

District has tips to clean the air

Staff reports

Modesto Bee, Monday, July 20, 2009

Drive a hybrid car to reduce tailpipe emissions, car-pool with co-workers, or skip the car and ride a bicycle instead. Switch to energy efficient appliances, plant a tree and use a clothesline instead of a dryer.

If those great ideas sound time-consuming or too expensive, don't worry, because you can still carry a reusable bag to the grocery store.

Folks from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District insist that there are plenty of small things people can do to save the planet. District representatives will offer tips Tuesday evening at a community meeting in Salida.

The district, which covers an eight-county region, is sponsoring 15 community meetings this summer to talk about air quality. Two-hour programs recently were held in Ceres and Merced.

One lucky participant wins an electric lawn mower at each meeting.

Tuesday's Healthy Living Air program will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Nick Blom Regional Library, 5835 Sisk Road, Salida.

A meeting will be held Aug. 6 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Westside Union Elementary School, 659 K St., Los Banos.

Levels downgrade air quality in Valley

By Gerald Carroll

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, July 20, 2009

High ozone levels are expected to trigger an "unhealthy" rating today for Tulare County's air, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported.

A stagnant high-pressure air mass centered over Central California continues to dominate the weather, with Sunday's Visalia high reaching a near-record 108 degrees. Forecasts for today call for a Visalia high of 106, according to the National Weather Service.

Heat, coupled with persistent high pressure, tends to worsen air conditions in the Central Valley, experts say.

There's a chance high temperatures could dip below 100 by Wednesday, said Gary Sanger of the National Weather Service's Hanford field office. But that's only if the pressure system weakens, he said.

"It's probably going to be 100-plus for most of this coming week," said Scott Borgioli of Visalia-based WeatherAg.

There's a chance that tropical moisture will move into the area by the weekend, he said, but that would have no bearing on the heat. Forecasters expect triple-digit temperatures to last through next weekend.

The record July 19 high for Visalia was 110, set in 1951.

Additional Facts

Five-day forecast

Day High Low

Today 101 68

Tuesday 99 67

Wednesday 99 66

Thursday 100 66

Friday 101 67

Source: www.Accuweather.com

Valley vanpools slash gasoline emissions

Fresno Bee

In the Sacramento Bee, Sunday, Jul. 19, 2009

FRESNO – A growing vanpool program based in Kings County, initially started for farm and prison workers, is cutting overall commuting costs and significantly reducing gasoline [emissions](#).

"Every time you see one of our vans, picture a dump truck of emissions taken off the road," said Ron Hughes, executive director of the Kings County Area Public Transit Agency.

The agency runs Agricultural Industries Transportation Services for farm-workers and Kings Area Rural Transit, or KART, for all other workers.

The vanpool program started in 2002 with two vans carrying about 24 prison workers. Service has expanded to serve a wider range of customers; more than 350 vans operate primarily in Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Kern counties.

Hughes said the impetus for the van program was a fatal accident in August 1999.

A van carrying farmworkers – most of whom were crowded on homemade benches with no safety restraints – collided with a tomato truck making a U-turn near the western Fresno County community of Five Points. The crash killed 13; two survived.

The deadly collision got the attention of lawmakers, who authorized a state and federal grant of \$5.8 million to start the farmworker van program, Hughes said.

It developed into a popular program over the years and now serves nearly 4,000 customers daily, akin to services that thrive in more urban areas.

Benefits of the vanpools are threefold: They deliver commuters to and from work inexpensively, make roadways safer and take thousands of vehicles off the roads, Hughes said.

In 2009, use of the vans will cut an estimated 551 tons of emissions from the air, he said.

The van programs have been a model in helping to reduce vehicle pollution, said Ashley Burrow, an air quality specialist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The Kings County-based vanpools also will contribute to 62 million fewer vehicle trips, which officials estimate will prevent four fatal accidents and 99 injury accidents while saving more than \$28 million in related costs, Hughes said.

Total projected savings in 2009 in emissions, prevented accidents and rider costs will be more than \$59 million, he said.

The average annual savings for van-pool riders is about \$7,500, factoring in the cost of gasoline, lower insurance premiums, and less wear and tear and maintenance on their vehicles, Hughes said.

Another benefit of vanpooling is that riders get a piece of their lives back, because the time spent traveling to and from work can be used to read, knit or clear e-mails, she said.

In the Kings County-based vanpooling programs, the expense of leasing the vans, maintenance, gas and insurance is divided among vanpool drivers and riders.

State and federal employees receive reimbursements, and others can get subsidies through air district grants. Some riders, such as those who work in downtown Fresno, also save on parking fees.

Costs for driving vanpoolers can range from \$100 to \$125 a month.

Kings County responds to birth defects concerns

By Eiji Yamashita
Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, July 18, 2009

Kings County health officials on Friday said they are on a fast track to investigate an unusually high percentage of birth defects reported last week by Kettleman City residents and environmental justice activists.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also released its own statement Friday, saying it has been working with the state and the county to begin the process of determining whether the incidents are related to environmental exposures.

Meanwhile, county officials drew a preliminary conclusion that these cases are "most likely a random event" and not linked to pollution around the rural town 40 miles southwest of Hanford.

The county's announcement comes the day before the scheduled protest march in Kettleman City on Saturday.

Environmental justice activists called the timing of the county's announcement "political as opposed to informational" and continued to accuse the county of its bias toward Waste Management.

Saturday's march will protest the proposed landfill expansion at Waste Management's Kettleman Hills Facility as well as the power plant proposal in Avenal. To set a stage for the march, community activists held a rally before the Kings County Government Center on July 8, when they announced figures showing an unusually high incident of birth defects in the community and called to halt the permit processes for all industrial projects around their community.

The activists say five babies were born with birth defects in Kettleman City during a 14-month period starting September 2007, and three of them have died. They say an estimated 17 to 20 children were born there during that time period.

Purely on the number of reported cases, it might be argued that a "cluster" exists, said Keith Winkler, Kings County's health director, said.. But he said of the five cases, the identity of one child could not be confirmed by the health department.

The county also found out, Winkler said, that one other child who died was born in Avenal, not Kettleman City.

"The county health department will continue to investigate these and all other cases of children born with birth defects," he said. "However, the county health officer has indicated that to the extent that a cluster may exist, it is his preliminary determination that it is most likely a random event unrelated to any environmental exposure to Kettleman City."

The county also said that 2.97 cases of birth defects per 1,000 live births were reported from Kettleman City between 1998-2005 — a number far lower when compared with 13.7 for Kings County and 12.27 for the entire Valley.

Health experts from Waste Management, which runs a 1,600-acre waste disposal facility in Kettleman Hills, gave similar reactions Friday.

"I'll make a guess that you'll not find that cluster, that it does not exist," said Dr. Benjamin Hoffman, chief medical officer for Waste Management. "There are some birth defects, but I'm going to bet there's no unifying case."

Hoffman, who was involved in health-risk analysis for the company's proposed landfill expansion, said there is no epidemiological evidence that residents' poor health is related to environmental exposure. "Local data didn't show anything; that was consistent with worldwide literature," Hoffman said.

Hoffman said he takes the community concerns seriously, but said "the problem here is, the allegations are diverting attention and resources from the important issues of community."

Waste Management has been required this year by the U.S. EPA to monitor the air around the facility throughout the day looking for individual polychlorinated biphenyls, a highly toxic substance known as PCBs, that are linked to birth defects and cancer.

The landfill expansion plan by the company would require another independent health study in Kettleman City. The recent concerns about birth defects, which are based on self-reported figures, would add a new twist to the controversy.

Bradley Angel, executive director of San Francisco-based Greenaction, called some of the statements made by the county Friday false.

"They claim, if the birth defect cluster exists, it's probably random, which they have zero to base it on, because they haven't tested anything or talked to anybody in the community," Angel said. "They either have ESP, or more likely it displays their incredible bias."

The county's claim that one child's parents lived in Avenal is false, because for eight of the nine months of the mother's pregnancy, the family lived in Kettleman City, Angel said.

Kings County Supervisor Richard Valle, who represents Kettleman City, complained of a lack of communication by opposition groups.

Valle said he has taken a proactive step to be in open communication with the EPA. Valle also said he has requested more than once to meet with Greenaction of San Francisco. He said his offers have been being ignored so far.

"They came to the county to have a press conference saying the county's ignoring them," Valle said. "I'm the one who's feeling ignored."

Angel said the only communication he received from Valle was a hostile phone call.

"He's communicated with me once several months ago, when he called me up and literally screamed at me on the phone," Angel said. "He was disrespectful. He never called me again."

Neighbors fighting concrete plant plans

By James Burger, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, July 18, 2009

Mark Polhamus wants to open a concrete crushing and recycling project on his heavy industrial property north of Hageman Road in northwest Bakersfield.

Area neighbors aren't big fans of the idea.

Kern County planning commissioners will hear the case for the second time Thursday, after delaying the project last month. County planners are recommending approval, with rules to add landscaping, control dust and prevent piles of concrete from piling up.

Polhamus owns the Cal Lowbed trucking and rental company on Rosedale Lane just north of Hageman along the Santa Fe Railroad tracks.

"I've been out there for three years and it was a junkyard when we moved out there. We've redone the road and put in first class yards," he said.

Neighbors include a Vaughn Water Company water storage tank complex and an airstrip run by the Kern Mosquito and Vector Control District.

But the wedge of heavy industrial property those users share has been trapped in the middle of residential neighborhoods -- older county neighborhoods to the west across Santa Fe Way and newer city neighborhoods developed in just the past few years to the north and east.

Residents there don't like the sound of a concrete crushing plant and are worried about dust, noise and traffic problems.

"It's too close to the neighborhoods," said area resident Carol Bender. "The closest house is approximately 800 feet from the project."

Neighbors are calling on the county to reject Polhamus' request for a conditional use permit.

Planners think the project is worthy of the county's blessing. Planning Director Ted James said dust, noise and traffic problems would be controlled through conditions on the project.

The county, which has been burned by refuse dumpers posing as recyclers before, was particularly concerned about how much material Polhamus would keep on his property.

They would limit his stockpile to six months' supply and require him to build retaining areas to hold the product. Stockpiles must stay at or below 16 feet tall.

Polhamus said the recycling operation is a perfect fit with his trucking company.

"We are on jobs where we collect concrete and asphalt," he said. "This totally marries into what I do every day. I've got 25 employees out there that I'm trying to keep in work."

It's a natural fit to collect it, crush it and reuse it as base material for parking lots, he said.

"We've got to be willing to follow the county's recommendations," he said. "What we're doing is a good thing for the environment, the community."

Bender said the noise and dust and industrial nature of the plan should force the city to do a full environmental report on the project.

Yes, the project is on heavy industrial land, she said, but that zoning doesn't belong in the neighborhood any more.

James said tracts of homes -- the most recent approved by the city of Bakersfield -- have been built up around the existing industrial zone.

"Now urbanization has moved in," he said.

Bender said the urbanization is out of place next to industrial.

"They did not create any buffer zone," she said. "We're not an urban area out here yet -- even though they're trying very hard to make us one."

Thursday's meeting will begin at 7 p.m. in the Kern County Administrative Center at 1115 Truxtun Ave., across N Street from the Rabobank Arena downtown.

Draft EIR lists impacts of proposed casino at Point Molate

By Katherine Tam, West County Times

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, July 19, 2009

A massive \$1.2 billion hotel-casino resort on Richmond's waterfront would bring thousands of jobs and millions in revenue, but it also would increase traffic and change the historic character of a century-old collection of buildings, among other impacts, according to an environmental report.

Officials and residents will decide if the trade-off is worth it.

The Guidiville Band of Pomo Indians and developer Upstream Point Molate LLC want to build a resort at the old Point Molate Naval Fuel Depot they say would draw about 20,000 people a day. The project calls for 124,000 square feet of gaming, two hotels totaling 1,075 rooms, a conference center, shops, restaurants, tribal facilities, parks, trails and ferry service sprawled across 85 acres north of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

Some welcome the jobs and revenue, while others fear a casino will feed on gamblers' addictions and bring crime and traffic.

The long-awaited draft environmental impact report is open for public comment through Sept. 23. Hearings are scheduled Aug. 12 and Sept. 17.

Several business organizations, nonprofit groups and others had not read the report yet and could not comment on its specifics, but said they planned to review it.

"We will be scrutinizing the document," said Robert Cheasty, a board member of Citizens for East Shore Parks, which has sued the city before over its compliance with state environmental laws. "We're hoping for more enlightenment out of the city."

Citizens for East Shore Parks earlier this year sued the city, developer and tribes, claiming the city is illegally pursuing an expedited land transfer for the resort project without first completing an environmental review. The lawsuit is pending and the parties are in discussions.

The four-volume draft environmental report carries a long list of impacts, from soil erosion to air quality, and a host of mitigation measures.

Among the impacts, some gaming and restaurants would be housed in buildings that make up the Winehaven National Historic District, which was home to a flourishing winery in the early 1900s. One building, a wine cellar with a deteriorating roof, would be demolished and another building moved to a different location, activities the report calls a significant and unavoidable impact. Large modern buildings would be added that would detract from the character of the district because of their sheer size, the report added.

Workers would number about 9,300 during construction and nearly 12,000 — mostly entry-level — when the complex opens, the report stated. About \$1.4 billion would be spent on building, manufacturing and operations during construction. Once open, the resort is expected to generate \$959 million in gross revenue its first year.

The casino and entertainment center, where performances and events would be held, are the economic engine, supplying 90 percent of the jobs and the bulk of the revenue.

It also would be the main driver for the increased traffic on local roads and highways. Drivers could wait longer at the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge toll plaza by 2025. The environmental report calls for re-striping parts of Richmond Parkway and Interstate 580 to add more lanes and funnel cars through. An I-80 westbound on-ramp at the sound side of the Parkway would need to be built. The developer and tribe would foot part of the bill.

The report lists five project alternatives. City officials will weigh these and hold public hearings before issuing a final environmental report, which will name a "preferred alternative" for moving ahead with the project. The alternatives are:

Build what's proposed but add 340 housing units to create a 35-acre residential neighborhood. The tribe would live in a third of the units.

Reduce development and add 56 more acres of open space and parks. One hotel would be built, not two, and the number of rooms capped at about 400. The retail village, entertainment center and conference center would be downsized.

No casino. The development would still include the other components, but the hotel would be smaller at 150 rooms and housing would increase to 1,100 units spread over 70.5 acres.

No casino. The land would be converted into a park and basic infrastructure such as restrooms would be added. The historic buildings would be stabilized, but not demolished or renovated.

Do nothing.

Federal, state, regional and city approvals are a must before the project can go forward. Contaminants also must be removed. About \$28.5 million from the federal government plus \$4 million from the developer will be used to clean up groundwater and soil contamination.

CASINO-HOTEL RESORT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

The draft environmental impact statement and environmental impact report for the Point Molate Mixed-Use Tribal Destination Resort and Casino is available for public review through Sept. 23.

Public workshops are 6 p.m. Aug. 10 and Aug. 27 at the Richmond Memorial Auditorium, 403 Civic Center Plaza. Public hearings are 6 p.m. Aug. 12 and Sept. 17 at the same location.

The report is available online at www.pointmolateeis-eir.com and at the Richmond Main Library, 325 Civic Center Plaza, and at City Hall, 450 Civic Center Plaza.

Kids' lower IQ scores linked to prenatal pollution

By Lindsey Tanner, AP Medical Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Monday, July 20, 2009

Chicago (AP) -- Researchers for the first time have linked air pollution exposure before birth with lower IQ scores in childhood, bolstering evidence that smog may harm the developing brain.

The results are in a study of 249 children of New York City women who wore backpack air monitors for 48 hours during the last few months of pregnancy. They lived in mostly low-income neighborhoods in northern

Manhattan and the South Bronx. They had varying levels of exposure to typical kinds of urban air pollution, mostly from car, bus and truck exhaust.

At age 5, before starting school, the children were given IQ tests. Those exposed to the most pollution before birth scored on average four to five points lower than children with less exposure.

That's a big enough difference that it could affect children's performance in school, said Frederica Perera, the study's lead author and director of the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health.

Dr. Michael Msall, a University of Chicago pediatrician not involved in the research, said the study doesn't mean that children living in congested cities "aren't going to learn to read and write and spell."

But it does suggest that you don't have to live right next door to a belching factory to face pollution health risks, and that there may be more dangers from typical urban air pollution than previously thought, he said.

"We are learning more and more about low-dose exposure and how things we take for granted may not be a free ride," he said.

While future research is needed to confirm the new results, the findings suggest exposure to air pollution before birth could have the same harmful effects on the developing brain as exposure to lead, said Patrick Breyse, an environmental health specialist at Johns Hopkins' school of public health.

And along with other environmental harms and disadvantages low-income children are exposed to, it could help explain why they often do worse academically than children from wealthier families, Breyse said.

"It's a profound observation," he said. "This paper is going to open a lot of eyes."

The study in the August edition of *Pediatrics* was released Monday.

In earlier research, involving some of the same children and others, Perera linked prenatal exposure to air pollution with genetic abnormalities at birth that could increase risks for cancer; smaller newborn head size and reduced birth weight. Her research team also has linked it with developmental delays at age 3 and with children's asthma.

The researchers studied pollutants that can cross the placenta and are known scientifically as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Main sources include vehicle exhaust and factory emissions. Tobacco smoke is another source, but mothers in the study were nonsmokers.

A total of 140 study children, 56 percent, were in the high exposure group. That means their mothers likely lived close to heavily congested streets, bus depots and other typical sources of city air pollution; the researchers are still examining data to confirm that, Perera said. The mothers were black or Dominican-American; the results likely apply to other groups, researchers said.

The researchers took into account other factors that could influence IQ, including secondhand smoke exposure, the home learning environment and air pollution exposure after birth, and still found a strong influence from prenatal exposure, Perera said.

Dr. Robert Geller, an Emory University pediatrician and toxicologist, said the study can't completely rule out that pollution exposure during early childhood might have contributed. He also noted fewer mothers in the high exposure group had graduated from high school. While that might also have contributed to the high-dose children's lower IQ scores, the study still provides compelling evidence implicating prenatal pollution exposure that should prompt additional studies, Geller said.

The researchers said they plan to continue monitoring and testing the children to learn whether school performance is affected and if there are any additional long-term effects.

Scientists zoom in on carbon dioxide in NYC

By Jennifer Peltz, Associated Press Writer

In Sunday Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, July 19, 2009

NEW YORK Wade McGillis peered up at the structure propped like a high-tech stick figure - minus the head - on an elementary school roof. Then he examined the electronics attached to its spindly metal frame, looking out over the Harlem brownstones nearby and the skyscrapers farther away.

Within 15 minutes, a graph spiked in his office eight blocks away. The abrupt peak marked the [carbon dioxide](#) the Columbia University environmental engineering professor and three visitors had exhaled.

The spike was an anomaly, but it proved the rooftop device had done its job, helping to break down questions about global warming to a local level.

"We're unraveling the story of how carbon (dioxide) changes over the day, changes from neighborhood to neighborhood, and changes from the country to the city," said McGillis, who has set up seven sensors in and around New York City. The newest, in Central Park, was installed this spring.

The urban experiment shows a growing interest by researchers in tracking how much of the heat-trapping gas a city, neighborhood or building puts in the atmosphere, and how much the urban environment can suck out.

Some scientists hope the data might eventually help shape efforts to curb emissions of carbon dioxide - one of the main contributors to global warming - and measure whether such efforts are effective.

Carbon dioxide is emitted by various natural processes, including animals' breathing. But human activities - especially burning coal, oil natural gas and other fossil fuels - have greatly increased the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases trap heat on the planet's surface, causing a range of climate effects, many scientists and regulators say.

The rise of greenhouse gases already has increased temperatures, sea levels and heavy rains enough to affect water supplies, agriculture and health, and the effects are expected to worsen, scientists told the Obama administration in a report released last month. The report calls for more work on distinguishing human and natural factors in climate change and scaling the information down to local levels.

McGillis' monitors are in locales ranging from Harlem to rural eastern Long Island, about 80 miles away. The sensors measure carbon dioxide levels, wind speeds and other weather data every 15 minutes, submitting the data wirelessly. Readings are posted online soon after they're taken.

The monitors in Central Park and Harlem are only about two miles apart but often show notable differences in carbon dioxide levels, he said, and reflect how people and nature intertwine to affect the gases' ebb and flow.

McGillis' three-year-old project joins a growing list of efforts to keep tabs on carbon dioxide.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration now has about 70 carbon dioxide sensors around the world, many in remote areas. The agency hopes to do more carbon dioxide monitoring in cities to help test whether efforts to curb carbon emissions are effective, said Pieter Tans, who runs the monitor network.

Most power plants have been required to monitor their carbon dioxide emissions since the 1990s. Scientists have done carbon monitoring experiments of their own in Chicago, Salt Lake City and southern California, among other places.

Purdue University researcher Kevin Gurney sends a low-flying plane over Indianapolis to sample the gas in an attempt to gauge carbon dioxide emissions building by building. He combines air samples with a range of emissions, traffic and other data.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also is seeking more local specifics on greenhouse gas emissions, and proposed requiring annual reports from about 13,000 fuel refineries, car manufacturers and other large industrial facilities.

The reporting could involve some monitoring but would largely rely on calculating emissions from burning fuel, said Bill Irving, an official in the EPA's climate change division.

"Our view is, at this stage, the advanced, rigorous calculation approaches are justified," he said.

Coal industry lobbyist Scott Segal says industrial emissions calculations are refined enough that more monitoring wouldn't add much information.

India Sees Climate Change "Pressure," U.S. Upbeat

By Reuters

In the N.Y. Times, Sunday, July 19, 2009

GURGAON, India (Reuters) - An Indian official on Sunday complained about U.S. pressure on India to curb its greenhouse gas emissions, but U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emerged from their talks upbeat about a solution.

"There is simply no case for the pressure that we, who have among the lowest emissions per capita, face to actually reduce emissions," Jairam Ramesh, India's minister of state for environment, told Clinton in their talks.

"And as if this pressure was not enough, we also face the threat of carbon tariffs on our exports to countries such as yours," he added in a statement he made to Clinton in private, repeated to journalists and then handed out to the media.

The comments took some of the shine off an event that Clinton staged at a "green" building outside New Delhi to show the potential of energy-saving technologies.

The red brick building, built by India's ITC tobacco and hotels conglomerate, maximizes natural light and its glass lets in light but not heat, which respectively reduce the need for artificial light and air-conditioning.

Making her first trip to India as secretary of state, Clinton was, however, upbeat about bridging U.S.-Indian differences on how to curb the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

"We had a very fruitful discussion today," Clinton told reporters after a one-hour discussion with Ramesh. "We have many more areas of agreement than perhaps had been appreciated."

TECHNOLOGY PACT

The United States wants big developing countries such as India and China, whose emissions are skyrocketing as their economies grow, to agree to rein them in.

Developing countries say industrial nations must curb their own pollution and provide funding to help developing nations before they are asked to set limits that could crimp their economic expansion.

Both sides appeared to be playing to the Indian domestic audience, with Clinton saying Washington did not wish to do anything that would reduce India's growth and Ramesh seeking to blunt criticism his government might concede too much.

Todd Stern, the U.S. special envoy for climate change, accompanied Clinton and will hold talks over the next few days with senior Indian officials.

With a new U.N. climate treaty due to be agreed in Copenhagen in December, tackling global warming is one of the central issues on Clinton's visit to New Delhi. On Monday she will meet Prime Minister Manmohan

Singh and External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna to discuss defense sales, nuclear power and non-proliferation.

U.S. officials expect to sign a pact to ensure that U.S. arms technology sold to India is used for its intended purposes and does not leak to third countries, a step required by U.S. law.

Such a pact would allow U.S. firms to compete for India's plan to buy 126 multi-role fighter aircraft, which would be one of the largest arms deals in the world and could be a boon to Lockheed Martin Corp and Boeing Co.

The United States also hopes India will announce that it has reserved two sites for U.S. companies to build nuclear power plants, which could be worth as much as \$10 billion in business for American firms.

And they want to establish a "strategic dialogue" between the two countries to be led by Clinton and Krishna, reflecting U.S. President Barack Obama's desire to strengthen ties with India.

Clinton touts prospects for better ties with India

By Robert Burns

AP National Security Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, Jul. 19, 2009

NEW DELHI U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton touted prospects for strengthening U.S.-India relations, despite sharp differences on carbon emissions, as they readied a pact giving U.S. companies more access to India's expanding markets.

"We want to broaden and deepen our strategic understanding" and find more common ground with India, Clinton told an audience of several hundred students and faculty members at Delhi University. She said she would announce later Monday a more comprehensive approach to U.S.-India relations, to include talks on energy security, agriculture reform, education and counterterrorism.

Clinton was expected to sign at least one agreement designed to give U.S. companies more access to India's expanding markets.

But her trip has not gone strictly according to script: she and an Indian official had a blunt exchange on the U.S. push for India accept binding limits on [carbon emissions](#).

Even as Clinton expressed optimism about an eventual climate change deal to India's benefit, its minister of environment and forests, Jairam Ramesh, told her: "There is simply no case for the pressure that we - who have among the lowest emissions per capita - face to actually reduce emissions."

"And as if this pressure was not enough, we also face the threat of carbon tariffs on our exports to countries such as yours," he added.

U.S. officials had expected the discussions to focus more on cooperation in related areas of energy efficiency, green buildings and clean-burning fuels.

Clinton said that Ramesh had presented a "fair argument." But she also said that India's case "loses force" because the fast-growing country's absolute level of carbon emissions - as opposed to the per capita amount - is "going up, and dramatically."

Later, at an agricultural research site in a farm field outside the capital, Clinton told reporters she is optimistic about getting a climate change deal that will satisfy India.

"This is part of a negotiation," she said. "It's part of a give-and-take and it's multilateral, which makes it even more complex. But until proven otherwise, I'm going to continue to speak out in favor of every country doing its part to deal with the challenge of global climate change."

Clinton also met Monday with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and was to hold separate talks with Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna to discuss forging a more productive partnership between two countries still struggling to overcome profound distrust rooted in Cold War rivalries. The Obama administration regards India as an emerging world power and a key to turning the tide against violent Islamic extremism.

In her session with Singh, Clinton presented an Obama invitation for a state visit Nov. 24 and the prime minister accepted, Clinton aides said.

Clinton, on her fourth visit to India and her first as secretary of state, used her appearance at Delhi University to stress the importance of stepping beyond formal diplomacy to encourage U.S.-India contacts on other levels, including academic and business.

"We have to get to the real meat of the matter, and our cooperation will do that for us," she told her university audience.

Clinton was expected to sign an agreement enabling U.S. companies to sell nuclear reactors to India, and possibly another on defense sales.

The nuclear deal would give American companies exclusive rights to sell nuclear power plants at specified locations in India - an opportunity that could be worth \$10 billion for U.S. sellers. A second deal, which officials said they hoped would also be ready for signing Monday, is known as an end-use monitoring agreement that would give the U.S. the right to ensure that U.S. arms sold to India are used for their intended purpose and that the technology is not resold or otherwise provided to third countries.

Clinton's trip, which began with a two-day visit to Mumbai, reflects a push by the Obama administration to keep U.S.-India relations on the improving path they have followed for more than a decade. For example, two-way trade has doubled since 2004.

Tiny Tuvalu says all its energy renewable by 2020

By Michael Casey - AP Environmental Writer
In the Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Jul. 20, 2009

BANGKOK -- The tiny island nation of Tuvalu, already under threat from rising seas caused by global warming, vowed Sunday to do its part for climate change by fueling its economy entirely from renewable sources by 2020.

The South Pacific nation of 12,000 people is part of a movement of countries and cities committed to going climate neutral. Since February 2008, 10 nations including New Zealand, Pakistan, Iceland and Costa Rica have vowed to reduce their [emissions of greenhouse gases](#) as part of a goal of reaching zero emissions in the next decade.

None of these commitments alone is expected to make a significant difference in the fight to cut heat-trapping gases. But the United Nations and many environmentalists say the moves can inspire bigger emitters like the United States and China to take bolder steps to limit their carbon footprints.

"In a sense, they are paving the way for medium and larger economies which have to move if we are going combat climate change," said Nick Nuttal, spokesman for the United Nations Environment Programme. It sponsors the Climate Neutral Network, a group of 100 governments,

nongovernment groups and companies looking to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. "These smaller economies are out to prove you can do it, and do it faster than some people previously thought."

Major polluters at the Group of Eight nations' summit earlier this month failed to agree on commitments to reduce carbon emissions. That indicates how difficult it will be to craft a new climate treaty later this year in Copenhagen, Denmark, one that would be a successor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Climate scientists have urged rich countries to reduce emissions from 2005 levels by between 25 percent and 40 percent by 2020 to avoid the worst effects of warming, which they say will lead to widespread drought, floods, higher sea levels and worsening storms.

For its part, Tuvalu hopes to replace the fossil fuels that it imports by ship with solar energy and wind power, a project that it expects will cost \$20 million.

Tuvalu already releases almost no greenhouse gases. But because of climate change, many South Pacific islands see worsening flooding amid predictions of a large sea level rise this century.

The country is just 10 square miles (26 square kilometers) in size, with most of its land less than a yard (meter) above sea level.

So far, Tuvalu has installed a 40 kilowatt solar energy system with the help of Japan's Kansai Electric Power Co. and Tokyo Electric Power Company, both members of the e8, an international nonprofit organization of 10 leading power utilities from G8 countries.

"There may be other, larger solar power installations in the world, but none could be more meaningful to customers than this one," Takao Shiraishi, general manager of the Kansai Electric Power Co., said in a statement.

"The plight of Tuvalu versus the rising tide vividly represents the worst early consequence of climate change," he added. "For Tuvalu, after 3,000 years of history, the success of U.N. climate talks in Copenhagen this December may well be a matter of national survival."

The Tuvalu government is working to expand the initial \$410,000 project from 40 to 60 kilowatts, and will extend solar power to outer islands, starting later this year with the commission of a \$800,000, 46 kilowatt solar power system for a secondary school. The Italian government is supporting the project.

"We thank those who are helping Tuvalu reduce its carbon footprint as it will strengthen our voice in those international negotiations," Public Utilities and Industries Minister Kausea Natano said in a statement. "And we look forward to the day when our nation offers an example to all - powered entirely by natural resources such as the sun and the wind."

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Friday, July 17, 2009:](#)

Chevron owes more to Richmond

By Antonia Juhasz

This week, Fortune magazine released its list of the 500 largest corporations in the world. With a nearly 25 percent increase in its revenues from 2007, Chevron Corp. moved from the sixth to the fifth largest corporation in the world. Only 36 countries on the planet had GDPs larger than Chevron's \$263 billion in 2008 revenues.

By revenue, Chevron is the largest corporation in California, the second-largest U.S. oil corporation and the third-largest corporation in the nation. Chevron's nearly \$24 billion in profits for 2008 were its largest on record and the fourth-highest profits of any corporation in the world. Chevron's profits have increased every year since 2002, increasing by an astounding 2,100 percent.

Those who have not benefited are the Richmond community, the site of Chevron's oldest refinery, and the state of California.

In November, Richmond voters passed Measure T. At the current price of oil, it would provide the city with an additional \$16 million annually from Chevron (adding 11 percent to the city's tax revenues). Chevron sued, challenging the new tax.

Chevron has also repeatedly blocked state initiatives to impose a severance tax on oil extracted in the state. California is the only major oil producing state in the nation without such a tax. It is estimated that imposition of a severance tax could bring in over \$1 billion a year to the California state budget.

Moreover, the Los Angeles Times reports Chevron's role in lobbying to keep initiatives to increase corporate taxation more broadly off the table in the state's budget negotiations.

The Chevron Richmond refinery is already the largest industrial polluter in the Bay Area. The Environmental Protection Agency reported nearly 100,000 pounds of toxic waste from the site in 2007, including more than 4,000 pounds of benzene, a known human carcinogen. The refinery is now, and has been, listed as in "high priority violation" of air compliance standards, among other violations, by the EPA every year since at least 2006.

Chevron now wants to retool the refinery to burn heavier crude that can be much more polluting than lighter grades. The senior scientist at Richmond's Communities for a Better Environment has found no technological fix available to ensure that a refinery can mitigate this type of pollution. CBE joined other community health and environmental groups to block the retooling, and the court ruled in their favor. The groups are now asking the city to better regulate the refinery by specifically capping the type of crude it can refine to ban the heavier more polluting grades. Chevron has said it plans to appeal the ruling. (It will also give

Richmond community programs \$565,000 in grants connected to the project.)

Unfortunately, Chevron had already begun construction at the refinery and subsequently laid off 1,100 workers. Community groups have asked Chevron to instead work on necessary upgrades they have been demanding for years to make the refinery cleaner and safer - work that would create many jobs.

More beneficial to the long-term health of all who live in the city - including refinery workers - is not only a cleaner and safer refinery, but a company willing to give back to the communities within which it operates and the state it calls home.

Antonia Juhasz is the director of the Chevron program at Global Exchange in San Francisco.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, July 17, 2009:](#)

Take extra precautions during this heat wave

After a relatively mild early summer so far, the triple-digit temperatures are baking us again. And they aren't going anywhere too soon.

This string of 100-plus degree days started on Tuesday and isn't expected to drop below 100 before July 25, as far as the Yahoo! extended forecast goes.

Wednesday's high of 107 didn't break a record, but it triggered the opening of cooling centers in Fresno, Merced and Visalia.

The cooling centers will stay open as long as the forecast highs are at least 105. Fresno's FAX bus system will provide free transportation along normal routes to and from the cooling center sites. To ride free, residents must indicate they are traveling to a cooling center.

From 1979-2002, excessive heat exposure caused nearly 9,000 deaths in the U.S., according to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Know the signs of heat-related illness: Cramps are an early sign, often followed by cool, moist skin; headache; dizziness and weakness or exhaustion; and nausea.

More serious signs are vomiting; decreased alertness or loss of consciousness; high body temperature (up to 105 degrees); ceasing to sweat; a rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing. Call 911 if these life-threatening signs appear.

Drink water throughout the day.

Small children, the elderly and chronically ill persons face the greatest risk.

In addition to the deadly heat, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has been issuing unhealthy air warnings for residents in Fresno, Madera, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

Do what you can to stay out of the heat and the unhealthy air.

[MediaNews editorial in the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, July 19, 2009:](#)

Editorial: Chevron refinery project should proceed with better EIR

THE CITY OF Richmond, Chevron and 1,000 union workers are paying the price for a flawed agreement approving the oil company's \$1 billion refinery upgrade. The hotly debated deal to accept Chevron's refinery project passed on a 5-4 vote last year over strong objections that the environmental impact report was incomplete.

Environmental groups sued, but work on the project began and was well under way when it was ordered to a halt earlier this month by Superior Court Judge Barbara Zuniga.

She correctly determined that the project's EIR was vague on whether new equipment being installed at the refinery that would enable the processing of heavier crude oil would increase pollution to unhealthy levels.

Chevron says that it plans to refine lighter oil but that it needed greater flexibility to refine other grades of oil if necessary.

However, as long as the upgraded Chevron plant will have the capacity to refine oil that poses an environmental threat, the EIR should have fully addressed the potential harm and remedies to keep a lid on polluting emissions.

That was the conclusion of environmental groups, four of the nine Richmond City Council members and even some local unions at an earlier date.

However, the council majority, Chevron and national union leaders, worked out a deal in advance of the final council vote, with insufficient attention to the concerns of Richmond residents, environmentalists and local unions.

Chevron was allowed to go ahead with all its refinery changes, the unions would get up to 2,000 jobs at the height of the project, and the city would pick up \$61 million in community benefits.

Unfortunately, the deal did not pass legal muster. Now 1,000 jobs are being lost, at least temporarily, the refinery upgrades, most of which will actually reduce pollution, will be delayed and Richmond could lose millions of dollars it counted on in its latest budget.

What is particularly dismaying about the whole situation is that the refinery upgrades, good-paying jobs and more revenue for Richmond could have been approved without a lawsuit or threat to the environment.

Had the Richmond City Council acted in a more open and thoughtful manner, it would have insisted on a proper EIR with environmental safeguards. Chevron may have had to make some adjustments in its plans, but that would have been far better than being on the losing end of a lawsuit.

There are some lessons to be learned from both the substance of the refinery deal and the way in which it was made. The environmental concerns were real and should have been dealt with in an open and complete manner.

The health of Richmond residents should not have been subject to potential risk, and the city and local unions should not have been bypassed.

Fortunately, all is not lost. Chevron's refinery updating project can and should proceed. Most of the changes will reduce pollution by replacing outdated equipment.

The oil firm also may well be able to have the capacity to refine heavy crude as long as there are proper and well-defined safeguards in a more accurate EIR. Also, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is prepared to offer its services in monitoring pollution.

Instead of pursuing litigation and allotting blame, Chevron, Richmond, local unions, environmental groups and the air board need to work together to achieve a complete EIR that assures area residents there is no increased health risk.

We trust that an agreement can be reached in a timely manner that will allow Chevron to update its refinery, create jobs and continue providing Richmond with community funds.

[Letters to the Modesto Bee, Monday, July 20, 2009:](#)

Reality check on cap-and-trade

Fear and scare tactics have recently found their way into letters to the editor regarding the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (the cap-and-trade bill). Some use false and misleading figures to support a claim that cap-and-trade will create a financial burden on the public.

FactCheck.Org exposes the hype surrounding the GOP's claims that the bill would add \$3,100 in higher energy taxes to families as a misrepresentation of President Barack Obama's proposal and the study from which the number is derived.

An EPA analysis of the draft version found that "The cap-and-trade policy has a relatively modest impact on U.S. consumers."

Clean energy changes to combat climate change that will be detrimental to future generations requires our generation to think not of ourselves, but of the future world.

Scare tactics, as it was said about rock 'n' roll causing the downfall of American society, need a reality check. Consider whether a cleaner environment is worthy of adding to the American standard of living.

Wayne Kirkbride, Twain Harte

Cap-and-trade passed too quickly

While almost everyone was obsessed with the death of the King of Pop, Congress passed House Resolution 2454 by a vote of 219 to 212. Among the 31 of 53 California representatives supporting it were Jerry McNerney and Dennis Cardoza, with only three hours to review a 1,200-page bill with 300 pages of amendments. McNerney and Cardoza are educated men, but I bet they are not speed readers!

This bill is called cap-and-trade, or cap- and-tax. If this gets through the Senate -- and don't expect any help from Barbara Boxer or Dianne Feinstein -- everyone will see a large increase in the price of energy.

It is apparent that our representatives have lost touch with the people of California.

Our state is broke and bills like this will only hurt our agriculture and business.

Just look at our Legislature. The Democrats still haven't figured out that they have not only run most business out of our state, they also have run out of other people's money!

Remember this when you vote in 2010, if we still have enough money to have an election.

Gene Dias, Modesto

[Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times guest commentary, Sunday, July 19, 2009:](#)

Tim Hunt: Ditching housing cap would open up redevelopment opportunities in Pleasanton

THE LEGAL challenge to Pleasanton's voter-approved, but ill-advised, housing cap received lots of additional juice when California Attorney General Jerry Brown formally joined the fray.

Two nonprofit groups focused on low-income housing have previously filed legal challenges, but Brown's intervention takes the situation to an entirely different level.

It's unlikely that the city's cap on housing units will stand up to state law, which has several requirements that cities accommodate growth. It's particularly true of employment centers such as Pleasanton that traditionally have welcomed retail businesses and jobs (tax generators), but limited housing to very expensive homes and projects for seniors.

The attorney general correctly asserts that limiting housing near jobs encourages urban sprawl, congestion and air pollution (witness Interstate 580 during commute hours).

Assuming the judge agrees and pitches the limit, it frees the City Council and the city to start thinking creatively about how to plan for the future. The housing cap is a major limitation to redeveloping portions of the Hacienda Business Park, where values on older buildings have plummeted to the point that churches and private schools can afford the rents.

That's a far cry from the time that Hacienda building owners could demand premium rents because of the park's location and amenities.

The area is ripe for redevelopment into mixed uses that would update it so it can continue to be a commerce hub.

If you want an obvious example of just how dysfunctional Sacramento is and how solidly legislators are in the pockets of special interests, consider the letter than 15 Bay Area Democrats sent to the BART general manager.

The letter urged BART to negotiate with its recalcitrant unions and mentioned concerns about service disruption and economic hardship on workers. Signers included: Valley Assembly representatives Joan Buchanan (newly elected but already running for the Ellen Tauscher's open congressional seat), Mary Hayashi, Tom Torlakson and Albert Torrico, along with state Sens. Ellen Corbett, Loni Hancock and Mark DeSaulnier (another congressional hopeful with lots of declared union support).

Two points:

1. California's budget has melted down and these "representatives" have the responsibility to balance it. Seems like they should be focused on getting their burning house extinguished and rebuilt as the top priority. Then there are other pressing issues such as water supply and reliability as well as restoring the Delta to say nothing of the business climate in California.
2. The union-centered focus is typical for Democrats, particularly in the Bay Area and other urban coastal counties. Why single out BART unions, whose members are the best paid in the nation and receive benefits about twice as expensive as the private sector (\$4,000 a month or 60 percent of the salary cost)? What about the riders who already are swallowing a fare increase or the taxpayers who are getting socked with a very expensive system?

They could have simply sat it out — a wise position — or, if they really are representing their constituents instead of union interests, they could have supported the BART board as it tries to control soaring health benefit costs.

While discussing BART, it's rare that I find myself agreeing with former director Roy Nakadegawa, whose letter was published this month.

Nakadegawa was arguing that the Oakland Airport didn't pay enough for the BART connection from the Coliseum station directly to the airport. He also commented on the absurd cost, \$525 million, involved both a \$150 million loan and a \$6 fare each way.

Even with that sky-high fare, it likely will require an operating subsidy.

What's even scarier is that the estimated daily ridership has dropped significantly from earlier estimates and yet the directors moved ahead with the six-mile connector at a cost that is roughly half of the estimated cost of expanding BART to west Livermore.

Given the appropriately tough line that the BART directors have taken on union negotiations, you have to wonder just how the minds were disconnected on the Oakland Airport line.

And, when it comes to disconnected minds, think about 75 percent of BART employees in the drivers and station agents union who rejected the contract. If they strike, so be it.

BART directors should endure the strike, impose a new rational contract and invite employees back to work on those terms. If they don't choose to return, then fire them and hire permanent replacements. Let the strikers find out how cold it is to be looking for a low-skill (station agent) job today outside of the government cocoon.

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