

Air regulator wants Calif diesel rule suspended

The Associated Press

In the SF Chronicle, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Wednesday, Dec. 2. and Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

FRESNO, Calif. — A member of the California Air Resources Board wants to suspend new diesel emissions rules for trucks and buses after learning that a researcher whose work contributed to the rules falsified his credentials.

The researcher, Hien Tran, compiled research on health effects of soot. Air regulators considered the report when adopting the landmark pollution standards in December 2008.

Tran had claimed to have a doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley.

But board chairwoman Mary Nichols says Tran admitted a few days before the vote that his degree was from Thornhill University, an online, unaccredited institution. He was demoted and suspended for 60 days without pay.

Board member John Telles is now calling for the rules to be set aside until the report is reviewed by independent researchers.

Air board vote on global warming emissions limits tabled until January

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

GLOBAL WARMING vote tabled: The Bay Area's air pollution board will wait at least until Jan. 6 before voting on a proposal aimed at reducing global warm gases from new development in nine counties.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board is considering the first-ever guidelines for cities and counties on when proposed developments would produce enough greenhouse gas emissions to warrant an environmental study on how to reduce them.

During a three hour public hearing Wednesday, the state Attorney General's Office announced its support for the proposal.

The plan would provide valuable guidance for cities and counties on determining whether to require changes to development proposals to reduce global warming gases, according to Janill Richards, deputy state attorney general.

Thirty six people signed up to speak for or against the plan Wednesday, but some left before their chance to speak came up during the long hearing.

Update: Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

By Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2009

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 12/2/2009: 80 Moderate (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 12/3/2009: 87 Moderate (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 12/3/2009: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/2/2009: Wood burning prohibited

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/3/2009: Wood burning prohibited

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Daily Air Quality Forecast

More information about the Daily Air Quality Forecast can be found at:
<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

More information about the Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status can be found at:
<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>.

Japanese Firm Plans Large Solar Farm in Avenal

PG&E Drives Interest in Central Valley

Valley Voice Newspaper, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

Kings County - Eurus Energy, a Japanese-owned company with worldwide renewable energy projects, is planning its first major utility-scale photovoltaic (PV) project near Avenal in Kings County. The 39-megawatt solar farm would be built next year on about 400 acres of farmland, according to an application for a conditional use permit filed with the Kings County Planning Department.

The renewable energy project is the latest sign of intense interest by energy entrepreneurs – many with foreign ties – who see Central California as the right place right now for these green investments.

“These are PV solar projects (not solar thermal) so they don't use any water,” said Cleantech America CEO Bill Barnes. “That makes sense for the Central Valley where we are both short on power and water.”

Besides that, Barnes emphasizes PG&E has announced it will use 500 mw of solar power produced in the Central Valley, half to be built by PG&E and 250 mw of that will be from independent developers.

Because of these factors, “I would say the Central Valley is well open for business for utility scale solar,” noted Barnes whose company is developing the first facility in this category in Mendota – set to generate power in January.

According to the Eurus Energy application – construction of the Avenal solar farm could begin in April and employ 125 during the construction process. “They've indicated at least 30 percent of the workforce will come from the Avenal area,” said county planner Jeremy Kinney.

Company exec David Thomlinson, who joined the San Diego-based American subsidiary of Eurus Energy in the past year, told the Voice he could not yet comment on the project. Eurus Energy has more than 1,600 mw of renewable power worldwide, mostly in wind energy. But the American subsidiary recently announced a push into large scale solar development here that would be added to some 250 mw of wind power projects it owns in the state.

Planner Kinney says the solar farm was filed as two side-by-side projects under two limited partnerships – one 19 mw and another 20 mw with the likelihood the company plans to sell off each. The names of the projects are Sun City and Sand Drag and will utilize elevated solar panels, some 5 feet off the ground that will follow the sun. The project is being proposed on ag land just outside the city limits of Avenal west of I-5 and the Kettleman Hills.

Oasis in the Sun

Solar appears to fit in well in Avenal where its motto is “Oasis in the Sun.” Other big solar power generation projects are planned west of the Westside foothills where Valley fog is less of a problem. Large solar projects are planned in the Carrizo Plain area south of Avenal and near Coalinga a few miles north where a hybrid plant will go solar by day and burn cow manure at night. The plant is affiliated with Chevron.

Besides the newly proposed solar arrays, the town of Avenal is awaiting a Dec. 10 California Energy Commission final decision on a much larger 600 mw gas power plant just east of I-5 but still in Avenal's sprawling 19-mile city limits. The project is expected to get the green light, meaning a big boost in property taxes for this low income community as well with 250 construction jobs beginning in April and lasting three years.

Targeting California

Solar energy projects are a hot commodity due to state mandates to increase renewable energy generation for state power users to 33 percent of utilities portfolio by 2030. Solar prospectors have been driving the back roads of the Central Valley, scouting for farmland near substations where hooking up to the grid may be easier.

With water short and crop prices depressed, farmers are more than willing to listen.

Solar deals are in the works in Corcoran and nearby with a French-backed firm, EnXco, talking to both the city and Corcoran Irrigation District about a large solar farm. One plant is under construction in Mendota in western Fresno County and at least two are in the tire kicking stage, said Kings planners near Kettleman City on the Valley side. One of those is being considered by a Chinese solar company looking to build here, said the planning department.

Cleantech America that is building the Mendota 5 mw PV unit is still working on a much larger 80 mw solar farm in Kings or Fresno counties. The company was recently purchased by New Zealand-based Meridian Energy as foreign interest in renewable power in California grows.

Other foreign players potentially active in the California market are several Chinese firms, SunTech, Trina, Yingli and ENN, partnering up with Duke Energy that has several traditional power plants in the state. A Spanish solar company, Fotowatio, has recently purchased a S.F.-based solar development firm, MMA Renewables. A number of these companies make solar panels and are now getting into the solar farm development business often with U.S. partners.

"There are a couple of companies talking to farmers about leasing ground near substations," says Dan Vink of Lower Tule Irrigation District.

"Two companies are talking to us," confirms Ceil Howe, owner of sprawling Westlake Farms in Kings County. "There is lots of money out there," added Howe, noting the fact that utilities like PG&E are on the hunt too trying to find locations and fully cooperating with third parties who want to generate power – clearly a "big change" over their attitude in the past. "Now they are looking for contracts" to generate more renewable power.

It's not just the sun that is attracting all this interest. The existing grid and planned long distance transmission lines running near these projects should be making connections to the statewide power grid less expensive than some proposed projects in the desert of California where all new transmission infrastructures will need to be built.

Environmental and political opposition to some large desert solar projects appears to be making the mid-state and Central Valley more attractive for renewable energy development where future supply is short and power can easily be moved either north or south. Solar developers seek land that is already "disturbed" grazing or farm land to overcome objections that more wilderness land will be impacted. Recently, one large Carrizo Plain solar project was dropped by its developer C Aursa V due to environmental opposition.

Not to be left out, existing power producers like GWF are both expanding their Kings gas-fired plants next year and taking a good look at solar. The two plants will become cleaner burning "combined-cycle" plants adding 25 mw each in Hanford and next to NAS Lemoore and are considering adding solar arrays nearby as well. Each is close to power substations.

Station Fire leaves residents in the dust

AIR QUALITY: Areas around summer's Station blaze inundated with haze of ash

By Tony Castro, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Thursday, Dec.3, 2009

Lisa Sarkin of Studio City feels like she's trapped in fog of brown soot.

For the past several days, a thin sheet of brown dust has been covering her house, her cars, her clothes when she goes outside -- and her conversations are broken up with a cough she can't seem to get rid of.

"I've never seen anything like this in my entire life," Sarkin said. "My pool is covered in something that's not dust and it's not dirt and looks like little flowery stuff.

"When I put my arm in the water and pulled it out, I had a brown ring around it. This stuff just sticks to everything."

Sarkin, like hundreds of thousands of San Fernando Valley residents, is among the latest victims of this summer's Station Fire - the worst fire in the city's history in terms of area burned that three months later continues to haunt Los Angeles.

In recent days, officials said, Santa Ana winds blowing through the Angeles National Forest, where the fire charred a 250-square-mile area, created a grayish-brown haze of dust and ash that has hovered over Los Angeles, especially in the Northeast Valley.

Residents have reported finding a sticky film on cars, pools and any flat surface of their property.

Los Angeles school officials were so concerned about air quality conditions early in the week that they canceled outside recess activities for students at many of the district's schools.

But the South Coast Air Quality Management District said air quality has improved in the South Coast Air Basin since then, with no special advisories in effect as of Wednesday.

"We have not had anything extraordinary in the past few days," said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the South Coast AQMD.

Atwood confirmed that the brown dust has been ash and dust from the Station Fire, kicked up by the winds, and possibly comingled in weather conditions that are normal for this time of year. But the same brown dust condition may pick up again in coming days with renewed winds.

Experts warn that extended exposure to this kind of particulate pollution could pose health dangers.

According to the National Weather Service, the brown dust condition was worsened by the light to moderate offshore winds with gusts up to 60 mph that blew through the region.

Court ruling scraps Livingston general plan

It's back to the drawing board for city after judge concludes it broke state laws.

By Jonah Owen Lamb

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

The city of Livingston broke state law when it approved its 2025 General Plan Update and certified the requisite environmental documents, a Merced Superior Court judge has ruled.

The ruling, which decided a nearly year-old lawsuit against the city, ordered Livingston to send its controversial 2025 GPU -- which projects the city to grow to roughly 100,000 -- back to the drawing board.

The suit was filed by the Merced Farm Bureau in December 2008. It claims the city's environmental impact report was inadequate and that the city violated state planning laws, among other charges.

According to court documents, presiding Judge Carol Ash concluded that the "city's approval of the GPU and certification of the EIR violated CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) and the Open Space Plans Act."

The ruling goes on to say the city must set aside its approval and certification of the GPU, as well as its EIR.

The city, which has yet to receive the ruling, said City Manager Richard Warne contends in the suit that it didn't break any such laws. In the filings, Livingston's lawyers argue the city exceeded the requirements of the EIR.

According to the suit, the city "claims there was no abuse of discretion and the city reached an informed decision in certifying the EIR, and their adoption of the GPU was not arbitrary, capricious or entirely lacking in evidentiary support."

Peter Koch, the Merced Farm Bureau's president, said he couldn't comment on the court's ruling since he hadn't received it yet.

The case specifically alleged the city failed to proceed in the proper manner by adopting an arbitrary GPU that didn't take into account public concerns over the plan. According to the case, the plan also failed to protect permanent open space, biological resources and agricultural land.

In addition, the suit alleged the city failed to live up to the CEQA. The case states that the EIR inadequately analyzed the plan's agricultural impacts, as well as its potential impacts on air quality and water resources, among other supposed defects.

The GPU is a document that sets the city's general policy toward land use and growth, including the annexation of farmland.

New model outlines climate change peril

By Kevin Yamamura

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

In 2100, Fisherman's Wharf would become Fisherman's Bay, the baseball diamond at AT&T Park would flood and two major Bay Area airports would better serve seaplanes under a climate change model unveiled Wednesday by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Google.

The governor released a new report determining that global warming, left unabated, would lead to higher sea levels, greater wildfire risks and less water supply over the next century, based on research compiled by the California Energy Commission.

Schwarzenegger also convened a panel of 23 experts from various sectors to review the 200-page report and draft final policy recommendations for the governor and Legislature by July.

The governor and legislative Democrats in 2006 approved a new law requiring California to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 25 percent by 2020. But the governor said Wednesday that "we must also be prepared if climate change continues to worsen."

The California Energy Commission spent \$150,000 in partnership with Google to develop a new Google Earth application that shows sea level changes in the Bay Area, as well as increased wildfire risks and snowpack reductions throughout the state. The energy commission also maintains a climate change research unit on which it spent \$2.4 million in 2007.

Schwarzenegger called the latest efforts a "Plan B" in case global warming continues. He said the state faces as much as \$2.5 trillion in costs related to risks from climate change.

In its report, the California Natural Resources Agency makes a dozen recommendations, including one suggesting that governments may wish to restrict new development in areas vulnerable to flood, fire or erosion. Among those areas is the manmade Treasure Island, where Schwarzenegger held his news conference.

"It's about considering those impacts," said Tony Brunello, the agency's deputy secretary for climate change and energy. "We're not saying the sky is falling. We're giving people real information so they don't lose millions of dollars."

Assemblyman Chuck DeVore, R-Irvine, questioned the science. He pointed to an incident last month in which hackers obtained hundreds of e-mails from a British university server, some of which included statements from climate-change researchers that raised questions about their findings. Scientists said the e-mails showed the researchers were only human and made inappropriate casual remarks. But skeptics seized upon the documents as proof that global warming projections are flawed.

"Combined with the \$21 billion deficit we're facing in the coming year, this shows we ought to be focusing our attention on more mundane things like living within our means," DeVore said. "To use this all-encompassing rubric of climate change as a power grab to usurp property rights is something we shouldn't be doing."

Brunello said, however, that the new state report largely serves an advisory purpose and that local governments would have to decide for themselves whether to pursue land-use changes.

Google Earth explores climate risks to California

By Samantha Young - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Google Inc. launched a new feature in its Google Earth Web site Wednesday designed to let Californians see the risks of climate change.

Google unveiled the new interactive tool in San Francisco as part of a climate change press conference by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The state partnered with Google on the program that shows Californians how warming temperatures, rising sea levels, precipitation shifts and more frequent, intense wildfires impact their environment.

The feature, called CalAdapt, was one of the recommendations of a 200-page state report detailing how California should prepare for climate change.

"When it comes to fighting global warming and climate change, it is technology, in the end, that will save us all," Schwarzenegger said.

Internet users can view interactive maps showing such things as the shrinking snow pack along the Sierra Nevada and how a rise in sea level could submerge parts of San Francisco.

"It allows Californians to see what's happening to our wonderful and beautiful state," Google chief executive Eric Schmidt said.

The Google feature and climate report were produced after Schwarzenegger directed agencies last year to devise a strategy to prepare California for the inevitable changes ahead.

The Republican governor released his report on Treasure Island, a man-made island where three years ago he signed California's landmark global warming law that requires the state to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

The report warns rising temperatures over the next few decades will lead to more heat waves, wildfires, droughts and floods. It recommends avoiding development in low-lying areas vulnerable to rising sea level, storm surges and coastal erosion.

Not all the responsibility lies with state government, however.

"The 800-pound gorilla is land-use and making changes at the local level," said Tony Brunello, deputy secretary for climate change and energy at the California Natural Resources Agency, who helped prepare the report.

Schwarzenegger also created a 23-member climate advisory panel to devise recommendations for how the state must adapt to climate change. Its members include former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Secretary William Reilly and former California Gov. Pete Wilson.

The recommendations are due in July.

Clean Energy Partnership funds LED streetlights

By Lorie Ham, Staff Reporter

Reedley Exponent Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2009

Thanks to the assistance of the San Joaquin Valley Energy Partnership, Reedley will be able to retrofit approximately 250 streetlights with energy efficient LED lights, said Russ Robertson, Public Works Manager, City of Reedley.

The San Joaquin Valley Energy Partnership was formed to assist small jurisdictions in accessing federal stimulus funds for energy efficiency programs, according to Tom Jordon, Senior Policy Advisor, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD). SJVAPCD and the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization lead this partnership to maximize access, services, and resources from the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program through the California Energy Commission.

This grant money is an allocation not a competitive grant, said Robertson. Reedley has already submitted their letter of intent for its share of the grant money. "The allocation is primarily based on population." Reedley is eligible for a \$132,456 grant. Use of these EECBG funds are only for energy efficiency projects and activities that meet the California Energy Commission's cost effectiveness criteria. There are administrative and reporting requirements. The Partnership handles the administration and reporting on behalf of participating jurisdictions.

"The projects must be energy efficient projects that will reduce our energy consumption and at the same time save us money in the long term," continued Robertson. Retrofitting of the streetlights will reduce the City's energy consumption on those lights by 50 percent.

A proposal to develop the Partnership was presented to and approved by the SJVAPCD in August of 2009 with the idea that while EECBG funds were needed for these type of projects, many smaller jurisdictions would be limited by the high level of administrative requirements to be able to pursue those funds on their own.

The EECBG Program was created by the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 and funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which provides \$787 billion in economic investment nationally, for the purpose of stimulating the economy. The California Energy Commission (CEC) received \$49.6 million for the state portion of this program. State law requires the CEC to use no less than 60 percent of it's EECBG Program funds for reallocation to small cities and counties which are defined as incorporated cities with populations of 35,000 or less, or small counties with populations of 200,000 or less.

Many other area cities are also eligible for EECBG Program funds. Among these are Fowler for \$30,424, Orange Cove for \$60,082, Parlier for \$76,026, and Sanger for \$145,895.

While a specific date has not been set for the streetlight retrofit, Robertson said the City should receive their allocation by early next year.

"This opportunity will allow Reedley to invest in new technology that will bring immediate savings in energy cost," said Rocky Rogers, Reedley's City Manager.

Tahoe faces new development battle: green vs. green

By Tom Knudson - McClatchy Newspapers
Modesto Bee, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

CRYSTAL BAY, Nev. -- As snow begins to blanket Lake Tahoe, the region finds itself facing a new kind of development battle: green vs. green.

On a ridge overlooking a sparkling, silver-blue bay, Roger Wittenberg has a dream. An inventor and developer, he wants to tear down the cavernous old Tahoe Biltmore Lodge & Casino and replace it with a \$140 million eco-friendly resort he says will work environmental miracles by shrinking carbon emissions and reducing the flow of sediment into the lake.

The resort, he added, also will emphasize health, nutrition and nature over gambling -- although it would include a small casino.

"We have the opportunity to make the next quantum leap forward," Wittenberg said. "We would like to be that project that (shows) us we can enjoy the lake without harming the lake."

Some environmentalists, who have waged battles against development at Lake Tahoe for decades, and a handful of residents are wary. The proposed Boulder Bay Resort & Wellness Center, they say, will bring even more traffic and pollution to narrow State Route 28 and the dated strip development around Crystal Bay and could even spark a new wave of urbanization.

"We are in a very difficult situation here," said Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, at a hearing before the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency last week.

"You might say: There's a lot of good here," Nason said. "But then the question arises: If we get a lot of good from this hotel, how many hotels are we going to need? What is the rest of the picture?"

Tension is high because tourist-dependent Lake Tahoe -- home to some of the toughest environmental laws in the nation - is losing business to other resort destinations. On the north side of the lake, where Boulder Bay would be located, support is strong.

One backer is Art Chapman, president of JMA Ventures LLC, which owns nearby Alpine Meadows and Homewood ski areas.

"I think we are really at a tipping point up here," Chapman said. "If we can't as a community support good, sustainable, proper, smart redevelopment of old areas, then what do we support?"

If successful, the Boulder Bay project would dramatically transform the tiny, pine-dotted community of Crystal Bay, where the historic Tahoe Biltmore - with its iconic giant wagon wheel sign out front - has stood for 63 years.

Not only would the Biltmore's casino and hotel rooms be demolished, asphalt parking lots and outbuildings would vanish, too. On the 16-acre site, a new 300-room hotel would rise, along with 59 condominiums, a health and wellness center, 20,000 square feet of shops and restaurants and a much smaller casino.

Wittenberg, who bought the Biltmore in 2007, describes the project as a model of environmental sensitivity. Snowmelt would be captured to irrigate landscaping and flush toilets. Compact fluorescent lights and tankless water heaters would shrink energy use.

Recycled products would be used throughout the facility, including exterior decking made from plastic bags and sawdust - a product called TREX that Wittenberg invented - and his own brand of insulation made from scrap paper and cardboard. The roofs of some buildings would be seeded with native grasses to better absorb and filter water.

Perhaps most important, he plans to build an underground water treatment facility to dramatically reduce erosion into the lake.

"Roger knows what he's doing," said Bob Maxson, president of Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village. "I don't know of a person in this community or this state that knows more about the environment (and) about how to protect that environment."

Global warming e-mails prompt Republican letter to EPA

GOP members of Congress ask the administration to put climate-change measures on hold because messages from scientists in Britain appear to cast doubt on the idea of man-made warming.

By Jim Tankersley and Alexander C. Hart, staff writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

Reporting from Washington - Citing e-mails that critics say cast doubt on global warming, congressional Republicans called on the Obama administration Wednesday to suspend efforts to combat climate change until the controversy is resolved.

In a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency, the lawmakers requested that a pending move to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act be halted, along with plans to limit emissions from vehicles, power plants and other sources, "until the agency can demonstrate the science underlying these regulatory decisions has not been compromised."

At issue are more than 1,000 electronic messages that were apparently obtained and released by a computer hacker. Most involve scientists at the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit in Britain, one of the few institutions in the world that collect the historical temperature data relied on by climate researchers.

At the heart of the controversy is whether human activity causes climate change. Skeptics argue that global temperatures may be warming naturally. They say that the e-mails suggest that scientists may have manipulated evidence to bolster their claims. The scientists dispute that and say that their words have been taken out of context.

Republicans used otherwise unrelated hearings Wednesday in the House and Senate to demand congressional investigations, but Obama administration officials and congressional Democrats pushed back.

"The e-mails do nothing to undermine the very strong scientific consensus . . . that tells us the Earth is warming, that warming is largely a result of human activity," Jane Lubchenco, who heads the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, told a House committee. She said that the e-mails don't cover data from NOAA and NASA, whose independent climate records show dramatic warming.

The controversy flared up just before a summit in Copenhagen next week at which President Obama and other world leaders will attempt to make progress on an international climate-change treaty.

In some e-mails, a prominent climate scientist urges colleagues to destroy records rather than release them under public disclosure laws. In others, scientists appear to discuss how to discredit research they disagree with.

One of the leading figures in the scandal, East Anglia climate scientist Phil Jones, stepped down temporarily this week amid an investigation into his work and e-mails.

In a 1999 e-mail, Jones wrote of using a "trick" to hide an apparent decline in recent temperatures on a chart being prepared for a meteorological organization. Warming skeptics seized on the line, which Jones said was "taken completely out of context" because he was simply looking for a clearer way to chart global warming.

Critics have also focused on an e-mail from Penn State University scientist Michael Mann as evidence that climate researchers have sought to downplay findings indicating that the Earth warmed naturally 1,000 years ago.

In a 2003 e-mail, Mann said that "it would be nice to 'contain' the putative" Medieval Warm Period.

Mann said in an interview last month that the e-mail reflected his desire to identify exactly when the period began -- not to downplay it. He also said that he had declined to act on Jones' request to destroy e-mails sought under freedom of information laws.

Republicans who have long questioned global-warming science say that the e-mails show a pattern that undermines the theory of man-made global warming.

"One cannot deny that the e-mails raised fundamental questions concerning . . . transparency and openness in science," Sen. James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.) said at a hearing Wednesday.

Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (R-Wis.), one of the authors of the letter to the EPA, said in a news release Wednesday that the e-mails "read more like scientific fascism than the scientific process. . . . It's time to take back the notion that the 'science is settled.' "

Some climate scientists have expressed alarm at the contents of the e-mails. But many scientists and environmental groups have aggressively challenged the notion that the messages undermine climate science.

"The body of evidence that human activity is a prominent agent in global warming is overwhelming," James McCarthy, chairman of the Union of Concerned Scientists, told Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) in a letter Wednesday.

"People write ridiculous e-mails when they're in the middle of a fight," Boxer said. "To me, what's important is, e-mails aside, is there global warming? Is it being affected by human activity? And there's nothing out there that says otherwise."

Paul McCartney takes Meat-Free Mondays to EU

By ROBERT WIELAARD, The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Washington Post and other papers, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

BRUSSELS -- Paul McCartney took his 'Meat-Free Mondays' campaign to the European Parliament on Thursday, saying the power to halt global warming lies as much with individuals as with their governments.

McCartney met in Brussels with Rajendra K. Pachauri, head of the U.N.'s global climate change panel, and praised the virtue of skipping meat one day a week for the sake of the environment.

"I grew up as a kid not eating meat on Fridays," McCartney told reporters. "It was part of the rules of the school I went to.

At a time of concerns over global warming, McCartney added, there are "even more crucial reason" to skip meat.

The former Beatle and well-known vegetarian said the production of food - from farm to fork - accounts for 20 to 30 percent of global green house gas emissions. Livestock production is responsible for around half of these emissions.

Still, he admitted that his flight from London to Brussels - and on to Berlin for a concert later Thursday - had contributed to global warming.

"They haven't invented microphones that work on candle power," he said. "I do everything I can. If I go for a car, I go for hybrid. I recycle."

Pachauri lauded McCartney's initiative, saying it "certainly makes the tasks of governments so much easier."

Earlier, Pachauri met with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, who said even if the global climate conference opening in Copenhagen next week does not yield a final accord it must "light the pathway to a legal agreement" on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Barroso said he was heartened that "around 90" government leaders are coming to Copenhagen for the Dec. 7-18 U.N. climate meeting.

India's "Death Factory" Leaves Toxic Legacy 25 Years On

By Reuters

In the N.Y. Times, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

BHOPAL, India (Reuters) - It was seen as a symbol of the new emerging India -- a factory that would not only generate thousands of jobs, but manufacture cheap pesticides for millions of farmers.

But the Union Carbide plant in the central city of Bhopal left a more potent legacy when it accidentally released toxic gases into the air, killing thousands of people and causing many more to suffer in the world's most deadly industrial disaster.

A quarter of a century on, the derelict factory stands abandoned, but behind its locked iron gates lies what environmentalists say is "a disaster within a disaster" -- a highly polluted site which, according to a new study, is slowly poisoning the drinking water for thousands of Indians.

Bhopal has long cast a shadow over India and how it handles the challenges of a 1.1 billion, largely poor population, improve health and safety regulations, and a fast-growing economy.

"Our findings suggest that the entire site is highly contaminated," said Sunita Narain, director of the Delhi-based think-tank, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), which in October tested the toxicity levels of ground water and soil samples in and outside the plant.

"The factory site in Bhopal is leading to chronic toxicity, which is a continuous tiny exposure leading to poisoning of our bodies."

In the early hours of December 3, 1984, around 40 metric tons of toxic methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked into the atmosphere and was carried by the wind to the surrounding slums.

The government says around 3,500 died as a result of the disaster. Activists however calculate that 25,000 people died in the immediate aftermath and the years that followed.

"BOTCHED" CLEAN-UP

Activists and health workers say a further 100,000 people who were exposed to the gas continue to suffer today.

Sicknesses range from cancer, blindness, respiratory difficulties immune and neurological disorders, female reproductive disorders as well as birth defects among children born to affected women. But activists and lawyers representing the affected populations from the nearby slums say the tragedy of this disaster is that it continues unabated.

"After the disaster, Union Carbide did this botched site remediation and created a massive landfill," said Rajan Sharma, a New York-based lawyer, who is demanding that U.S. company Dow Chemical clean up the site and purify the water supply.

"There are thousands of tons of toxic chemical waste which have been not been properly disposed inside and just outside the factory site, which have been seeping into the ground for years."

Around 340 metric tons of chemical waste are stored in a warehouse inside the plant and needs to be disposed of.

Dow Chemical, which now owns Union Carbide, denies any responsibility saying it bought the company a decade after Union Carbide had settled its liabilities to the Indian government in 1989 by paying \$470 million (281 million pounds) for the victims.

"Any efforts by activists and non-governmental organisations to try to attach responsibility or liability for the site clean-up to Union Carbide and Dow are misdirected," Tom F. Sprick, Director of Union Carbide Information Centre, told Reuters by email.

"Regarding any site contamination ... we have no first-hand knowledge of what chemicals, if any, may remain at the site and what impact, if any, they may be having on area groundwater."

Sprick added that the Indian government took control of the site in 1998 and assumed all accountability, including clean-up activities, for the site.

NO EVIDENCE OF POLLUTION?

Authorities also have for years refuted claims that the water is contaminated, saying that various studies commissioned by the government have found no evidence of pollution.

However, the CSE report contradicts the government's findings, saying samples taken from around the factory site were found to contain chlorinated benzene compounds and organochlorine pesticides 561 times the national standard.

Samples taken as far as 3 km (1.9 miles) away from the plant were found to have toxic chemicals 38.6 times more than the standard. The report said there could be no other source of these toxins than Union Carbide.

Babulal Gaur, state minister responsible for relief and rehabilitation after the disaster denied this.

"There is no pollution and even if there was, it got drained away by the monsoons years ago," he told Reuters.

As dawn breaks over the slums of Jai Prakash Nagar, located directly opposite the plant, women brave the cool winter air to gather water at the communal taps with their buckets.

"You can smell it ... this water is poison and I hate giving it to my children to drink, but we are poor and have no choice," said 55-year-old Savitri, whose husband and son died a year after the disaster due to respiratory problems.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009:](#)

EPA number makes Valley seem worse than it is, officials say

By Mark Grossi

Local air officials offered an expanded view of the statistics I used in a story last week about the San Joaquin Valley having the worst soot and other fine particle pollution in the country.

They don't argue that the annual average of so-called PM-2.5 is the nation's highest -- well beyond other air basins. I wrote that it is 45% above the health standard, which is true for the statistical yardstick I used.

But air officials say the number is misleading because it represents the worst spot in the Valley, which is in Bakersfield. In other words, millions of Valley residents are not exposed to this level of pollution daily.

Officials crunched the numbers to get annual averages based on daily exposures in all eight counties from Stockton to Bakersfield. In 2008, residents were exposed to PM-2.5 levels 12.7% above the health standard, which is far less than the 45% figure I used.

By the numbers:

- The health standard: 15 micrograms per cubic meter of air.
- In 2008: Valley residents were daily exposed to 16.3 micrograms.
- EPA annual average that I quoted: 21.5 micrograms.

Remember, that last number refers to one monitoring site in Bakersfield.

At the same time, remember this pollution is considered more dangerous than ozone. And there are health experts who believe that 15 micrograms is not an adequate protection for public health.

[Manteca Bulletin Commentary Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2009:](#)

High speed rail on track to turn into next big flop

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

California is not Europe. Nor is the Golden State Japan.

We do not have built up city centers with world-class public transportation. Instead we have urban sprawl that essentially has converted California's love affair with the car into a shotgun wedding of sorts.

That is why the high speed rail connecting Los Angeles, San Francisco and Sacramento and San Francisco has all the making of a major disaster that will make California City – the much ballyhooed late 1950s planned community for nearly two million people in the middle of the Mojave Desert that has about 14,000 residents – seem like a major success story in contrast.

California City – the third largest in terms of land mass in the state with 80,000 acres – has an extensive grid of crumbling roads in place because real estate developer and sociology professor Nat Mendelsohn forgot two little important details – water and jobs.

It was an ambitious undertaking to “properly” plan a community from scratch that would rival Los Angeles in stature. It sounded good in theory but in the real world of California it had about as much chance succeeding as Gary Coleman has of beating Michael Jordan in a game of one-on-one basketball. The same is true for high speed rail.

It was sold to voters as a futuristic, pollution-free, fast, safe, efficient, and low-cost way to move people. That is why they were able to get a \$10 billion bond measure passed which, by all indications, isn't likely to cover much more than a tenth of the final cost.

It looks good on paper but in reality it is plagued with problems.

First, it will do little more than what jet traffic between those cities do now which is dump passengers who will then either rent a car or use private cars to get around once they reach their final stop.

But let's say the dynamics are challenging because the high speed rail will go to the heart of where many people want to reach such as central Los Angeles and downtown San Francisco.

That means you have to get people along the congested urban route to roil over and play dead. The railroad system we have in place now that was pushed by the Big Four – Leland Stanford, Collis Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins tried to build the Central Pacific today – was built long before CEQA (California's Environmental Quality Act) entered the state's lexicon.

Even if the high speed train parallels existing rail corridors, it “isn't already there.” That means legal challenges will pop up all over the place. If anyone thinks otherwise, they probably also believe that the California Legislature will restructure government, overhaul the state tax system, and slash tax rates by the end of 2010.

Separated crossing grades are nice but what about the noise. It's electric so there will be no increased noise, right? That's the assumption, but if you're within two blocks of a high speed train line – even one

topping out at 100 mph through urban areas, the odds are you won't be having happy thoughts. And not having happy thoughts is a critical ingredient into filing CEQA-based lawsuits.

It gets better. What are the odds some farmer will challenge the CEQA process because their dairy herd near the rural segments of the line where trains will go 200 mph may get the jitters and reduce milk production? Farmers will be reasonable to deal with compared to environmental worries that some rare insect may become windshield splatter or a kangaroo rat may inadvertently wander across the tracks with the bullet train barreling down on them.

But even if that can all be addressed, the biggest question is why go to all the hassle of serving a Los Angeles-to-San Francisco (and Sacramento corridor that arguably isn't where the real need is in this state.

A high speed system running from Riverside and San Bernardino counties to Los Angeles and Orange County makes more sense much like converting the Altamont Commuter Express train service into a high speed rail system. You would never have to worry about generating enough passengers, it would ease congestion, and have a bigger impact on reducing pollution. Vehicles in stop and go traffic pollute one heck of a lot more – and burn a lot more fossil fuel – than those traveling at 65 mph between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Or ask yourself this question: How many light rail systems could be built in California's heavily populated areas that run by electric power and how many more people would that move per day compared to high speed rail trains?

There is a lot of bang for the buck that can be generated with \$100 billion by doing something else to enhance transit and reduce congestion in California.

[In the Stockton Record, Commentary, Thursday, December 3, 2009:](#)

When the emissions numbers simply don't add up

By Eugene Robinson, The Washington Post

Climate-change skeptics are barking up the wrong smokestack. The shell game being played isn't with the science, it's with the solutions -- specifically, the carbon emissions targets that enlightened world leaders are pledging to meet. That's where the numbers don't add up.

When the Copenhagen climate summit convenes next week, the European nations that have led the crusade against global warming will be able to report that the continent has met the targets for carbon emission reductions set in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. There may be shoulder dislocations from all the self-congratulatory back-patting.

But the Kyoto targets were well on the way toward being met before they were even established. The targets are based on 1990 emissions levels -- after the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc had been fouling the air for years with their antiquated, carbon-spewing heavy industries. When the communist regimes - and their creaky economies -- collapsed in a heap, emissions from the former Soviet-dominated zone fell by nearly 40 percent.

Now they are rising again, but they remain about 35 percent below Kyoto's benchmark 1990 levels.

This post-Soviet industrial meltdown is responsible for most of the progress in reducing carbon emissions that Europe is able to claim. It's not that Europeans have done nothing.

The United States, of course, never ratified the Kyoto treaty. Since 1997, carbon emissions here have increased by an estimated 7 percent. In China -- which has now taken over as the world's leading source of atmospheric greenhouse gases - carbon emissions actually doubled over the past 12 years. Along with other fast-growing economic powers such as India and Brazil, China took a pass on any limits Kyoto might have wanted to impose.

The bottom line is that since the Kyoto agreement 12 years ago, worldwide carbon emissions have increased by nearly 30 percent.

President Obama, who has decided to attend the Copenhagen summit, plans to offer a 17 percent cut in U.S carbon emissions -- using 2005 levels as a benchmark -- by 2020. Leaving aside for the moment

whether this is achievable the problem remains that climate change is a global phenomenon. Local action can be rendered meaningless.

China is prepared to offer its first emissions target at Copenhagen, and at first glance, it looks impressive: a reduction of between 40 percent and 45 percent in its "carbon intensity" by 2020. But this "intensity" business is a huge caveat, because it refers to carbon emissions relative to the size of the Chinese economy. If the economy grew by 10 percent in a given year and carbon emissions grew "only" by 9 percent, that would count as a reduction. Assuming growth continues at current rates, China's carbon emissions could easily increase by 40 percent by 2020 -- and Chinese leaders could proclaim they had met their target.

That's a lot of numbers, a lot of assumptions, a lot of scenarios. But even if the Copenhagen summit is wildly successful, the concentration of heat-trapping carbon in the atmosphere will continue to rise. This doesn't mean the whole exercise is futile, it just means that Copenhagen won't provide any definitive solution to what so many scientists say is an urgent problem.

It's also true that even if all greenhouse emissions could magically be halted tomorrow, the elevated levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere -- higher than at any time in the past 800,000 years, according to researchers who study Antarctic ice-core samples -- would take many decades to decline to historical levels.

If the planet is warm now because of human-generated greenhouse gases, it's going to get warmer.

But if there's a longer growing season in the higher latitudes? If cross-polar shipping slashes transportation costs? If winters are milder -- more pleasant, even -- in Chicago, Moscow and Beijing? We may all be in this together, but there are going to be winners and losers. That's something they should talk about in Copenhagen, too.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses climate change in the Mission District in San Francisco among other areas in California by the end of the century if nothing is done now to control air pollution warns Arnold Schwarzenegger. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

El cambio climático puede desaparecer el barrio latino la Misión en San Francisco

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, December 02, 2009

El cambio climático podría borrar del mapa para fines de este siglo al barrio latino de La Misión, en San Francisco, entre muchas otras zonas de California si no se hace desde ahora algo por controlar la contaminación del aire, advirtió el gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

El aumento de temperatura en la tierra deshiela los polos, lo que incrementa los mares y causa ciertos efectos, como potenciales inundaciones de las zonas costeras y aumento en el nivel del mar.

Google, el mecanismo de búsqueda en la red mundial presenta en su sección Google Earth un proyecto interactivo en el que se muestran inundaciones que ocurrirían con el cambio climático. El presidente de la empresa, Eric Schmidt, dijo que "el proyecto es parte de los esfuerzos" de su compañía "para crear conciencia sobre lo que nos rodea".

En el referido portal muchas zonas de la costa se tiñen de azul, y áreas que hoy tienen sequía se verían inundadas.

El gobernador sostuvo que "lo más importante es saber que todo eso sucedería si no hacemos nada por evitarlo".

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that along with five other cities in southern California, and with automobile industry in the region, they will create areas for non polluting vehicles.

Acuerdo de California y cinco ciudades de la región para vehículos no contaminantes

Manuel Ocaño

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, December 02, 2009

El gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger anunció un convenio de su administración con cinco ciudades del sur de California, las más pobladas, y algunas de las principales empresas automotrices para crear una región de vehículos no contaminantes.

Schwarzenegger dijo que el 30 por ciento de los gases que provocan en California el efecto invernadero provienen de vehículos. La zona con el aire más contaminado en el país, Los Ángeles, así como Burbank, Pasadena, Santa Mónica y Santa Ana formarán una región con infraestructura para diversos modelos de autos, como los híbridos, los híbridos de conexión, los de batería eléctrica, los de combustible y los eléctricos.

Frank van Meel, representante de la principal automotriz alemana reconoció la importancia de que los funcionarios creen conciencia sobre temas ambientales y que los industriales busquemos respuestas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Chinese Government aligns itself with India and Brazil's demands on climate change.](#)

Gobierno chino se alinea con India y Brasil en exigencias cambio climático

El Periodico de Mexico, Thursday, December 03, 2009

Pekín, (EFE).- El Gobierno de China aseguró hoy que comparte prácticamente los mismos puntos de vista que países en desarrollo como India y Brasil respecto a la lucha contra el cambio climático, señalando que son especialmente los países desarrollados los que deben liderar los esfuerzos de reducción de emisiones.

"Tenemos demandas, posiciones y preocupaciones similares, en esencia que todos deben honrar sus compromisos y muy especialmente las naciones desarrolladas deben cumplir los objetivos de reducción de emisiones a medio plazo que ellas mismas fijaron", destacó al respecto en rueda de prensa el portavoz de Asuntos Exteriores chino, Qin Gang.

El éxito de la cumbre del cambio climático que empieza la próxima semana en Copenhague, señaló Qin, reside en "si la comunidad internacional puede respetar el Convenio Marco de las Naciones Unidas, el Protocolo de Kioto, la Hoja de Ruta de Bali y el principio de responsabilidades comunes pero diferenciadas".

Preguntado sobre la posición india -el pasado fin de semana prometió "esfuerzos" contra el cambio climático pero no ofreció cifras concretas-, Qin señaló que "China e India son ambos países en desarrollo y víctimas" del calentamiento global.

"No tienen objetivos obligatorios de emisión de reducciones, y los dos comparten la misma postura de que son los países desarrollados los que deben liderar", añadió el portavoz.

"China entiende la situación actual de la India, ambos debemos tomar medidas de adaptación y mitigación (del cambio climático) acordes a nuestras condiciones nacionales", destacó.

China, el mayor emisor mundial de dióxido de carbono, aumentó el optimismo de la comunidad internacional ante la Cumbre de Copenhague al anunciar la semana pasada que su primer ministro, Wen Jiabao, encabezaría la delegación nacional en la capital danesa.

También al comprometerse a reducir en 2020 entre un 40 y un 45 por ciento su intensidad de carbono, cifra que se obtiene al dividir las emisiones de CO2 de un país por su producto interior bruto.