

## District may ban wood burning

Sellers of cleaner-burning stoves, logs back previous two-step enforcement plan.

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

(Published Monday, July 14, 2003, 4:32 AM)

In the middle of July, one of the Valley's hottest air quality discussions concerns a popular Thanksgiving or Christmas activity -- wood burning in fireplaces.

Air authorities are expected Thursday to pass a rule allowing a ban on wood burning in fireplaces, wood stoves and other appliances on the worst cold-weather days, when soot and other particles turn the air into a damp, dirty haze.

To make enforcement practical, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff advises stopping all wood burning when the air becomes unhealthy. The proposal eliminates a previously considered step, which would have prevented fireplace burning on even moderately polluted days.

But the extra step also would have allowed federally certified wood stoves, and possibly manufactured logs, to burn on such moderate days. Companies that sell those products want the extra step because it encourages people to purchase cleaner-burning appliances.

"It works in Seattle, Denver and Albuquerque," said John Crouch, representing the Hearth, Barbecue and Patio Association. "Those metropolitan areas have two steps, and it raises awareness. Why not here?"

Industry representatives are expected to make their case before the air district governing board, which is scheduled to discuss the rule Thursday at the agency's Fresno headquarters.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is requiring the board to approve a wood-burning rule as part of a lawsuit settlement. District officials say it must be in place this winter.

Federal officials rank the Valley among the worst places in the country for particle pollution. On the worst days in the winter, wood burning from homes accounts for 20% or more of the particle pollution around urban neighborhoods in Fresno and Bakersfield.

This winter, armed with the new rule, officials will order residents not to burn wood on days when the air quality index in their county reaches 150, which is considered unhealthy. The index is a rating system, ranging from the healthiest air at zero to a lung-burning 300 or above.

But residents will only be encouraged to voluntarily stop burning when the index hits 100, which is unhealthy for people with sensitive lungs, said Tom Jordan, district senior air quality planner.

"We're saying we don't think you should burn at that point," Jordan said. "But if you do burn, burn cleanly. Use a certified wood stove or a manufactured log."

Instead of that voluntary campaign, many western U.S. cities make the lower or moderate pollution level part of the rule -- the first of two steps in their enforcement.

At this moderate level, wood burning is banned in fireplaces and old, polluting wood stoves. But people owning the cleaner alternatives are allowed to burn, unless the air pollution deteriorates to an unhealthy stage.

When the unhealthy stage is reached, the rule's second step is invoked, banning all burning.

But Seattle's winter pollution hasn't been high enough to trigger that second step in a decade, said Jim Nolan, compliance director at the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency.

"It might be a whole lot easier to enforce if we didn't have the two steps," Nolan said. "But we wouldn't be able to get our message out as often without the first step. It's a slow education process, but it works. We've been dealing with it since 1985."

The two-step approach would pose problems in the Valley, Jordan said. The 25,000-square-mile district has eight counties, which means several different forecasts each day. The public would hear conflicting messages.

"On one day, it might be OK to burn in Stockton or Modesto, but you might have some restrictions in Bakersfield, and you might have no burning at all in Fresno," Jordan said. "It becomes too confusing, too difficult to enforce. It will be much simpler to have the one trigger and stop burning wood at that point."

But Chris Caron, vice president of Duraflame, which manufactures logs in Stockton, said he has been speaking with air district board members, hoping they will switch to the two-step approach.

"Restrictions are appropriate," Caron said. "But the district makes it sound like wood burning is making 30% of the particulate problem throughout the Valley. That's just not so. You need to include the moderate days."

Other industry officials say the district is missing an opportunity to encourage replacement of older devices. Residents will hear just the no-burn message, said Rod Poplarchick, owner of Climate Control Systems in Visalia.

"Why would people spend money on a new appliance or a cleaner-burning approach if they believe they can't burn?" he asked. "They'll keep what they have."

District officials replied that each county would be considered separately, so the whole Valley would not necessarily be affected by a no-burn order. Depending on air quality, a no-burn night could focus on Fresno County but not San Joaquin or Stanislaus counties.

Officials added that no-burn nights probably would occur 20 or more times in the Fresno area. Inspectors will be in the field during those nights, looking for offenders.

Officials are expected to exempt houses above 3,000 feet in the Sierra as well as dwellings where the sole source of heat is wood. People who live in areas without natural gas service also would be exempt.

Offenders would receive letters in an attempt to educate them, said district planner Jordan. No fine has yet been established for repeat offenders, though state law allows the district to impose penalties up to \$10,000 a day for air violations.

"We have broad discretion," Jordan said. "But a potential fine would be nowhere near the high end of that range."

#### **If You Go**

**What:** San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District meeting.

**When:** 9 a.m. Thursday.

**Where:** 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno.

## **'Spare the Air' day is today**

The Hanford Sentinel, July 13, 2003

FRESNO - A "Spare the Air" day has been forecast for today in Kings County by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District because of expected air pollution levels.

During Spare the Air days, the district suggests that residents take steps to cut back on air pollution including carpooling or taking mass transit, waiting until late in the day to refuel a vehicle and postponing yard work with gas-powered equipment.

## **Spare the Air days to continue**

The Hanford Sentinel, July 11, 2003

FRESNO - The highest temperatures of the year are expected locally into this weekend, so it's no surprise that Spare the Air days have been announced for today and Friday throughout the central and southern San Joaquin Valley.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has called for Spare the Air days in the Central Region of Kings, Fresno and Madera counties along with the Southern Region of Tulare and Kern counties. The advisory is likely to run through the weekend, as triple digit temperatures are forecast .

Residents can help reduce and control air pollution levels by the adhering to the following measures:

€ Starting charcoal briquettes with electric or chimney starters;

€ Postponing lawn care with gas-powered equipment; and

€ Trip linking (organize errands into one vehicle trip).

## **Effect of fireworks on smog probed**

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian, July 11, 2003

The Fourth of July is all about flags, family and the spectacle of fireworks. Unfortunately, in one of America's smoggiest cities, it's also about the smoky pollution caused when thousands upon thousands of fireworks explode in a few hours of celebration.

Air quality sensors in Bakersfield on the night of Friday, July 4, recorded particulate smog readings that violated the federal 24-hour health standard. The peak hourly readings that night were two or three times greater than those usually seen only in the middle of winter, when particulates are a more common problem due to residential wood burning and the burning of agricultural waste.

Evan Shipp, chief meteorologist for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said he can't be sure the holiday's high readings were caused by fireworks, since such holidays often bring other unusual behavior, such as different driving patterns and lots of barbecuing. Further tests will be done on samples taken that day to determine the source of the particles collected by air district sensors.

But Shipp said it is noteworthy that the readings spiked right after sundown and stayed high until midnight -- the primary period of fireworks activity. He also said high particulate pollution was recorded throughout the valley on the Fourth wherever the air district has similar sensors. But Bakersfield's readings were much greater -- two to three times greater, in fact, than the next highest city, which was Fresno.

"It's a very unusual event," Shipp said. "We don't currently have anything that's pinpointing fireworks. We may have that eventually, because we'll have chemical speciation of the data that might earmark it as lots of burning or carbon."

Particulate pollution is caused primarily by combustion and land disturbance activities such as plowing and construction. Fireworks, as a combustion event, also release particulates.

The tiny soot particles released by combustion can penetrate deep into the lungs, where they clog breathing passageways, aggravating asthma and bronchitis and reducing lung capacity. Some of these particles are so small that they can pass from the lungs directly into the bloodstream, causing heart trouble.

A single sparkler, firecracker or bottle rocket may not produce a lot of smoke. But across a city of 260,000 people -- with several organized fireworks displays and thousands of informal backyard parties -- the emissions are significant. Many people reported seeing a vast haze of smoke enveloping neighborhoods during Fourth of July celebrations and lingering long after.

"I thought there was a separate fire," said Mary Griffin, who lives near Bakersfield College, where the city's largest annual fireworks display is held. "But I'm not going to be a wet blanket and complain about it. To me the fireworks are a safe and sane way to celebrate the Fourth of July."

It's unlikely that many people gave a thought to pollution when they purchased their holiday pyrotechnics, or enjoyed the "rockets' red glare" at organized displays. And it's unlikely to become a major issue in the battle against air pollution in the valley, given that it represents just four hours of pollution out of a whole year.

Air district officials are not planning any regulations to control fireworks, and it's unknown if any exist in other California air basins. Yet for some people, the fog of smoke caused by fireworks was hard to ignore.

"There were more and brighter and more powerful fireworks in our group than I had seen before. There was far more than little children needed in our particular situation to make them happy," said Ann Williams, who lives near Garces Memorial High School in Bakersfield and is a former member of the air district's Citizens Advisory Committee.

"You know, on the Fourth of July, whenever those things go off there's a puff of smoke. There are lots of little children breathing that stuff when they let it off, and we don't know the effect of this on children's health."

## **Peninsula's baby bullet train on track**

Caltrain's largest improvement project to begin service in 2004

By Justin Jouvenal, STAFF WRITER - Tri-Valley Herald, Article Last Updated: Monday, July 14, 2003 - 3:26:33 AM PST

As it approaches its one-year anniversary, the largest improvement project in Caltrain's history is steaming forward largely on schedule.

The \$110 million CTX project will clear the way for limited "baby bullet" service to begin speeding down the Peninsula by early 2004, while construction should be completely wrapped up by next summer, said Jayme Maltbie, a Caltrain spokeswoman.

The end of the line is also in sight for Caltrain's weekend shutdowns. Maltbie said Caltrain will begin running trains on Saturday and Sunday in March.

"We haven't had major problems with construction," she said.

The 22-month project, which kicked off last July, will transform the aging Caltrain system. The baby bullet express trains will significantly cut the time it takes to travel from San Francisco to San Jose. The trip will be reduced from 90 minutes to 55 minutes.

Caltrain is constructing passing tracks in three locations so the baby bullet trains can bypass local service.

## **Suburbs suffering from city pollution**

Research: Exhaust from autos in cities has greater impact on trees in country than those in urban core

July 14, 2003

By Douglas Fischer, STAFF WRITER - Tru-Valley Herald

A surprising report showing smog is worse in rural areas than in cities has potentially troubling implications for places like Livermore, Pleasanton, Concord and Walnut Creek, according to one of the researchers involved in the study.

The study caused a stir last week when it labeled air pollution as the reason cloned trees planted in the heart of New York City grew nearly twice as robustly as country brethren growing in outlying suburbs.

Allowing for other variables such as heat and carbon dioxide, a team of scientists found persistent exposure to ground-level ozone, or smog, stunted the growth of the suburban trees.

It means that exhaust from autos and trucks in Oakland, Fremont and Hayward has its harshest effect not on residents of those cities but in areas where people have moved to escape the

pollution and congestion -- Danville, Dublin, Livermore.

"What's going on in Livermore is the same sort of thing that's going on in the suburban areas around New York City," said Todd Dawson, a professor of integrative biology at the University of California, Berkeley, and one of the authors of the study.

"It has very negative influences on plant growth. It causes damage you can see on leaves."

The study also confirms what the Bay Area experiences on Spare the Air days -- the worst air accumulates in outlying areas, such as the Livermore and Napa valleys.

The peculiar findings have to do with how air pollution is formed.

High in the atmosphere, ozone protects life on Earth from harmful solar radiation. On the ground, it attacks cells, causing stunted growth in plants and asthma and other respiratory illnesses in humans.

But car exhaust needs sunlight and other pollutants to cook it into smog, or ground-level ozone. "It takes a little bit of time. What's coming from the city are ozone precursors," said Allen Goldstein, a professor of biogeochemistry at UC Berkeley. "You shift from having more primary pollutants (in the city) to having more secondary pollutants like ozone (in the country)."

That's not to say one is worse than the other, cautioned Jean Roggenkamp, planning and transportation section manager at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

"When you think of other things like diesel particulates, being in the city with the buses and the trucks -- I don't know if that's so healthy," she said.

In the Bay Area, on balance, diesel soot is more of a health threat than ozone, Roggenkamp said.

"I don't want to downplay our problems, but it's not too many days a year that ozone is a problem. And the levels are not that far over (federal standards)."

Still, the findings made the cover of one of the nation's most respected scientific journals, "Nature," because it undermines the notion that pollution in the suburbs is diffuse, diluted and not as bad as in the city.

"It is basically making the pollution more toxic," said Jillian Gregg, the report's lead author and a postdoctoral researcher with the Environmental Protection Agency in Oregon.

The research is unconnected with the agency and was done when both Gregg and Dawson were at Cornell University in New York.

"By the time (air pollution) is deposited on humans and plants in the city, its impacts are actually more severe than when it was first created in the city."

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## **It's hotter than hot for some Valley workers**

Hottest-in-city distinction goes to 2 pilots who sat in 121-degree cockpit.

By Diana Marcum, The Fresno Bee

*(Published Saturday, July 12, 2003, 12:59 PM)*

There is the pavement-burned-my-feet-on-the-way-to-the-pool, just-a-cold-salad-for-dinner, who-invented-neckties-anyway kind of hot.

Then there is hot. The kind of hot that makes Fresno's 103 on Friday or the 104 predicted for today look balmy by comparison. The kind of hot that makes lungs tighten.

The kind of hot that Thomas Carlton faced at his roofing job. Atop a building going up at Blackstone and Barstow avenues, steam rose from volcanic-hot, black goo.

The temperature: 119 degrees.

"Picture wax boiling and smoke sort of billowing. It looks like one of those movies where someone goes into a vat of liquid and comes out a skeleton," said Fresno Roofing Co. supervisor Ed Duarte.

As an apprentice, Carlton gets the heavy jobs such as lifting asphalt plugs that weigh 100 pounds (and are labeled "Hot Stuff"). The asphalt is heated to 450 degrees then pumped to the roof, where Carlton and others spread what's called a hot mop.

On the ground there was a breeze. Not a cool one, but some air in motion. Where Carlton and his co-workers labored inside 6-foot walls, the heat from the day and the heat from the melted asphalt hung compressed and still.

Duarte, once an apprentice himself, figured Carlton was a shoo-in as the hottest person in Fresno on Friday.

"Higher is hotter, and it's a hot mop, and he has the job with the most exertion," he said with the certainty of someone who has picked a winning racehorse.

But Carlton only tied for second with Jorge Lamas, who owns a tire-repair and towing shop, for facing the highest temperature. It was also 119 degrees where Lamas kneeled as he hooked an overheated car to his tow truck in Sanger.

The award for the hottest in Fresno, based on unscientific evidence -- propping up a \$1.99 thermometer at various work sites -- went to helicopter pilots Brad Bohlmann and Ben Gearing.

Trudging across a smoldering east Fresno tarmac surrounded by burned weeds, they strategized cooler surroundings.

Bohlmann suggested lawns.

"And sprinklers and flowers and shrubbery," said Gearing, a native of England who considers anything over 80 degrees stifling.

It was 110 degrees as Gearing ran through a pre-check flight or, as he put it, "looked at the flappy bits on top."

They climbed into the helicopter sitting on the heated asphalt. The temperature in the un-air-conditioned, bubbled-glass cockpit climbed to 121 degrees and stayed there while they waited five minutes for permission to take off.

An argument could be made that small-airplane pilots have it worse. Although it's a few degrees cooler in the planes because the windows are smaller, airplane pilots wait longer to take off, including taxiing to the runway.

Flight instructor Savio Fernandes, however, declined the title of hottest, as he didn't feel overheated. Fernandes is a native of Zimbabwe, where it's regularly 119 ("But a dry heat," he said.) He drives a car with the heater stuck on hot and likes the feeling of auto as sauna.

"I'm all about the heat," he said. "People in Fresno are funny. They don't know what hot is."

Daniel Hearty, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service who recently moved to the Central Valley from Florida, does consider 103 degrees hot.

"But it's more of an oven hot as opposed to sauna hot. It's not like Florida."

He has a name for the high-pressure system expected to create triple-digit heat through the weekend in a Valley used to temperatures in the 90s this time of year: heat wave.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District predicts Spare the Air days during the high temperatures.

## **Officials power up sale talk**

By TIM BRAGG, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian, July 13, 2003

Efforts by PG&E to sell a mothballed electricity plant in northwest Bakersfield may be back online.

But even if a proposed transfer of the plant goes through, energy experts and government officials say the project faces significant regulatory and economic hurdles that could put the efforts on the back burner again.

Uncertainty about what kind of fuel the plant would burn, and how it would keep emissions down to an acceptable level in an area plagued by air pollution, also make the plant's future difficult to predict.

Officials from Pacific Gas & Electric, which wants to sell the old Kern Power Plant, and North American Power Group, which wants to buy it, say they have satisfied conditions for a sale laid out by the state and the California Public Utilities Commission.

The power plant, located near the corner of Coffee Road and Rosedale Highway, has not produced any electricity since 1985.

The commission rejected an earlier proposed sale of the plant to North American.

North American Power Group President Michael Ruffatto said the final hurdle was passed when the public utilities commission approved a contract calling for North American to use the Bakersfield plant to supply utility Southern California Edison with electricity.

The power contract said the Rosedale plant would burn biomass, allowing Edison to count the power toward a state requirement that requires utilities to get power from renewable energy sources.

Ruffatto said the plant will not burn biomass as it is traditionally defined -- wood chippings from agricultural prunings -- but he would not say exactly what fuel the plant would use.

Now, the ball is in PG&E's court, Ruffatto said.

"We expect PG&E to put in another application to transfer ownership of the plant," Ruffatto said.

Cynthia Pollard, a spokeswoman for PG&E, said utility officials are pulling together the information for such an application. But she said no decision has been made on when it would be filed with the public utilities commission.

Ruffatto said he hopes to get the plant refurbished or a new facility built on the site, depending on which turns out to be the most feasible, within one to two years.

"We're talking millions," said Ruffatto, when asked about how much it would cost to refurbish the plant, or to knock it down and build a new one.

"We also want to coordinate with the city on the ultimate site redevelopment," he said.

That may be a problem for Ruffatto, because city officials have major concerns about the plant.

They include air and ground water quality issues, concerns about increased traffic on surrounding streets and the impacts an operating power plant would have on the hundreds of houses and dozens of commercial developments that have grown around the power plant since it was completed in 1948.

It once burned oil and natural gas.

In May, the Bakersfield City Council approved a resolution by Councilman David Couch that opposes the transfer in ownership to North American with the aim of restarting power generation there.

Couch said the city plans to hold a meeting on the power plant in which PG&E and North American would be invited to explain their plans for the project, but have not set a specific date.

Ruffatto said he also plans to hold community meetings on the project in Bakersfield.

Jack Hardisty, development services director for the city, said North American would have to apply for city permission to generate power at the site again because the old permits allowing such activity have long since expired.

"There are power plants that operate in urban areas in other cities," Hardisty said. "But they operate under a different set of standards than those in rural areas."

Although the San Joaquin Valley's air quality is poor, that wouldn't automatically preclude a plant that burns a renewable fuel to create electricity. Others in the valley have received permits for such activity.

"The plant would have to use the best technology available to control air pollution in order to get a permit," said Steve Tomlin, a senior air quality engineer with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We would create a model to see how the plant would impact air quality," Tomlin said. "It would also depend on what kind of fuel that is used."

Tomlin said no applications for a permit for the plant have been received.

Ruffatto said the company was waiting on a ruling from the California Energy Commission on what kinds of bio-fuels would qualify for state's renewable fuel mandates on utilities.

But an energy expert said there are few renewable fuels available for power plants other than biomass, which is the burning of prunings and other wood wastes from agriculture.

"They are going to need a lot of financing to get this built, and lenders would want proof that all the environmental issues can be dealt with up front" said Jesse Frederick, vice president at WZI Inc., an environmental and energy consulting firm.

Aside from the air quality issues, there are also concerns about groundwater contamination already affecting the power plant site.

Frederick said lenders would be especially concerned with the potential for lawsuits, especially those concerning residents who live near the plant.

## **Summer back with a vengeance after June gloom**

In The Bakersfield Californian from The Associated Press, July 14, 2003, 03:45:10 AM

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Summer hit California full force over the weekend, with blistering temperatures topping 100 degrees in some areas and record-breaking heat in others.

Monday was likely to be even hotter, but temperatures were expected to drop a few degrees toward the middle of the week, according to the National Weather Service.

Temperatures reached a record 89 degrees in Big Bear Lake Sunday, beating the 1985 record of 88 degrees. Cuyamaca hit 96 degrees, one degree higher than the 1958 record. Thermal hit 115 degrees, tying the 1950 record. There was near-record heat in the mountains and Antelope Valley on Sunday, the weather service reported. A variety of factors are contributing the heat, including clear skies and high air pressure, NWS weather specialist Stuart Seto said. "We had our June gloom, and for people waiting for summer time, it came in with a vengeance."

The region also experienced a Stage 1 smog alert last week, the first in five years.

High ozone levels in the central San Bernardino Mountains prompted the South Coast Air Quality Management District to advise people with sensitivities to smog, such as children, the elderly and those with heart and lung diseases, to stay indoors.

## **Heavy Smog Stages a Return to Southland**

By Gary Polakovic, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer, July 12, 2003

After years of retreat, heavy smog returned to the Los Angeles region late Friday as ozone reached very unhealthy levels in the central San Bernardino Mountains, prompting a rare first-stage smog alert.

The brunt of the smog was concentrated along the Rim of the World highway near Lake Arrowhead, sparing the densely populated urban Los Angeles Basin from the worst air pollution but belying the mountain hamlet's healthy alpine image. High mountain canyons can sometimes harbor ideal smog-forming conditions.

"For the most part, this is limited to a small portion of the L.A. Basin. People should exercise a good deal of caution in particular when exercising outdoors," said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

"This is not a good time to go hiking or exercising in the Lake Arrowhead area, especially in the late afternoon," Atwood said. "The elderly, children and people with asthma and heart and lung disease should stay indoors. Everyone else should avoid strenuous, sustained outdoor activity, such as yard work, biking, jogging. These are precautions everyone should take."

Smog in milder — but still unhealthy — doses settled in the Santa Clarita, San Fernando, San Gabriel and San Bernardino valleys on Friday, capping two weeks of mostly poor air quality, according to the AQMD.

The summer of 2003 is shaping up as the most polluted year since 1998 — the last time a first-stage alert was called. It comes on the heels of several years of minimal air quality improvements and signals serious vulnerabilities in the decades-long fight to clean the nation's smoggiest region.

"This is a significant setback in our progress toward clean air and it underscores the need for further pollution control at the local, state and federal level, especially as it relates to cars and trucks," said Barry Wallerstein, executive officer of the AQMD.

So far this year, 33 days of unhealthy air quality have occurred across the region, nearly twice as many as this time last year. Breezes blow most of the pollution inland, with communities from Simi Valley to Santa Clarita to Riverside tending to suffer the most.

Ozone is a colorless gas that forms in the air when emissions from tailpipes and smokestacks as well as paints and household chemicals mix with sunshine. It is highly corrosive and can destroy lung tissue, causing shortness of breath, headaches, nausea and dizziness. The federal government ranks air pollution in the Los Angeles region as extreme, the worst designation in the nation.

Lewis Murray, executive director of the Lake Arrowhead Communities Chamber of Commerce, said air quality was noticeably poor in the mountains and he worries what it might mean for visitors during the height of vacation season.

"It did seem kind of hazy today. It's so hot up here today, so I'm not surprised," Murray said Friday. "I don't think of us having smog problems up here. I keep hearing how the smog is decreasing, and I just assumed that with the changes in automobiles we had turned the tide on smog."

Indeed, the Los Angeles smog cleanup is widely regarded as one the nation's great environmental success stories. Despite rapid growth and 10 million vehicles on area highways, days of unhealthy ozone have been cut by 70% over the past 15 years. The worst days, when ozone reaches the very unhealthy mark as it did in the mountains Friday, were thought to have been eliminated in 1998.

Montclair City Councilman Leonard Paulitz, who represents Inland Empire cities on the governing board of the South Coast AQMD, heard about the dirty air in Lake Arrowhead upon return from a meeting touting the success of the Los Angeles smog cleanup.

"The fight's not over. If people thought it was over, this shows it's not. Up until now, I thought things were getting better, but we're losing ground," Paulitz said.

Environmentalists seized on the smog alert announcement as further evidence that air pollution regulators in Los Angeles, Sacramento and Washington are spending too much time trying to mold environmental regulations to the liking of businesses and not enough time aggressively pursuing emissions reductions.

"We're seeing this happening and all I can say is there are some sources of pollution that are growing and expanding and are not being controlled in any respect: the ships, the trains, the old off-road equipment," said Julie Masters, an attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

On Aug. 1, Los Angeles air quality officials will consider a new anti-smog master plan that they acknowledge will be hard-pressed to achieve clean air goals by the federally mandated deadline of 2010. Failure to meet that target not only means people would continue to be exposed to unhealthy air, but that businesses and highway construction could face federal sanctions.

More dirty air may be on the way. The AQMD is forecasting first-stage smog alerts over the weekend for mountain areas between Crestline and Big Bear. Meanwhile, smog in the Santa Clarita Valley is hovering very close to the very unhealthy mark as well.

## **Concern grows over valley air pollution**

By MARK GROSSI, THE FRESNO BEE, published earlier in the Fresno Bee but also pinto in the Modesto Bee on July 13, 2003

Dirty air already is touted as the No.1 environmental issue among Central Valley residents, but a new survey shows that more residents are now deeply concerned about it.

The statewide survey by the Public Policy Institute of California shows that 42 percent of valley residents think air pollution is a big problem. Three years ago, when valley residents made air quality their top environmental issue in the institute's annual survey, 28 percent felt that way.

The Central Valley mirrored statewide opinion on the major culprit: vehicle emissions. Yet, like most Californians, valley residents expressed only a modest concern regarding the contribution their driving lends to poor air quality.

That was not a big surprise to one official with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which has struggled for years to clean up one of the worst air basins in the country.

"When it comes to clean air, everyone wants it, but few are willing to make even small personal changes to make it happen," district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello said.

Institute researchers called 2,002 adults last month and posed questions about the environment. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, and the sampling error was plus or minus 2 percentage points.

The survey was a collaborative effort of the private, nonprofit Public Policy Institute, based in San Francisco; the David and Lucile Packard Foundation; the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; and the James Irvine Foundation.

By a wide margin, the respondents said they consider air pollution the most important environmental issue. About 30 percent ranked air pollution No.1, followed by 10 percent for water pollution, and 7 percent for growth and sprawl.

Even though many residents said they did not see their driving habits as a big problem, they said they would be willing to consider getting smaller vehicles to reduce fuel consumption and air pollution.

Mark Baldassare, the institute's statewide survey director, said: "That says a lot about environmental protection in relation to economic concerns."

Institute officials said the increase in air quality concern was clear among residents in the Central Valley, which includes both the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. Why?

"Valley residents (60 percent in the survey) are by far the most likely to report that air quality has worsened in the past decade," the researchers wrote.

The San Joaquin Valley's air problem has actually improved in many areas over the past decade, valley air officials say. But it has not improved as quickly as other areas, nor is it close to achieving the federal standard for healthy air, environmentalists say.

The rest of the state is well aware of air quality problems, too. The survey showed that 58 percent of Californians believe air pollution poses a serious health threat, and that 37 percent say a family member suffers from asthma or other respiratory problems.

Californians apparently like one pollution-fighting idea: high-speed rail. About 65 percent said they would approve a \$10 billion bond measure for planning and construction of a high-speed rail connection between Los Angeles and San Francisco via the Central Valley.

Other survey findings:

Twenty-eight percent of respondents approved of the way that Gov. Davis is handling his job, and only 30 percent approved of the way that he is handling environmental issues in the state. "Here's an issue in which (Davis has) demonstrated some pretty decisive acts," Baldassare said, citing last year's expansion of the Smog Check II program to include the Bay Area and support for an open space bond measure on the ballot.

"He's getting no credit for anything these days."

**Fresno Bee editorial:**

## **Unclear on the concept**

**Too many Valley residents miss their own connection to air problems.**

*(Published Sunday, July 13, 2003, 5:11 AM)*

Awareness is the first step toward solving a problem, so it's good news that Central Valley residents have a growing concern for the quality of our air. But it's also apparent that not everyone is making the right connection between what the problem is and what we must do about it.

A new statewide survey by the Public Policy Institute of California shows that 42% of Valley residents think air pollution is a big problem right now -- the single biggest environmental concern. That's up from only 28% just three years ago.

Valley residents also have it right in identifying the single-largest cause of foul air: vehicle emissions.

But there's a catch. We know that driving cars and trucks is the biggest part of the problem, but we're not so concerned about our own driving patterns and habits in that context. In other words, too many of us still think it's someone else's fault. Cars are the problem, we say, but not *my* car.

Guess again. Everyone who gets behind the wheel of a vehicle is causing air pollution. Everyone.

It doesn't matter if it's an old clunker burning oil or a new and freshly tuned car, or even one of the interesting hybrid vehicles now on the roads -- they all pollute.

To be sure, some are much worse than others and deserve special regulatory attention, but they all pollute. And all of us who drive are polluters, and share the responsibility for the problem we have in the Valley today.

"When it comes to clean air, everyone wants it, but few are willing to make even small personal changes to make it happen," said San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

Nicely and succinctly put. And until that fact changes, we aren't likely to be able to do more than nibble at the margins of the air quality problem.

Ah, well. No one really thought this would be easy, did they?

**Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee:**

## **EPA's enforcement fiction**

Environmental agency cynically manipulates its data.

*(Published Monday, July 14, 2003, 4:34 AM)*

There's no nice way to put this. Under President Bush, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cut back on criminal investigations of polluters, then cynically manipulated the data to suggest the opposite.

What constitutes a criminal investigation in today's EPA has been exaggerated and distorted to the point of deliberate deception. Any call by any EPA agent, however casual, can be classified as an investigation. Thus, as one disgusted investigator told the Sacramento Bee, "I called the FBI and said 'If you need us, give us a call.' That warranted a [criminal] case number. There was no investigation."

Pollution agency officials have seized upon the war on terrorism to boost EPA's enforcement numbers, at least as they appear on paper. Of the 674 enforcement cases officials claim they initiated in 2002, 190 were for "counterterrorism," efforts, many of them, like the call above in which EPA was not the major investigator nor even a minor player. To record such a contact as an agency initiated investigation is, as one agent said, "false." To be blunt, it is a lie.

EPA inflated the penalties meted out to "polluters" in a similarly dishonest fashion. This past April, the agency took credit for 471 years of prison sentences handed out to polluters in 2001 and 2002. The agency press release failed to note that a very large number of these cases involved drug traffickers. The EPA was brought in only to help dispose of toxic methamphetamine labs after the narcotics agencies had already completed the investigations that led to the arrests, prosecutions and incarcerations for which the EPA took credit.

While political spinners at EPA tout phantom enforcement, investigators responsible for fulfilling the agency's mission -- "to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment"-- complain anonymously that their work is being undercut. The number of EPA referrals to federal prosecutors has fallen 29% since the last full year of the Clinton administration. Enforcement budgets have been cut and personnel redirected to other duties. The agency's top enforcement official quit last year after documenting the Bush administration's systematic sabotage of enforcement efforts.

Under Bush, the EPA has been in full-scale retreat on environmental protection. No matter how the statistics are manipulated, that sad truth emerges for all to see.

## **Cross-purposes**

By Richard L. McIntosh, Clovis

*(Published Friday, July 11, 2003, 5:36 AM)*

It amazes me that California government works to protect the environment, yet all the gas pumps post this message: "Contains MTBE. The state of California has determined that the use of this product presents a significant risk to the environment."

I have no choice of gasoline without MTBE.