

## **Valley briefs**

Fresno Bee, Wed., Jan. 19, 2005

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) -- The constant gray shroud that has hung over the Central Valley since the rains stopped last week isn't just making the place gloomy. Air quality experts report the high pressure system is working as a lid over the Valley, trapping pollutants low to the ground, where they could hurt people with sensitive lungs or heart problems.

Regulators warned anyone with breathing problems to stay indoors on Tuesday, and asked everyone else to refrain from burning wood in fireplaces so they don't increase the pollution in the air. Soot and ashes combine in the atmosphere with combustion from cars, creating a hovering mass of tiny specks that can penetrate deep inside lungs, triggering asthma attacks.

The Air Quality Index rates the air from completely healthy, at zero, to dangerous at 300. When the index reaches 150, wood burning is banned, and the air is unhealthy for everyone.

Conditions are expected to be harmful to those with pre-existing problems -- with the index hovering around 100 -- until Wednesday.

The persistent clouds are expected to linger for the rest of the week, and to continue trapping particles in the Valley, said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"The pollution being created is just sticking around," Ferreria said.

## **Hazy days spark 'burn discouraged' alert**

BEE STAFF REPORTS AND NEWS SERVICES

Wed. Jan 19, Modesto Bee

San Joaquin Valley residents have two reasons to hide under the blankets: One is winter's gloom, and the other is the dirty air lurking beneath those gray clouds.

Today's air quality forecast for three counties — Stanislaus, Fresno and Tulare — prompted a "burning discouraged" advisory from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. People are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves.

"High pressure has now returned and it's provided a lid over the San Joaquin Valley, and it's basically trapping the pollutants being made below," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the air district.

Wood burning and combustion from vehicles mix to create specks of pollutants small enough to penetrate deep inside lungs. The particles can trigger asthma attacks and heart problems.

When pollutant levels are predicted in the 101 to 150 range on the Air Quality Index, the air district discourages wood burning. Today, Stanislaus County's AQI level is expected to be 104 — triggering the no-burn advisory. San Joaquin County's AQI forecast for today is 97, and Merced County's is 95.

Burning wood is banned when the AQI forecast is above 150, which is unhealthy for the public at large, not just those with sensitive lungs.

The AQI rating system ranges from healthy air at zero to hazardous at 301 and higher.

Unhealthy air conditions could continue through the weekend.

For the Modesto area, AccuWeather forecasters predicted partly cloudy days through Sunday, with high temperatures ranging from 47 degrees to 51 degrees on Sunday. AccuWeather predicted overnight lows in the low 40s.

Chilly winter days such as these provide the perfect habitat for particles of pollution.

Microscopic pieces of soot and grime stay suspended in the damp air, and a warm lid at higher elevations prevents the polluted air from escaping.

"The pollution being created is just sticking around," Ferreria said. He said the restrictions on burning wood and other district control measures "have helped in reducing our pollutant levels."

Meanwhile, many people burn wood to reduce utility bills in winter. Natural gas prices increase in the cold months.

This year, natural gas prices are particularly high, said Jonathan Franks, a spokesman for Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

## **Burn advisory**

Modesto Bee, News and Notes  
Wed. Jan. 19, 2005

People in Stanislaus, Fresno and Tulare counties are being asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality.

## **Bush `Clear Skies' proposal hinders power plant cleanups, official says**

JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer  
S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, January 18, 2005

(WASHINGTON (AP) -- President Bush's push to revise the Clean Air Act sometimes has hindered enforcement of the existing law for cleaning up coal-fired power plants, the Justice Department's top environmental lawyer said Tuesday.

Congress has balked so far at enacting Bush's plan to change the way power plants meet air pollution requirements. His "Clear Skies" initiative would ease regulatory controls on utilities and set up a broader market-based system to reduce smokestack emissions.

In the meantime, the Bush administration has prosecuted violations of a Clean Air Act program it wants scaled back to make it less demanding of industry.

Companies have negotiated settlements to reduce their pollution and pay fines under the program, which requires added pollution controls when major upgrades or repairs substantially boost emissions.

"We have had some successes regarding settlement. ... The existence of the potential 'Clear Skies' initiative in some cases has made a company want to delay their conversations with us. But so what?" said Thomas Sansonetti, assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's environment division.

"We should not put forth a proposal for a better law because of a slavish allegiance to an inadequate law?" Sansonetti asked rhetorically during a talk about the program sponsored by the conservative Washington Legal Foundation. "I mean, you need to go ahead and push forward."

Sansonetti's comments came just days after the National Academy of Sciences suggested in an interim report that Bush's air pollution strategies might achieve less at certain plants than the law he wants to replace. While the study says existing law "provides more stringent emission limits for new and modified major sources," the Bush White House maintains that far more pollution reductions would occur overall under its plan.

Sansonetti said settlement talks with industry are continuing, but some companies are hesitant because of the legal uncertainties from various court rulings. It's understandable, he said, for a company to think that "you might well want to see how the cases turn out" before negotiating a settlement with the Justice Department.

The remark is similar to a comment by former EPA Administrator Christie Whitman in March 2002 that was roundly criticized by environmentalists. Whitman suggested that power plants sued for pollution violations might want to hold off settling their cases until an appeals court had ruled on the Tennessee Valley Authority's challenge to her agency's orders.

## **Paying to ease greenhouse gases -- and consciences**

By Dan Neil, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Wed., Jan. 19, 2005

With the Kyoto Protocol set to go into effect in February, some Americans may be feeling left out — the United States withdrew from the international accord on climate change in 2001. But a new company, using a market-based system of carbon credits and debits not unlike Kyoto, allows drivers to pay to offset their cars' annual emission of greenhouse gases. Think of it as Kyoto for commuters.

The U.S. company, Benven LLC, sells a product called TerraPass, essentially a pricy bumper sticker identifying the driver as a volunteer in the fight against global warming. Benven directs the money from TerraPass sales toward clean energy and efficiency projects that will — if it all works as advertised — reduce overall carbon-dioxide emissions commensurate with their cars' output of the gas.

TerraPass emerged last fall from a classroom project at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, but began as a pang of guilt in the mind of professor Karl Ulrich, who drives his Ford F-150 pickup from Philadelphia to his farm in Vermont on the weekends.

"I'm an environmentalist, but I need this truck," Ulrich says. "On one of the trips it occurred to me that I'd be willing to pay to offset the impact of the truck."

With a no-interest loan from Ulrich, the class set up the Web-based, for-profit business ([www.terrapass.com](http://www.terrapass.com)) offering three levels of carbon dioxide "remediation": four metric tons for \$39.95; six metric tons for \$49.95 and 10 metric tons for \$79.95. For reference, a vehicle that gets 20 miles per gallon and travels 12,000 miles per year produces about five metric tons of carbon dioxide per year.

In the near term, the money TerraPass generates will be used to buy carbon credits on the Chicago Climate Exchange ([www.chicagoclimatex.com](http://www.chicagoclimatex.com)), a commodities market-like organization whose members have committed to reduce greenhouse emissions. Benven then "retires" those credits, making that capital available to cover the marginal costs of purchasing more energy-efficient equipment, for example, or switching to renewable energy sources. Exchange members include Ford Motor Co., International Paper Co. and IBM.

Transportation represents about 25% of U.S. carbon emissions (slightly more in California), but electrical generation represents about 40%. Because it is generally easier to reduce carbon emissions in the production and conservation of electricity, Ulrich says, a carbon-conscious dollar spent with TerraPass goes further than one spent on a more fuel-efficient vehicle.

"A Toyota Prius costs about \$3,000 more than a Corolla, and for that \$3,000 you reduce carbon emissions by about 3 tons per year," says Ulrich. "But if you invested that \$3,000 in TerraPass, you can save 375 tons of carbon."

Such arithmetic might make some environmentalists queasy. "Any program that reduces CO<sub>2</sub> is a good thing," says John Boesel, president of WestStart-CALSTART, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering clean transportation nationwide. "A win-win would be that people would be buying more efficient vehicles and taking these sorts of steps."

Ulrich acknowledges that TerraPass, in assuaging the guilt of those who drive gas hogs, could reduce consumer resistance to purchasing such a vehicle, but he says, "A customer who buys a TerraPass will be one that buys a responsible vehicle."

Ulrich, who has no financial interest in Benven, compares the program to recycling. "You don't have to recycle," he says. "People just do it."

**Canada Considers Copying California's Greenhouse Gas Law  
Officials are touring the state this week as their nation explores whether to adopt similar rules.**

By Miguel Bustillo, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Wed., Jan. 19, 2005

Canadian officials, who are considering regulations to reduce carbon dioxide exhaust from cars and trucks, are spending a few days this week getting a firsthand look at their primary inspiration: California.

Although Canada has not decided whether it will follow California's lead by requiring automakers to cut greenhouse gases to combat global warming, the country's environment minister noted Monday that doing so could have a powerful cumulative effect.

If Canada and New York and other Northeastern states all pass California-style greenhouse gas regulations, "we would be at least a third of the market," Environment Minister Stephane Dion said. "It is always difficult for Canada to go alone."

Dion is part of a delegation of Canadian officials, including the country's minister of transportation, that is touring California. The delegation is scheduled to meet with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger today to learn more about the state's pioneering greenhouse gas law.

The law, passed last year, requires automakers to reduce tailpipe emissions of greenhouse gases nearly 30% by 2016. It is strongly opposed by automakers, who have filed state and federal lawsuits to block it.

The Canadian officials said their government would prefer to follow the example of the European Union, which entered into a voluntary agreement with automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

But if such a deal cannot be struck, Canada is prepared to go forward with a California-style regulation, the officials said. Canadian officials plan to discuss the issue with representatives of the carmakers later this month.

"At the end of the day, we want results," Transportation Minister Jean Lapierre said in an interview in Los Angeles on Monday. "We could go more directly into regulations. But we would rather have a voluntary agreement."

In addition to learning about the state's global warming regulation, Canadian officials wanted to see how California was addressing its long-standing problems with air pollution, traffic gridlock and urban sprawl. They also wanted to discuss Schwarzenegger's hydrogen power initiatives.

On Monday, the Canadians were in the Los Angeles area, where they met with business leaders and toured the Diamond Bar headquarters of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the region's main smog-fighting agency. Afterward, they toured the Port of Los Angeles and went to Santa Monica to visit the offices of the Rand Corp. think tank and the environmental group the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Several Northeastern states have indicated that they plan to copy California's tailpipe rule, expressing frustration with what they see as a lack of action by the Bush administration to address climate change.

If Canada also follows California, economies of scale may force automakers to make the technology needed to meet the requirements — mainly variable-speed transmissions and other fuel-economy boosters — mandatory in all cars. That is what eventually happened with another California innovation to reduce car emissions, the catalytic converter, environmentalists say.

"The prospect of Canada adopting the California approach scares the automakers to death," said Roland Hwang, a car pollution expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "With the Canadians on board, we'd reach the tipping point."

Auto manufacturers worry that the end result would be a patchwork of different carbon dioxide standards throughout the states — and perhaps other parts of North America, if Canada moves forward with its own rule. That would make it more costly for them to make cars and trucks for the different markets, they argue.

"When Canadian officials look closely at this regulation, they'll see increased costs to consumers, loss of jobs, with no benefits in air quality or climate," said Gloria Bergquist, vice president of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, the industry group that has sued California.

## **Greg Bynum New chairman, Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce**

Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday, Jan. 19, 2005

What's in store for Bakersfield and Kern County's business this year? Staff writer Jennifer Plotnick discussed that with Greg Bynum, who will be sworn in as 2005 chairman of the board of the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 27.

Bynum, president and CEO of Gregory D. Bynum & Associates Inc., will succeed 2004 chairman Jim Baldwin, of the Bakersfield Association for Retarded Citizens, in representing the nearly 1,600 business-member organization.

Here's a synopsis of Bynum's comments.

1 What is the most important issue facing Kern County businesses this year, and how will the chamber address it?

The condition of the economy and employment. We'll be actively involved in legislative advocacy, watching closely to make sure our community is well-represented and that legislation is effective in creating jobs and economic vitality in our area. We will focus our major efforts on being actively involved in finding a solution for funding our transportation infrastructure and working diligently on ways the chamber and business can be involved supporting the improvement of air quality in our region. Our vision is to build a unified business community and promote an environment for business retention, growth and success.

2 Will you lobby for other issues?

We have our eye on Sacramento and Washington (D.C.) as it relates to transportation bills and where available cooperative funding may be to assist us. [We'll seek to find ways to continue progress \(with air quality\)](#). We will have a task force charged with monitoring that and assisting with ideas and concepts of how we might be helpful. We're going to be looking at all business issues. I would certainly think we would be sensitive to the balance between how the state has taken tax revenues away from cities. We'll be watching closely how that issue bears out under the state's ledger.

3 Because of issues such as workers' compensation, do you see California, as some people do, as a business-unfriendly state? And why should businesses come to Kern County?

Our governmental review committee was fully supportive of the initiative process (to reform workers' compensation). The Legislature sometimes overburdens business with legislation and we'll be sensitive to that. But there's no better place in the world to do business. That's underscored by the fact we're the fifth-largest economy in the world.

Can we do better by advocating less regulation and less taxation? Certainly, and we should continue to do that. Do I expect to see a mass exodus of business from California in the current environment? No.

I can see several positive reasons for coming here: cost of living, quality of life and dynamic growth and expansion. Our slogan is "Bakersfield: Life as it Should Be." That says it all. This is a very solid, family-oriented community that reveres traditional values and a solid environment in which to raise their families.

4 In 2002, per capita personal income in the Bakersfield metro area was \$22,635, compared with the state's \$32,989. What responsibility do you think local businesses bear in bringing local earnings up? How do they do it?

It's somewhat reflective of the demographic we have in this community. It's also reflective of our environment and lower cost of living. Businesses bear the responsibility to adequately compensate their employees. And in turn, those employees can participate by helping make businesses successful. I advocate for businesses to be thoughtful employers in our community.

5 The housing boom went bust in the late 1980s and early 1990s. When housing went flat, how did that impact the business climate?

All business cycles over time. Part of what happened in real estate was due to significant change in tax law in '86. This is a growth period that has not been rivaled in my memory.

All the state, local and national economists that have looked at this see a significant long-term growth pattern for real estate and housing and a significant demand that is not being met currently.

When people are used to inflationary trends, they adjust to those in making decisions. Businesses probably adapt their spending plans on that basis.

[Editorial, Fresno Bee, Wed., Jan. 19, 2005](#)

[Our Views in Brief](#)

### **Someone is getting hurt**

The dreary gray skies that blanket the Valley do more than depress its residents. They conceal potentially dangerous levels of air pollution, in the form of fine particulates. Much of this pollution comes from wood fires, and is so tiny it can find its way deep into human lungs. The measurement of particulates suspended in the air has reached the stage of unhealthy for sensitive people — the old, the very young and those with breathing and heart problems. At this level, wood burning is discouraged; when the pollution goes higher, burning is banned. But it's important to remember, sitting in front of that cozy fire, that even when wood burning is merely discouraged, someone out there is being harmed by your smoke. Have a heart.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, Wed. Jan. 19](#)

### **Why not a column on cleaner air?**

I noticed the air quality was very good after the deluge of rain and high winds we've been receiving. I'd like to see The Bee carry a regular column on how we can reduce pollutants in the air.

There's a lot of discussion about agriculture's role, but how about the rest of us? The auto industry is resisting making changes because consumers aren't interested in buying fuel-efficient cars.

The recent drop in gas prices doesn't give us much incentive, though \$1.80 a gallon definitely makes me think about how many trips I'm taking and how I can consolidate them. There's an advantage to consolidating trips besides the gas savings — reducing parking-lot stress.

I'd love to see The Bee discuss the impact of gas-powered lawn mowers and blowers. Let's get a discussion going.

GAIL CLARK  
Modesto