Proposed bill seeks to link ag with fireplace burn bans

By Seth Nidever, staff writer
Hanford Sentinel, Wed., May 20, 2009

A Dean Florez bill that cleared the Senate last week seeks to ban agricultural burning on days when fireplace burn bans are in effect. But local agricultural sources said the air district already has rules in effect to accomplish the same thing.

The bill, which cleared the Senate on a 23-14 vote Thursday, would prohibit any agricultural burning from taking place on days when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District puts the kibosh on fireplace burning.

The fireplace restrictions kick in every winter and are designed to reduce the small particle pollution that bedevils Valley air.

The ban days multiplied last year, and there were some days when fireplace burning was banned but agricultural burning took place, said Seyed Sadredin, district executive officer.

Sadredin said the Florez bill codifies changes the district made in January to close the loophole.

"We think it's a good idea," he said.

Florez, D-Shafter, couldn't be reached for comment Monday.

Agricultural burning has been coming under tighter regulation in the last five years.

Farmers must apply for permission to burn, and they must demonstrate economic hardship or disease issues.

In most cases, the waste is ground up and sent to electricity generation plants or returned to field to be used as mulch.

"It's quite restrictive already," said John Warmerdam, a Kings County tree fruit grower.

Warmerdam said he hasn't burned in two years.

Orchard trimmings go back into the field as chipped ground cover, and uprooted trees are chipped and sent to power plants that burn green waste, he said.

Most kinds of agricultural burning will be prohibited by 2010.

Local growers are looking forward to the completion of a sewage composting facility near Kettleman City that will take agricultural and other green waste, mix it with treated sewage from Los Angeles and spread it on nearby farmland.

There aren't enough power plants in the Valley to take the waste, said Manuel Cunha, president of the Fresno-based Nisei Farmers League.

The plant, now under construction, is expected to start up in 2011.

After long fight, California's emission rules are now national policy

By Jim Downing, staff writer
Sacramento Bee, Wed., May. 20, 2009

President Barack Obama did most of the talking at Tuesday's launch of the nation's first greenhouse-gas restrictions for cars, but the spotlight was on the Californians sitting in the front row in the White House Rose Garden.

After millions in legal costs and years of delays, the state's emissions rules are now national policy, set to drive a nearly 40 percent increase in vehicle fuel efficiency by 2016.

"This has been a huge victory for the state of California," said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was in the audience Tuesday. "As the president said, if it wouldn't have been for the great leadership of our great state, this would have never happened."

It's been more than eight years since state Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, then in her first weeks in the Assembly, introduced the vehicle emissions bill that eventually led to Tuesday's announcement.

"It wasn't the popular issue to carry back in 2001," Pavley said in a phone interview en route to Tuesday's event. "But being a freshman, I said, 'Well, why not?' "

Assembly Bill 1493, signed into law by Gov. Gray Davis in 2002, became the opening shot in California's war on global warming.The state had been driving national standards on smog-forming emissions since the 1960s, but Pavley's bill was the first attempt to regulate climate-warming gases.

California is the only state with the power under the federal Clean Air Act to set its own air pollution rules – subject to the approval of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. If the EPA blesses California's standards, other states can copy them.

Eventually, at least 15 states declared their willingness to adopt California's plan. That potential for national impact turned AB 1493 into an early battleground for climate change regulation.

Automakers sued to block the rules, arguing the emissions standards would drive up costs by thousands of dollars a vehicle.

At the same time, the Bush administration's EPA argued that California had no jurisdiction over greenhouse gases. The agency for two years refused to respond to California's request to implement the law, then rejected it in December 2007 – prompting a suit from Attorney General Jerry Brown.

All told, Brown's office spent roughly $4 million to uphold AB 1493, according to Deputy Attorney General Kate Kenealy.

As the disputes dragged on, the state's climate agenda expanded. In 2006, Schwarzenegger signed a bill committing the state to trim greenhouse gas emissions from nearly all sectors of the economy to 1990 levels by 2020. California Air Resources Board regulators have been counting on AB 1493 to deliver nearly a fifth of those cuts.

The stalemate over the bill began to break last fall in a series of meetings between state air quality regulators, their environmental allies, and officials from Ford, General Motors, Honda and Toyota.

"What everybody realized was that there was real interest in trying to unknot these problems," said Roland Hwang, vehicle policy director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, who was at the meetings.

Soon after his November victory, Obama signaled that he planned to back California's emissions-cutting request. At the same time, automakers' troubles were deepening, eroding their bargaining position.

"I don't think there was really any choice," said David Cole, chairman of the nonprofit Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich. "The financial problems are so serious in this industry that to pick a fight on this now would be ludicrous."

Discussions intensified last weekend, leading to the agreement that sent Schwarzenegger, Pavley and air board Chairwoman Mary Nichols rushing to Washington for Tuesday's announcement.

While California officials and environmental groups are presenting the deal as a win for their side, automakers are also casting it in a positive light. They had consistently opposed a greenhouse-gas standard valid only in certain states. Under the new agreement, the nation will have a single standard.

While Tuesday's deal settles the major disputes over AB 1493 for now, the peace won't necessarily be permanent. Key details of the 2016 targets won't be released until next year. As the rules take effect, California could choose to step in if it feels the EPA isn't enforcing the standards, Kenealy said.

In addition, California retains its right to set its own air standards, and AB 1493 authorizes the air board to tighten vehicle emissions in 2017 and beyond – setting up another potential battle with carmakers and the federal government.

New Auto Standards vs. Old U.S. Preferences

Mileage Rules To Add to Price, Shrink Engines

By Steven Mufson, staff writer
Washington Post, Wed., May 20, 2009

The cars of the near future will be lighter, more expensive and maybe smaller. Big engines will shrink. And more and more cars will be hybrids or diesel-powered vehicles like those common in Europe.

Those aren't qualities that American consumers have rushed to embrace in the past. But the new fuel-efficiency and tailpipe-emissions standards unveiled yesterday at the White House will push automakers and motorists in a direction aimed at reducing U.S. oil dependence and the emissions of greenhouse gases, just part of the administration's program for remaking the ailing American car industry.

Many analysts worry that without boosting gasoline taxes to make fuel efficiency a priority for consumers, the administration may be setting a standard for new cars that won't match motorists' tastes.

"There's a general rule of thumb: The way to achieve higher fuel efficiency is to make cars lighter and put in smaller engines," said Jeremy Anwyl, chief executive of Edmunds.com, an automotive information firm. "In some ways, it's formulaic. Unfortunately, those tend to be the cars people don't want to buy."

But automobile manufacturers, two of which are already relying on U.S. government aid to avert bankruptcy, said yesterday that they welcomed the new "harmonized" national standards for fuel efficiency and tailpipe emissions. While meeting the targets for 2016 might be challenging, they said it would be easier than dealing with a "patchwork" of regulations that differed from California to the Transportation Department to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"What was so important for us was we had so many different regulations, testing procedures and classes of what we sell," said Susan M. Cischke, group vice president for sustainability, environment and safety engineering at Ford. "It was a huge amount of work just to certify the vehicles. The national standard gives us the certainty and flexibility we need to meet these tough targets."

Carmakers and administration officials said that the technology for building more fuel-efficient vehicles already exists, but they acknowledge that it will cost money.
James Lentz, president of U.S. sales for Toyota, said that eventually consumers would take fuel efficiency for granted the way they now expect cars to have air bags or stabilizers or anti-lock brakes, innovations once considered expensive.

"It's just a question of time and money," he said. A senior administration official said on Monday that the new standards would add $600 to the price of the average car, on top of the $700 of added costs that would have resulted from more modestly increased targets permitted under the 2007 energy bill.

"Yes, it costs money to develop these vehicles," President Obama said yesterday in a Rose Garden ceremony that included governors, members of Congress, auto executives and the head of the United Auto Workers. "But even as the price to build these cars and trucks goes up, the cost of driving these vehicles will go down as drivers save money at the pump."

The president asserted that the typical driver would save about $2,800 by getting better gas mileage and that higher purchase costs would be paid off within three years. But payback periods will vary widely depending on the type of vehicle and the price of gasoline, industry experts said, and some highly efficient vehicles might never pay off.

Hardly any cars on the road in the United States today meet the new standard -- 39 miles a gallon for passenger cars and about 30 for light trucks -- and virtually all are hybrids. Several small cars are within striking distance, and by averaging hybrids and traditional combustion engines, automakers could meet overall targets even if certain models fall short

Lentz said that Toyota passenger cars already average just three miles a gallon less than the target the Obama administration set yesterday for new 2016 cars. "I'm fairly comfortable on the passenger-car side," he said. "The challenge for us will be light trucks. Their average now is 24 miles per gallon, and the number to get to is going to be 30. So there is a lot of work to be done on the light trucks."

Emissions deal an example of Obama compromises

By Jennifer Loven, Associated Press
In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wed., May 20, 2009

Washington **-** -- The White House-forged auto emissions deal among long-warring states, carmakers and environmentalists is the most dramatic evidence yet of what President Obama is hoping to brand - and eventually sell to voters - as his signature governing style.

"In the past, an agreement such as this would have been considered impossible," Obama said Tuesday in announcing the deal, the usually poker-faced president reveling in his own achievement. "It represents not only a change in policy in Washington but the harbinger of a change in the way business is done in Washington."

Maybe.

A stack of other complicated issues - health care overhaul, Mideast peace, global warming - probably won't unfold in such a favorable environment for agreement. They will challenge anew

Obama's promise to be the kind of pragmatic leader who refuses to get boxed in by ideological labels and can persuade divergent interests to cooperate.

Still, he proved that remarkable results can be won. Under the mileage-and-emissions compromise that Obama built, traditional enemies came together. Everyone agreed to give something:
-- The federal government will now do what it long refused under President George W. Bush - bend to the desires by several states to set more stringent fuel-efficiency rules than Washington.
-- States agreed to abandon efforts to go their own way, at least for the time being.
-- Automakers pledged to drop their budget-sapping lawsuits protesting the enactment of a patchwork of differing state rules.
-- Environmentalists accepted a longer buildup to more fuel-efficient vehicles.
-- Consumers will shell out an average of $1,300 more for new vehicles by 2016.

The proposed new federal rules call for the auto industry to produce by 2016, four years faster than required by a 2007 law, vehicles that average 35.5 miles per gallon over each company's fleet.

Even more, the plan sets the nation's first-ever federal limits on greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks, achieving a 30 percent reduction through the new fuel-efficiency levels and by changing standards for air conditioners.

On other issues, Obama's approach has been taking serious hits.

He deeply irritated liberal backers by reversing course to fight the court-ordered release of prisoner-abuse photos, by reviving military trials for some terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay and by declining to support a truth commission to investigate detainee interrogations.

Republicans, meanwhile, are keeping up a drumbeat of doubt about Obama's decisions to release once-classified legal memos authorizing the use of harsh questioning methods for terror suspects.

Why, some commentators ask, is Obama all over the map? For what does he stand without compromise?

Behind the scenes, the White House is not discomfited by these questions, but delighted.

Aides are gambling that the public will see - and like - a president making decisions and forging coalitions based on circumstances instead of creed. It worked during his successful presidential campaign. It seems to be working now in his relations with Congress, where Obama refrains from haggling over legislative details in favor of merely setting broad goals. Obama as dealmaker is a narrative this White House loves to promote.

"His whole approach is about coalition building," Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick said Tuesday at the White House, speaking glowingly of the auto-emissions agreement. "It's all about bringing people together."

The president hopes that view will only expand - and hold.

Toxic ‘carbon tet’ lingers in air near schools

By James Bruggers, staff writer
USA Today, Wed., May 20, 2009

For much of the 20th century, carbon tetrachloride was regarded as a miracle chemical: It was used to put out fires, degrease machines, kill bugs, dry-clean clothing and even help stamp collectors detect forgeries.

From the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s, most of those uses were discontinued for health and safety reasons. Then came what appeared to be the final blow: Thirteen years ago, carbon tetrachloride and other chemicals that were eating up the Earth's ozone layer were banned or restricted under the Montreal Protocol. The treaty, ratified years earlier by the United States and 193 other countries, was designed to protect the layer of the atmosphere that filters the sun's dangerous ultraviolet radiation.

Despite all of these efforts to eliminate carbon tetrachloride — classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a probable human carcinogen and known to damage the liver, kidneys and brain — it still shows up at elevated levels around the world, scientists say. That's a testament, they say, to its past widespread use and its tough-as-nails persistence.

USA TODAY found it outside 70 of 95 schools in 30 states it monitored for a week last fall as part of its "Smokestack Effect" series, yet there were no obvious industrial sources to explain the readings. And in recent years, as more communities and the EPA have taken greater stock of the toxic chemicals found in the air we breathe, carbon tetrachloride accounts for 12% to 15% of cancer risks from toxic chemicals in some places. And those are risks that will not be going away soon.

"Carbon tet," as it is often called, is not alone. Many substances that once were building blocks of our modern world — PCBs, lead, chlorofluorocarbons — have hung on in the environment, long after their dangers were recognized and governments acted against them.

Allen Robinson, a Carnegie Mellon University engineering professor who has studied toxic air in Pittsburgh, says carbon tet, which once held an honored place in laundry rooms across America as an effective spot remover, serves as a particularly resonant cautionary tale. "This is a great example of … where we thought we had some great technology, but we learned there were unintended environmental consequences,"

Robinson says. "Unfortunately, … we've placed those consequences onto future generations."

Some carbon tetrachloride wafts up from inside landfills, says Kenneth Mitchell, chief of the EPA's air toxics program in its Southeast regional office in Atlanta. Smokestacks and leaky pipes and valves at a few industrial plants in the USA and elsewhere still release smaller quantities of the chemical, which is used to make other chemicals.

The United Nations Environment Program has been investigating the possibility that some plants may be emitting the chemical but not reporting it. Most of it, though, is probably left over from the past because carbon tetrachloride degrades so slowly, Mitchell says.

Carbon tetrachloride released into the air can be expected "to stick around about 50 years," he adds. "The fact that you still find it in the air is not that surprising." What has happened, Mitchell says, is that
atmospheric circulation mixes carbon tetrachloride into air throughout the world, creating a fairly steady level globally.

Elevated levels across the USA

Carbon tet shows up in approximately the same concentrations — levels that could produce between one and 100 additional cancer cases among 1 million people over a lifetime of exposure — at monitors across the nation, Robinson says. That's what he and his colleagues found when they compared levels documented at monitors in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pa., in 2006 and 2007 against a national network of air-sampling results.

Those same elevated levels are what the University of Louisville has measured since 2000 at several monitors in Louisville. There has been no decline in carbon tet levels in Louisville during that time, even though the EPA shows no reported industrial releases of the chemical in the area since 1990, when one company reported 2 pounds of emissions. City officials say dry cleaners haven't used carbon tet since at least 1992.

USA TODAY found similar levels — enough to produce four to 70 additional cancer cases among 1 million people — outside the 70 schools, and experts emphasize the risks are not unique to American schools.
The carbon tet detected near the schools reflects background levels found nearly everywhere. "It really is a global pollutant," Robinson says.

It's not the only chemical that's been banned or tightly controlled that hangs around, like a visiting relative who overstays his welcome.

Production of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, used in electrical equipment, paints, plastics and hundreds of other industrial applications, was banned in the 1970s. Yet they linger, too, moving through the world's food web. Mitchell says people still can be exposed to PCBs by eating contaminated fish and shellfish, ingesting contaminated breast or cow's milk and breathing indoor air in buildings where electrical equipment still contains PCBs.

Another example of a stubborn toxic substance is lead. Although it's no longer allowed in car or truck fuel or in many paint products, lead can be picked up from soil near homes or roads or from drinking water in old lead pipes, Mitchell says.

Carbon tet is a clear, sweet-smelling liquid that easily evaporates, so most that has escaped into the environment is found as a gas, according to a chemical profile by the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

The EPA says the chemical's primary purpose was to make chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which were used as refrigerants and propellants and were the key target of the Montreal Protocol, enacted in 1987. Production of carbon tet peaked in the early 1970s, the EPA says.

It has been banned in consumer products such as spot cleaners since at least 1973, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

"You can't buy it anymore," says Leland Bell, a retired Louisville chemist who has collected stamps for 70 years, since he was an elementary school student. He recalls how it helped reveal authenticating watermarks. "You'd put the stamp facedown in a little black tray, and put a few drops of carbon tetrachloride on," he says. "We really didn't give it much thought."

But, he adds, "it's a potent chemical. We're really good at using something without really knowing" the consequences.

California banned it as a pesticide, used mostly in stored grain, in 1986. Yet it's still being detected at elevated levels in California, says Melanie Marty, a toxicologist with the California EPA.

The risk it presents, she says, is somewhat less than the chemical constituents of motor vehicle tailpipe emissions, like benzene, a known carcinogen. "There are many other concerns that I feel are more pressing, like traffic-related pollution, particulate matter, ozone (and) some of the other air toxics," she says. But carbon tet is among the thousands of chemicals that people are exposed to every day, she says. "You breathe it in," she says, "and it's absorbed. It's going to get into your body."

'You can't do anything about' it

The risks can add up.

The Pittsburgh study found carbon tet accounted for as much as 12% of Pittsburgh residents' cancer risks from the toxic air pollutants it studied and concluded that there was really nothing air officials could do to reduce the risks. People will just have to wait for the risks to fall slowly over time under the Montreal Protocol, the study said.

In Louisville, a health-risk assessment in 2003 concluded that carbon tet, among the dozens of chemicals studied, was responsible for up to 15% of Louisville residents' cancer risks.

The city responded by writing carbon tet into its program to reduce air toxics. The move was taken as a precaution in case any of the city's chemical plants were to start emitting carbon tet in the future, says Lauren
Anderson, executive director of the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District.

Typically, Louisville's air agency goes after chemicals that can produce more than one additional cancer death in 1 million people. But, Anderson says, there's nothing that local officials can do about the carbon tet already in Louisville's air, so her agency focuses on reducing the unhealthful emissions of other chemicals. "Why worry about something you can't do anything about?" she asks.

Under the Montreal Protocol, developing countries still have until next year to stop production of the chemical, says Tom Land, an EPA official who helps run the agency's stratospheric-ozone protection programs.

For the United States and other industrialized nations, the deadline was 1996. The treaty, however, did not ban the chemical outright, Land says. The fine print left open the possibility that some carbon tet production could continue in the USA.

"You can make it, and then turn it into something else," Land says, adding that its use is tightly controlled.

U.S. companies reported they emitted 165,000 pounds of carbon tet in 2007, the most recent year for which the numbers are available through the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory. That compares with 3.5 million pounds emitted 20 years ago.

The largest single air emission source in 2007 was the DuPont Performance Elastomers plant in Beaumont, Texas, which reported 53,000 pounds of carbon tetrachloride emissions that year, according to the EPA inventory.

The company uses it to make chlorosulfonated polyethylene, a synthetic rubber material in applications like automotive hoses and gaskets, company spokeswoman Cathy Branciaroli said.

She adds that since 2000 the plant has reduced its carbon tetrachloride emissions by 40% and now recycles more than 99% of the chemical.

For Jane Williams, chair of the Sierra Club's Toxics Committee, carbon tet illustrates how so-called bans are often incomplete and how it can be hard to fix mistakes: "It's like Pandora's box. Once you open it up, you can't put it back in the box."

Bruggers covers the environment for The (Louisville) Courier-Journal and courier-journal.com.

O.C. Register blog, Tuesday, May 19, 2009:

Smog regulator: New mileage standards will help clear O.C., L.A. air

by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

President Obama's decision to toughen fuel economy standards for carmakers, announced Tuesday, will have a big effect on Southern California: helping the troubled region meet federal clean-air targets that might otherwise have been difficult to reach.

Barry Wallerstein, executive officer of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, said Obama's new standards — an average 35.5 miles per gallon for new autos — also will mean clearer skies and a smaller contribution to climate change.

"The action today is important for Southern California," he said. "It means less local air pollution as well as a reduction in greenhouse gases. And everyone wins. Consumers get cars with better mileage, and there will be less air pollution associated with the delivery of gasoline and the fueling of vehicles."

The South Coast air basin, which includes all of Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, must meet federal targets for ground-level ozone — a lung irritant — by 2024, and for fine particle pollution, which can work its way deep into the lungs, by 2015.

Before Obama's action, Wallerstein said, his agency was looking at a welter of different regulations, including state standards that might or might not have been approved by the federal government.

"This allows us to move forward to implement the clean air plan in the manner in which it was envisioned," Wallerstein said. "This important step forward ensures that vehicles across the country will meet the same standards."

Fresno Bee Smog Blog, Wed., May 20, 2009:

Arvin still the smoggiest city in U.S.

By Mark Grossi

Two years ago, I wrote that Arvin was the smoggiest town in America. That hasn't changed. But at least Arvin is getting a lot more attention now.

Here are the smog numbers from last year: Arvin, a Kern County city of 16,000, had 102 violations of the federal standard. Crestline in San Bernardino followed closely with 97.

Even in the nation's dirtiest air basins, those are gaudy numbers, and the health effects are real. Ozone causes tiny tears in lung tissue, triggering many types of breathing problems. This invisible gas is now associated with premature death.

Why is it so smoggy in Arvin? The San Joaquin Valley's bad air collects in the southeast corner of this 25,000-square mile bowl -- at Arvin. It will be the last place to achieve clean-air status years from now, experts say.

Change has begun, though. Now, half of the police car fleet is hybrid in Arvin, one of only five communities in the country using hybrids this way.

The city also is supposed to get a hybrid street sweeper, and Arvin officials have bought a hybrid front-end loader, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district, which underwrote the hybrid purchases with about a half million dollars, has shown up at Arvin City Council meetings. Officials are talking with residents. Efforts have been made.

But Arvin's ozone problem is not home grown. It floats in from Bakersfield, Fresno and other cities. The pollution comes from nearly 4 million Valley residents, major freeways, agriculture and industries.

Arvin's distinction as the smoggiest city in America remains a Valleywide problem, not just the burden of a small, farmworker community.

Bakersfield Californian commentary, Wed., May 20, 2009:

Aloha, and start your engines!

Permit process has been grueling

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

So, you want to open an off-road track in Kern County? You must be stubborn or crazy. Best if you're both.

Oh, and a good, strong pair of legs is essential for all the hoop jumping you'll be doing.

Since the state has failed miserably at building new off-road parks (despite an $86 million annual budget and $90 million generated by fuel taxes and green sticker fees paid by off-roaders for, um, new parks), it's basically up to regular Joes to take up the slack.

That's no easy feat when you consider the byzantine world of CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act.

Even so, Darrell Melton, Darin Layton and Charlie Comfort were crazy enough to wade into that world more than four years ago to open Honolulu Hills Raceway east of Taft.

And they've been stubborn enough to stick with it over four years of stutter-stepping through paperwork, meetings, reports, studies and countless phone calls.

They've been operating under a temporary use permit from the county that allows for some races and practice days, but haven't been able to go full-time without a Fish and Game permit.

They should have that golden permit in about three months, I was assured by Fish and Game's senior environmental specialist, Julie Vance.

I was all set to slam Fish and Game for dragging its feet. After all, a safe, legal riding park can only help cut down on illegal riding and actually protect more critters than it harms, I thought.

But Vance, curse her common sense ways, agreed that Honolulu Hills is a good project that desperately needed.

"One of the reasons we were interested in seeing this happen is that trespassing by OHVs is a big problem, and we recognize that," she said. "You need a place to relieve the pressure. Our lands are hit with that, too. It's a constant enforcement issue."

Part of the delay was inexperience on the owners' parts, she said. And they also weren't sure whether to apply for a permit for the immediate race track (which is already built and involves 160 acres) or the ultimate vision (640 acres of trails, camping and concessions).

Yeah, in hindsight, Melton said, it would probably have been better to hire a Roger McIntosh-type development consultant who can work through permits in his sleep.

"I think even he would have had a difficult time with this one though because it was so unique," Melton said.

No one seemed to know what to do with the Honolulu guys and their raceway.

Even the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wasn't sure what to ask for. Melton said they had a friend who works with oil companies on air mitigation do a report and the district was so pleased with it, they asked if they could use it as a model.

Melton, a substitute teacher with a psychology degree, agreed he may have made some missteps along the way.

"I'm no dummy, but I'm no genius, either," he said. "It should really be up to the state to put in more riding parks. They have all the money, they know all the hoops with Fish and Game and all the other agencies. It's a lot easier for them than a private person."

Actually, Melton and his partners could probably teach the state a few lessons, considering how a state riding park east of Bakersfield proposed a few years ago fell through at the last minute.

Vance said that if Melton and his partners talked to Fish and Game first, the permitting probably would have taken much less time.

Vance will have the chance to prove that possibly in the near future if all goes as planned for Ron Pierce, who's scouting for land east of Bakersfield to open a similar off-road race track.

He had a permit to hold a handful of events on his own ranch at Breckenridge and Comanche roads, and they were so well received, he's decided to jump into the pond with the Honolulu guys.

Having spent a career as a builder, however, he's a bit more prepared for the process.

"If you're not stubborn as a mule, you're not going to get anywhere," he said.

Crazy helps, too.

L.A. Times editorial, Wed., May 20, 2009:

White House hits the gas on environmental issues

Obama's tailpipe emissions standards and push to cap greenhouse gases has put industry on notice.

To listen to the global warming deniers, the Obama administration’s announcement Tuesday that it plans to restrict greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles will hurt the economy, force consumers to buy cars they don't want and endanger the lives of motorists. The opposite is closer to the truth.

Until the banking crisis overtook the issue, the nation's top economic concern was high gasoline prices. The financial meltdown caused oil prices to plummet, but that will change when the economy recovers. Improving fuel efficiency will dramatically reduce U.S. demand, which accounts for a quarter of the world's oil demand. That will put far more downward pressure on prices, and do it more quickly, than opening more domestic lands to drilling possibly could.

Obama announced that the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency will work together to improve the average fuel economy of vehicles sold in the U.S. to 35.5 miles per gallon by 2016. This should render moot a separate effort by California and 13 other states to regulate tailpipe emissions and assure a unified national standard for new vehicles. That will ultimately benefit automakers.

The safety argument is based on studies that have shown past regulation of fuel efficiency increased the number of deaths in auto accidents by encouraging smaller and lighter vehicles. That's mainly because people in lighter cars are in greater danger when they're in accidents

involving heavier ones; if everybody drove smaller cars, we'd all be safer. Future cars will have more efficient engines, transmissions and tires, none of which will affect size, and they probably will be built from lighter and stronger materials that will enhance safety. These elements will add to a new car's cost -- about $1,300 more per vehicle by 2016, according to the Obama administration -- but consumers will more than make up the difference in fuel savings.

The crackdown on vehicles comes as Congress is debating a groundbreaking bill: to regulate greenhouse gases in nearly every sector of the U.S. economy, and Obama has put lawmakers and industry on notice: If they don't act, the administration is willing to do the job. The EPA is empowered to regulate these gases under the Clean Air Act, and the kind of command-and-control measures it would implement would probably be far more costly to polluters than the cap-and-trade scheme being negotiated in Congress. Cutting a deal that heads off such intervention is in everybody's interest.

S.F. Chronicle editorial, Wed., May 20, 2009:

State's emission rules get federal blessing

Washington finally got the memo. We're referring to California's message about the need for tougher tailpipe emission rules for the sake of energy savings and clean air.

Since 2002, when this state passed stricter pollution laws, Sacramento has waited for federal blessing to put the plan into effect. Automakers, backed by the previous White House, blocked the change.

What a difference a year makes. Detroit is on its back financially, its clout erased by bailouts. President Obama is intent on carrying through on the promise to let California's plans take effect. Washington is marching steadily toward broader limits on greenhouse gases.

From showroom floors to gas stations, drivers will soon see the difference that tighter emission rules bring. Beginning in 2012, new cars and light trucks will pollute less and go farther on a full tank. By 2016, the new fleets will run 40 percent cleaner and get an average of 36 miles per gallon.

New designs will probably drive up purchase costs by about $1,300 per vehicle, Obama said. But he promised that owners would recover this cost after three years of driving. A retooled auto industry could recover as the nation moves toward a clean-energy world. Additionally, the president predicted a drop in oil imports by as much as 1.8 billion barrels.

The changes, embodied in a presidential announcement, are sweet vindication for California and 13 other states that passed similar laws unfulfilled until now. That's why Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger zipped back to the White House on election day to take part in the ceremony, which also drew House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Barbara Boxer, both California Democrats.

With this showdown finished, Washington can look forward to an even bigger one: the design and specifics of national policy on climate change.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Obama’s plan for cleaner, more efficient cars. For more information, please call Maricela Velásquez at (559) 230-5849.

Camino para autos limpios

Obama delinea los nuevos estándares de rendimiento

By Steven R. Hurst, Associated Press
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WASHINGTON, D.C.— El presidente Barack Obama anunció ayer nuevos estándares para los vehículos automotores en cuestión de emisiones de gases y eficiencia de combustible, con el propósito de ayudar a reducir el calentamiento global y la dependencia estadounidense del petróleo importado.

Este ataque en dos frentes a problemas ambientales es la más reciente de una serie de medidas que alejan al gobierno de las políticas de su antecesor en el cargo, George W. Bush. Obama consideró que el plan representa un cambio histórico hacia una economía de energías renovables.

"Si bien Estados Unidos constituye menos del 5% de la población mundial, creamos casi la cuarta parte de la demanda mundial de petróleo. Este apetito tiene un costo enorme", dijo el presidente, rodeado por legisladores influyentes, así como dirigentes de la industria y los sindicatos del sector automotor.

Las nuevas pautas obligan a que los autos vendidos en Estados Unidos reduzcan la emisión de dióxido de carbono en un tercio de su nivel actual para el 2016. Los nuevos estándares para uso combustibles requieren una mejora del 30% en su rendimiento por litro.

Obama indicó que las nuevas reglas llevarían a retirar de circulación 177 millones de autos en cerca de seis años y medio.

En ese periodo el ahorro en el consumo de petróleo de los autos estadounidenses, camiones y autobuses será igual al total de las importaciones de crudo al país proveniente de Arabia Saudí, Venezuela, Libia y
Nigeria durante el año pasado. "Como resultado de este acuerdo", dijo Obama, "ahorraremos 1,800 millones de barriles de petróleo durante la vida de los vehículos que se vendan en los próximos cinco años. En medio de una crisis histórica en nuestra industria automotriz, esta iniciativa da certidumbre a las compañías sobre un futuro en el que planearán la creación de los autos del siglo XXI".

La nueva medida para las emisiones de los autos y camiones ahorrará millones de barriles de petróleo, pero también significará que los consumidores tendrán que erogar unos 1,300 dólares adicionales por vehículo para cuando el plan sea culminado en el 2016.

Obama señaló que el ahorro en los combustibles compensará el aumento del precio de los vehículos en tres años.

Las automotrices europeas, una importante competencia para las estadounidenses, indicaron que las nuevas medidas no las afectarán, pues en sus propios países ya están acostumbradas a cumplir con elevados estándares de eficiencia en el uso del combustible.

"Como líderes en el sector de mayor calidad en rendimiento de combustible y reducción de emisiones podríamos tener cierta ventaja en el mercado de Estados Unidos", dijo Birgit Hiller, vocera de BMW AG en Munich, Alemania.

Las nuevas pautas están diseñadas en parte para superar un conflicto entre el gobierno federal y los estados, en particular California, que había aprobado reglas más estrictas que las de gobiernos federales anteriores.

La nueva política iguala los estándares de emisión de los estados, pero da a los fabricantes un plazo mayor para alcanzar los objetivos. La industria automotriz había combatido las normas estatales, pero aceptó la nueva política federal que le da un plazo de seis años y medio para alcanzarlas.

California, otros 13 estados y el distrito de Columbia, sede del gobierno federal, habían pedido a la Casa Blanca que les permitiera imponer estándares más estrictos que los exigidos por el gobierno del país.

Aún falta que la Agencia de Protección Ambiental y el Departamento del Transporte aprueben detalles de la implementación del plan.

Las automotrices expresaron su apoyo al plan. "Todos estamos de acuerdo en trabajar juntos en un programa nacional", dijo Dave McCurdy, presidente y director general del la Alianza de Fabricantes de Automóviles.