eastwood-directed movie "Changeling" featuring Angelina Jolie also was destroyed, Meyer said.

Along with the courthouse square, the famous clock tower that enabled Michael J. Fox's character in "Back to the Future" to travel through time was damaged, fire officials said.

Ten people - nine firefighters and a sheriff's deputy - suffered minor injuries in the blaze. The deputy and a firefighter were injured in an explosion in the building where the videos were housed at around 2:30 p.m., authorities said.

Meyer estimated there were 40,000 to 50,000 videos and reels in a video vault that burned but said duplicates were stored in a different location. Firefighters managed to recover hundreds of titles.

The videos included every film that Universal has produced and footage from television series including "Miami Vice" and "I Love Lucy."

Hundreds of visitors who waited for hours outside the park gates were turned away Sunday after officials decided not to open the area. On a typical weekend day, about 25,000 people visit Universal Studios.

An adjacent shopping promenade also was closed. The MTV Movie Awards, broadcasting live Sunday night from the nearby Gibson Amphitheater, went on as planned.

The blaze was believed to be one of the longest-running commercial fires in Los Angeles County history. "It is one of the longest fires to extinguish because of its complexity and size," said county Fire Capt. Mike Brown.

PG&E pays to offset Democrats' carbon emissions

By SAMANTHA YOUNG - Associated Press Writer
Sacramento Bee Monday, June 2, 2008

SACRAMENTO -- California Democrats have recruited Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to offset carbon emissions related to the national party convention this summer.

The state's largest utility will buy \$8,440 worth of carbon credits that will come from a Northern California redwood forest.

"We want to make sure we go to a city like Denver to show that even though we're a big delegation, we think about making a small impact," state Democratic Party Chairman Art Torres said.

California's is the first Democratic delegation to announce such an arrangement as part of a national push by the Democratic Party to reduce or offset carbon output at its convention, Torres said.

State party officials asked PG&E - an influential utility with business interests before the Legislature and state agencies - to cover the average carbon emissions generated by its 441 delegates, and 62 alternates, committee members and staff. It amounts to \$10 a person.

The idea is to offset the carbon dioxide emitted by the airplanes and taxis that shuttle delegates into and around Denver during the Aug. 25-28 convention.

PG&E is the latest corporation covering expenses for California delegations attending both the Democratic and Republican national conventions. Other donors have pledged to cover transportation, catering, wages and other expenses. In exchange, they gain access to influential lawmakers and party power brokers.

"It's a great move by the Democratic Party to have somebody else pick up the tab," said Robert Stern, president of the Center for Governmental Studies in Los Angeles and former general counsel of the California Fair Political Practices Commission. "Why wouldn't they ask each delegate to chip in \$10?"

Former Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, said many delegates - especially college students - are living on a fixed income and can't afford to pay for the extras.

PG&E's contribution will come from shareholder money, utility spokesman Keely Wachs said.

The money will buy 844 tons of carbon to be absorbed by the 24,000-acre Garcia River Forest in Mendocino County owned by the nonprofit Conservation Fund.

The group manages the coastal forest to store more carbon dioxide than if the forest were left to grow naturally or cut aggressively for timber sales. It follows forestry management standards endorsed by the California Air Resources Board.

Heated arguments begin over climate change

by Zachary Coile, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, June 3, 2008

Washington - -- As senators began a raucous argument over climate change legislation Monday, even its sponsors admitted their chances of passing the Climate Security Act this year are, at best, a long shot. But both supporters and opponents of the Senate bill were so eager for the fight over the issue that lawmakers voted 74-14 to begin debate on the chamber floor.

President Bush issued a veto threat Monday, warning that the bill to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds by 2050, S2191, could saddle the U.S. economy with huge costs. And Senate Republican leaders, who hope to play up those same concerns, asked for 30 hours of debate before any amendments can be offered.

In other words, they hope to slow-walk the bill to its almost certain demise.

But Democrats also see value in this week's clash: They believe the debate will increase the bill's chances for passage in the next Congress, and could force some vulnerable GOP senators to cast uncomfortable votes in an election year.

"The American people deserve to know who is willing to step up to the plate," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and is a chief sponsor of the bill.

The dispute over the bill began early Monday as Bush, speaking at an event at the White House on taxes, warned that the Senate bill could add trillions of dollars in costs to U.S. businesses and consumers.

"You know, there's a much better way to address the environment than imposing these costs on the job creators, which will ultimately have to be borne by American consumers," Bush said.

Supporters of the bill began with their own noisy rally in a park across the street from the U.S. Capitol, where they urged lawmakers to back the bill, waving signs reading, "Yes to Green Jobs" and "Do it for the Polar Bear."

Sen. Joe Lieberman, independent-Conn., a chief sponsor of the bill, pointed out that a study by the Energy Information Administration, an arm of the Energy Department, has calculated that gas prices are likely to rise by, at most, 2 cents a year because of the climate change bill. He noted, by contrast, that the price of gasoline has jumped 250 percent since Bush took office.

"Would the American people love to limit the increase in gas to 2 cents a gallon a year?" Lieberman said. "You bet they would, instead of the enormous increase that has occurred, right?"

The bill's sponsors also pointed to a new analysis by the environmental group, Natural Resources Defense Council, which found that the legislation could lower gas prices by reducing demand for oil as Americans shift to more energy-efficient cars, buildings and homes.

The Senate bill has the high-profile backing of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Vice President Al Gore. Gore, in a statement Monday, said, "While it's important that people change their light bulbs, it's even more important that we change the laws."

The bill, sponsored by Lieberman and Republican Sen. John Warner of Virginia, among others, would require about 2,100 major U.S. emitters - mostly coal-fired power plants, oil refineries and

chemical plants - to pay for the right to emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Proceeds from selling or trading those permits could total over \$6 trillion over the next 40 years, and would be reinvested in renewable energy and rebates to consumers.

But Republicans warned that the bill would put U.S. manufacturers at a competitive disadvantage, while doing little to reduce worldwide emissions as China and India burn increasing amounts of coal to sustain rapidly growing economies.

"In the event that we acted unilaterally and we had a cap-and-trade system that reduced the amount of emissions of CO₂, these (U.S.) companies would be losers. They would merely be moved to China or India or Mexico," said Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, ranking Republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

But backers of the bill said the United States must start showing global leadership by cutting its own emissions while pushing developing nations to do the same.

"We're not going to sit around and wait for India and China," Boxer said. "Since when do we do that? This is America."

The debate is expected to last a week. The bill's sponsors said they are still searching for the 60 votes needed to break a filibuster. "I feel confident we're going to get over 50. We have a shot at 60, but it's going to be hard," Lieberman said.

S.D. farm county votes on huge new oil refinery

By DIRK LAMMERS, Associated Press Writer

ELK POINT, S.D. — A proposal to build the first new U.S. oil refinery in more than 30 years in this mostly agricultural corner of the Midwest is facing a make-or-break decision at the ballot box.

Union County residents vote Tuesday on Hyperion Resources' request to zone nearly 3,300 acres of pristine farm land north of Elk Point as a development district for the \$10 billion oil refinery, billed as a potential step toward national energy independence.

The proposal has been a contentious issue in this southeast corner of South Dakota, with supporters citing economic development benefits and opponents voicing environmental and quality-of-life concerns. Both sides have been campaigning door to door.

Just under 10,000 of Union County's 13,462 residents are registered to vote Tuesday.

The Hyperion Energy Center would process 400,000 barrels of thick Canadian crude oil a day, which company executives say would help the U.S. reduce its dependence on overseas oil. Construction could begin in 2010 and take about four years.

The company says it will leave the area if the referendum vote shows that residents didn't want the refinery.

"That's what we've said from Day 1," said Preston Phillips, a Hyperion Resources project executive. "We want to be in a community that wants us here."

Phillips said the U.S. desperately needs more refining capacity, and the energy center will bring in needed crude oil from a friendly neighbor to the north. The company has said it will bring in the crude oil by pipeline but has announced no specific plans for that transportation link.

The project, about 60 miles south of Sioux Falls, would create 1,800 permanent jobs and another 4,500 construction jobs over a four-year period, Phillips said. "The economic development that this project presents to the area is substantial," he said.

Project opponent Jason Quam rejects the argument that Union County needs saving. The county is doing well economically with a low unemployment rate and one of the highest median household incomes in the state, he said.

Quam, a Union County resident with the group Citizens Against Oil Pollution, said he thinks much of the refinery's public support comes from outside the county.

He believes residents will reject the proposed zoning change, saying they realize that a refinery would bring unneeded pollution to a beautiful area built on agriculture.

He noted that the project is supported by the state and neighboring towns and counties.

"But when it comes down to it, it's going to be local people who are voting," Quam said.

Hyperion billed the facility as a "green refinery," saying it will rank among the cleanest and most environmentally friendly oil refineries in the world. J.L. "Corky" Frank, a Hyperion project executive, said the plant will have the lowest emission levels of any U.S. refinery.

If voters approve the zoning, the company's next big hurdle is a lengthy [air quality permit](#) application being reviewed by the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

[S.F. Chronicle commentaries, Tuesday, June 3, 208:](#)

CARB diesel emission rule too costly

By Bob Ramorino

As a Californian, the second-generation owner of a trucking company in the East Bay with more than 60 employees, and as a parent, I, too, want to do my part to help clean the air that all our families breathe. For the past several years, California's trucking industry has worked closely with the state Legislature and the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to find practical, realistic ways to clean up diesel trucks, and to accomplish that goal without putting an undue burden on California's businesses and consumers.

In 2006, for example, the trucking industry transitioned to a new ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel, and we've worked with CARB on rules to curb truck idling. The California Trucking Association also backed legislation that would have banned the registration of any truck made prior to 1994, in order to remove some of the dirtiest, most polluting engines from the road.

In addition to the various regulations targeting truck emissions, CARB recently released the draft of a new emissions regulation that will be taken up by the board this October. This new regulation would require that every diesel truck or bus operating in California meet a stringent new emissions standard.

Although this regulation is still a work in progress, its impact is clear: In the next five years, every diesel truck and bus operating in California, regardless of the year it was manufactured, will be required to meet the new emission standard. Targeting older diesel vehicles is one thing, but to make a one-size-fits-all rule that even targets trucks less than 5 years old puts a heavy burden on businesses in California.

Some have mentioned new technology that can help diesel trucks meet these new standards. Unfortunately this technology isn't even in production yet so it is impossible to put an exact price tag on it. Consider that Raley's Supermarkets is testing one of these new diesel exhaust cleansing systems on just 20 newer-model big rigs at a cost of \$500,000. This system still needs to be certified by CARB and probably wouldn't be on the market until 2010. If we try to multiply these same costs by the hundreds of thousands of diesel trucks and buses that would fall under the new CARB regulation, we are looking at a regulation that would come with an unprecedented price tag just to retrofit trucks and buses. This doesn't include the cost of new diesel trucks, which can range anywhere from \$120,000 to \$150,000 each.

Despite claims to the contrary that have run on these pages, given our state's \$17.2 billion budget deficit, precious few state resources are available to pay for this sort of far-reaching regulation. It's been suggested that Proposition 1B bond money is available to clean up trucks, but the bulk of this money has already been allocated for targeted clean-up efforts that focus on California's ports.

Others have pointed to the CARB's Carl Moyer Memorial Air Quality Standards Attainment program as a potential source of funds for clean trucks. Unfortunately, there is very little money in this fund, and that money is only available for those who do not fall under a CARB regulation,

such as the new emissions rule. So unless truck owners had already started the cumbersome Carl Moyer application process, come October they will not be eligible for any of these funds.

Unfortunately, California's consumers, who are already coping with skyrocketing fuel and food prices, a credit and housing crisis, and a looming recession, will be faced with additional costs for this new regulation.

While California truckers want to do our part to clean the air that we all must breathe, this new regulation is troubling to many because it comes at a time when California is already enduring a severe economic downturn. We are joining with a broad coalition that includes businesses, nonprofits and agriculture to work with CARB to craft a sensible truck and bus replacement rule that both cleans the air and keeps California's economy moving forward.

Bob Ramorino is the president of Roadstar Trucking Inc. in Hayward.

Power industry needs visionary leadership

By Winston Hickox

Forty percent of greenhouse-gas emissions come from generating electric power - more than from cars, or any other single source. This little-known fact deserves much greater discussion and understanding. While building alternative energy plants and asking people to be more aware of their electric usage are important steps, they are only a beginning.

You may be surprised to learn that the technology exists to radically reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and we could apply it without building new power plants, and without asking consumers to make significant changes in their behavior. So why does the power system operate largely the same way it did 60 years ago?

The answer is, unfortunately, lack of leadership to ensure we implement the needed upgrades to take our electrical grid system into the 21st century. Despite a strong public desire to make energy usage more efficient, affordable and environmentally responsible, those who have the ability to make this happen have been dragging their feet.

The energy sector is in dire need of visionary thought and action if we are to meet the world's increasing needs for energy, all the while being mindful of climate change risks. We must avoid building unnecessary and/or "dirty" power plants, thus further damaging our planet and wasting our resources. We need to address the problem at its source: the grid system and the efficient use of energy in buildings and homes.

Consider, for a moment, how much computers have changed over the last 30 years. The same is true in virtually every major technology-based market, be it telecommunications, building and construction, and even the automotive industry. Each has evolved to meet environmental challenges and societal changes. It is past the time for the energy industry to do the same.

Since its initial development in the early 20th century, the energy industry has not taken any significant steps toward improving the way power is managed and delivered. While solar and other alternative energy sources have made progress in the way energy is created, simply pushing new energy sources onto an already congested and poorly managed grid will only complicate the problem.

Global demand for energy, especially with the surging economies of China and India, is expected to increase by as much as 60 percent over the next 20 years. Action can - and must - be taken now by those in charge to lower greenhouse gas emissions, slow human causes of global warming and prevent energy crises such as blackouts and their related financial calamities. There is an abundance of new and developing technology - not to mention investment capital - that is or soon will be available to help the energy industry make advances in the way it manages and delivers power. The technology exists today to offer utilities a central operating system - a "brain" that can guide and direct electrical flow, determining how resources should be managed across the grid and ultimately allowing more electricity to flow through the grid with the existing resources.

One way is to invest in technology that makes power generation more environmentally responsible. Another is communities and government working to drastically change the energy market by putting cities in charge of their own energy future. San Francisco has already adopted this model, called Community Choice Aggregation.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have already gone into developing new ways of improving our energy ecosystem, and now is the time for us to really start taking advantage of all the promise inherent in these new technologies. As part of the global society, all of us need to force the issue further and faster and demand that politicians and energy leaders take serious and immediate action to improve the power system. It is imperative that those who are making the tough decisions within the energy industry get on board and show strong leadership and vision. The technology is there to be had and the time for action is now.

Winston Hickox, the former director of the California Environmental Protection Agency, is a director of Optimal Technologies, which works to make power generation, transmission, distribution and consumption more environmentally responsible, reliable, secure and cost efficient.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, June 3, 2008:](#)

So much for the hype

Who to vote for? I am not voting for anyone. I have not received a single piece of campaign mail on recycled paper with non-petroleum based ink. So much for their hype concerning air quality and any other environmental issues.

Ann Pardini, Fresno

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Mexico City paints its rooftops green. In a new campaign, the city seeks to convert rooftops of buildings into gardens to help improve the air quality. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Pintan de verde el techo del DF

La Opinión, Monday, June 02, 2008

México - La alcaldía de Ciudad de México inauguró hoy una "Azotea verde" como parte de un programa que busca transformar los techos de edificios públicos y privados en jardines que contribuyan a [mejorar el medio ambiente y la calidad del aire](#) en la urbe, una de las más contaminadas del mundo.

Un total de 1.190 metros cuadrados de la azotea del Centro de Desarrollo Infantil del Sistema de Transporte Colectivo Metro, ubicada en el centro de la ciudad, fueron cubiertos con plantas arbustivas y pasto, lo que significó una inversión de 1,3 millones de pesos mexicanos (unos 125.000 dólares).

El proyecto, realizado por la Secretaría del Medio Ambiente en coordinación con el Metro de la capital, forma parte del llamado "Plan Verde" de la alcaldía, que incluye acciones de reforestación urbana para la ciudad, donde habitan 9,2 millones de personas, cerca de 20 millones si se toma en cuenta la zona metropolitana.

Durante el acto, la secretaria del Medio Ambiente de la capital, Martha Delgado, sostuvo que "entre los beneficios económicos, las azoteas verdes reducen el uso del aire acondicionado hasta en un 40 por ciento, lo que implica un importante ahorro de energía".

Asimismo, evitan tener que impermeabilizar un inmueble durante 40 años, lo cual "aumenta el valor de las construcciones alrededor de un 15 por ciento", manifestó.

En términos ambientales, este tipo de obras sirven para la "captura de polvo y partículas suspendidas que causan enfermedades en las vías respiratorias", como el plomo, y funcionan "como aislamiento acústico y térmico para la ciudad", destacó la funcionaria.

Los jardines captan además el agua de lluvia, devuelven humedad al ambiente y ayudan a disminuir el calor durante el verano.

Según Delgado, de esta manera se compensa la falta de áreas verdes en la metrópolis, a la vez que se mejora la estética urbana y se promueve la conciencia ecológica.

Es necesario "recuperar todas las azoteas que podamos, empezando por los edificios públicos", afirmó por su parte el alcalde capitalino, Marcelo Ebrard.

Ebrard apuntó que la reforestación urbana permite que "la ciudad tenga mejores condiciones para resistir cambios importantes en el clima", y recordó que los veranos tienden a ser cada vez más calientes.

Adicionalmente "tenemos temporadas de lluvias más intensas, un poco menos predecibles", dijo.

Debido al concreto y al asfalto empleados en las construcciones de la ciudad, materiales que generan un exceso de calor en el medio ambiente porque absorben grandes cantidades de energía solar, en Ciudad de México se da el fenómeno conocido como "isla de calor".

Por eso existen en la capital diferencias hasta de 10 centígrados en las temperaturas de sitios ubicados a la misma altura, pero a pocos kilómetros de distancia.

Datos de la secretaría del Medioambiente de la capital mexicana señalan que la Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México (donde se ubica Ciudad de México) aporta el 6,7% de todas las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero del país, con 43,4 millones de toneladas equivalentes de bióxido de carbono en 2006.

Se estima que por la urbe mexicana circulan 5,5 millones de automóviles y que el número de vehículos se incrementa a razón de 250.000 por año. EFE