

Smog: Dirty air makes allergies worse

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Friday, March 27, 2009

A national study involving 70,000 children, aged 3 to 17, showed that increased exposure to ozone and particulate matter makes allergies worse, according to the California Air Resources Board.

The study -- published in the January issue of Environmental Health Perspectives -- found that even small increases in ozone or particulate matter could trigger hay fever and respiratory allergy symptoms.

Ozone is a corrosive summertime gas that has been studied extensively for many years. Particulate matter, an assortment of very small liquid and solid particles floating in the air, penetrate deeply into lungs increasing the number and severity of asthma attacks, aggravating bronchitis and other lung diseases, and reducing a body's ability to fight infections.

"We have grown accustomed to allergies and operate on the assumption that the only relief is medication for symptoms," said ARB board member Barbara Riordan. "But, reducing ozone and particulate matter also helps. Children can use more energy on their school work and less on struggling with runny nose and itchy eyes."

Local trucking company fined for emissions violations

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, March 26, 2009

Britz-Simplot Grower Solutions, a San Joaquin Valley fertilizer business with offices throughout the region, was fined \$16,500 this month for air pollution violations.

The company didn't inspect its diesel truck fleet between 2007-2008 at its Hanford, Hollister, Terra Bella, Traver, Five Points and Stockton facilities, according to a press release from the California Air Resources Board.

Officials at Britz-Simplot's Fresno office called it a "more of a clerical paperwork error" than a deliberate violation.

None of the trucks fined violated the smoke emissions standards when actually tested, said Jim Cavallero, director of security.

"We want to move forward and work as diligently as we can to make sure every i is dotted and every t is crossed," Cavallero said.

Diesel exhaust contains a variety of harmful gases and over 40 other known cancer-causing compounds, according to CARB. In 1998, California identified diesel particulate matter as a toxic air contaminant based on its potential to cause cancer, premature death and other health problems.

Vehicle fuel efficiency standards to rise

The administration plans the first increase in requirements for passenger cars since 1985.

Associated Press

In the L.A. Times and other papers, Friday, March 27, 2009

Washington -- The Obama administration plans to raise fuel efficiency standards by two miles per gallon to a 27.3 average mpg for new cars and trucks in the 2011 model year, marking the first increase in passenger car standards in more than two decades.

Under the changes, which are slightly less stringent than those proposed by the George W. Bush administration, new passenger cars will need to meet 30.2 mpg for the 2011 model year; and pickup trucks, SUVs and minivans will need to reach 24.1 mpg, an administration official told the

Associated Press on Thursday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak in advance of an announcement expected today.

The fuel efficiency rules are the first step in meeting a 2007 energy law that will require carmakers to meet at least 35 mpg by 2020, a 40% increase over the current standard of about 25 mpg.

Passenger car requirements have remained unchanged at 27.5 mpg since 1985, drawing complaints from environmental groups that the government has been slow to push automakers to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles.

During his campaign, President Obama said he would support a 4% annual increase in the standards so the fleet of new cars and trucks would reach 40 mpg by 2022.

The Bush administration had proposed regulations last year that would have raised the standards to a combined 27.8 mpg in 2011, requiring passenger cars to meet 31.2 mpg and light trucks to hit 25 mpg that year. The plan would have cost the auto industry nearly \$50 billion.

The Obama administration has said it only had two months to produce the 2011 rules, which are required by April 1 to give car companies enough time to plan their vehicle lineup.

White House Announces International Meetings to Address Energy and Climate Issues

By Andrew C. Revkin

N.Y. Times, Sat., March 28, 2009

The Obama administration announced Saturday that it had organized a series of meetings among representatives of 16 countries and the European Union to discuss energy and climate issues.

The meetings, to be held in Washington in April and in La Maddalena, Italy, in July, will seek to resolve longstanding issues that have blocked the development of an international climate treaty.

The participants, who include Chinese and Indian representatives, will also try to create "concrete initiatives and joint ventures that increase the supply of clean energy while cutting greenhouse gas emissions," according to a White House news release. The talks, called the Major Economies Meetings on Energy Security and Climate Change, echo in name and goals an initiative begun in the last two years of the Bush administration.

Those meetings gathered developing and developed countries that were the largest emitters of the heat-trapping gases linked to global warming. The meetings were cast by the Bush administration as intended to set long-term goals for reducing emissions and to seek actions that could be taken in sectors of economies like power generation and manufacturing.

The talks organized by the Bush administration were criticized by some small developing countries, European officials and environmental groups as an effort to circumvent global climate negotiations led by the United Nations, although President George W. Bush said at the time that the meetings were intended to support the global talks.

The United States refused to ratify an earlier international agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, objecting that developing countries like China and India were not bound by its restrictions on emissions of heat-trapping gases.

Negotiations for a new global treaty are under way and will culminate in talks in Copenhagen in December.

The president of the National Wildlife Federation, Larry Schweiger, said Saturday that any such meetings were useful as ways to seek common ground among the world's biggest emitters of heat-trapping gases.

At the time, some environmentalists credited the Bush administration's effort for initiating direct exchanges about climate with China and India.

But Mr. Schweiger said he expected the Obama administration's initiative to be more productive.

"It's a matter of intent," he said. "I think the Bush administration never intended to come up with a big solution. I think this administration is truly committed to finding a solution for everybody."

Appeals court rejects windy argument

Court rules that dust kicked up by strong winds not subject to Clean Air Act

By Mateusz Perkowski

Capital Press Ag Weekly, Thursday, March 26, 2009

The U.S. Court of Appeals has dismissed an environmentalist group's argument that farm dust kicked up by the wind should be regulated as pollution.

The March 20 decision upheld a 2007 Environmental Protection Agency rule that created a regulatory exemption for certain types of emissions - including those from farms and mines - caused by "exceptional events."

In a previous ruling last month, the same court opened the way for dust generated by farm practices to be regulated as a form of pollution under the Clean Air Act.

However, the court rejected the complaint by the Natural Resources Defense Council, which claimed that dust from farms and mines shouldn't be exempt from regulation even if it has been aggravated by strong winds.

The group initially petitioned the EPA in May 2007 to change the exemption and challenged the agency's rule at an U.S. Court of Appeals hearing in October 2008.

"Pursuant to the unambiguous language of (the Clean Air Act), under no circumstances may emissions from mining and agricultural activities be considered an exceptional event, whether or not 'subjected to long-range transport,'" NRDC wrote in its petition.

The group argued that the exemption should only apply to natural events that are unpredictable and cannot be suppressed.

Dust from farms and mines is generated at predictable locations and can be controlled, which disqualifies it from the EPA's definition of "exceptional," according to NRDC.

The American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Mining Association, which intervened in the case, argued that the EPA's exemption protects farms and mines from unreasonable regulations.

"It is not always physically possible, in conditions of high winds, to control particulate matter to levels that do not exceed (federal air quality standards)," the groups said in a court document. "Even when physically possible to do so, the cost would often likely be extremely high."

Judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals rejected NRDC's petition largely on procedural grounds.

According to the court's opinion, the environmentalist group did not specifically challenge the EPA's exemption provisions when the rule was initially proposed.

Under federal law, groups can challenge Clean Air Act regulations in court only if they made their objections clear during the public rule-making process.

NRDC did submit a letter to the EPA when the rule was proposed, but its comments were not specific to the objections later raised in court, according to the ruling.

"Rulemaking proceedings are intricate and cumbersome enough. Agency officials should not have to wade through reams of documents searching for 'implied' challenges," the court opinion said. "It is not too much to expect interested persons to point to the portion of the proposed rule they are arguing against."

The American Farm Bureau Federation is relieved by the court's decision, particularly on the heels of its previous dust-related ruling, said Danielle Quist, an attorney for the group.

The EPA decides whether or not to classify an event as "exceptional" on a case-by-case basis, so NRDC basically overreacted in challenging the exemption, Quist said.

"They tried to make this rule into more than it is," she said.

Colin O'Brien, attorney for NRDC, said that the court decision does not require the EPA - which is now under a new administration - to abide by the farm- and mine-related exemption guidelines in the rule's preamble.

If the agency exempts emissions according to those guidelines, NRDC may challenge those actions in court, O'Brien said.

"At this point, our position is to wait and see how the rule is applied," he said.

Pump change good for Earth but not wallets

Gas stations in low-income areas may not be able to keep up with change

Stockton Record, Monday, March 30, 2009

SACRAMENTO - You felt the pain at the pump last summer. So did the Earth's climate; transportation accounts for about 40 percent of the state's greenhouse gas emissions.

A complex and controversial rule to be considered next month by California air officials would require a greater mix of alternative fuels to be available at the pump, which supporters say would cool down climate change and, potentially, save drivers a few cents when they fill up at the gas station.

But not everyone is cheerleading this change; some interest groups argue the rule may have the opposite effect than what is intended and could harm disadvantaged communities.

What's this all about?

The "Low Carbon Fuel Standard" is an "ambitious goal, unprecedented in modern industrial times," Stephen Kaffka, a University of California, Davis, agronomist, told members of the California Air Resources Board at a meeting last week.

The standard is one of the largest pieces of the state's plan to reduce greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2020.

The rule would require fuel producers to provide a greater mix of biofuels, hydrogen, natural gas or electricity. This would reduce our dependence on foreign oil and create a lasting market for alternative energy in the state, according to the air board. And it will cut greenhouse gas emissions to the tune of taking 3 million cars off the road.

"We've all been very fortunate, in many ways, to have lived in the oil era, but the oil era will come to an end," Kaffka said.

What's it going to cost?

It's hard to say. The rule allows fuel providers to decide how to meet the standard using whatever combination of fuels they see fit.

In the long term, though, cutting oil-based fuel in favor of other varieties should save California up to \$10 billion over the next decade, the air board says.

As many as 30 new refineries for biofuels could be built to meet demand, including a dozen in the San Joaquin Valley.

While future oil prices could sway the cost or savings dramatically, gas prices at the pump are not expected to increase, the air board says. If anything, they could decrease by up to 8 cents per gallon of gas.

So, what's the controversy?

The rule takes a "cradle-to-grave" approach at analyzing the impact various fuels have on our climate.

In the case of corn-based ethanol, this includes considering land-use changes, such as the destruction of South American rainforests so food crops can be planted to make up for land used to produce biofuels.

Ethanol producers feel this creates an unfair playing field, comparing them unfavorably with other fuels and may cause the entire rule to backfire.

Other critics say some fuels in question are unproven. Transportation businesses that ultimately use that fuel worry that their equipment may be incompatible, and that customers may take their business out of state.

"We're talking about jobs," said Kyle Goodman, of Fresno-based Inland Star Distribution Centers. "It means a lot to our industry."

Despite the state's cost predictions, any unexpected rise in energy costs would have a disproportionate effect on low-income communities, warned a representative with the Mexican-American Political Association

What's next?

Board members are to vote on the plan at their April 23 meeting. Visit www.arb.ca.gov and click on the "Low Carbon Fuel" link.

New California air board rule will require auto shops to inflate tires

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Monday, March 30, 2009

The latest target of California's war on global warming: squishy tires.

Thursday, the state Air Resources Board voted 8-0 in favor of a rule that requires most automotive service shops to check and inflate tires to the recommended pressure.

The measure should prolong tire life and improve fuel efficiency slightly, cutting greenhouse-gas emissions.

The tire measure is a small part of California's climate-change strategy, accounting for less than 0.5 percent of the state's 2020 emissions-reduction target. But it's one of the few immediate changes that consumers are likely to notice.

Enforcement of the rule will start in July 2010. The regulation applies to roughly 40,000 auto shops statewide, including smog-check and oil-change stations and most other businesses that work on vehicles. Auto body and glass shops and car washes are excluded.

It's not clear whether customers will pay more to have their cars serviced as a result of the measure. Shops are free to charge as much as they like – or to charge nothing at all – for checking pressure and inflating tires. Many shops already check pressure as part of routine service.

"We're relying on the market to control it," said air board Deputy Executive Officer Mike Scheible. If shops appear to be using the regulation to gouge customers, Scheible said, the rule could be modified. Air board staff estimate the cost of labor to check and fill a set of car tires at roughly \$2.

Under the rule, auto shops will be required to have on hand a high-accuracy pressure gauge, which costs about \$25.

Customers are free to decline the pressure check when their cars are being serviced. Drivers won't be penalized for having soft tires. Law-enforcement officers won't check tire pressure during traffic stops.

For every 3 pounds per square inch of pressure that tires are underinflated, fuel economy drops by roughly 1 percent, according to federal studies.

Tires inflated with air typically lose about 1 psi per month. Inflating tires with nitrogen gas, as some shops do, slows the rate of leakage.

Roughly one-fifth of passenger vehicles have tires underinflated by 6 psi or more, according to federal and state studies. An additional one-third of vehicles have tires that are moderately underinflated, 1 to 6 psi less than what the manufacturer recommends.

Vehicles manufactured since 2008 are required to have built-in pressure gauges that notify the driver when tires are low.

Pump pain: Owners hit by pricey upgrade

By Dana M. Nichols, staff writer

Stockton Record, Sunday, March 29, 2009

MOUNTAIN RANCH - Gasoline no longer flows from the pumps at The Gas Station in this remote mountain village.

Jerry and Jackie Yates, owners of the business, which also sells auto parts, decided to quit selling gasoline rather than buy tens of thousands of dollars in equipment all California gas stations are required to install by Wednesday to reduce pollution from escaping gasoline fumes.

"We didn't even get a price on it, because we know we can't afford it," Jerry Yates said.

That means that Yates' former customers must now make a 20-mile round trip to San Andreas to fuel their cars. And they won't be alone.

The California Air Resources Board estimates that about 5 percent of California's 11,000 retail gas stations either already have or will stop selling gasoline rather than comply with the new rules, known formally as Phase II of the state's Enhanced Vapor Recovery regulation. That

translates into roughly 550 stations that will stop pumping statewide, many of them independent and small-volume stations serving remote rural areas.

Lakhmir Grewal, air pollution control officer for the Calaveras County Air Pollution Control District, estimated that three or four more of the county's 33 gas stations may ultimately stop pumping because of the new regulations.

All involved agree that higher-volume stations and those owned directly by the major oil corporations have had an easier time complying than have the independents.

In all, 22 of Calaveras County's 33 gas stations already had complied fully with the new rules by mid March. In San Joaquin County at the same time, 89 had complied and 117 had not, said Morgan Lambert, compliance manager for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Statewide, less than half had fully complied by late this winter. Yet about 80 percent statewide have at least obtained all the necessary permits to install the improvements, said Dimitri Stanich, spokesman for the California Air Resources Board.

Given those percentages and that there have been shortages of the required equipment, as well as shortages of people qualified to install the equipment, regulators are cutting stations some slack.

"If they are showing good-faith efforts to meet the deadline, then the district will penalize them for not making the deadline, but (will) allow them to keep operating," Stanich said.

That may be the situation at Ernie's General Store on Waterloo Road, where work crews have been on site in recent weeks installing the necessary nozzles and other vapor recovery equipment, including a carbon filter device to capture fumes from underground storage tanks.

Ernest Giannellini, owner of the independent store and gas station, said his bigger concern is whether the \$100,000 he spent will prove a worthwhile investment.

"We are really getting blasted from every which direction," he said of the situation faced by small independent gas sellers. "The only ones who can stay in business are the major oil companies."

Balaji Angle, owner of one gas station in Ripon and three in Stockton, said he has all the needed permits but his supplier is out of the nozzles he needs to meet the April 1 deadline.

"The government is going out of their bounds in imposing on small business people things we can not afford," Angle said.

Some independent station owners and some local government officials worry that the hidden purpose of the law was to drive smaller stations out of business.

"I don't think this is as much an environmental move as an economic one," said Steve Wilensky, the elected Calaveras County supervisor whose district includes Mountain Ranch. "Just the way this has been set up is, at the very least I would guess, unfortunate, and at the worst, predatory."

State regulators insist that the policy was based on science and the need to protect human health.

"These are just uncontrolled emissions. This is ten tons per day of volatile organic compounds," Stanich said of the fumes escaping from the earlier nozzles and storage tanks. Stanich said the reduction in pollution from the measures is the equivalent of removing 400,000 cars from California roads.

And he said that benefit stands even when taking into account the additional miles people in places such as Mountain Ranch will now have to drive to purchase fuel.

Meanwhile, State Sen. Dave Cox, R-Fair Oaks, has drafted SB 507, a bill that would extend the EVR Phase II deadline for a year. That bill is currently waiting for a committee hearing.

Source: Fuel efficiency standard going up

By Ken Thomas, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, March 27, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration plans to raise fuel efficiency standards by 2 miles per gallon to 27.3 mpg for new cars and trucks in the 2011 model year, marking the first increase in passenger car standards in more than two decades.

Under the changes, which are slightly less stringent than those proposed by the Bush administration, new passenger cars will need to meet 30.2 mpg for the 2011 model year and pickup trucks, sport utility vehicles, and minivans will need to reach 24.1 mpg, an administration official told The Associated Press on Thursday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak in advance of an announcement expected Friday.

The fuel efficiency rules are the first step in meeting a 2007 energy law that will require car makers to meet at least 35 mpg by 2020, a 40 percent increase over the current standard of about 25 mpg.

Passenger car requirements have remained unchanged at 27.5 mpg since 1985, drawing complaints from environmental groups that the government has been slow to push automakers to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles.

During his campaign, President Barack Obama said he would support a 4 percent annual increase in the standards so the fleet of new cars and trucks would reach 40 mpg by 2022.

The Bush administration had proposed regulations last year that would have raised the standards to a combined 27.8 mpg in 2011, requiring passenger cars to meet 31.2 mpg and light trucks to hit 25 mpg that year. The plan would have cost the auto industry nearly \$50 billion.

The Obama administration has said it only had two months to produce the 2011 rules, which are required by April 1 to give car companies enough time to plan their vehicle lineup.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, a project of the Center for Auto Safety, said the 2011 standard would require the administration "to make up for it in the following years. The good news is that they're promising that they will."

Transportation officials are working with the Environmental Protection Agency on a more comprehensive set of fuel efficiency rules expected later this year for vehicles through the 2015 model year.

Future standards will need to be squared with a pending ruling on a request from California to reverse a Bush-era decision that prevents the state from setting its own limits on greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

Thirteen other states and the District of Columbia want to adopt California's standards, which would cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent in new cars and trucks by 2016.

Obama asked the EPA to reconsider its March 2008 ruling denying California the right to control heat-trapping gases from vehicle exhaust. A decision on the request is expected in weeks.

A 2007 Supreme Court decision said the EPA had the authority to control greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles using the Clean Air Act.

Auto industry officials want a single, national standard and contend that multiple regulations will burden the industry struggling during the economic downturn.

Dave McCurdy, chief executive of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said he hoped the administration "can find ways to bridge state and federal concerns and move all stakeholders

towards an aggressive national fuel economy/greenhouse gas emissions program administered by the federal government."

Thornton-area carbon storage plan nixed, continues elsewhere

By Andrew Adams

Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, March 27, 2009

At one point, the small community of Thornton seemed poised to take a place on the forefront of the effort to combat global warming.

A coalition of government agencies, academic groups and companies joined together in 2003 to form the West Coast Regional Carbon Sequestration Partnership or WESTCARB.

The group is studying the feasibility of injecting carbon dioxide beneath the Earth's surface as a way to combat global warming. In 2006, the group found a piece of land in Thornton that could have served as a trial location. The plan was to capture carbon dioxide at industrial sources and then pump it underground.

Carbon dioxide is believed to be one of the major causes of the "greenhouse effect" that is to blame for global warming.

Adam Gottlieb, a spokesman for the California Energy Commission, said complications with securing permits for the project as well as negotiations with the property owner of the proposed site doomed the project.

While WESTCARB has a "very exciting" project that's scheduled to start soon in Arizona, Gottlieb said there are no plans for any future work in California.

"We're trying to work on something, but right now there is just nothing on the horizon in California," he said. "The Central Valley is an ideal area but right now we've got some issues with finding the right site."

The Thornton project had been scheduled to start in the spring of 2007.

WESTCARB secured permits on Wednesday to begin a trial project to inject 2,000 tons of carbon dioxide 3,500 feet below ground into an underground saline formation in Joseph City, Ariz., located east of Flagstaff and northeast of Phoenix.

The project is not unlike what was proposed for the Thornton project, which also would have entailed 2,000 tons of the gas.

Service stations may face closure

By Dana Bartholomew, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Monday, March 30, 2009

More than half of the state's gas stations will miss a Wednesday deadline for scrubbing toxic vapors from their pumps, setting them up for hefty fines or eventually even closure, officials say.

An estimated 2,000 of the 3,900 service stations in Southern California have not yet installed next-generation vapor-trapping systems, although they've known for years about the April 1 deadline, according to local air quality regulators.

Realizing the scope of the problem, lawmakers have proposed two bills seeking a delay. Independent gas station owners also want a year's extension, predicting a wave of closures if they're penalized for noncompliance.

"You're going to see gas stations shut down. You're going to see massive unemployment. You're going to see (gas) prices creep up. You're going to see blight in urban areas," said Tom Kise of the Responsible Clean Air Coalition, a group of independent oil marketers advocating an extension. "It's going to have a devastating effect across California."

Local gas station owners blame a combination of bureaucratic bungling, the tight credit market and dire equipment shortages for their inability to install the vapor filters.

"It's extortion, is what it is," said Chatsworth businessman Andre van der Valk, who faces thousands of dollars in fines for not yet installing the equipment at his three independent gas stations.

At issue is the so-called enhanced vapor recovery system, ordered by the California Air Resources Board to remove smog-producing vapors emitted at gas stations.

Regulators say the EVR equipment will filter 10 tons of harmful hydrocarbons - the equivalent of 450,000 cars - emitted when motorists fill up at the pump. In Southern California, the systems will remove about 1.4 tons per day.

Research has found that the volatile organic compounds can exacerbate heart and breathing problems. One compound, benzene, can cause cancer.

But the health measures come at a price.

The nozzles and other EVR equipment cost about \$11,000 a pump, or roughly \$75,000 a station - costs expected to be passed on to motorists with a 1-cent-per-gallon increase.

State air regulators say the EVR mandate was set in 2000. Equipment to retrofit most pumps has been available since 2005, officials say, with the state extending credit to help station owners make the purchase.

Critics, however, vehemently disagree. They said the 2005 EVR system worked on only 10 percent of station pumps. They also dispute that the state offered financial help to the station owners.

But while most major oil suppliers have installed the emissions equipment at company-owned stations, independent operators have not.

More than 60 percent of the 11,000 service stations across the state have not installed the EVR equipment, CARB officials said last week. After April 1, they face fines from \$100 to thousands of dollars a day - or closure - depending on levels of compliance.

"We're not looking to put anybody out of business," said CARB spokesman Dimitri Stanich. "We just want to get the air cleaned up."

"We are aware that there are circumstances beyond local station owners' control and we are absolutely willing to work with them."

The South Coast Air Quality Management District reports that 2,027 stations in their jurisdiction have installed the equipment and 1,894 have not; all but 500 are in some stage of the permit process.

An additional 1,137 low-volume fuel dispensers are exempt.

Last week, the agency announced that fines will be ramped up for the worst offenders beginning this summer. Stations that still haven't complied by Dec. 31 will be closed.

Critics, however, say the depths of a recession is no time to enforce a regulation they claim will have only a marginal effect on air quality. They also say it was only two years ago that an EVR system was certified to work on all gas station pumps.

They add that, in the crunch to install two EVR systems with sketchy availability, gas station owners have gotten fleeced by bogus out-of-state contractors.

"This is just sheer craziness on the part of CARB," said state Sen. Dave Cox, R-Fair Oaks, author of a bill seeking an extension. "It is just nutso."

Van der Valk, whose family has owned service stations for decades, runs two company-owned Shell stations in the San Fernando Valley, with vapor equipment installed by Shell. Since August, he said he's had to replace a dozen broken or defective new EVR nozzles costing \$400 each.

He said he's tried everything he could to install emissions equipment at his three family-owned Alliance stations in Simi Valley, Santa Monica and Santa Paula.

Financing promised earlier by the state has not been made available, he said, while other funding sources for small businesses dried up.

He said it took him nearly three months to wrangle a \$225,000 bank loan, which was finally approved earlier this month.

But when he tried to buy the vapor-recovery system, he said parts were unavailable. In addition, there were no equipment contractors in sight. Obtaining necessary city permits resulted in even further delays.

And when van der Valk tried arranging a meeting with Air Resources Board officials, he said no one would agree to speak with him.

"We're not saying we're not going to (comply)," said van der Valk, of Chatsworth, who was honored for his heroism in rescuing passengers during the Sept. 12 Metrolink crash. "We're just saying, let's be realistic.

"The economy, financing, parts availability, the time it takes to get permits, and the cost - we need more time."

Outside wood boilers drawing attention

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, March 29, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Outdoor wood boilers—popular with many homeowners fed up with rising prices for home heating fuel—are getting attention this winter from neighbors, public officials and health advocates.

Sales of the outdoor heaters spiked last summer in the Fairbanks area when oil prices rose dramatically. While homeowners welcomed the savings in heating costs, neighbors weren't as thrilled, especially since improperly burning fuels can cause the units to emit thick plumes of soot.

That, in part, prompted officials at the Fairbanks North Star Borough and the Alaska Legislature to consider rules that would tighten emission standards for home heating systems. The rules also would give tax breaks for residents who upgrade their less-efficient systems.

A possible borough ordinance also could clamp down on outdoor boilers that emit enough to be a nuisance to neighbors, Borough Mayor Jim Whitaker said.

Making matters worse is Fairbanks' poor air quality, which has placed the city on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of communities with chronic problems. The problem has been identified as "particulate" air pollution soot and dust from a blend of sources.

A report in February by the Cold Climate Housing Research Center suggested wood stoves, and particularly outdoor wood boilers, are the biggest culprits when it comes to particulate pollution coming from homes.

The report also indicated an aggressive pollution prevention program could halve borough air pollution.

The borough, which paid the research center \$20,000 to conduct the study, has been preparing to respond to the EPA's decision to list Fairbanks as a problem polluter. Ryan Colgan, who

helped draft the study, said chief among the recommendations is a future cap on emissions from coal- and wood-burning heating systems, including outdoor boilers.

Rob Richards, whose store sells two models of outdoor boilers, said local officials have done a good job of educating those using wood-fired heating systems to avoid burning wet, "green" and improperly dried wood, which he blames for much of the neighbor-to-neighbor issues.

Richards suggested that the new regulations need to balance both the need for improved air quality but also the need to heat homes in one of the coldest places in the United States.

"If wood is not an acceptable heat (source), something needs to be made available to these people," he said.

OC scientist honored for unraveling secrets of air pollution

By Pat Brennan, environment editor
O.C. Register, Friday, March 27, 2009

To keep us all from choking on the air we breathe, air quality regulators need computer models: systems that can predict how pollution forms and moves around so effective measures can be crafted to curb it.

To be accurate, however, the computer models have needs of their own, such as strong data on the chemistry behind air pollution. That's where UC Irvine chemistry professor Barbara Finlayson-Pitts comes in — and why she's receiving an award in May from a clean-air group in Los Angeles.

Finlayson-Pitts is known for her work on how sea salt in the air relates to smog formation; she and her group of researchers, known as AirUCI, also examine the intricate chemistry taking place on surfaces — buildings, concrete, vegetation — that contributes to Southern California's days of brown haze.

Nitrogen oxides, for example, are an important precursor to smog.

"People have known for decades that oxides of nitrogen go to surfaces to do some important chemistry that affects the atmosphere," said Finlayson-Pitts during a break in her hectic schedule. "We still don't understand, at a molecular level, the chemistry of what's going on there."

While the models can do wonders these days, they are sometimes limited by gaps in specific data.

"The models are missing a huge chunk of very important chemistry, I tell my modeling friends," she says. "They look at me quite rightly and say, 'That's because you chemists haven't told us.' "

Finlayson-Pitts will receive the Carl Moyer California Air Quality Award May 15 at the Coalition for Clean Air in Los Angeles, part of an event honoring "visionary women who are changing the future of California's air quality."

"She has a proven track record of being published in highly regarded, peer-reviewed journals for more than 25 years," said coalition spokeswoman Lisa Warshaw. "She's recognized as a good teacher training future scientists."

Finlayson-Pitts says she's especially excited to get the award because her husband, UC Riverside air pollution researcher Jim Pitts, received it two years ago.

"It's nice to follow in his footsteps here, and it's nice recognition of the importance of doing fundamental chemistry and developing appropriate air pollution controls," she said.

Researchers: Pollution lingers over ocean, coasts

USA TODAY, Monday, March 30, 2009

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — U.S. researchers say commercial vessels on the ocean are causing enough air pollution to cause "a significant health concern" for coastal communities.

The study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was released last month. Lead researcher Daniel Lack tells the South Florida Sun Sentinel that diesel engines aboard freighters, tankers and cruise ships are producing as much pollution as 300 million cars.

Lack and other NOAA researchers found that tiny specks of soot and sulfuric acid from the ships' smokestacks hang in the air for as long as 10 days and travel 20 to 30 miles inland.

Last year, the International Maritime Organization set new mandatory standards to reduce emissions from ocean vessels.

New Hampshire issues first climate plan

By David Tirrell-Wysocki, Associated Press Writer
USA TODAY, Sunday, March 29, 2009

CONCORD, N.H. — New Hampshire's first climate action plan calls for "a new way of living," beginning immediately, to reduce carbon emissions blamed for global warming -- and preparing the state for the warming the authors say is already under way.

Recommendations range from making buildings more energy efficient to expanding public transportation systems and bike lanes as well as building transmission lines to bring hydroelectric and wind power from Canada.

"Future economic growth in New Hampshire as well as mitigation of and adaptation to a changing climate will depend on how quickly we transition to a new way of living" based on increasing energy efficiency, using more renewable energy and driving less, the report said.

The 29-member Climate Change Policy Task Force worked for a year to develop the wide-ranging plan it released last week. It set a goal of reducing greenhouse gases to 80 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050, with a mid-point goal of a 20 percent reduction by 2025.

A public/private partnership will oversee and guide the plan's implementation. The New Hampshire Energy and Climate Collaborative includes leading businesses, nonprofit organizations and educational institutions.

In general categories, the 67 recommendations would reduce greenhouse emissions from buildings, power production and transportation; protect forests that help absorb carbon emissions; support regional and national greenhouse gas proposals; do more to educate the public on the topic; and plan to adapt to climate change.

The group is counting on future technology to achieve the ultimate goal, but said some changes can begin now, especially in energy efficiency.

"The technology, equipment and expertise exist today to substantially reduce the amount of energy required to heat and cool the average existing home, as well as to make new homes highly efficient from the outset," the report said. It cited studies showing homes can be made anywhere from 15 percent to 60 percent more energy efficient with improved air-leak sealing, insulation and equipment.

The authors say making plans to adapt to a warmer climate is important because even if energy saving changes begin immediately, they won't be in time to quickly affect greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere.

The report says New Hampshire has experienced climate changes already, including warmer winters, less snow, more rain, earlier spring run-off and more severe weather. The report said future changes could hurt the lucrative skiing and snowmobiling industries, lead to more droughts and floods, boost air pollution and hurt forestry and agriculture.

Slowing development to preserve forests is critical, the report said, because trees absorb and store large amounts of carbon and provide a renewable fuel.

Regarding power production, the recommendations include generating more energy from renewable sources; improving power transmission; and allowing regulated utilities including Public Service Company of New Hampshire to build renewable energy power plants.

The plan does not suggest replacing Public Service's coal-burning power plant in Bow. The company hopes to keep the plant running for 10 to 20 years, but its project to install air pollution devices to clean mercury from its smoke is being challenged.

On the roads, the report recommends tougher emissions standards and speed enforcement, laws against idling, incentives for people to buy energy efficient cars and better traffic flow to ease congestion.

The group also wants the state to lead by example, forming an Energy Management Unit to lead state efforts to cut energy use.

Alaska volcano quiets down after making ashy mess

By Rachel D'Oro, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, March 29, 2009

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—Alaska's Mount Redoubt has simmered down after spreading a layer of gritty volcanic ash over scores of communities that include the state's largest city.

The volcano was emitting low-level tremors Sunday but no more eruptions, monitors at the Alaska Volcano Observatory said. Seismicity increased when a plume rose 25,000 feet above sea level, but scientists said it appeared to be only vapor and they were not counting it among Redoubt's 18 eruptions during the past week.

The calm follows several strong eruptions Saturday that spewed an ash cloud 100 miles northeast to Anchorage, the state's largest city, and beyond.

Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport shut down because of the ash, which can cause dangerous damage to engines. Crews there were cleaning up runways, taxiways and passenger gates on Sunday, and one of the airport's three runways opened about 2 p.m., said airport spokeswoman Linda Bustamante. The airport is expected to be in full operations by Tuesday evening.

"The idea is to spread snow on top of the ash, get an ash-and-snow mix, then go out with graders with big blades in front, plow and truck the snow out," she said. "This is quite a cleanup going on."

Alaska Airlines, the state's largest carrier, canceled all flights in and out of Anchorage Saturday after the airport was shut down. The airline resumed flights to and from Anchorage late Sunday afternoon.

Nikiski, about 50 miles from Redoubt, was among the worst hit communities. Observatory volcanologist Game McGimsey said the ash accumulation there was as thick as a dime, although old-timers there say they've seen much worse. The ash—with the look and feel of dry, pulverized clay, but much more abrasive—can seep through car filters into the engine, but so far no one has reported any problems to mechanics at Steve's Chevron in Nikiski.

"Some of the hearty locals say, 'We didn't get any ash. Remember when we got three or inches?'" said station attendant Rick Olmsted, who was living in Cusick, Wash., when Mount St. Helens blew with ferocious force in 1980. Cusick, 285 miles away, got dusted and so did other states.

"Now, that's ash," Olmsted said.

Anchorage's dusting was more than enough for many residents, particularly in the southern sections where the ashfall was heavier, turning snow in yards a dark, dingy gray. Steve Morris, manager of the city's air quality program, said most of the ash particles are very large and would be difficult to breathe in.

Still, being caught unprepared in the ashfall could be uncomfortable, the particles exuding a hint of sulfur and stinging the eyes, nose and throat.

After the ash began to fall Saturday evening, a neighborhood True Value hardware store quickly sold out of face masks as panicky customers stormed in. People also were snapping up air filters and tarps and, on Sunday, cleaning supplies, said clerk Roger Foraker.

"You really don't clean this," he said. "You let it clean itself off."

Foraker had a more pressing concern. His wife has been stuck in Seattle since Thursday, trying to get a flight home.

"And she was on vacation for three weeks before that," he said.

Redoubt became active a week ago. McGimsey said the eruptions are like "bullets coming out of a gun barrel."

The volcano last erupted in 1989-90. A 1989 eruption sent ash 150 miles away into the path of a KLM flight carrying 231 passengers, flaming out its four engines. Pilots ultimately restarted the engines and landed safely.

The latest activity has caused flooding and mud flows into the Drift River valley, where the Chevron-operated Drift River Terminal is located. The terminal has 6.2 million gallons of oil stored in two tanks.

[Tri-Valley Herald commentary, Monday, March 30, 2009:](#)

Air board's rule will cripple an already crippled economy

By Tim Hunt, Herald columnist

The popping of the housing bubble coupled with the financial crisis that grew out of it has hammered California.

Throw in the drought magnified by court-ordered pumping restrictions that have farmers planning to leave hundreds of thousands of acres fallow or ripping out orchards and other permanent crops, and the state's economy is one of the worst in the country. To say nothing about the dysfunctional mess in Sacramento that is known as the Legislature.

So consider the California Air Resources Board last month when it adopted new regulations that require semiconductor makers to cut greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2012, eight years before the deadline that the Legislature imposed in its law to joust with global warming.

That 2006 law requires lowering levels of certain gases assumed to have a warming effect on the Earth's atmosphere to 1990 levels by 2020. It affects 85 plants in the state.

This came the same week Intel announced plans to invest \$7 billion, despite the current recession, in modifying its fabrication plants to produce the next generation of semiconductors. Remember the law that Intel founder Gordon Moore discussed in 1965 says that the number of transistors on a chip — thus the computing power — will double every two years. It's held true to this day. Thus, the constant innovation necessary to stay competitive in the hardware sector.

So along come the air regulators who decide that California really shouldn't have chip manufacturing anymore. Unfortunately, Intel already figured it out — the entire \$7 billion will be spent on plants elsewhere in the United States.

The air board action demonstrates — again — just how these zealots ignore any economic impact and focus only on goals that are based on science that's questionable at best.

Incidentally, the state air board already has declared war on diesel-powered trucks that are critical to commerce and the Bay Area's version decided that wood fires are far too polluting to allow on some winter nights.

Our local supervisor, Scott Haggerty, is part of that Bay Area group — direct comments to his office.

Watch for more of this locally after both the Pleasanton and Livermore city councils approved steps to deal with the mandates required by the state's anti-global warming bill — AB 32. Livermore approved adding a section to its General Plan to deal with the requirements.

Pleasanton received an audit of the greenhouse gas emissions in its city. Both cities, along with the other governmental agencies in the state, now will move to develop plans to reduce emission of those greenhouse gases.

If the actions of the air board are any indication, you will want to hold tightly to your wallet since transportation was the largest source of warming gases.

If you're looking for PGA golf at Wente this week, turn west and head for Hayward.

Yes, Hayward.

The Nationwide tour event has moved from the Course at Wente Vineyards to the TPC San Francisco Bay at Stonebrae in the Hayward hills this week.

The Stonebrae Country Club and surrounding residential development finally was developed after decades of debate when Hayward leaders realized that adding an upscale element would benefit their declining community. The golf course and the vistas are as sensational as those at Wente.

To enhance the broadcast, organizers reversed the nines so the 18th hole for the televised event will have a long-view backdrop of the Bay and the San Francisco skyline. It will make for sensational television. The course was designed by David McLay Kidd, the golf course architect who designed the famed Bandon Dunes on the southern Oregon Coast.

The dedicated volunteers that are committed to continuing adult day care in the Tri-Valley achieved a milestone this month when they released a request for proposal seeking a partner to operate the center.

The previous center closed last year when the Livermore Valley Charter School exercised its right to expand into the space the day-care leased. The service provides care for the frail elderly allowing their caregivers both a respite from those responsibilities and the time to conduct necessary business or go to work.

As more and more seniors age in place here in the Valley, it's a critical piece of the puzzle for those families.

Tim Hunt is the principal with Hunt Enterprises, a communications and government affairs firm. He is the former editor and associate publisher of the Tri-Valley Herald.

[Modesto Bee, guest commentary, Sunday, March 29, 2009](#)

Legislators share this session's priorities

Excerpt from a longer editorial

Editor's note: We invited the five state legislators who represent our region to provide information about the most important bills they are promoting this season. The descriptions below were provided by their respective offices. Committee hearings are starting over the next few weeks. To learn more about any of the bills, go to www.sen.ca.gov or www.assembly.ca.gov and click on Legislation. Bills can be searched by number, topic or author.

CATHLEEN GALGIANI, D-LIVINGSTON

17th Assembly District

PROPOSED LEGISLATION

AB 414: Would require the state Air Resources Board to establish a trade-down program that provides assistance to owners of high-use, newer-model, heavy-duty fleet vehicles to convert those for lower-use commercial operations

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, March 29, 2009:](#)

Applauds columnist

We should all applaud columnist Lois Henry for exposing yet another example of a governmental bureaucracy using questionable science to impact and control our lives ("Dodgy science will kill industry," March 15).

The California Air Resources Board's use of pseudoscience to impose "draconian" emission standards that will supposedly save "thousands of lives" is akin to state and federal fishery agencies concluding that the pumps that export water from the Sacramento San Joaquin Delta are solely to blame for the ecosystem collapse therein.

CARB's emission standards will have detrimental impacts on the state's already dire economy in a way similar to pumping restrictions from the Delta. Jobs will be lost and businesses will either be forced to close or flee the state like rats from a sinking ship. If additional restrictions, based on questionable science conducted by scientists with questionable motives or that blatantly lie about their credentials, are to be the norm, we'd all better grab our life vests.

Greg A. Hammett, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, March 30, 2009:](#)

Tulare race track plan is a bad idea

The proposed race track in Tulare should be stopped now before any more mistakes can be made. The report on this development that is available at our library is a blueprint for disaster.

If Hurricane Katrina had sent a plan of disaster to the city of New Orleans before the storm hit it would resemble the preplan for the race track and its impact on Tulare.

The city of Tulare is at the center of the most productive farm land in the world and it makes no sense to pave one thousand acres of this land. Agriculture is the number one industry in California and Tulare County is consistently in the top three counties in this industry.

The traffic and pollution a race track would create would be monumental. Just how funding for the road improvements has not been addressed. I have visited two NASCAR race tracks and looking at them, Highway 99 would need to be widened to at least three lanes in each direction for the length of Tulare County.

Page Avenue and Avenues 220 and 184 would need to expand and the freeway exits and overpasses redesigned. Are the residents on Page Avenue willing to have eight lanes of traffic adjacent to their homes? Residents in the southeast quarter will have their homes become inaccessible on race days. When leaving Watkins Glenn on race day, we were in a traffic jam for seven hours.

The stream that runs through Elk Bayou Park is seasonable; however, just a short walk along its banks and in any season reveals that it is a major bird habitat. The plan calls for a drag strip to be built along this water way. The noise and water pollution would destroy this habitat.

Speaking of habitat, the burrowing owl is mentioned as a possible resident of this site. The burrowing owl is on the threatened species list.

The report mentions the creation of jobs. We always need quality jobs.

The jobs created by this project would be minimum wage jobs in the food and service industry. Not the living wage jobs needed in this area.

The water run off from this location will percolate into our ground water and I can't wait to shower in a mixture of racing fuel and industrial waste.

This project must be brought to a rapid halt now, before any money is wasted on a project that is doomed to fail.

Dr. Bruce K. Boaz, Ph.D.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses lights off for Earth. More than 3 thousand cities in 84 countries will turn off their lights on Saturday for Earth Hour as a symbol in the fight against global warming. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Un apagón por el planeta

Casi 3 mil ciudades apagarán sus luces

EFE

en La Opinión, Friday, March 27, 2009

GINEBRA (EFE).- La Hora del Planeta dejará a oscuras, este sábado y durante una hora, a 2,848 ciudades de 84 países en señal de lucha contra el cambio climático, una iniciativa convocada por el Foro Mundial de la Naturaleza (WWF).

El sábado de 20.30 a 21.30 horas (hora de cada ciudad participante) ciudadanos, empresas, gobiernos y organizaciones alrededor del mundo apagarán sus luces para demostrar a los dirigentes políticos su preocupación por el cambio climático.

Las pirámides de Giza (Egipto), el Coliseo de Atenas, la Torre Eiffel de París, el Coliseo en Roma o el puente Golden Gate en San Francisco son algunos de los lugares emblemáticos que apagarán sus luces por el futuro del medio ambiente.

Además, participarán ciudades de 47 países emergentes como Brasil, Argentina, Turquía, México, China o India.

"Este es un acto simbólico con el que no se reducirá de manera significativa el consumo de energía, aunque es una forma de darle voz a la población", dijo la gerente de WWF para la Hora del Planeta, Joanna Wiseman,

"Todo el planeta funcionará el sábado como una sola comunidad para transmitir a los líderes que toman las decisiones sobre medio ambiente que nos preocupamos por el cambio climático", agregó.

La responsable del WWF aclaró que "no hay que apagar todas las luces. Se trata de prescindir de todo aquello que gasta energía de forma innecesaria, sin comprometer la seguridad de los ciudadanos".

La campaña mundial comenzará en Nueva Zelanda -debido a la diferencia horaria- donde todos los generadores de diesel de las islas Chatham, un pequeño archipiélago en la costa este, serán apagados a la hora convenida.

El apagón mundial se irá trasladando hacia el oeste, desde las principales ciudades de Asia-Pacífico, hasta Europa y en España se quedarán sin luz lugares tan emblemáticos como la fuente de la Cibeles en Madrid, el museo Guggenheim en Bilbao o la Alhambra en Granada .

En el continente americano participarán las principales ciudades de norte a sur, y así, en Colombia, se oscurecerán iconos de Bogotá, Medellín y Cartagena.

En Bolivia participarán en la campaña ciudades como Santa Cruz, La Paz y Cochabamba, mientras en Chile, el Palacio de La Moneda, la plaza de la Ciudadanía, la Torre Entel, la Catedral de Santiago y los municipios de Santiago y Valdivia son algunos de los iconos que verán apagadas sus luces de fachada.

Toda Centroamérica se unirá asimismo a la Hora del Planeta, y en Perú, las autoridades han llamado a que todos los peruanos apaguen las luces durante la Hora del Planeta.

La iniciativa pretende llamar la atención de los dirigentes que participarán en la reunión de Copenhague en diciembre, donde se firmará un nuevo tratado global sobre el cambio climático que sustituirá al de Kyoto.

Incluso el secretario general de la ONU, Ban Ki-Moon, hizo un llamamiento a la población de todo el planeta para que participe en esta iniciativa y recalcó que "la Hora del Planeta es una forma para los ciudadanos de enviar un mensaje, pedir acciones concretas ante el cambio climático".

"Necesitamos un acuerdo ambicioso, un acuerdo justo y efectivo. un acuerdo fundamentado en la ciencia", añadió.

La Hora del Planeta comenzó en 2007 en Australia, y contó con la participación de más de 2 millones de personas.

Un año después, el evento se convirtió en el movimiento más grande del mundo frente al cambio climático, al contar con la colaboración de más de 100 millones de personas en más de 350 ciudades.

Ban declaró que esta edición promete ser "una de las demostraciones públicas más grandes que se han intentado", mientras que el WWF manifestó su deseo de lograr implicar a más de mil millones de personas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the State of California will help truckers meet pollution rules. ARB will fund \\$350 million to finance the change out of older trucks and commercial machineries that pollute.](#)

Tienden el estado una mano temporal a desamparados en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, March 26, 2009

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California informó que aportará 350 millones de dólares para financiar cambios de camiones o de maquinarias a las unidades comerciales que son más contaminantes. El Programa de Financiamiento para el Control de la Contaminación de California ayudará inicialmente a propietarios de camiones de carga de modelos de 1993 o anteriores. El plan permite que los camioneros propietarios mantengan su trabajo pero que sustituyan maquinarias con préstamos de escasos o nulos interés financiero, o incluso con subsidio, según cada caso. Para el año 2014 todos los camiones, considerados una de las principales fuentes de contaminación, deberán tener motores y filtros adecuados en California.