

Around the Region

HEALTHY AIR LIVING EVENT

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Monday, June 1, 2009

When: Thursday, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Where: Air District Office, 4800 Enterprise Way

Info: Healthy Air Living is a year-round program aimed at reducing emissions by making air quality a factor in daily decision-making by valley residents, businesses and organizations. The meeting is open to any valley business. Agenda topics include:

- Employee trip reduction
- Incentives and grants available to valley businesses
- How to implement emission-reduction strategies in a business operation
- Exploring energy efficiency at the workplace

The air district asks that businesses interested in attending call 559-230-6032. For more information about Healthy Air Living or the business summits, go to www.healthylairliving.com or contact the district office in Modesto, 557-6400.

Air District wants smoky diesels off the road

by Alex Cantatore

Turlock Journal, Saturday, May 30, 2009

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced a new program this week, intended to remove antiquated diesel trucks - and the black smoke they belch out - from Valley roads.

A total of more than \$15 million dollars is available through the new Voucher Incentive Program, which will purchase and destroy old diesel trucks if owners will replace them with vehicles that meet 2007 emission standards.

"Funding assistance for clean trucks is key to quickly reduce diesel emissions in one of the busiest trade corridors in the state," said Air Resources Board Chairman Mary D. Nichols. "This will benefit Valley residents with cleaner air to breathe, resulting in fewer cases of respiratory disease, hospital visits and missed work days."

Between \$30,000 and \$35,000 will be available per grant, depending on the age of the truck.

Eligible trucks must have a 1993 or older engine, spend 75 percent of their time in California, and be registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles with a declared combined weight greater than 60,000 pounds. Additionally, the truck must have been registered in California for each of the past two years, during which time the vehicle traveled more than 30,000 miles per year or consumed 4,700 gallons of diesel fuel.

Additionally, truck fleets eligible for the program cannot contain more than three heavy-duty diesel trucks. Should an owner desire to participate in the program but his or her vehicles did not meet the mileage requirements, two trucks can be traded for one replacement payment.

Vouchers are approved on a first come, first-served basis. All approvals will be made within five business days of applying.

Trucks purchased through the program must be obtained from one of 10 certified dealers, including Turlock's Interstate Truck Center.

The Voucher Incentive Program is a component of the State of California's diesel emission reduction plan, which began in 2000. Recently, the state adopted new clean bus and truck

regulations and approved new aerodynamics standards for trucks, all of which are intended to cut climate change emissions by 30 percent by 2020

"This is a valuable way to encourage owners/operators of older trucks to make an investment in newer, cleaner models, and it fills a great need," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

For more information on the program or to apply, call the grants and incentives department at (559) 230-5800, or the ARB diesel hotline at (866) 634-3735. The District's Web site on the voucher program is available at http://www.valleyair.org/Grant_Programs/GrantPrograms.htm.

Calif. group offers funds for old diesels

By eTrucker Staff

eTrucker, Friday, May 29, 2009

The California Valley Air District announced it has money for heavy-duty diesel owners of small fleets to replace their older, polluting trucks with newer, cleaner models. The Voucher Incentive Program is a new, streamlined option funded through the Carl Moyer Memorial Air Quality Attainment Program. More than \$15 million is available through the program, which is open to any owner to fund heavy-duty truck replacements statewide.

Between \$30,000 and \$35,000 is available per grant, depending on the age of the truck. Trucks with 1993 and older engines are eligible. Grants are made on a first-come first-served basis, and applications will be approved within five business days. "This is a valuable way to encourage owners-operators of older trucks to make an investment in newer, cleaner models, and it fills a great need," says Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Eligible trucks must operate 75 percent of the time in California but need not be based in the Central Valley. Additional criteria include:

- Fleet size must be no more than three heavy-duty diesel trucks;
- Old truck must have a 1993 or older engine;
- Truck must be registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles with a declared combined weight greater than 60,000 pounds (Class 8);
- Truck must have operated more than 30,000 miles per year or consumed 4,700 gallons of diesel fuel per year in each of the previous two years. In cases where one truck did not earn enough mileage, the operator may retire two trucks for one replacement to meet the usage requirement; and
- Truck must be operational and have been registered in California for each of the last two years (partial registration for at least three months per year is eligible).

The replacement truck/s must meet at least 2007 emissions standards and be purchased through a participating dealership, and the old truck destroyed. Trucks purchased through the program are subject to three-year reporting. A list of participating dealerships is available [here](#).

The program is part of the state's overall diesel emissions reduction plan started in 2000. For additional program information or to apply for a voucher, call the grants and incentives department at 559-230-5800 or the California Air Resources Board's diesel hotline at 866-634-3735. Check www.valleyair.org for website updates and to sign up for automated e-mail information or CARB's website at www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/moyer/voucher/voucher.htm.

The Valley Air District covers eight counties, including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley air basin portion of Kern.

Stimulus Money May Change

High Speed Rail Schedule

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, June 1, 2009

San Joaquin Valley - The Central Valley portion of the High Speed Rail system may be constructed after both the San Francisco-to-San Jose and Los Angeles-to-Anaheim segments are constructed, but that timetable is not set in stone.

High Speed Rail Authority spokesperson Kris Deutschman said it is true that both the northern and southern segments of the rail system are further along in the planning stage than the Central Valley, but what actually gets built first is yet to be determined. At one time, it was believed the Valley segment would be one of the first constructed.

However, earlier this month, the Authority approved a list of shovel-ready construction projects likely to qualify for \$8 billion in federal stimulus funding for high speed trains.

According to the Authority, one of the project elements selected was the entire Los Angeles-to-Anaheim and San Francisco-to-San Jose corridors, where the Authority is expected to have completed the project level environmental documents this year and qualified and selected design build teams to begin construction of the sections by the 2012 deadline.

The Authority also selected a second stimulus project that would be the identification, selection and negotiation of right-of-way acquisition in the Merced-to-Bakersfield section, including the system's planned maintenance facility, but not the rail system.

Mike Olmos, Visalia assistant city manager, said he attended that meeting and he is not surprised that the Central Valley segment may come later rather than earlier.

"There are some areas further along because right of way can be acquired now," said Olmos.

"However, we're the middle link. The high speed rail cannot work unless the middle link is done. They have to get to us if they want to make a connection between L.A. and S.F. and that's what the system is all about."

Georgiana Vivian, with the Authority, told members of the Tulare Sunrise Rotary Club that because of the federal stimulus funding, the projects first considered "shovel ready" must be built first. Right now, the San Francisco-to-San Jose segment is by far the farthest along, with the Los Angeles-to-Anaheim segment second.

Vivian said construction on the Central Valley segment may not begin for another seven years, but Deutschman said that does not mean that portions of the Valley line could not be built sooner and there is a key reason at least a portion of the Valley line is important.

"We need to test trains on long stretches of flat land and the Valley would be best for that," she said. Vivian said the timetable is to begin testing trains by 2015 and that the Authority must test the trains and tracks for three years before passengers can be carried. That means the earliest riders will be able to get aboard the high speed rail is 2018.

"We have the longest segment and that is where they can achieve the speeds to test the trains," agreed Olmos.

He said the seven-year timetable sounds about right, but work on the environmental review of the Valley line – which includes determining where the line will go – is moving forward.

"There's a team of consultants working on the Bakersfield-to-Merced segment. They've been in contact with us," said Olmos.

Visalia hopes to land a stop, and the Authority has identified five possible locations for a stop in this area – four along Highway 99 near Visalia and one at Highway 43 and Highway 198 near Hanford.

"We have a general route and recommended stations in the Valley, all along the 99 corridor, not I-5," said Deutschman. However, the Authority has not decided if a stop will be placed in the Visalia/Hanford area.

She also said the Authority is trying to determine where to place its maintenance facilities – two smaller facilities probably at each end, then one large facility somewhere near the middle of the system. Olmos said the Authority is looking at the old Castle Air Force Base north of Merced for that large facility.

The 800-mile high speed rail is being funded by a \$90 billion bond measure, another \$12-15 billion in federal money, \$2-3 billion in local money and \$6-7 billion in private funds.

Deutschman said the Authority should hear by the end of June if it is going to get any stimulus money, but it is confident some will come. When asked how many dollars the high speed rail might get, she replied, "All I'm hearing are billions."

Federal rail officials have established initial criteria for grants to complete individual projects that are "ready to go" with preliminary engineering and environmental work completed and that demonstrate "independent utility."

"We are confident that California's system is well ahead of every other high speed train project in the country and should be a leading candidate to receive stimulus funding," said Board Chairman Quentin Kopp. "Ours is the only one with billions of dollars in voter-approved state funding committed to the project, with environmental clearances already in place and with construction elements already identified and ready to go."

Deutschman said the L.A. route is most "shovel ready," but there are portions within each segment that might be shovel ready, but not the entire system.

When fully completed, passengers will be able to ride from San Francisco to San Diego. The S.F.-to-L.A. non-stop run is projected to take less than three hours.

Greenhouse emissions bill faces contentious summer of debate

By David Lightman and Renee Schoof
Sacramento Bee, Monday, June 1, 2009

WASHINGTON – Congress will return today ready to engage in a historic debate on whether the country should shift to cleaner and more efficient use of energy and reduce the heat-trapping gases building up in the atmosphere.

Before leaving for Memorial Day, the House Energy and Commerce Committee approved a bill that would set the country's first mandatory limits on greenhouse gases, promote renewable energy and increase the efficiency of buildings, appliances and vehicles.

The bill now will be considered by other committees and should reach the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote this summer.

This month is expected to feature lawmakers publicly airing concerns about costs and the impact on agriculture and heavy industry.

Environmentalists will try to strengthen the bill, arguing that its efficiency measures and other provisions will hold down costs.

As it now stands, the measure would cut greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent compared with 2005 levels by 2020, and continues to an 83 percent cut by 2050 by setting a declining limit, or cap, on the amount of emissions companies can produce.

Companies covered by the bill must hold permits, known as allowances, for each ton of emissions, and they can trade these allowances as needed.

More than 80 percent of the allowances would be given to utilities and businesses in the early years after the program starts in 2012, while the rest would be auctioned.

Many of the free allowances are designed to pass savings on to consumers, partly by spreading some of them to regulated local distribution companies, whose mandate is to keep costs down. Others are intended to help businesses adjust to higher energy costs or make up for competitive disadvantages.

Douglas Elmendorf, director of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, said it's hard to estimate the economic impact of climate change. But, he added, "I think the consensus view is that climate change will have some costs for U.S. economic activity."

Scientists say the 500 billion tons of carbon – and growing – that humans have added to the atmosphere in the industrial era is putting Earth on a course to soon being warmer than it's been in millions of years.

International negotiators will meet in December in Copenhagen, Denmark, to try to get the cooperation necessary for global emissions reductions.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, said his committee's clean energy bill not only would cut global warming pollution but also would break U.S. dependence on foreign oil and make the United States a leader in clean energy technology.

The bill still needs to be considered by as many as eight more House committees before it gets to a vote by the full House this summer.

Climate and energy bill faces hurdles when Congress returns

David Lightman and Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers
In the Merced Sun-Star and Fresno Bee, Sunday, May 31, 2009

WASHINGTON — Congress will return Monday ready to engage in a historic debate on whether the country should shift to cleaner and more efficient use of energy and reduce the heat-trapping gases building up in the atmosphere.

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Douglas Elmendorf, director of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, said it's hard to estimate the economic impact of climate change. The analysis is "still in its infancy," he said.

But, he added, "I think the consensus view is that climate change will have some costs for U.S. economic activity."

Scientists say the 500 billion tons of carbon — and growing — that humans have added to the atmosphere in the industrial era is putting Earth on a course to being warmer soon than it's been in millions of years.

International negotiators meet in December in Copenhagen to try to get the cooperation that would be necessary for global emissions reductions.

Dangerous climate shifts will be hard to avoid, Gavin Schmidt of NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and David Archer of the geophysical sciences department of the University of Chicago wrote in a recent issue of Nature magazine.

Reductions that start soon could avert severe climate changes. Otherwise, expensive measures to pull the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, out of the atmosphere, could be needed, the scientists wrote, adding, "It will probably be cheaper in the long run to avoid making the mess in the first place."

Waxman said his committee's clean energy bill would not only cut global warming pollution but also break American dependence on foreign oil and make the U.S. a leader in clean energy technology.

Republicans argue it will cost too much. They use a figure of \$3,100 a year per family that they took from a 2007 academic study, even though the author of the study said publicly weeks ago that they misinterpreted the data, and even though the figure was based on the value of allowances going back to the federal government, rather than being mostly distributed to ratepayers.

"The Democrats' cap and trade energy plan — which should be called 'cap and tax' — is a reckless proposal that will do more harm than good," said Rep. Gregg Harper, R-Miss.

The National Republican Congressional Committee is pushing hard. In recent weeks it sent news releases to media in the congressional districts of 12 committee Democrats.

"There is mounting evidence that under the Democrats' National Energy Tax plan utility rates will skyrocket and American families and businesses will suffer as a result," it said.

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., said his party will frame the debate as one that "offers people a choice: Do we look to the past and do nothing, or choose a clean energy future?"

"The reality is that we can make much deeper reductions at net savings to consumers," said Alden Meyer of the Union of Concerned Scientists, an environmental group.

While congressional Republicans are generally opposed to cap and trade, some Democrats also say they're not assured their states won't be clobbered.

"Ohio is suffering grievously during the recession, and we don't need another blow in the form of cap and trade," said Steve Fought, press secretary to Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio. Kaptur and others, though, realize that the bill is moving forward, and "we need to find things to make it palatable" — they just aren't sure yet how.

Some rural lawmakers also have serious concerns that Democrats must address before the bill can proceed. Among their worries are that new low-carbon fuel standards could hurt corn ethanol producers.

"I've gotten comments from agricultural interests who are very upset that their concerns are not being addressed," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Calif.

The bill still needs to be considered by as many as eight more House committees before it gets to a vote by the full House this summer. If it passes, it would head to the Senate, where it faces more efforts to shape it and an uncertain outcome.

GOP says Democrats' climate proposal does little

By H. Josef Hebert, The Associated Press
In the Washington Post, Saturday, May 30, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The climate change proposal developed by congressional Democrats and endorsed by President Barack Obama does little to reduce global warming and saddles Americans with high energy costs, Republicans said Saturday.

Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, in the GOP's weekly radio and Internet address, said the House's climate bill was "a classic example of unwise government." The address culminated a week of coordinated Republican attacks on the Democratic proposal, which would require the first nationwide reductions in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases blamed for global warming.

GOP House members used the weeklong Memorial Day break recess to drum up voter opposition to the Democratic bill. The governor's criticism echoed Republican lawmakers' arguments at "energy summits" in Pennsylvania, Indiana and California and at other forums during the week.

The proposal to cap greenhouse emissions "will cost us dearly in jobs and income and it stands no chance of achieving its objective of a cooler earth" because other nation's such as China and India will not have to follow, Daniels said.

"The cost for all American taxpayers will be certain, huge, and immediate. Any benefits are extremely uncertain, minuscule, and decades distant," he contended.

The bill would require a 17 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020 and 83 percent reduction by midcentury. It advanced from the House Energy and Commerce Committee shortly before lawmakers left Washington for their holiday break, getting only one GOP vote.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has said she wants to take up the measure in the full House this summer.

"The national energy tax imposed by Speaker Pelosi's climate change bill would double electric bills here in Indiana, working a severe hardship on low income families, but that's only where the damage starts," Daniels said. "In a state where we like to make things, like steel and autos and RVs, it would cost us countless jobs. ... Our farmers and livestock producers would see their costs skyrocket. and our coal miners would be looking for new work."

Daniels made no mention of compromises by the bill's chief Democratic sponsors Reps. Henry Waxman of California and Edward Markey of Massachusetts aimed at easing the economic costs on energy-intensive industries such as steel and automobiles, and on regions heavily dependent on coal for electricity generation.

Under a cap-and-trade provision, polluters would be able to buy and sell emission allowances to ease the cost of the reduction. Initially free emission allowances would be provided to electric utilities and other energy-intensive industries facing unfair competition from abroad.

Waxman and Markey have argued that much of the higher fuel costs would be offset by increased energy efficiency and rebates using money from the sale of emission allowances to people facing higher energy costs.

But Daniels said there's a better approach than the cap-and-trade government mandate and "protect the environment, lower energy costs and create jobs at the same time all without raising taxes." He cited Indiana's production of ethanol and biodiesel, efforts to develop less polluting coal plants, expansion of wind power and conservation programs.

Congressional Republicans said that instead of a mandatory cap on pollution, they want to expand domestic oil and gas development, using some of the proceeds for renewable energy development, expansion of nuclear energy and more support for research into ways to capture carbon from coal burning.

The Democratic bill also would devote billions of dollars to carbon capture research and would require utilities to generate at least 12 percent of their power from renewable energy.

For climate change bill, hard part starts now

By Jennifer A. Dlouhy, Hearst Newspapers

In the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, May 31, 2009

Washington - -- Environmentalists celebrated earlier this month when a key House committee approved a contentious proposal to combat climate change after months of often-bitter public deliberations and intense closed-door negotiations.

But for congressional supporters of the bill, the really hard part is just beginning.

To get the climate change initiative to the House floor - and ultimately passed by the chamber - Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, and Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, must first run it through a gantlet of eight congressional committees headed by fellow Democrats who claim a piece of the action.

The two lawmakers will have to win over Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, who has threatened to torpedo the legislation if it doesn't include provisions that would benefit biofuels made from corn and other plants.

And they must do it all while preserving the delicate compromise that Waxman forged with Rust Belt, oil-patch and coastal Democrats to get the bill approved by his Energy and Commerce Committee on May 21.

Jim DiPeso, an environmentalist who backs the legislation, said the challenge is daunting. He predicted the task will test Pelosi, Waxman and bill co-sponsor Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass.

"There's no question that Waxman and Markey will have to draw deeply on their political skills to thread the needle and assemble a majority" of support among the 435 House members, said DiPeso, the policy director of Republicans for Environmental Protection. "There are many powerful and territorial players to please."

The legislation would force businesses to meet steadily tightening limits on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global warming. To meet the new caps, companies could cut their emissions, buy allowances from the federal government and other businesses to spew more of the gases, or "offset" their emissions by investing in pollution-reducing projects such as reforestation.

The bill also aims to spur renewable power by requiring utilities to derive 15 percent of their electricity from wind, the sun and other easily replenished sources. But it does not include a plan for doling out federal revenue from selling emissions allowances - something that will be decided by the House Ways and Means Committee.

Decisions made by that panel and its chairman, Rep. Charlie Rangel, D-N.Y., risk shredding the delicate compromise that got the bill through the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Some Democrats who voted for the measure, such as Rep. G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina, have said their support is tied to Congress giving a big chunk of allowance proceeds to low- and middle-income households in the form of tax cuts and vouchers. Other Democrats, such as Rep. Jay Inslee of Washington, say they want to see much of the money invested in renewable energy research.

Peterson's 46-member Agriculture Committee also is poised to make major alterations of the climate change plan, including overhauling the way the Environmental Protection Agency calculates the greenhouse gas emissions from alternative fuels made from corn and other plant materials.

Peterson wants to make sure that when corn and other crops are made into biofuels, they qualify as low-carbon fuels under federal mandates.

He and other corn-based ethanol advocates are worried about an EPA proposal to include "indirect land use" changes - such as the clearing of forest for new farmlands - as part of any calculations on the carbon footprint of biofuels.

Peterson also has been an outspoken critic of the entire measure; he and other farm-state lawmakers say it tilts too heavily in favor of urban interests instead of rural ones.

For Pelosi and Waxman, any moves to assuage Peterson's concerns - or those of Democrats on Rangel's Ways and Means panel - risk alienating lukewarm supporters of the bill. Already, the measure is drawing criticism from both the left and right, because Waxman and Markey made significant concessions to get the proposal through the Energy and Commerce Committee.

For instance, liberal environmentalists insist the effectiveness of the proposed greenhouse gas limits would be undercut by Waxman's decision to allow more than two-thirds of the emissions allowances to be donated to electric utilities, trade-sensitive industries, oil refiners and other interests.

Republicans, meanwhile, have largely united against the legislation, which they say would impose a hefty "energy tax" on every U.S. business and consumer.

Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, in the GOP's weekly radio and Internet address on Saturday, said the climate bill was "a classic example of unwise government." The proposal "will cost us dearly in jobs and income and it stands no chance of achieving its objective of a cooler Earth" because other nations such as China and India will not have to follow, he said.

Bill aims to keep emission-reduction efforts local

Assembly members hope to use California's global warming law to force industries to improve air quality in areas worst affected by pollution, which tend to be low-income and minority neighborhoods.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Monday, June 1, 2009

Legislation to use California's crackdown on global warming emissions as a lever to attack industrial air pollution is to be debated in the state Assembly this week.

The bill, AB 1404, is an opening salvo in a struggle that has been brewing since 2006 when California passed a sweeping law to control greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. At issue: whether low-income neighborhoods that suffer disproportionately from dirty air can benefit from regulations to control climate change.

"This may be the single most important opportunity to clean L.A.'s dirty air in my career," said Assemblyman Kevin de Leon (D-Los Angeles), a co-author of the bill whose district includes a cement plant and chrome plating facilities and is criss-crossed by six freeways.

A report released last week by researchers at USC and UC Berkeley, notes that poor people, Latinos and African Americans would suffer disproportionately from intensified heat waves, droughts and floods that are expected as the Earth warms.

"People of color will be hurt the most -- unless elected officials and other policymakers intervene," said Rachel Morello-Frosch, a UC Berkeley associate professor and co-author of the report.

African Americans living in Los Angeles have a projected heat-wave mortality rate nearly twice that of other L.A. residents, according to the report. And in many of the neighborhoods that suffer the worst air quality in the nation, including those in L.A. and the San Joaquin Valley, the population is predominantly Latino.

Public health groups want to force companies to spend their money close to home by retrofitting their facilities. In addition to slowing global warming, greenhouse gas cleanup would reduce the particulates and toxic gases that cause cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

But companies want to avoid some cleanup expenses through "offsets" -- paying for cheaper projects to reduce greenhouse gases elsewhere in California or in other states and countries.

For example, a refinery in Los Angeles could pay a rancher in Northern California to reforest range land because trees absorb carbon dioxide. Or a cement plant in Riverside County could compensate a company in Asia for controlling methane emissions from a pig farm.

The California conflict echoes a parallel fight in Congress, where a bill allowing industry to use extensive offsets is to be debated in the House this summer.

Under preliminary guidelines adopted by the California Air Resources Board, up to 49% of greenhouse gas pollution from power plants and other industrial facilities could be reduced through offsets. But AB 1404 would limit offsets to 10% of emissions and assess fees to fund careful verification of offset projects.

Phony offsets, in which companies pay for projects that in fact do not reduce emissions, have been the subject of investigations in the United States and abroad.

"The oil industry wants to place these offsets offshore in Brazil or Indonesia where California regulators can't verify if they are real or permanent," De Leon said. "But companies shouldn't be able to buy their way out of controlling their pollution here in California."

The legislation is backed by more than 60 California public health groups and labor unions who see it as a way to maintain pollution-abatement jobs in California.

"We shouldn't be outsourcing our public health and air quality benefits to other states and countries," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, Sacramento lobbyist for the California Lung Assn.

Thirty California counties fail to meet federal health standards for fine particulates, the most dangerous of lung-damaging pollutants.

But industry groups oppose the bill, saying it will limit their flexibility in meeting greenhouse gas targets. "An arbitrary limit . . . would result in higher costs for energy and infrastructure providers that would be passed along to state and local governments," the Western States Petroleum Assn., the California Chamber of Commerce and other business groups wrote in a letter to legislators.

The political sensitivity of the issue was underscored May 22, when the Air Resources Board appointed a 16-member committee headed by Stanford Economist Lawrence H. Goulder to make recommendations on the design of cap-and-trade regulations.

In a letter to the board, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last week signaled his opposition to handing out free allowances to emit greenhouse gases, as in proposed federal legislation. Instead, he urged the board to consider "returning the value of allowances back to the people, including through an auction of allowances and distribution of auction proceeds in the form of a rebate or dividend."

According to the "Climate Gap" researchers, offering fewer free pollution permits to oil facilities, which are mostly located in low-income neighborhoods such as Wilmington in Southern California and Richmond in Northern California, would be particularly effective in cleaning up unhealthy air.

Downsizing is real upper for Daylight

Laser technology reshaped for more commercial uses

By Mike Freeman, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Monday, June 1, 2009

In a Poway lab, Paul Larson holds a small metal case with a sliver-like lens down the center and two tiny lenses on either end. It's the guts of a laser sensor, from startup company Daylight Solutions, that detects the color of heat.

Or more precisely, the color of chemical vapor. By being able to find and measure chemical vapor, Daylight is betting that its cutting-edge sensor technology will change the landscape in fields ranging from medical diagnostics to environmental monitoring.

The four-year-old firm, which has raised \$13 million in venture capital, has essentially uncovered a way to transform bulky infrared-laser technology, previously confined to university labs, so it can be brought to the real world.

With a Daylight-powered laser-sensor device, diabetics can detect glucose in their breath, eliminating the need for finger-prick tests. Vehicles can be equipped with laser-powered breathalyzers so if a driver has been drinking, the vehicle won't start. And smoke alarms can be beefed up to find harmful gases before a fire starts or people get sick.

"I look at this as next-generation technology," said Larson, the company's co-founder and chief operating officer. "It's like going from the mainframe computer to the desktop."

Daylight has accomplished this by shrinking the sensitive sensors from the size of a desk to the size of a fast-food hamburger box – with the aim of getting even smaller.

It also has figured out how to run the laser sensors on batteries and make them tunable like a radio, opening the door to detecting a variety of molecules without complex adjustments.

A real-world experiment using Daylight's technology occurred during the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Students of Princeton engineering professor Claire Gmachl used one of Daylight's systems to detect and measure the relative concentration of greenhouse gases.

The experiment, done with blessing of the Chinese government, sought to determine whether steps taken by the government to improve air quality worked.

"Do factory shutdowns, do restrictions on car traffic really clean up the air?" Gmachl asked. "Can people influence air quality in the short term? It obviously helped, because the air quality was fine."

Gmachl's students now are using one of Daylight's laser sensors on a trickier problem. On the coast of Ghana, it is common to smoke fish in ovens to enhance the shelf life and flavor of the catch. The students are studying how much of a health risk the smoking process poses to people. They are using an infrared laser sensor to detect chemicals in fumes.

"If our eyes could see in the infrared, chemical vapor would have color," Gmachl said. "So different chemicals would have distinct colors . . . based on what the laser system and sensors are doing."

The wave lengths, or colors, of many different chemical vapors have been mapped in labs, Gmachl said. In China, her students used Daylight's sensors to search for ozone, carbon dioxide and ammonia.

Timothy Day, chief executive and co-founder of Daylight Solutions, said the company's lasers operate in the mid-infrared wave-length spectrum, which the human eye can't see.

"It's the color of heat," Day said. "It's the color snakes can see."

The lasers are produced in part using quantum-cascade semiconductor chips first developed by Bell Labs in 1992.

What Daylight has added is patented technology around the quantum-cascade chips to enable commercial products. The company calls its innovations External Cavity Quantum Cascade Laser technology.

Day, Larson and Salvatore Crivillo III founded Daylight, which now has 23 employees, with the idea of bringing techniques from the telecommunications optical world to laser sensors.

Day has a doctorate in electrical engineering from Stanford. He was a chief technology officer for New Focus, a photonics firm in the San Francisco Bay Area that was acquired in 2004. His father, Tom Day, was president of San Diego State University for 22 years.

Larson was the director of specialized integrated circuits at Qualcomm and has 20 years of experience in the communications chip business.

For now, much of Daylight's sales come from universities and research labs. It expects revenue to be in the "double-digit millions" by the end of this year, Larson said.

The portable, tunable sensors potentially have many uses outside the lab. Airport scanners, for example, are not very good at analyzing liquids – perhaps one reason open water bottles don't make it on airplanes.

But laser sensors are good at detecting chemical vapors from liquids.

"I am very impressed with their technology," said Lowell Burnett, a member of Daylight's advisory board and former chief executive of airport-scanner developer Quantum Magnetics in San Diego.

"There are hurdles for any innovative new technology coming to market. But I think their hurdles are not as high as many other technologies. This is something the country needs."

Daylight is working with defense firms to use the lasers to confuse heat-seeking missiles fired at commercial and military aircraft or ships.

Felix Comeau, chief executive of Alcohol Countermeasure Systems Corp. in Canada, is working with Daylight on new types of alcohol-interlock breathalyzer devices, which will prevent a vehicle from starting if alcohol is detected.

Laser sensors have an advantage over existing technology, Comeau said, in that they are durable and need less service. Over the long term, they have the potential to be smaller. For now, though, they are too big to be practical, he said.

But Comeau has high hopes.

"It's going to take some doing from an engineering standpoint," he said. "What they need to do is take this device that's relatively large and relatively expensive and take it down to where it's about the size of a cell phone."

Energy from pig slurry helps fight climate change

By Arthur Max, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Sunday, May 31, 2009

STERKSEL, Netherlands (AP) -- The 2,700 pigs on the farm that John Horrevorts manages yield more than ham and bacon. A biogas plant makes enough electricity from their waste to run the farm and feeds extra wattage into the Dutch national grid.

He even gets bonus payments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

As the world struggles to reduce pollution causing climate change, attention has focused on the burning of fossil fuels in factories, power stations, and vehicles. But U.N. scientists say farming and forestry account for more than 30 percent of the greenhouse gases that are gradually heating the earth. Much of that pollution comes from cattle, sheep and pigs that belch or excrete methane, a heat-trapping gas more than 20 times as potent as carbon dioxide, the most common global warming gas.

Negotiators from 190 countries have been working to reach a new climate change agreement in December on ways to reduce emissions and help countries adapt to changes in climate. They will reconvene June 1 in Bonn, Germany, for another two-week session.

Yet it is uncertain whether cutting agricultural emissions will be part of the agreement expected to emerge at the final meetings in Copenhagen, Denmark. The subject is complex, emissions are difficult to measure, and the whole question is politically sensitive, touching on the distrust between the world's rich and poor countries.

Scientists say it is too important to be left out.

"It would be absolutely nuts to ignore agriculture and forestry in any future climate deal," said Pete Smith, professor of soils and global change at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

U.N. studies say agriculture is the main source of income for one of every three working people. It also is a growing source of pollution, as the global population increases and living standards rise in developing countries where more people are eating meat.

The latest research by the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization says animal husbandry accounts for 18 percent of all greenhouse gases, when taking into account the grassland and forests that are cleared for raising livestock.

When the FAO report came out in 2006, "people in the livestock sector were shocked because they thought they did a good job," says Akke van der Zijpp, a professor of animal husbandry at Wageningen University, a premier Dutch technical facility. Now they "are becoming slowly aware that this problem has to be solved."

One way to deal with it is to reduce the methane animals produce by changing their diet or through breeding.

Another is to make use of it and burn it.

Horrevorts says Wageningen University's Praktijkcentrum, or Sterksel Research Center, creates 5,000 megawatts a year, enough to power 1,500 homes. The farm uses the electricity it needs and feeds the rest into the national grid, for which the government pays up to euro177 (\$238) per megawatt as a green energy subsidy.

Pigs can be remarkably house-broken animals. Here, they drop their waste through slats on the floor in the middle of the barn while spending most of their time in open stalls to the side. The slurry is channeled into three 4,000 cubic meter (141,250 cubic feet) tanks, then mixed into a thick goo with other organic waste like low-quality grain and carrot juice to increase the methane potential. Bacteria break down the material in a digester tank and the gas is siphoned off into a generator to produce electricity.

Horrevorts says a group including his operation and four other commercial farms avoids methane emissions equivalent to 40,000 tons of carbon a year. Dozens of private or nonprofit companies known as offset providers will "buy" those tons as a way of supporting renewable energy or other projects that reduce carbon emissions, then resell the credits to individuals or companies who want to shrink their carbon footprint.

Last year, Horrevorts said, a British offset provider paid euro5 (\$6.70) per ton for people wanting to neutralize plane travel or rock concert tickets. This year, the farm was negotiating with a Dutch company seeking to become carbon neutral to promote a green image.

Though operating expenses for the biogas plant are considerable, the combination of electricity savings, power production and carbon credits makes it profitable, Horrevorts says.

Horrevorts, who is a biological researcher rather than a professional farmer, says that with financial incentives through electricity subsidies, it could become standard practice for ordinary farmers. About 50 commercial biogas plants operate on farms in the Netherlands, and the practice is spreading across industrial livestock farms around the world.

"I think in the future every pig farm will have a biogas plant," he says.

But at euro1 million (\$1.3 million) for a big plant like Sterksel's, it's a rich man's answer to climate change.

About 70 percent of the world's agriculture is on small land holdings in the developing world, which complicates climate politics, says Antonio Hill of the nonprofit group Oxfam International.

"It sounds like a big pot," Hill said, but dealing with farming is tougher than with industries. "You're talking about tens of thousands of sources of industrial emissions in rich countries. That's a lot more manageable than hundreds of millions of agricultural operations."

Measuring and verifying carbon reductions from soil conservation, grassland management and livestock is complicated, and those reductions may not be permanent. Trees planted to soak up carbon from the air, for example, can always be cut down and burned.

In the past year, much effort has gone into quantifying emissions from deforestation in the tropics and ways to compensate countries like Brazil or Indonesia for protecting their rainforests. But no comparable effort has gone into accounting for the vast farming sector.

Another obstacle to an agreement in the U.N. talks is the suspicion that rich countries will meet a large part of their emissions reductions by buying credits on the international carbon market rather than constraining their own industries. In other words, they would buy credits from farmers

to reduce their carbon footprint, in the same way the offset company bought credits from the Sterksel pig farm.

"If the idea is that rich countries will do most of their reductions through offsets, a lot of developing countries have a big problem with that," says Hill, speaking from his home base in Bolivia.

Hill says he expected nothing more in the Copenhagen agreement than "place holders," or general statements that can be filled in later with details. But Smith, the scientist from Aberdeen who co-wrote the agriculture section in the 2007 report by the U.N's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, says including agriculture in the Copenhagen agreement would provide a source of capital from rich countries to poor ones.

"It would be a desperate shame if it were blocked for political reasons," he says.

California forests hold one answer to climate change

The state is a leader in setting up a program to offset heat-trapping emissions by investing in woodlands.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer
L.A. Times, Monday, June 1, 2009

Reporting from Arcata, Calif. -- Silvery light flickers through the redwood canopy of the Van Eck forest down to a fragrant carpet of needles and thimbleberry brush. A brook splashes along polished stones, through thickets of ferns.

How lush. How lovely. How lucrative.

This 2,200-acre spread in Humboldt County does well by doing good. For the last four years, Van Eck's foresters restricted logging, allowing trees to do what trees do: absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The conservation foundation that oversees the forest then calculated that carbon bonus and sold it for \$2 million to individuals and companies trying to offset some 185,000 metric tons of their greenhouse gas emissions.

"Forests can be managed like a long-term carbon bank," said Laurie Wayburn, president of the Pacific Forest Trust, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that oversees Van Eck. Selling offsets, she said, is like "writing checks on the account."

In the struggle over how to address climate change nationally and globally, forests play a major role. "Cap-and-trade" programs set limits on greenhouse gases and allow industries to trade emissions permits among themselves. And they can include provisions for offsetting heat-trapping pollution by investing in woodlands.

Offsets are poised for explosive growth. In the next two years, California is expected to roll out a statewide carbon market that may be expanded to other Western states. Nationally, climate legislation approved by a key congressional committee last week would allow U.S. industries to use offsets worth up to 2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, part of which could come from forest projects here and abroad.

A new climate treaty scheduled to be signed in Copenhagen in December may allow industrial countries to offset emissions with forest-saving projects in Brazil, Indonesia and other developing nations.

Ripe for fraud?

But the carbon commodity business is controversial. Critics fear that poorly regulated offsets could hand a get-out-of-jail-free card to heavy polluters. Should a coal-fired power plant in Nevada avoid slashing carbon dioxide emissions by paying to preserve trees in Oregon? Is this a complex trading scheme ripe for fraud?

To create trustworthy offsets, California's Air Resources Board two years ago set up the nation's first government-sponsored system to quantify and verify carbon. Those rules are being rewritten for possible use by other states.

"Companies having a hard time meeting their carbon emission limits may want to invest in forestry as a way to cut costs," said Mary D. Nichols, the board's chairwoman. "We have hundreds of thousands of acres of forests that can play a role in helping us to prevent global warming."

Forests are central to Earth's climate because, like oceans, they are a carbon "sink." Through photosynthesis, trees absorb carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas that is heating the planet's atmosphere. Allowing trees to grow larger before logging increases the carbon stored in a forest. So do widening the forested buffers along streams and clearing out underbrush to allow more space for trees. Reforesting areas abandoned to brush or destroyed by wildfire would also greatly boost carbon stock.

"California leads the world with regard to the role of forests in combating climate change," said Chris Kelly, California director for the Conservation Fund, a Virginia-based nonprofit that has sold offsets from Mendocino County preserves. "I just had an inquiry from a Canadian buyer who's expecting Canada to move in the direction set by California."

But so far, big timber operators, including Sierra Pacific Industries and Green Diamond Resource Co., have yet to enroll in California's offsets program. Current standards require owners to agree to a permanent conservation easement, a legal agreement that would guarantee carbon-storage measures in perpetuity. Companies have found that too onerous, and as a result only a handful of woodlands have registered, mainly those managed by conservation groups.

For the last 18 months, members of a task force of environmentalists, timber operators and state officials have been locked in contentious negotiations to revise the rules. The new draft, to go before the Air Resources Board next month, substitutes a 100-year contract for the easement, thus allowing development after a century. It also clarifies rules for companies to quantify and verify carbon.

At least one environmental group is uncomfortable with the changes. "By removing the easement, you leave the system open to gaming," said Brian Nowicki, a forest specialist with the Center for Biological Diversity.

"The timber industry wants 'business as usual' practices, like clear-cutting, to qualify for carbon credit."

But groups represented on the task force, including the Environmental Defense Fund, the Nature Conservancy and Pacific Forest Trust, say that century-long contracts and strict accounting rules will guarantee that offsets will be granted only if additional carbon is stored above and beyond conventional forest practices.

David Bischel, president of the California Forestry Assn., the industry trade group, said he expects more landowners to sign up but cautions, "It is an opportunity in its infancy: When you add up the numbers, it is not a huge source of revenue."

'This is a win-win'

Nonetheless, he estimates that the state's 14 million acres of private timberland could be managed to sequester twice as much carbon as they do now. And he praises conservationists for acknowledging the need for working forests: "We've moved on from the old timber wars. This is a win-win."

Among the first companies to jump into the forest carbon market was Pacific Gas & Electric, Northern California's biggest utility. Its "Climate Smart" program offers customers the chance to pay a tax-deductible surcharge on their bills, averaging \$5, to offset electricity use. In two years, 30,400 customers have bought 214,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas reductions -- the emissions equivalent of taking 43,000 cars off the road for a year. Much of that tonnage was purchased from the Conservation Fund, which manages Mendocino County's 23,780-acre Garcia River Forest. At Van Eck, politicians were among the first purchasers: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco), both seeking to offset air travel.

Federal forests, which account for more than half of the state's woodlands, are not being considered for trading schemes, although officials are studying how to increase their carbon sequestration. A U.S. Forest Service program invites individuals to offset their carbon footprint by donating to a Carbon Capital Fund to pay for tree-planting in the San Bernardino National Forest, among others.

Over the next few decades, however, the state's new standards could allow timber companies to market at least 13 million metric tons of carbon dioxide offsets from private lands, according to the Air Resources Board.

Forest owners can earn far more by full-scale logging or selling to developers. But if offset values rise under mandatory climate regulations, they could offer a counterweight to development pressure. The U.S. annually loses an estimated 1.5 million acres of private forest to urban sprawl.

Wedge between a gated community and a tract that shows the ragged remains of clear-cuts, Van Eck is a micromanaged woodland laboratory. The biggest cost of meeting carbon rules is labor," said Wayburn, the Pacific Forest Trust's president. "You have to crawl over the logs, estimate the carbon by measuring the butt end, and do detailed inventories."

Between giant stumps of redwoods felled in the 19th century, Van Eck's foresters paint turquoise rings around trees slated for cutting. Wayburn tramps across a bed of moss, pointing out trees scarred by bears and glancing skyward to catch a glimpse of Arnie, the resident spotted owl. She points out the forest's role in protecting clean water and wildlife -- not just in cooling the climate.

"We're re-creating a mature forest," she said. "We will leave some trees to get 600 years old. But we're also thinning over time because wider spacing leads to an older forest. If you don't harvest at all, you can't restore very well. Fire comes in. Pests and invasive species come in."

Whether California's forests can be recruited to wage a climate war is linked to the eventual price of offsets. And the price that companies will pay depends on the credibility of the offset.

"What is being done on Van Eck can be done across a wide variety of forests," Wayburn said. "The challenge of global warming is figuring out whether you've made a difference. Here, you can see that you have."

Lawmakers criticize retrofit of gas pumps

By Mark Glover

Sacramento Bee, Friday, May 29, 2009

A state-mandated vapor recovery system retrofit at thousands of gas pumps statewide has pitted the California Air Resources Board against some state lawmakers.

The air board says it's working to protect the health of millions of Californians, but agitated lawmakers accuse the board and the state's air districts of riding roughshod over small businesses and the jobs they provide amid the economic downturn.

A recent state Senate report said nearly \$1 million in fines have been issued against station owners and more than 60 have been driven out of business.

State Sen. Dave Cox, R-Fair Oaks, contends the board's actions amount to the state saying "that it's OK to take (away) these small businesses."

The air board counters that it has been considerate of owners' needs -- that fines have been minimal and no stations have gone out of business because of the regulation.

"Absolutely, we will continue as we have been. ... The preponderance of gas station owners have shown a willingness to comply," said air board spokesman Dimitri Stanich.

The gas station retrofit has been in the works for nearly a decade, as the air board sought to limit emissions that escape from gas pump nozzles when motorists fill their vehicles' fuel tanks at service stations.

The state ultimately mandated improved nozzles, vapor processors and other equipment, which the air board said would eliminate the daily release of up to 10 tons of smog-forming compounds as a result of spillage and fumes escaping at gas stations.

Gasoline vapors are primarily made of hydrocarbons, which react with other air pollutants to form ozone that can contribute to respiratory problems, including asthma. The state also said the enhanced vapor recovery, or EVR, systems will reduce exposure to benzene, a carcinogen.

The retrofit, however, is pricey – about \$11,000 per pump, or an average of about \$80,000 for a typical service station, the industry says.

As the April 1 deadline for the retrofit approached, the air board said it was prepared, along with 35 air districts statewide, to levy fines and close stations not in compliance. The board estimated that 5 percent of about 11,000 California stations facing the deadline ultimately would close.

Just before the deadline, however, the board said station operators could avoid fines if they showed "a good-faith effort in reaching compliance," including filing applications to start the retrofit.

By the middle of this month, Stanich said that 9,723, or 93 percent, of 10,403 stations statewide had applied. And of that total, 7,310 stations, or 70 percent, already had installed the required equipment.

He acknowledged there are "holdouts," some perhaps waiting for legislation to spare them the cost of the retrofit.

Stanich said that, as of mid-May, no station "has been closed for this regulation," although some had received notices of violations. Stanich said fines have been limited and the board is providing leeway to those not in compliance.

That's a far cry from a report lawmakers produced.

On April 30, a state Senate release – topped with the names of Sens. Cox; Ron Calderon, D-Montebello; and Rod Wright, D-Inglewood – cited information gleaned from regional air control districts. That research reported fines totaling \$943,815 against 149 California stations and claimed that 64 stations had been closed as of April 17.

Senators also claimed that regulations differed among regional air districts.

Wright said he's an "advocate for clean air, but we are talking about the closing of viable businesses and the loss of thousands of jobs for rank-and-file workers. Many of the stations that are trying to comply are being hampered by high fees and difficult local permitting processes."

Calderon, who warned of high job losses before the April 1 retrofit deadline, noted, "Whether local air control districts are directly shutting down gas stations or the stations are closing because of the high fines, the end result is the same – stations are closing, workers are out of jobs and gas prices will go back up."

Cox responded with Senate Bill 507, which would extend the date of retrofit enforcement for a year. However, that bill died last week in the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. Other bills still making their way through the Capitol propose limiting fines or providing some financial assistance to station owners struggling to do the retrofit.

About the only point of agreement in the debate is that scores of gas stations ultimately will close. What is unknown is exactly how many will go under and over how long a period of time.

Cleaner fuel through hydrogen innovation

by Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Friday, May 29, 2009

Using hydrogen, the Ripon-based mechanical engineer-turned-inventor says he doubles his fuel efficiency. He uses diesel, too, but since about 1½ years ago, he's injected hydrogen into his

truck engine using a simple device that he's trying to get certified by state and federal air regulators. He calls it the "Revolution 22."

Together with three business partners, he plans to someday soon manufacture the primitive machine in Tracy under the auspices of his newly formed company, Go Go Green LLC.

The stainless steel cylinder — what the company markets as a "hydrogen fuel and emission reduction system" — is electrically wired to McConahay's truck in a way that allows it to breathe hydrogen into the engine's intake manifold. From there, it quickens the flame spread during combustion, igniting more of the vaporized fuel and dramatically reducing carbon emissions. What comes out the tailpipe is a clean, faintly white vapor that smells similar to soap.

"Isn't that great?" asked McConahay's electrician friend and business partner John Dupree, kneeling down by the tailpipe after just inhaling the vapor to prove its cleanness. "You can barely see it."

The mechanism is actually nothing new. Backyard inventors have for decades tinkered with similar aftermarket add-ons. The innovative part is inside the cylinder — the chemical mixture that separates water into oxygen and hydrogen. Normally, hydrogen fuel generators use electricity, or a "brute force" reaction, to divide molecules. Using a chemical instead of electrical reaction uses less energy.

The chemical mixture was created by Modesto-based molecular chemist Jonathan Knudsen, who in 2001 graduated with a doctorate degree in chemistry from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. For now, it's his patent-pending intellectual property.

The company — based at the Tracy Municipal Airport — can't sell the device in the U.S. until it is certified by the California Air Resource Board and the Environmental Protection Agency. But it can legally market the product internationally through its Web site.

Thanks to Richard Ortenheim, owner of Tracy's Skyview Aviation and finance officer for Go Go Green, the company already has an international contact. Ortenheim's father, Bjorn Ortenheim is a 67-year-old Swedish scientist who has for decades studied hydrogen fuel and renewable energy. He boasts 17 patents to his name and agreed to help market the product overseas.

Go Go Green has set up shop at the Tracy airport, where McConahay and Dupree fine-tune their creation while they wait for the go-ahead from state and federal regulators to get their business off the ground.

The men said they're depending on investors to keep the company afloat through the permitting ordeal, which can cost up to \$1.3 million.

After that, it's all downhill, Dupree said.

"That's when we can bring jobs to Tracy," he said from his space at the airport. "We can easily open a huge warehouse, employ hundreds of people. That's how big this is."

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sat., May 30, 2009:](#)

Carbon Offsets: A Small Price to Pay for Efficiency

By Robert H. Frank

ARE carbon offsets a good thing?

They are intended to reduce the environmental impact of consumption. Traveling by plane, for example, causes carbon dioxide to be emitted into the atmosphere, so travelers can pay a specialist to offset those emissions some other way — perhaps by planting vegetation or installing renewable-energy technologies. It all sounds reasonable.

Yet carbon offsets have drawn sharp criticism, even ridicule. A British Web site called Cheat Neutral (www.cheatneutral.com) parodies the concept — by offering a service under which someone who wants to cheat on his partner can pay someone else who will refrain from

committing an act of infidelity. The site's founders say they wanted to use humor to demonstrate why the market for carbon offsets is a moral travesty.

But the criticism is misguided. If our goal is to reduce carbon emissions as efficiently as possible, offsets make perfect economic sense.

Consider the decision of whether to buy a hybrid car. Because of the expensive batteries and other complex equipment in such cars, they can cost much more than similar vehicles powered by standard combustion engines. Many people drive so little that they wouldn't save enough on gasoline to recoup the higher cost. Yet many such people buy hybrids anyway, because they think they are helping the environment. Well and good, but they could help even more by buying a standard car and using the savings to buy carbon offsets.

The same goes for someone who wonders whether it's O.K. to eat foods grown far from home. A New Yorker may worry, for example, that the diesel fuel burned to ship California-grown tomatoes to him in winter will accelerate global warming. But suppose he would be happy to pay \$10 more than the cost of shipping those tomatoes rather than eat locally grown root vegetables nine months a year. That would buy more than enough carbon offsets to neutralize the greenhouse gases emitted by shipping the tomatoes. So it would be much better, for him and the planet, if he bought offsets and ate winter tomatoes.

Of course, carbon offsets alone won't eliminate global warming. People also need stronger incentives to take into account the environmental consequences of their actions.

President Obama has proposed attacking the problem with a carbon cap-and-trade system. The government would first set a limit on annual carbon emissions, then auction emissions permits to the highest bidders.

Companies could still use processes or sell products that emit carbon, but only by first buying a permit for each unit of carbon released. If the government wanted to limit carbon emissions to five billion tons a year, for example, it would auction that many tons of annual carbon permits.

This approach was first used in the United States to address acid rain, when the Clean Air Act established a market for permits to emit sulfur dioxide. Compared with more traditional regulatory measures, the auction method substantially reduced the cost of achieving the law's air-quality target.

As people learn more about such an approach, they seem less likely to oppose it. Although several environmental groups once bitterly opposed pollution permit auctions, they now endorse them enthusiastically.

A carbon cap-and-trade system is functionally similar to a carbon tax. Both approaches would raise the cost of activities that generate carbon dioxide emissions, giving people a powerful incentive to reduce their carbon footprints. Carbon offsets are no substitute for the stronger incentives inherent in carbon taxes or cap-and-trade, but they can reinforce their effects. Both carbon taxes and permit auctions would also generate revenue that could be used to buy additional carbon offsets.

Dozens of companies, nonprofit and for-profit, sell carbon offsets, and some critics question how their work can be verified. But with various certification programs now in place — including the Gold Standard and Green-e Climate, to name two — there is no reason that fraud should be harder to curb in carbon-offset markets than in other domains.

At last count, Cheat Neutral, the British infidelity neutralization Web site, said it had offset 65,768 cheats, and had recruited a roster of "9,002 faithful people ready to neutralize your misdemeanors." The Web site draws out the parallel this way: "When you cheat on your partner you add to the heartbreak, pain, and jealousy in the atmosphere." Cheat Neutral claims that its plan "neutralizes the pain and unhappy emotion and leaves you with a clear conscience."

Actually, no. Only you will know whether your conscience is clear, but it is certain that higher rates of marital fidelity in London do nothing to eliminate the anguish caused by straying spouses

in Manchester. In contrast, one person's reduction in carbon dioxide emissions anywhere on the planet fully offsets anyone else's contribution to the total.

Carbon offsets, though much maligned, are an excellent idea. If you want to help reduce carbon emissions, consider buying some.

Robert H. Frank, a Cornell University economist, is a visiting faculty member at the Stern School of Business at New York University. He is the author of "The Economic Naturalist's Field Guide: Common Sense Principles for Troubled Times," which will be published on Monday.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses climate change kills thousands. Global Humanitarian Forum urges the stop on global warming. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

El cambio climático mata a miles

Foro Humanitario Global urge a frenar el calentamiento del planeta

El Universal, Saturday, May 30, 2009

LONDRES (EFE).— El cambio climático causa la muerte de 300 mil personas al año y supone un coste económico de 125 mil millones de dólares, según un informe del Foro Humanitario Global que se presentó ayer en Londres.

El estudio fue elaborado por expertos y agencias internacionales y pretende "presionar" a los líderes mundiales para que alcancen un acuerdo en la cumbre sobre el clima que se celebrará el próximo mes de diciembre en Copenhague.

El ex secretario general de la ONU y presidente del foro, Kofi Annan, lamentó en la presentación del informe que la crisis económica haya relegado la lucha contra este fenómeno a un segundo plano y advirtió: "El cambio climático no va a esperar". Según el informe, este fenómeno afecta en la actualidad a más de 300 millones de personas y sus consecuencias perjudican especialmente a los países más pobres, que sin embargo emiten tan sólo 1% de dióxido de carbono.

Las proyecciones realizadas para el año 2030 apuntan a que, de seguir así, el cambio climático será responsable de 500 mil muertes anuales, afectará a 600 millones de personas y supondrá un coste económico de 300 mil millones de dólares (unos 215 mil millones de euros). "Algo terrible está pasando y tenemos que hacer algo", insistió Annan.

En el panel de asesores que participó en la redacción de este informe hay expertos del Instituto Internacional para el Medio Ambiente y el Desarrollo, del Panel Intergubernamental para el Cambio Climático, del Programa Medioambiental de las Naciones Unidas y de la organización no gubernamental Oxfam, entre otros. Según precisaron los autores del reporte, 90% de las muertes contabilizadas como efecto directo del cambio climático se derivan del agravamiento de problemas como la malnutrición, la diarrea o la malaria. El restante 10% se deben a la mayor frecuencia de los desastres naturales, que han aumentado 40% en los últimos 25 años.

El ex secretario general de Naciones Unidas subrayó que el objetivo es crear conciencia en la sociedad con respecto a que el cambio climático y sus consecuencias se están notando hoy y no son "una cuestión del futuro".

Desde Oxfam, su responsable en el Reino Unido, Barbara Stocking, alertó: "El tiempo (para actuar) se está agotando". Annan exigió a los gobiernos de todo el mundo que definan sus políticas ante el cambio climático, especialmente en lo que atañe a la reducción de las emisiones de CO₂, en vez de esperar a ver qué hace el resto de países para actuar.

Stocking, a la vez, criticó que la Unión Europea ya no esté a la cabeza de esta lucha y esté azapada a la espera de que EU y China hagan algún movimiento.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the Valley Air District has launched a new program that will finance up to 35 thousand dollars older diesel trucks for newer cleaner ones.](#)

Autoridades ambientales proponen cambiar viejas camionetas que usan diesel

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, May 29, 2009

La Administración de Calidad del Aire en el Valle de San Joaquín en California lanzó un nuevo programa para financiar hasta con 35 mil dólares a quienes deseen cambiar viajes camionetas que consumen diesel por nuevos modelos menos contaminantes.

Maricela Velásquez es vocera de la administración y platicó que el estado de California tiene hasta 15 millones de dólares para el programa: "El distrito del aire está ofreciendo dinero para cambiar los antiguos camiones del aire, o las trocas" de diesel para que tengamos mejor medio ambiente, mejor calidad del aire".

Las condiciones son que las unidades a reemplazarse sean de modelos de 1993 o anteriores, con capacidad de carga de 60 mil libras, y que usen diesel para operar. El dinero que ofrece la administración sería suficiente para conseguir nuevas unidades, "pues van a poder recibir entre 30 mil y 35 mil dólares", declaró Velásquez.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses President Obama recognizes a solar energy generator on areal base Nellis as a national example in the generating and consumption of solar energy.](#)

Destaca el presidente Obama como ejemplo nacional a una generadora solar en la base aérea Nellis

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, May 28, 2009

El presidente Barack Obama dijo que una generadora de energía solar con 72 mil paneles o rejillas en la base aérea Nellis, en Nevada es el ejemplo de proyectos que desea ver en todo el país. "Estamos junto a la mayor base de su tipo en todo el hemisferio occidental", comentó el mandatario, al aclarar sin embargo que en la generación y consumo de energía solar en el mundo, Estados Unidos todavía se encuentra detrás de Japón y Alemania. El presidente instó a echar mano a una y poderosa herramienta: "El poder de la energía limpia renovable, para construir una nueva base más firme para el crecimiento económico". Dijo además que como en la base Nellis, los estadounidenses pueden consumir una cuarta parte de electricidad generada por energía solar.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses legislature is trying to apply the same restrictions on Oakland's maritime port as does the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.](#)

Tratan de adaptar a Oakland restricciones a contaminación de puertos de Los Ángeles y Long Beach

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, May 27, 2009

La legislatura de California analiza una propuesta que impondría al puerto marítimo de Oakland restricciones similares a las que el año pasado adoptaron las terminales de Los Ángeles y Long Beach, las mayores en el país.

El legislador, Jerry Hill propone que Oakland cobre cuotas a los camiones de carga que consumen diesel y el dinero que se reúna se use precisamente para combatir la contaminación.

Dos estudios atribuyeron el año pasado a la contaminación en el puerto de Oakland cientos de muertes prematuras y enfermedades respiratorias entre residentes el área.

Algunas instituciones han cuestionado que el plan de cuotas carece de un límite tope para la contaminación.