

Ban on burning old orchards takes effect

Clean-air regulation meant to stop half the agricultural smoke in valley

By JOHN HOLLAND

Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 31, 2007

Starting Friday, farmers will have to cease another part of the burning that has long sent smoke into the San Joaquin Valley sky.

The ban will apply to most of the wood waste created by the removal of orchards. It is part of a burning phaseout that already has affected disposal of some of the pruned limbs from living trees and residue from field crops.

The orchard-removal ban will take care of about half the agricultural burning in the region, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Growers will have to use alternatives, mainly chipping the wood into mulch or power plant fuel. This is already a common practice because of the clampdown on burning pruned limbs.

"In general, the industry is ready for this," said Gabriele Ludwig, senior manager of global technical and regulatory affairs for the Almond Board of California, based in Modesto. "If you're doing an orchard removal in the San Joaquin Valley, most growers are doing some kind of chipping."

Still, the ban will impose costs that could be greater than what it has cost to pile the trees, obtain a burn permit and set the wood ablaze.

"For some of us, this is going to be a hardship," said almond grower Louie Bandoni, president of the Merced County Farm Bureau. "It's not a bad idea for some farmers, but the same things don't work for everyone."

Almonds are by far the largest orchard crop in the north valley. Walnuts, peaches, cherries and apricots are major crops, too.

Growers remove orchards for various reasons - to replace trees past their prime, to switch crops, to control diseases or to make way for development.

The phaseout was ordered under state legislation approved in 2003. The district board set specific rules for the orchard-removal portion May 17.

Orchards 20 acres or smaller will be exempt from the ban until 2010 because the board decided that alternatives are not affordable.

Three more years of burning also was granted for land used to grow citrus, apples, pears, quinces or figs. Those trees were exempted because practical alternatives do not exist or burning is needed to control tree diseases. These are not major crops in the north valley.

The exempted land accounts for about 10percent of the agriculture burning in the region.

The break for small orchards drew fire from state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who wrote the 2003 bill.

"It is beyond comprehension to me why the air district is working so hard to weaken the implementation of clean-air laws, while valley children trudge off to school each day, inhalers in hand," he said.

Florez urged the district to offer incentives to farmers to take their waste to bio-mass power plants or to help them buy chippers.

Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, said the Legislature could help by requiring biomass plants to increase their use of farm waste.

He also said the plants should be allowed to charge extra for their power because of their help in reducing smoke from farms.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT: Starting Friday, burning will not be allowed for most of the wood waste created by the removal of orchards in the San Joaquin Valley.

WHY: Smoke from burning wood can worsen asthma, bronchitis, heart disease and other ailments.

WHAT ELSE: The ban is part of a phaseout of agricultural burning ordered by a state law in 2003. Burning was prohibited in 2005 for field crop residue and for pruned limbs from several tree crops. Growers have until 2010 to stop burning prunings from almond, walnut, grape and a few other crops.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Valley farmers must learn not to burn

San Joaquin Air District bans incinerating agricultural waste

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, May 31, 2007

As of Friday, San Joaquin Valley farmers will no longer be allowed to burn biowaste from their orchards.

The ban from the San Joaquin Air District is in response to a recent state law that mandates the phasing out of agriculture burning.

Farmers now must start using alternative methods to dispose of orchard-removal waste, such as chipping or mulching.

"Agricultural burning creates emissions in the Valley we really can't accommodate," said Air District representative Kelly Morphy. "So the air district has taken steps to not only comply with state law, but to ensure that farmers are aware of the new restrictions."

According to the air district, the policy change is expected to reduce nearly 2,400 tons per year of unhealthy smog-forming and particle emissions Valleywide.

Specifically, officials expect the change to reduce 811 tons per year of volatile organic compounds, 644 tons of nitrogen oxides and 938 tons of unhealthy particulate matter.

Morphy said the air district anticipates a high level of cooperation from the farming industry.

"We already have a staff of inspectors that do surveillance to make sure the rules are being followed," she said. "However, the agricultural community is in constant contact with the district and members often participate in workshops with industry organizations that address air quality issues. So we expect a high level of compliance."

The law does allow exemptions in cases where feasible alternatives to burning don't currently exist. Citrus, apple, pear, quince and fig orchards all fall under that designation because those crops contain a "pervasive tree disease" that is transferable unless waste is burned.

Burning still won't be allowed at all in the Valley on smoggy days or when conditions exist that could lead to a violation of federal air-quality standards.

Air District Executive Director Seyed Sadredin would like the government to provide more options for farmers to dispose of their biowaste.

"The state Legislature can give us more tools to facilitate alternatives to open burning that are economically feasible," he said.

For more information on burning restrictions, contact the Air District at (209) 557-6400.

Local dairyman calls it quits, sells off cows

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, May 31, 2007

With an auctioneer keeping rhythm, local dairyman Manuel Maciel watched Tuesday as his life's work disappeared - one cow at a time.

"I basically don't want to change," said Maciel, 62, taking a break to step outside the Overland Stock Yards, inside of which all of his 700 milk cows and their calves were fetching high prices from buyers as far away as Utah and Idaho.

"It's been a great run. I enjoyed it," he said.

Maciel, who with his son Michael Maciel had managed the 58-year-old family dairy at the corner of 16th and Elder avenues, said they would have had to increase herd size and update their facility to keep the dairy going.

"Basically, he doesn't want to bring (the dairy) into what will be required for the next generation of dairymen," said Tommy Mendes in a phone interview.

Mendes operates a 1,300-cow dairy near Riverdale. He and other family members were named Dairy Family of the Year in 1974.

[There will be those like Maciel who don't want to keep up with the monitoring and reporting requirements of new air and water regulations, according to Mendes.](#)

Complying with the regulations is easier to manage for larger dairies because they can spread out the cost.

"This whole (environmental) thing is going to put the small dairies out of business," said Dino Giacomazzi, who manages a dairy on Sixth Avenue north of Highway 198.

Giacomazzi called his own operation "mid-sized."

Maciel made it clear Tuesday that his decision to sell was more of a personal choice than an economic one.

"I think my cows will do better with a dairyman willing to invest more in facilities than I have," he said.

Maciel's animals were fetching an average of \$3,700 a head Tuesday - more than what a typical herd would sell for, according to Jacquyn Dupree, executive manager at Overland Stock Yards.

Maciel's stock had a strong reputation for milk productivity, according to Dupree.

One of Maciel's cows holds the world record for the amount of milk produced in a lifetime, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

A plaque memorializing the achievement sits over the cow's grave on the Maciel property.

"It's hard to give individual attention when you have thousands of cows," said his son Michael, referring to his and his father's decision not to pursue an increase in the size of their herd.

Mendes said he hired a consulting firm "a long time ago" to bring his dairy into compliance with water regulations he could see coming.

Now he has employees taking regular soil samples.

"You have to get involved in every aspect of it," he said.

More days, fewer hours to spare the air

BAY AREA: BART, ferries will only be free before 1 p.m. in hopes of discouraging rowdy joyriders

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, May 31, 2007

Bay Area public transit operators will offer free rides on up to four smoggy Spare the Air days this year, but with some restrictions not in place last year, officials announced Wednesday.

Ferries, BART and CalTrain and ACE commuter trains will waive fares only until 1 p.m. in a change aimed at limiting rowdy people from causing disruptions and overcrowding.

Buses will continue to offer free fares all day. With their slower speeds and less scenic routes, buses did not attract the fun-loving crowds of young riders that flocked to trains and ferries last year.

"The free rides on trains and ferries will be available to those who board before 1 p.m.," said Amy Worth, an Orinda city councilwoman who serves on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "This will cut down on the overcrowding and unruly behavior."

Last year, transit officials spent about \$13 million to fund free fares all day on six smoggy days. The last three days were added in mid-season because of an unexpected windfall in state budget funds.

This year, the MTC and Bay Area Air Quality Management District set aside \$8.5 million, mostly to reimburse transit operators for lost fare money.

The money was enough to offer free fares around the clock for three days. Transit operators, however, said they decided it would do more good to waive fares for a total of four days with the new 1 p.m. limit on free train and bus rides.

Sponsors of the free fares acknowledged that their program-- the largest free-fare program of its kind in the nation -- carries a relatively high cost for reducing pollution.

Last year's cost amounted to about \$411,000 per ton of pollution reduced, much more than the cost of buying and junking dirty old cars, according to a report by the MTC.

"It is a high cost by some measurements, but the benefits are about more than reducing pollution on an individual day," said Mark Ross, a Martinez city councilman who serves as chairman of the Bay Area air quality board. "It's about changing people's behavior to ride public transit in the long run, and reduce pollution that causes ozone (smog) and contributes to global warming."

Worth compared the free fares to discount coupons.

"This is like a coupon to try out public transit," she said. "People can see if they like it, and if they do, they could be long-term users."

Twenty-nine public transit providers in the Bay Area are participating this year, an increase of five agencies -- including Vallejo Transit, officials said.

The free rides will be offered this year on the first four non-holiday weekdays when the Bay Area air quality district declares a Spare the Air warning because of predicted unhealthy smog levels. The district declared 13 Spare the Air days last year, an unusually high number because of two scorching heat waves, which accelerate the conversion of pollution into smog.

The smog season begins Friday and lasts until Oct. 12.

On Spare the Air days, the district asks consumers to drive less and refrain from painting structures, using gas-powered mowers, or filling up cars with gas before 6 p.m.

"The biggest difference people can make is to drive less," said Jack Broadbent, the air quality district's executive officer.

Consumers can sign up to get e-mail notices of Spare the Air days at <http://www.sparetheair.org>.

Good news: Spare the Air days increase

Bad news: Free transit will be confined to morning time

By Douglas Fischer, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, May 31, 2007

SAN FRANCISCO - Spare the Air organizers announced Wednesday they had found a way to stretch three days of free transit into four while simultaneously addressing complaints that rowdy joyriders and non-commuters spoil the evening commute and endanger efforts to prod drivers into transit.

The Spare the Air program will again offer free rides on almost all Bay Area mass transit operators on the first four bad-air weekdays of the season, which begins Friday.

But there's a twist: The offer extends all day on buses, but on BART, Caltrain and Altamont Commuter Express trains, as well as the region's ferries, the free ride will end at 1 p.m.

With train riders paying the evening tolls, the air district could spread \$7.5 million in transit funds approved earlier this year over four days instead of three, said Jack Broadbent, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's executive director.

But the program still draws fire from transit activists who complain the free ride is considerably more expensive than other programs used to curb smog-forming emissions. They also note there's no evidence a few days of free transit over the summer compels drivers to habitually abandon the car for transit.

That may change, too, under the revamped Spare the Air program. Broadbent said the district plans a more robust surveying program to assess how Bay Area residents respond to Spare the Air alerts.

"We see it as much as an educational effort as it is a measure to get people out of their cars and to try transit," Broadbent said before a news conference in Justin Herman Plaza launching the program. "Long term, if it changes behavior, this is a much cheaper way to reduce emissions."

Last year the district promised three free days of mass transit, then expanded it to six after a state tax windfall freed up more transit money. As with last year, cash for this year's program comes from an account dedicated to relieving congestion and improving air quality.

Barring another windfall - considered unlikely - the program will be limited to just four days, said John Goodwin, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which cuts the checks.

And while the free transit program attracts the headlines, the region's clean air cops note there are many other ways to reduce emissions when temperatures spike, the air grows thick and the haze turns brown. Avoiding barbecuing, postponing errands and fuel purchases, curtailing the use of personal care products, even not cleaning the bathroom can all reduce the amount of smog-forming pollutants contributing to bad air days.

Around the Region

Transit is free on smoggy days

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, May 31, 2007

Roseville Transit will provide free fixed-route and commuter service rides on predicted "Spare the Air" days from June through September.

When air quality reaches an index of 27 or higher, a Spare the Air day is announced.

By providing free transit, city officials hope to encourage people to use the bus, reducing the number of vehicles on the road and air-polluting emissions.

To receive Spare the Air day predictions, sign up for free Air Alert e-mails or text messages when air quality in the Sacramento region is forecast as unhealthy. To sign up, go to www.MyAirAlert.net.

For more information, call (916) 774-5757 or go to www.roseville.ca.us/transit.

EPA panel gets an earful

Daylong hearing is held on state push to enforce tougher emissions rule.

By Chris Bowman - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, May 31, 2007

California's much-vaunted law restricting greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles won't make a dent in global warming, even if adopted worldwide, a group of automobile manufacturers declared Wednesday.

Though delivered with bombshell flourish, the auto lobby's assertion at a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hearing in Sacramento did not appear to rattle California representatives -- or the wide array of those on hand to support those representatives as they seek federal permission to enforce the landmark state law.

"We recognize that what we are doing will have minimal impact," state Air Resources Board Chairman Robert Sawyer said outside the hearing.

Still, Sawyer and an entourage of state brass ranging from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's office to Attorney General Jerry Brown and to Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez said every bit of reduction in heat-trapping exhaust matters.

"Doing nothing is not an option for global warming," Sawyer said. "That's a head-in-the-sand approach by a dinosaur industry."

California needs EPA permission to enforce its first-in-the-nation greenhouse gases law. The measure requires automakers to cut carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping exhaust gases by 30 percent in the next nine years.

The U.S. Clean Air Act doesn't address tailpipe gases linked to global warming, and it prohibits states from enforcing emission standards tougher than EPA's. The act makes an exception for California, however, because its air pollution is so severe and because its smog-fighting efforts predate the federal law. The state can set stricter-than-federal standards as long as it gets an EPA waiver. Once the waiver is approved, California and 11 other states that adopted the same law can enforce it.

Wednesday's hearing on the waiver follows one earlier this month in Arlington, Va. The state requested the hearings 18 months ago.

Brown, a former California governor and Democratic presidential candidate, did not let the time lapse go unnoticed. He accused the Bush administration of engaging in a "dangerous strategy for endless stonewalling."

He also repeated an earlier promise to sue the EPA if it does not issue the waiver by October.

The hearing panel of four EPA officials gave no indication when or if they would grant the waiver.

The federal environmental agency has granted 45 of the 50 waivers that California has requested since 1968, according to the state air board.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, representing nine automakers, stood alone in its opposition to the EPA waiver Wednesday.

As with other California firsts in vehicle pollution controls -- from the 1970s mandate for catalytic converters to the more recent requirement to sell zero-emission vehicles -- the auto industry

representatives argued that the technological changes needed to curb greenhouse gas emissions would raise the sticker price out of reach of most consumers and kill thousands of jobs in auto plants.

But, unlike the earlier rules, the greenhouse gas restrictions address a global problem and, as the auto industry kept pointing out Wednesday, come without a cost-benefit analysis.

"This regulation will never have any measurable impact whatsoever on global climate change, even if adopted nationwide or worldwide," said Andrew Clubok, an attorney for the auto alliance. "Let me repeat that."

Roland Hwang, vehicles policy director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, called the argument "the last gasp of the auto industry in a losing battle against mandatory carbon dioxide controls."

In an opinion favoring California's position last month, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the auto industry's assertion that the global impact doesn't justify the state's tailpipe restrictions.

"Agencies, like legislatures, do not generally resolve massive problems in one fell swoop, but instead whittle away over time, refining their approach as circumstances change," the court said.

Clubok said the industry is pursuing a more effective, longer term approach of replacing the standard internal combustion engine with hydrogen-powered fuel cells, battery-powered motors and hybrid engines.

The auto group represents BMW, DaimlerChrysler, Ford, General Motors, Mazda, Mitsubishi, Porsche, Toyota and Volkswagen.

More than 50 proponents of the waiver testified during the daylong hearing at the state environmental protection agency headquarters in downtown Sacramento. They included former state Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, author of the 2002 emissions law; scientists and environmental health advocates; and Sempra Energy and Pacific Gas & Electric representatives, whose companies do not want to be targeted for more emission reductions if the auto emissions law goes unenforced.

Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo and West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon appealed to the EPA officials' sense of place: As Earth's average temperature increases, the Sierra snowpack will diminish more rapidly and flooding downstream on the Sacramento River will likely become more frequent and intense, they said.

"We can regulate leaf blowers to protect residents from particle pollutants, but we cannot protect them from the biggest catastrophe that could wipe out our community," Cabaldon told the EPA panel.

Fowl electricity

John Upton

Tracy Press, Wednesday, May 30, 2007

A bill making its way through the state Legislature would see more electricity made from manure. By John Upton

The incinerated dung of chickens, turkeys and pigs could soon power Californian street lights, fax machines and toasters under an Assembly bill likely to reduce waste and water pollution but increase air pollution.

Much of the state's poultry manure currently is spread on the ground as fertilizer. The practice increases crop yields but creates pollution problems when it flows into rivers and lakes, where rich nutrients foster growth of algae and disrupt oxygen levels and food chains.

Manure fuel projects are "waste management projects that also create energy," said University of California, Berkeley, energy and environment professor Alex Farrell.

The amount of air pollution created by bio-fuels like chicken litter is affected by the technology used to burn it, according to Farrell, who said large-scale operations are usually cleaner than smaller ones.

Like other fuels, poultry litter contributes to global warming because it releases carbon dioxide when it's burned. Poultry litter includes manure, seeds, feathers and wood chips.

But supporters describe the renewable energy technology as carbon-neutral because carbon released by manure is originally drawn from the air by plants grown to feed poultry.

"What's available on the surface of the earth is staying on the surface of the earth," chicken farmer Steve Mahrt said. "Any time you're doing anything with coal or oil or natural gas, you're taking it from underneath the earth."

Mahrt figures the litter from the 100,000 egg-laying chickens on the farm he manages in Petaluma, north of San Francisco, could generate between 50 and 60 kilowatts of electricity annually. That could power 50 homes.

There are more than 285 million birds in California farms, according to government and industry data. That suggests poultry poop could power hundreds of thousands of Californian homes, though results would vary based on technology and the types of birds and their feed.

The litter now is recycled as fertilizer, Mahrt said, and the ash left behind when it's burned for electricity would also be used as fertilizer.

Representatives of Environment California and the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies contacted Monday said they had not analyzed the bill.

"In general, we like biomass," Environment California energy lobbyist Bernadette DelChiaro said. "It's not as clean as, say, a wind turbine or a solar panel, but there's no one technology that's a panacea. It's going to take a mix of a bunch of different resources to get ourselves off of fossil fuels."

The country's first poultry manure-fueled power plant is due to open next month in Minnesota, where power company Fibrominn expects to turn 700,000 tons a year of turkey litter and other agricultural biomass into power for 55,000 homes.

The technology could also be used to turn pig manure into electricity, according to a legislative staffer who researched the bill.

California farms already produce renewable energy and reduce global warming by burning methane from the manure of cattle and pigs to power more than 50,000 homes.

The Public Utilities Commission voted last week to approve a plan by Tracy provider Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to pump treated dairy methane from Fresno County into a natural gas pipeline for conversion to electricity.

California Energy Commission data shows methane, with the global warming potential of more than 6 million tons of carbon dioxide, is released annually from Californian manure.

Burning that methane for electricity could have global warming benefits similar to taking more than 1 million cars off the road, based on Environmental Protection Agency emissions data.

State law directs utility companies to buy at least 50 megawatts of electricity every year from onsite farm generators, which could power 50,000 homes.

The bill by Assemblywoman Cathleen Galgiani, D-Stockton, would add 20 megawatts that must come from agricultural biomass sources other than by burning methane.

Like 'net-metering' laws that govern wind and solar energy, utility companies under state law are required to credit farms' accounts at wholesale prices for electricity they produce from manure. They are not required to pay for electricity that exceeds farms' own needs.

RCM Digesters Environmental Scientist Eric Larsen, who has designed several digesters in the Central Valley, said a utility company last year took \$70,000 worth of electricity for free from one of his clients.

"Without being compensated for that excess generation," Larsen said, "the customer generator who has installed a solar, wind or biogas generator has no incentive to install any energy efficiency upgrades."

Galgiani, who represents Tracy and some farmland and serves as vice chairwoman of the State Legislative Rural Caucus, expects her bill to become law. "So far, we haven't ruffled any feathers," she said Friday.

Capital-area cyclists leave cars at home in May

By Tony Bizjak - Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Thursday, May 31, 2007

Million Mile May, Sacramento's annual get-on-your-bike event, rolls to a close tonight with one big question outstanding:

Can the region's pedal-pushers hit the magical and heretofore unreachable million-mile mark?

By Wednesday night, a day away from the deadline, some 4,600 Sacramento-area residents had pushed the region's collective pedometer to a record 821,000 miles.

That's substantially more than last year's 627,000 miles, and well beyond the 476,000 logged in 2005 -- the first year organizers challenged Sacramento to ditch the car and hop on the saddle.

Participants, like rookie bike commuter Kathleen Ave of Sacramento and longtime racer Carlos Casillas of Davis, are logging their miles daily on the event Web site, www.bikecommutemonth.com.

While the monthlong event finally stands a chance of living up to its grand name, it's not really about the miles, says event co-coordinator Marilyn Bryant.

"It's about the journey," she said.

Bryant leads the Sacramento Transportation Management Association, an agency that promotes alternative modes of transportation. "It's about workplace camaraderie. About people riding at lunch. Families taking bike rides together."

Bryant said local sponsors -- governments, transportation agencies, air quality officials, businesses, and bike groups -- are pleased that the number of participants is up more than 1,000 over last year.

It's a sign, they say, that biking in Sacramento is gaining ground.

For some, like neophyte Ave, who lives in Curtis Park and works in Folsom, the experience has been a happy revelation.

Ave typically commutes in her car on Highway 50 but says the congested drive is stressful.

Last week, inspired by word of other Million Mile May participants, Ave took a new route. She pedaled her bike two miles to a light-rail station, rode the train to Folsom, then pedaled another mile up Iron Point Road to work.

It's 20 minutes longer than via car, but the bike gets her heart going, and the train allows her to relax and work on her laptop, she said.

"It's fun. I'm totally inspired!" she said. She intends to leave her car home most days now. "It's such a joy to push yourself on a bike."

Coordinator Bryant said Ave is a classic example of what event organizers hope to achieve -- getting more people to use bikes as part of daily life for work, chores and exercise.

So far this month, the number of miles people have biked for errands has reduced air pollution by 17,000 pounds, according to Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District calculations.

The big question, advocates say, is how to translate the enthusiasm of May into permanent lifestyle changes for commuters.

Cycling advocate Owen Howlett, who just taught a class at the Sacramento Natural Foods Coop on how to outfit a bike for grocery shopping, said Million Mile May should help show people that riding bikes on city streets is safer than many of them think -- as long as cyclists learn and obey the rules of the road.

As more cyclists use the streets, motorists also will become more aware, Bryant said.

"We're hoping car drivers are seeing more cyclists, and thinking, 'Hmm, I'll slow down here,'" Bryant said.

At the same time, cities such as Davis, Folsom, Roseville and Sacramento increasingly are building what are called "Complete Streets," with space for bikes and pedestrians as part of the design.

Despite the lofty societal goals, for some the May event really is about miles and competition.

A handful of gung-ho cyclists are practically living on their bikes this month.

As of Wednesday afternoon, racer Casillas proudly topped the mileage list at 2,300 miles.

Casillas, who commutes daily from Davis to downtown Sacramento, where he works as an analyst for the attorney general, has been pouring it on in hopes of being No. 1. With hours to go, however, he's not broken free of the pack.

Last year's mileage champ, Kenny Kwong, a downtown state worker, and several others were mere miles behind.

Casillas thought a recent 212-mile ride would launch him to victory, but the tenacious Kwong won't let go.

"The dude is right there!" Casillas said.

Kwong promised himself that he wouldn't do this again this year. But, he couldn't help himself.

"I'm going to make it hard for Carlos and those guys," he said. "I respect them, but I'm not going to just hand the crown over to them."

NY teens ready to gauge air pollution

By Colleen Long, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, L.A. Times, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, May 31, 2007

NEW YORK- Teenagers from a Brooklyn neighborhood surrounded by power plants, a waste-transfer station and a busy expressway will soon take to the streets to monitor the pollutants residents are breathing.

After completing training, volunteers from a New York-based Hispanic community organization, UPROSE, will use handheld devices to monitor levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and other particles in the air in Sunset Park. Their efforts are part of a wider campaign to map air quality in several urban U.S. neighborhoods.

"In order for us to really change things, we need to know what's there on a daily basis," said Frank Torres, director of youth leadership for UPROSE. "We want to educate the community, put the power in their hands so they can change their surroundings."

More than 90 percent of Hispanics and 86 percent of blacks in the U.S. live in urban settings, which are typically at higher risk for air pollution, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Hispanics are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanics to live in places that fall short of EPA standards for airborne particle matter.

"We don't give a unified health message to people," said Jane Delgado, president of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health, which is charting data from similar projects in Detroit, Watsonville, Calif., and Brownsville, Texas. "We tell people go out and exercise, but for some kids, breathing the air in their communities will contribute to asthma attacks and other problems. We need to know exactly what is going on near our homes."

Some air pollutants commonly found in urban areas can cause skin and eye irritation, as well as asthma, particularly in children. Paula Gomez, head of the Brownsville Community Health Center near the U.S.-Mexico border, said spikes in asthma attacks in that area occur when winds blow from the south, where more than 150 factories that produce electrical devices and plastics are located.

"At night you can sometimes smell the chemicals in the air," she said.

Data collection will continue for about six months, after which the alliance will create an interactive report using Google maps. It hopes eventually to collect air quality data from 20 locations, Delgado said.

"We need good data, close to the ground, collected by people in the communities," she said. "If more people were concerned about emissions, their concerns would be answered by the government. By not keeping good data, it makes it hard to have a whole response."

The project is funded by grants, mostly from the Kellogg Foundation, Delgado said. It costs about \$2,500 to equip each of the four cities with the technology, including a GPS, video camera and the pollution detectors.

Wade McGillis, a professor in Columbia University's department of Earth and environmental sciences, said the handheld devices are a good tool to get community members involved, but that data should also be collected by stationary monitors, which provide more accurate readings and would be less prone to human error.

'Green' machines generate weak sales

Small engine makers turn to alternative energy sources

USA TODAY

In the Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, May 31, 2007

From all-terrain vehicles to snow blowers, makers of powered outdoor equipment are joining the auto industry in looking at alternative energy to deal with increasingly tough environmental rules.

But early efforts haven't produced rousing results. Alternative-powered machines "are not economical to produce at this time," says James McNew, vice president of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, a trade group.

Plus, it's not clear that consumers are willing to pay more for greener equipment or change their fueling habits.

The response has been tepid for the propane-powered mower made by Dixie Chopper, a Coatesville, Ind.-based maker of high-end riding mowers. "It's like anything else. The first one that come out, everyone wants to shy away" from it, says media marketing manager Rick Judy.

To try to drum up sales, the company drove one of the mowers cross-country, arriving at the steps of California's state capitol in Sacramento earlier this month.

With some outdoor equipment potentially far dirtier than cars or trucks, the industry is under pressure to cut emissions. In April, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed new rules that would require 35 percent cuts in hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxide for lawn mowers, personal watercraft and other equipment powered by small engines. For gasoline engines, that could mean fitting them with catalytic converters like those in cars.

Costs of the changeover could add \$47 to the price of a lawn tractor, \$280 for an outboard engine and \$360 for a personal watercraft, the EPA estimates.

Environmentalists support fighting pollution by finding alternative-energy sources for small engines, not just focusing on cars and trucks. "If we're going to move ourselves off oil and have good air quality, we have to deal with everything," says Brendan Bell of the Sierra Club's Energy Program.

Some of the alternative-fuel equipment that manufacturers are trying out:

- Propane mower. Dixie Chopper wanted to set the standard for environmentalism, but it's been an uphill battle. In the past two years, it says it's sold only about 200 of the mowers, which are mostly intended for commercial or government use. They start at \$11,900, about \$1,000 more than for the gasoline-powered version. But propane costs less than gas, Judy says.
- Biodiesel ATV. Arctic Cat has just started selling a heavy-duty all-terrain vehicle that runs on biodiesel fuel. The ATV gets up to 50 percent better fuel economy than a comparable gasoline engine and actually runs better on biodiesel than regular diesel, says spokesman Kale Wainer. "A little better lubrication, I would assume."

The \$9,299 ATV was tested on a biodiesel made from vegetable oil or animal fat. The fuel produced fewer carbon-dioxide, hydrocarbon, carbon-monoxide and particulate emissions. "The soybean growers came to us and asked if we would test biodiesel," Wainer says.

Toro says all its diesel-powered golf course and grounds equipment will be capable of handling biodiesel by next year.

- Hydrogen-powered lawn carts. Toro is providing three hydrogen fuel-cell turf maintenance carts for a pilot project in New York state this year.

The three carts will be used by the Niagara Falls and Beaver Island state parks to shuttle workers and grounds equipment, haul lawn equipment, and for snow removal and trash cleanup. They were built with the help of a \$380,000 state research grant.

- Hybrid lawn mower and snow blower. John Deere sells a riding mower for golf courses that couples electric power to either an 18-horsepower gasoline or diesel engine.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, Thursday, May 31, 2007:](#)

North side changes are welcome

In ways great and small, Visalia's north side is finally getting the attention and development it deserves.

We applaud the current developments with eager anticipation for a prosperous future for Visalia's most neglected sector.

The latest developments were the approval by the Visalia Planning Commission of two large shopping centers for the north side, both north of Riggan Avenue and along Dinuba Boulevard.

On the west side of Dinuba, Home Depot plans a 106,000-square-foot store as one anchor of a 54-acre shopping center that will straddle Dinuba Boulevard.

On the east side, Target will build a 126,000-square-foot store.

Together, these two projects address a pressing need for the north side and fill a vacuum that has existed for a long time: There is virtually no large hardware/garden store in Visalia north of Highway 198, and there is no large department store at all. For the first time, residents of these neighborhoods will have an option to driving almost the entire length of the city, and mostly on Mooney Boulevard, for these kinds of shopping opportunities.

With the rapid growth of the north side, from east to west, not only will these outlets offer those residents some convenient choice, [it will help reduce traffic congestion and pollution from vehicle trips.](#)

In addition, the planning commission this week approved a 224-unit multi-family housing subdivision along Dinuba just south of the Target complex.

This addresses a need for multi-family housing in general for the city as well as balances the large amount of single-family homes in that area.

These developments are just the latest in a concerted effort by the city of Visalia to encourage development and prosperity on the north side, which has long suffered a stigma of low expectations and the typical problems of urban blight.

Renewal of the north side began years ago with the city's commitment to install utility lines - sewer, water and power - along Dinuba, reinforce the road system and move key public safety and recreation centers there.

The city's commitment to the Riverway Sports Park (to open in August) and the Shannon Ranch development helped raise the profile of the area.

Investment by local business people in projects such as the newly opened Food 4 Less shopping center on Dinuba, recovery of some blighted areas such as those in the region of the Lincoln Oval Park and the city's attention to move fire and police stations to the north side all helped.

Property owners and neighborhood groups are starting to show increased attention to the area as an opportunity for growth.

There is plenty left to do. The north side continues to contain some of Visalia's most blighted and troubled areas.

But this area is now on the verge of a renaissance that will eventually be the most dramatic in Visalia.

Credit for the progress of the area needs to be given to the city of Visalia, its development policies, the consistent support of the Visalia City Council and Mayor Jesus Gamboa in particular, a longtime champion for the north side, and the Visalia Planning Commission.

Outgoing Commissioner Victor Perez, a north-side resident, has also been a persistent advocate of policies to sustain the north side. As he leaves office after eight years on the commission, Perez can take credit for a legacy that we hope will represent a model of urban development.

All the commissioners who have served with him get credit for thoughtful decisions with regard to what this area might be.

Much attention has been directed at various city projects over the past several years, but maybe none of them, even the development south of Packwood Creek, will ultimately have the impact of these changes in north Visalia.

Combined, they make a valuable contribution to our city.