

High wind warning

Modesto Bee, News and Notes, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006

High wind expected today throughout the San Joaquin Valley has prompted air pollution officials to issue a health cautionary statement. The wind — forecast to be from 10 to 20 mph with possible gusts to 30 mph — can kick up dust and create unhealthy concentrations of particles in the air.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis and increase the risk of respiratory infection. People with health risks should avoid strenuous activities or heavy exertion through this evening. Despite the concerns, fireplace use isn't prohibited in any county today.

It had to end: Freeze watch on

DAVID BURGER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006

The biggest temperature difference in one day, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, happened in Browning, Mont., in January 1916. The temperature dropped from 44 degrees to minus 56 degrees within 24 hours.

Browning, meet Bakersfield.

While Bakersfield won't reach the extremes Browning did, later tonight a freeze watch will be in effect only days after Bakersfield tied a record high with 73 degrees on Feb. 6.

The rough weather doesn't end there: the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District cautions residents that strong winds with gusts of up to 30 mph will continue through this evening.

And rain could arrive this weekend, said Jeff Myers, a meteorologist from the National Weather Service.

The battalion's worth of bad weather is a result of a particularly strong cold front from western Canada, Myers said.

"It looks like our good weather has run out, and we're back to our regular February temperatures," Myers said.

The freeze watch will begin tonight for the central and southern San Joaquin Valley, the weather service said. Temperatures early Thursday morning could reach 27 degrees.

That could be bad for the area's almond growers and for people who plan on making Pumpkin Tortellini with Almonds in Brown Butter Sage Sauce. (See the California Almond Board's Web site for the recipe.)

When the temperature reaches 29 degrees for as little as a half-hour, said Mario Viveros, farm adviser for the University of California Extension in Bakersfield, growers can expect to see as much as 25 percent damage to almond crops. When the temperature reaches 27 degrees, he said, 100 percent damage can be seen.

Along with almonds, early peaches in Arvin are also in bloom and susceptible to below-freezing temperatures, he said.

The cold front will be dry at least until the end of the work week, Myers said. The high winds coupled with the dry conditions are leading to unhealthy air, said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the air district, in a health advisory.

While winds usually blow pollutants out of the air, unusually high winds -- like those forecast today -- can kick up larger particles and make the air worse, the district said.

And Tuesday already was a no-burn day.

But before area residents decide to pack up and move to Scranton, Pa., for similar temperatures, Myers said to hold on. Relax, we're still in California, he said.

(And after the blizzard of 2006 just a few days ago, Scranton is expecting more flurries this weekend.)

Air quality expected to worsen this week

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District cautions that air pollution levels may climb in coming days.

Expected high winds throughout the Central Valley have prompted local air-pollution officials to issue a health cautionary warning for today.

The high winds - forecasted to be 10 to 20 miles per hour with possible gusts to 30 miles per hour in parts of the valley - can kick up dust from dry land and create unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter.

Valley farmers keep their eyes on thermometer

By Jim Guy and Dennis Pollock / The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

A cold, windy weather front moving down from the North is catching the attention of those involved in agriculture and air quality.

Night temperatures for the next few days are predicted to fall to the low 30s, prompting Valley growers to watch thermometers for freezing temperatures, while winds gusting to as high as 30 mph in the western portion of the Valley today are likely to kick up dust and create breathing problems.

Carlos Molina, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Hanford, says a mass of cold air from Alaska is the source of the weather front, which will end the past few balmy days of 70-degree weather.

Today, the forecast is for a high of 58 degrees, three below the normal of 61. Tonight, the low temperature is expected to be 33 degrees. More mornings in the low 30s are expected to follow.

So far, growers are only mildly concerned.

"Growers can run water if they feel they could have a problem of blooms or buds freezing," said Dennis Plann, Fresno County's deputy agricultural commissioner. He said problems could arise if temperatures fell below 32 degrees "for two or three hours."

If high temperatures dip below 55 degrees, that also can have an effect on agriculture because it would curtail the flight of bees that are vital to pollination of crops worth millions of dollars, led by almonds.

"It could delay pollination," said Lyle Johnston, a beekeeper who lives in Rocky Ford, Colo., and spends the winter in Madera. Rain that is in some forecasts for the weekend also could close the door on pollination for a while.

"But when it warms up, the bees will be back in the fields," Johnston said.

A cooling snap would mean beekeepers would have to supplement the bees' diet. Johnston said a 2,000-gallon mobile tank is used to deliver corn fructose syrup at a rate of one gallon per hive.

"We call it the welfare wagon," he said. "The bees may be on the welfare wagon for next week."

At this time of year, a mild freeze in citrus groves is less of a concern.

"This has actually been warmer than we would like it to be," said Bob Blakely, director of grower services for California Citrus Mutual in Exeter.

Blakely explained that citrus is now at a level of maturity and sugar content that should resist damage unless temperatures drop below 28 degrees for an extended period.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an air quality warning Tuesday afternoon. The warning is in effect until this evening. High winds can create unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller, or PM10.

"The combination of things being relatively dry — the lack of moisture in the soil — and the unusually high winds could lead to unhealthy air," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the air district.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, the district said. In people with heart disease, short-term exposure to particle pollution has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmias, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The district is advising people with heart or lung disease to follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality.

Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, the district says. Everyone is advised to avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

Wal-Mart plan fuels controversy

Merced leaders welcome huge distribution center, but foes see big problems

By DAVID CHIRCOP - MERCED SUN-STAR
in the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006

The largest retailer on Earth has stirred local opposition with its plan to build a 1,000,000-square-foot distribution center in Merced next year.

While civic leaders are welcoming the windfall of jobs the center could bring, a coalition of anti-Wal-Mart forces is assembling against the massive project.

"Any claims that are being made about the economic benefits need to be taken with more than a grain of salt," said Kenny Mostern, spokesman for the Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth.

The alliance includes political, environmental, labor and farm organizations.

The group says the center will snarl traffic and worsen air pollution.

Wal-Mart has come under fire from grocery unions and chains that oppose its entrance into the supermarket business with Wal-Mart supercenters.

It also has drawn opposition from social justice groups and a number of cities, including Turlock, which blocked the placement of a supercenter in early 2004. Wal-Mart is waging a legal battle to overturn Turlock's supercenter ban.

A 209,779-square-foot Wal-Mart supercenter is proposed in Ripon. Opponents there say they've collected 4,200 signatures supporting their position. City officials, meanwhile, are crafting an ordinance that would place design and other restrictions on future retail in Ripon.

In Merced, the proposed facility between Childs and Gerard avenues in the southeast part of the city would be Wal-Mart's fourth California distribution center, initially employing about 600 people. It could grow to employ 900 people within three years, a Wal-Mart spokesman said.

Starting salaries would range from \$12 to \$15 per hour, the spokesman said.

But Mostern said Wal-Mart has made and broken similar promises in other communities.

Before the company opened a distribution center in Maine last year, it promised the city 350 to 400 full-time jobs, Mostern said.

He said 225 temporary positions were created, paying \$8.50 to \$9.50 an hour.

"That's completely false," said Keith Morris, community affairs manager for the Bentonville, Ark., company.

He said Wal-Mart worked closely with the city and state officials and that no distribution centers in the country pay such low wages.

Morris said 90 percent of the jobs at the company's distribution centers are full time.

The company has not announced the volume of trucks it plans to dock at the Merced center. However, opponents say it will include parking for 3,300 trucks, trailers and cars and add about one truck per minute to Highway 99.

City officials have worked closely with a Wal-Mart land consultant for four years to secure a site for the distribution center.

The proposed site is in an enterprise zone, which would give the company several state tax incentives, including a hiring and sales tax credit.

Wal-Mart announced plans to move here less than a month after the state agreed to fund the \$68 million Mission Interchange, the first leg of the Campus Parkway.

The project is deemed necessary for landing the center.

"It's very clear that Wal-Mart, knowing the need for a Campus Parkway, bought that park over there and said 'It's ours,'" said Mostern. "It's going to be horrible for people trying to get to the campus."

Morris said all issues concerning traffic and pollution will be addressed in a full environmental report.

"It's such an early stage for someone to express opposition without any facts," he said.

Martinez refinery fined \$1.1 million for pollution violations

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday Feb. 15, 2006

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - Air quality regulators fined the Tesoro Refining and Marketing Co. more than \$1 million for a series of pollution violations including a 19-day span last year when one of its refineries was unable to stop producing black plumes of sooty particulates, air quality officials said.

The company also was ordered to spend an estimated \$275 million to upgrade equipment at its Golden Eagle refinery in Martinez to prevent further violations, officials with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District said Tuesday.

The equipment improvements are expected to reduce the release of particulates, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide by more than 3,000 tons a year, air quality officials said.

The company blamed the pollution on a broken piece of equipment on a machine that processes heavy carbon materials in the refining of crude oil.

The \$1.1 million settlement, which was signed several weeks ago and made public Tuesday, will be used by the air district and the Contra Costa County district attorney's office to pursue other air pollution cases.

Community to talk about steel factory

Berkeley meeting targets settlement made to reduce odor emissions

By Kristin Bender, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Wed., Feb. 15, 2006

BERKELEY - A community meeting is slated today to review a settlement agreement between a West Berkeley steel factory and the Bay Area Air Quality Management district, which has ordered the company to install a system to reduce odor emissions.

Following nine notices of violations from the air district last year, Pacific Steel will install a \$2 million odor-reduction system and pay \$17,500 in fines.

The legal settlement followed at least two decades of complaints from residents and businesspeople about the smell of burning plastic in the air, headaches, nausea and a tightness in their chests because of the persistent outside odor.

A Pacific Steel representative said the company wants to work with the community on the best possible solution.

But some, including grass-roots groups West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs and the CleanAirCoalition, say the agreement does not go far enough. They want a more complete plan for reducing the odors.

To bring various groups together, City Councilmember Linda Maio's office has pulled together a meeting from 7 to 8:30 p.m. today at the West Berkeley Senior Center, 1900 Sixth St.

The meeting will include a discussion of the settlement agreement and how the air district's health-risk assessment will address emissions from the site and potential source reductions, according to a news release from Maio's office.

Representatives from the air-quality district and Pacific Steel Casting will attend, as will the city's toxic management specialist, Maio's office said. Representatives from the CleanAirCoalition also plan to be there.

In a Jan. 30 letter, the coalition asked Pacific Steel to devise a plan to abate the nuisance or face a lawsuit in small claims court.

The letter says the plant's "overpowering vapors" prohibit residents from being outside, opening windows, gardening or allowing their children to play outside.

"We can never anticipate when our day will be spoiled by your company's discharges, only that it will be borne on the wind and we will be subjected to it or spared from it depending on which way the wind is blowing," the letter states.

The group has contracted with Neighborhood Solutions, the same group that helped neighbors win a small claims lawsuit against the troubled Le Chateau cooperative housing facility in Berkeley last year, Executive Director Grace Neufeld said.

Martinez refinery fined \$1.1 million for pollution violations

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

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Tesoro refiner fined \$1.1 million

Company also ordered to update some equipment

By Jane Kay, environmental writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, February 15, 2006

Bay Area air quality regulators have slapped \$1.1 million in penalties on Tesoro Refining and Marketing Co. for spewing particulate pollution in and around Martinez and Concord last year, one of the largest fines involving an oil refinery in the region.

The regulators also ordered Tesoro to spend an estimated \$275 million to upgrade major equipment at its Golden Eagle refinery near Martinez as a way of preventing a repeat of the string of violations plaguing the plant, one of the oldest on San Francisco Bay.

The improvements to the equipment should result in a reduction of more than 3,000 tons a year of particulates, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and ammonia, say air quality officials who released details of the settlement Tuesday.

Representatives of Tesoro, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the Contra Costa County district attorney's office signed the agreement several weeks ago.

The air district's hearing board issued the conditional abatement order requiring Tesoro to modernize its technology in December. The order serves as the underlying document on which the settlement agreement is based.

Tesoro spokeswoman Maureen Erwin issued a statement Tuesday saying that the corporation, while disappointed with the penalty, will modify the equipment and remove the source of emissions.

"We're committed to doing the right thing," the statement said.

In addition to the current expenditures, Tesoro said it has spent \$25 million in recent years to improve equipment causing problems at the refinery, some of which create problems in nearby neighborhoods.

For 19 days -- from Jan. 12 to Jan. 30 last year -- the Tesoro refinery couldn't stop producing black plumes and rain of sooty particulates that floated around Martinez. Health officials link these fine particles to an increase in serious respiratory and heart problems.

Tesoro, which now owns and operates the former Tosco Avon refinery, said at the time that the pollution was caused by a faulty boiler on the coker, a piece of equipment that processes heavier carbon materials in the refining of crude oil.

As a result, the air district regulators charged Tesoro for violating the air district's standards for visible emissions, for particulate matter, for nitrogen oxides and for violating its own permit requirements.

The Contra Costa County district attorney's office charged the corporation with violating the state's health-and-safety code for creating a public nuisance.

Robert Kochly, the county's district attorney, said the large penalty "sends a message" that when refineries allow illegal emissions that enter the atmosphere and the surrounding neighborhoods, "that's when our office is going to step in and exact a price on them."

The \$1.1 million will be shared by the air district and the district attorney's office, and used to pursue other illegal air pollution cases, officials said.

China Announces Plan to Combat Pollution

By ELAINE KURTENBACH, The Associated Press

Published in the Washington Post

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SHANGHAI, China -- China announced a plan Wednesday to combat widespread pollution and leave a better environment for future generations, citing the need to stave off possible social instability.

The plan, approved by the State Council, or Cabinet, focuses on pollution controls and calls for the country to clean up heavily polluted regions and reverse degradation of water, air and land by 2010.

"The move is aimed at protecting the long-term interests of the Chinese nation and leaving a good living and development space for our offspring," according to an announcement published in state media.

Among the most urgent problems cited by the official Xinhua News Agency were acid rain, pollution of the soil, organic pollutants, potential risks from nuclear facilities and a decline in biodiversity.

Most major rivers are polluted and acid rain has damaged more than one-third of China's land area, as well as neighboring countries, the Xinhua report noted.

The government has previously responded to environmental crises largely on a piecemeal basis. The new plan appears to be a broader strategy in keeping with the government's newly stated emphasis on seeking sustainable development after years of breakneck growth.

"The government does seem to be paying more attention to broad environmental protection issues," said Zhao Qingxiang, a professor in the Environment Department of Shanghai's East China University of Science & Technology.

"But what I'm concerned about is how this plan will affect the entire ecological system, which has a long way to go. It's not just a matter of closing down a few factories."

Under the plan, regional governments will be asked to set environmental targets and conduct regular evaluations. It also calls for environmental quality to be considered in assessing the performance of local officials _ until recently judged mainly on their success in promoting economic development.

"Leading officials and other relevant government officials will be punished for making wrong decisions that cause serious environmental accidents and for gravely obstructing environmental law enforcement," it said.

Government ministries have been ordered to adapt fiscal, tax, pricing, trade and technology policies to the new strategy.

The State Council said the plan was in part prompted by a toxic chemical spill in northeastern China's Songhua River in November that "stunned the nation and sounded an alarm about the country's worsening environment."

The environmental protection minister was dismissed following the disaster, which affected water supplies for millions of people in China and neighboring Russia.

Pollution, often linked to official corruption and incompetence, has sparked a series of sometimes violent confrontations between authorities and rural residents.

In one of the more widely publicized cases, dozens were injured in April riots when police tried to move protesters from an industrial complex in Wangkantou, a village in the east's Zhejiang

province. The residents were outraged by chemical plant pollution they said had destroyed their crops.

"The issue of pollution has become a 'blasting fuse' for social instability," Zhou Shengxian, director of the State Environmental Protection Administration, said in comments posted on the agency's Web site.

Evidence of the negative effects of years of rapid industrialization, uncontrolled construction and widespread use of farm chemicals can be seen everywhere in China, from the biggest cities to the countryside.

Some 16 of the world's 20 smoggiest cities are in China, and the World Bank estimates that more than 400,000 deaths a year are linked to air pollution. Canals surrounding Shanghai stink and fester, as do many in the countryside. Piles of construction material and other waste cover huge stretches of rural land.

Local authorities have tended not to enforce pollution controls, land use restrictions and other limits that might hurt land sales and tax revenues or discourage investors. Heavily polluting factories often either bribe officials to look the other way or pay cursory fines.

Organizers nearing goal

Inside SOCAL

Associated Press

Published in the LA Daily News

Feb. 15, 2006

TURIN, Italy - After three days of competition at the Turin Games, organizers are edging closer to their goal for ticket sales.

Giuseppe Gattino, head of the TOROC organizing committee, said Tuesday that 13,000 tickets were sold Monday and brought the Games' total to 789,000.

With 1.03 million tickets available, organizers have set a sales goal of 830,000.

Some venues have been full houses. Organizers said 4,489 people attended Monday's women's snowboarding halfpipe final, and there have been near-sellouts at the figure skating and speedskating venues.

Women's hockey preliminaries involving the United States, Canada and the home Italian team have played to half-full crowds, and attendance at other sports has lagged even more.

Gattino said sales of licensed Olympic merchandise at official Olympic stores have totaled more than \$3.5 million so far.

First, it was the quality of the ice at the Olympic speedskating oval. Now, the guy who starts the races is the focus of criticism.

Two-time Olympic gold medalist Marianne Timmer of the Netherlands was disqualified from the 500 meters Tuesday for causing a second false start in her heat.

Some skaters and coaches have complained the starter is holding skaters too long in the starting stance and causing them to make tiny moves that set off a false start.

When Timmer saw her bid for another Olympic medal end without even getting off the line, she threw her armband and glasses off in a fury and circled the training track in tears.

"She had a chance to medal," coach Jac Orie said. "Especially if you look at the times."

Russia's Svetlana Zhurova set the top time of 38.23 seconds, more than a full second off the world record.

The complaint was echoed by Kip Carpenter, an American who nearly tripped coming off the line after false-starting once.

"The starter is really hurting people. You're supposed to be down for 1!, two seconds at the most," Carpenter said. "When you're down for 2!, three seconds, it's a tough position. I tripped up and it just got my timing off."

Speedskater Joey Cheek credits his gold medal in the men's 500 meters to his relaxation skills. And Jessica Simpson?

Cheek said he watched the movie "The Dukes of Hazzard" - which featured Simpson as Daisy Duke - before he raced Monday, then "skated out of my head."

"I've never skated races that well before. For it to come together like this in the Olympics is a real honor," he said.

The 26-year-old consciously tried to avoid the stress he experienced at Salt Lake City in 2002, when he won bronze in the 1,000 meters.

Olympic organizers are proud to say theirs is the longest women's downhill course on the circuit. So it was a bit of a shock to find out that it was shorter than they had thought.

The Olimpica Fraiteve course had been advertised as 3,503 yards long. But a recent measurement established that the correct length was in fact 3,345.45 yards.

The Russian and Austrian Olympic committees have been reprimanded for violating rules on advertising banners and sponsors logos.

The International Olympic Committee confirmed Tuesday it had sent letters warning the Russians and Austrians to comply with the size limit on manufacturers' logos on uniforms worn at medal presentations and other ceremonies.

Under the rules, logos can't exceed 20 square centimeters, or 3.1 square inches.

The Russian uniforms are emblazoned with logos of the team's main clothing sponsor, Bosco di Ciliegi. The Austrians have logos of sportswear manufacturer Spyder.

[Smog levels](#) in the Winter Olympics host city exceed European Union limits almost daily, but authorities said taking steps against air pollution would disrupt the Games.

Monitoring stations across the city are constantly detecting pollutant levels dangerous to human health, said Enrico Garrou, director of the Regional Environment Protection Agency in Turin.

Most alarming are the levels of particulate matter - particles of soot and dirt tinier than a human hair but dangerous enough to damage lungs and increase cancer risks. EU rules require that the limit on these not be exceeded more than 35 days annually, Garrou said.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, February 15, 2006:](#)

EPA's rollback

Weakening standards for dust pollution would hurt the Valley.

If the federal agency charged with cleaning up the Valley's air won't do its job, then the state may have to step in. That's the thought behind the latest air-quality legislation offered by a Valley senator.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed relaxing — and even eliminating — some of its rules about airborne dust, a tremendous problem for all Valley residents. EPA officials have concluded — without support from their own scientific experts — that they can safely eliminate their own dust health standard in what it defines as sparsely populated "rural" areas.

The EPA's proposal would tighten the daily limit on the amount of particle pollution allowed in urban areas, but the EPA proposes a nationwide exemption from such rules for farming and mining operations.

It isn't clear what the EPA means by "rural areas." Is Madera County rural, while just across the San Joaquin River you find "urban" Fresno-Clovis? Do the EPA policymakers — many of them

political appointees with ideological agendas — believe that people breathe different air on different sides of the river?

California's tougher dust and soot standards would remain in place even if the EPA adopts this proposal. That's good. The tiny particles can be deadly when they burrow deep into human lungs. But federal sanctions that have been used to increase compliance with pollution control efforts — notably withholding of billions of dollars in road funds — would disappear.

That's a change for the worse that state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, would like to finesse. He has proposed two bills, one a carrot and the other a stick.

The carrot (SB1230) comes in the form of financial incentives for businesses that reduce more pollution than the law requires. The stick in the other bill (SB1252) would be fines of up to \$50,000 against businesses breaking dust rules.

National farming and mining interests are the motive force behind the EPA's proposed rule changes. California ag interests, to their credit, have not joined that national effort, despite the fact that the state's farmers find themselves first in line when new rules were being passed to clean up our air, and have borne much of the the brunt of the effort since.

Federal officials said Monday that the proposal to weaken the dust rules isn't a done deal. There will be many hearings and meetings, and the proposed new rules wouldn't be final until September and wouldn't take effect until 2009. The officials said they welcome "robust" discussion of the issue. Just what we had in mind.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006](#)

Editorial: CARB takes on tobacco

It's official: Cigarettes pollute

The California Air Resources Board quietly pulled off another first the other day. The board declared secondhand smoke a toxic air contaminant. It's the only such designation by an air regulator in the world.

The board's action puts tobacco smoke in the same category as the toxic fumes that spew from car tailpipes or factory chimneys.

For years, state air regulators have been required to monitor and reduce exposure to those harmful pollutants. They must now devise means to reduce human exposure to secondhand smoke.

The science behind the tobacco designation is irrefutable. According to the Air Resources Board, smokers release 40 tons of nicotine into the air in California each year, 365 tons of soot and ash and 1,900 tons of carbon dioxide. Beyond the millions of smokers who die or are sickened by their own dangerous addiction, the smoke they spew into the air has been linked to 400 additional lung cancer deaths a year in nonsmokers, 3,600 deadly heart attacks and 31,000 asthma attacks in children.

Still, regulating tobacco use any further will be a tough challenge. Smoking in public indoor settings - including restaurants, bars, offices and other workplaces - is already banned in California. Even outdoor smoking is restricted. Most major outdoor sports arenas either ban smoking or severely limit it.

The next major challenge may be to restrict or ban smoking in more private settings, perhaps in cars when children are present or in apartments. Many nonsmokers who live in apartments that share common ventilation systems with smokers can't escape harmful exposure. Some jurisdictions have created nonsmoking sections in senior apartment complexes, or banned smoking in common areas. Such restrictions are expected to expand in coming years.

Bills to ban smoking in cars when young children are present have failed passage in the Legislature for the past several years. But the air board's action may give the proposals new impetus.

If nothing else, the designation serves to remind the smokers that their unhealthy habit has dangerous consequences to the nonsmokers around them. It's a message that cannot be delivered too often.