

## **Nauseating chemical fumes drive 11 from Modesto homes**

By ROSALIO AHUMADA - BEE STAFF WRITER

[Modesto Bee, Thursday, October 7, 2004](#)

Chemical fumes sickened 11 people from two homes in a Modesto neighborhood Wednesday night.

The residents reported that the fumes made breathing difficult, burned their eyes and throats, and brought on nausea. Emergency personnel treated the adults and children at the scene.

As of 10 p.m., a hazardous materials team from the Fire Department had been unable to find the source of the fumes in the vicinity of Kearney Avenue and Pearl Street, two blocks north of West Orangeburg Avenue.

Battalion Chief Tom Brennan said one of his firefighters described the odor as similar to a pesticide or some other household chemical.

With the hazmat team unable to find anything, a firefighter and a police officer started knocking on doors along the 1500 block of Pearl to ask residents if they had left a household chemical unattended.

The Pearl Street homes line an alley where the fumes seemed to be coming from.

The firefighters' search included a trailer in the alley. The man living there said he had not been affected by the fumes, Brennan said.

The first report of something amiss in the neighborhood air - a diesel-like smell - came in at about 8 p.m. Police responded but detected nothing.

Residents called again almost an hour later to report that the smell had returned, and that it was worse. They said it was starting to make them sick.

This time, a police officer felt a burning sensation in his eyes when he walked near the alley, Sgt. Andy Schlenker said.

Police called for help. Four fire engine crews and two ambulances responded.

The 11 ailing residents waited across the street during the search for the source of the fumes. No one else was evacuated.

Joyce Freeman, 39, was one of the people who called police to report the smell coming from the alley.

"The smell was coming from the back of our house and it kept getting stronger and stronger," she said.

She said she was coughing badly when a police officer told her and her two children to get out of their house.

When the search ended, authorities allowed Freeman and the others to return to their homes.

## **Florez backs more dairy inspections**

**Extra officials would enforce air, water standards under proposal**

By STEVEN MAYER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, October 7, 2004

Divide 650 dairies in the valley by three state inspectors with limited powers -- and what do you get?

Too little protection for Kern County's precious groundwater and already suffering air quality, said state Sen. Dean Florez.

In response to the growing number of dairies and dairy cows in Kern County and elsewhere in the valley, Florez on Wednesday called for the creation of an expanded inspection program to

enforce water and air pollution guidelines for dairies. The proposal would establish a dairy inspector "with teeth" in every California county that has 100,000 or more animals in confined facilities, such as dairies.

"In the next three months, you'll probably see us looking at, not only cleaning the air, but making sure we are protecting our groundwater ... for future generations," Florez said at a news conference in Bakersfield.

"What we're asking for today comes from the fact that inspectors found a dairy in Buttonwillow that was using a secret channel to illegally dump wastewater onto a reserve," he said.

"Unfortunately, this is the same dairy that had similar problems in Chino, where it was illegally dumping wastewater into a flood control basin."

Kern County is home to an estimated 290,000 milk cows on 55 dairies. An additional two dozen projects -- with more than 214,000 bovines -- are waiting in the wings.

The county Board of Supervisors, a governing body Florez characterized as "dairy friendly," voted in August to let the first nine new projects move ahead.

Under the current dairy inspection system, the state Regional Water Quality Control Board's three inspectors typically get to dairies about once every three years.

In the past, the county has had a dairy inspector, but that position has gone unfilled, Florez said. And those inspectors don't enforce air and water standards.

Under Florez's proposal, each participating county would be required to assign an inspector to enforce state and local air and water standards, as well as conditional use permitting requirements. The goal is to see each dairy inspected at least once a year.

Lonnie Wass, director of the state Regional Water Quality Control Board, said three inspectors are not enough to catch potential violators.

"The more eyes that we have available out there in the field, the better," Wass said.

"There is a dairy quality assurance program, a voluntary program by dairymen where they participate among themselves," he said. "But there needs to be support for the counties, and eyes for us out there in the field as well."

The Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship is an industry-sponsored organization that endorses what it calls responsible and efficient regulation for dairies.

"We're willing to be regulated," said J.P. Cativiela, the alliance's program coordinator. "We know we need to be part of the regulatory process."

Cativiela said he hasn't seen the details of Florez's proposal, so it was too early to determine whether the alliance would support or oppose it.

"But we're concerned about costs. We're concerned about increased bureaucracy," he said. "Do we need to pass a state law? I wonder about that."

Costs for dairies could go up if the proposal becomes law.

"I have a very simple concept," Florez said. "The polluter pays. ... People who create the problem pay for the problem."

Florez said he would like to see his proposal move toward legislation as quickly as possible.

"Most people in Kern County that I talk to want accountability," Florez said. "They want to know who to talk to. They want to know who to call."

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Wednesday, October 6, 2004:](#)

### **Controlled burns minimize fire, pollution woes**

By JOE FONTAINE, Tehachapi

The recent conflict between the National Park Service and the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District has brought attention to a problem that must be faced.

Everyone acknowledges that air quality in the Central Valley is terrible. As the district attacks air pollution it must not disregard another problem -- the alarming accumulation of dangerous fuels in mountain areas.

*The Bakersfield Californian* recently reported the district plans to impose a \$75,000 fine on Sequoia National Park for a controlled burn project to reduce dangerous fuels. The two agencies had agreed upon a multiple-day burn in the park in late June. After a few days into the burn, the district told the park it could not burn on June 30 because of adverse air conditions.

In defense of that decision, Dave Crow, district control officer in a letter printed in *The Californian*, did not acknowledge the additional cost that the order would impose on the park.

In addition, the project needed to be finished and the fire crews released before the Fourth of July weekend when they might have been needed elsewhere to protect lives and property.

The dangerous fuels in our mountains have been accumulating at an alarming rate. People in Kern County do not need to be reminded of the disastrous 150,000 acre McNally Fire that burned in Sequoia National Forest two summers ago, or the tragic loss of life and property in southern California last fall. Much more controlled burning than has been allowed by the air district is the only way to effectively deal with the accumulation of dangerous fuels.

Most of the area in those fires was covered by dense brush, that once ignited is almost impossible to stop. Some people advocate logging in forested areas to prevent wildfires. Logging only removes the trunks of trees, the least flammable fuel. Slash, small non-merchantable trees, brush and other accumulated dead material are left behind. The only practical way to remove those is through controlled burning.

Controlled burning cannot guarantee there will be no wildfires, but it gives fire fighters a fair chance to control them before they become a disaster. The McNally Fire burned for more than a month in July and August of 2002 creating some of the worst air quality we have ever experienced in Kern County.

Using controlled fire Sequoia National Park has done an excellent job of reducing dangerous fuels and restoring a healthy resilient forest. In the near future Sequoia National Forest will also need to implement a controlled fire program to reduce excessive fuels in the Giant Sequoia National Monument. The communities inside the Monument are in danger from wildfire.

The air district must sit down with all agencies responsible for fire management and develop a balanced plan that meets all of the needs of the public, as well as air quality. A little temporary smoke is not as bad as the smoke produced by huge wildfires. Protection of lives and property must be taken into consideration as we work to improve air quality.

*Joe Fontaine of Tehachapi is a retired Kern County science teacher who formerly headed the national Sierra Club.*

[Stockton Record editorial, Thursday, Oct. 7, 2004:](#)

## **State keeps driving toward cleaner air**

In case you missed the news, California -- to no one's surprise -- has adopted the toughest clean-air rules in the world.

The decision by the California Air Resources Board is neither the end of global warming nor the ruin of the American automobile industry, although both sides in the debate over standards want us to see it their way.

The solutions are somewhere in the middle.

Vehicle travel is essential. We use cars and trucks for everything from individual movement to turning the wheels of commerce.

Few would argue that carbon-dioxide tailpipe emissions are not harmful. Many scientists believe vehicle exhaust is the primary contributor to greenhouse gases that help cause global warming.

The argument revolves around the rate and degree of change required by the auto industry.

California officials have taken the most significant step toward cleaner air, telling carmakers they have until 2009 to begin introducing new technology and until 2016 to meet the tougher exhaust standards. The goal is a 25 percent reduction in exhaust from cars and light trucks and 18 percent from larger trucks and sport utility vehicles.

The regulations are the result of a 2002 law signed by former Gov. Gray Davis that required the state Air Resources Board to set new emissions standards.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers has threatened to challenge that law in federal court. The auto industry worries about the cost of such changes, the unevenness of having to produce separately for Californians and consumer reaction. Ten percent of the nation's vehicles are sold in California.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who owns a Humvee, supports the tougher rules. He's said he'll use his influence to fight any lawsuits brought by the automakers.

Polling by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California shows four out of five residents -- worried about air pollution and related health problems -- support the new regulations.

The board's timetable is gradual and long range. Manufacturers have plenty of time to take existing hybrid models and work on upgrades. There are other steps -- continuously variable transmissions and engines that shut off unneeded cylinders -- that can be taken.

That's where their energies ought to be devoted, not the courtroom.

It would have been better if California officials had linked changes to measurable reductions in air pollution.

We're already seeing improvement in Central Valley smog levels, in part because of a cooler summer but also because driving habits are changing.

Even as the Valley's commuter corps is growing, the amount of air pollution is decreasing. During the past decade, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has imposed 500 clean-air rules credited with cutting emissions.

The rules still must be reviewed by the state Legislature and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

No one expects them to back off. They can make the progress more accountable by insisting reductions in emissions be factored into the rate of change.

Meanwhile, consumers can anticipate smaller cars, smaller engines, a rise in hybrid alternatives, more cost (at least initially) -- and cleaner air.