

It'll be a daily task to spare air

Regional officials expand call from specific days to all summer long.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

in the Modesto Bee, Monday, October 29 and the Fresno Bee, Friday, October 26, 2007

Regional air officials want residents to make a lifestyle change next summer -- by getting out of their cars regularly and into the fight against smog.

For the past 10 years, residents have been asked into the fight only on summer bad-air days.

On such days, officials have asked people to drive less and cut back on other smog-making activities.

Now, officials will ask for it every day. They want people to take the bus, carpool, ride bicycles, walk and otherwise get by without cars as often as possible.

Officials also want people to consider cutting back every day on less-known sources -- such as lawn equipment and barbecue lighter fluid.

"We want people actively thinking about what they can do all the time," said Jaime Holt, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We want people to join the club, an air-friendly club."

The Valley is one of the country's worst air basins for ozone, the main ingredient in smog.

Vehicles are the biggest problem, but the lawn mower, the barbecue lighter fluid, the fumes from a can of paint and many other sources are problems, too.

Holt said a 2005 survey indicated that about 65% of the residents here would be willing to take some kind of action to fight air pollution.

The district is working on ways to get people more involved.

Officials are discussing ideas with many public and private groups, and some concepts already have taken shape.

In spring, a media blitz will broadly target residents, businesses, public agencies and children.

In summer, people will be encouraged to stop using their vehicles during a one- or two-week period at the height of the smog season, which usually is in July and August.

Since 1997, the district has used a voluntary effort, called Spare the Air, to get the public's help on the worst summer days.

But after a decade, officials fear people might be tuning out.

"It has reached a point of diminishing returns," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "It's time to kick it up a notch."

The campaign might include such innovations as an online chat page, where people could talk about ways to reduce pollution.

The hot topics might include drive-up windows at fast-food restaurants.

District officials said air pollution is not a problem if a car idles 90 seconds or less at a drive-up window.

But if the wait is longer, it creates less pollution to park the car and walk into the restaurant to order.

Smoke warning issued for Valley

Try-Valley Herald, Saturday, October 27, 2007

San Joaquin Air District says pollutant from Southern California fires likely to linger in region for days. Smoke warning in effect for San Joaquin Valley.

Smoke from the out-of-control wildfires in Southern California has found its way into the San Joaquin Valley, prompting Air District officials to issue a cautionary warning.

Because of the uncertainty of when these fires could be extinguished, officials say the warning will be in effect into next week.

These fires are producing large amounts of smoke, which is resulting in increasing particulate concentrations, said Air District meteorologist Gary Acremont. If you smell smoke, take precautions to avoid health impacts.

According to the district, exposure to particle pollution such as smoke can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, initiate asthma attacks and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Residents of San Joaquin County and the majority of other counties across the southern Central Valley are being advised to use caution as conditions warrant.

Officials say that if you can smell smoke, you are likely doing some damage to your lungs, especially if you suffer from a pre-existing respiratory condition such as bronchitis.

People with heart and lung disease should follow their doctors advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure to smoky air, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, as conditions dictate.

As of Friday afternoon, Valley air quality was forecast as moderate, with conditions deteriorating.

The southern California fires mark the second time in two months that wildfires have impacted San Joaquin air quality.

Most recently, the Moonlight Fire near Sacramento dropped a significant amount of smoke into the Valley, prompting health warnings and forcing some schools to cancel outdoor sporting events.

Daily air quality forecasts are available by calling the Valley Air District at 1-800-SMOG-INFO or by visiting its Web site at <http://www.valleyair.org>.

Wildfire smoke may affect local air quality

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Oct. 26 2007

Air pollution officials have issued a health caution for the western portion of Kern County due to winds that are pushing smoke from the Southern California wildfires into the area.

Poor air quality with low visibility looking south on Oswell Street Wednesday afternoon from various sources in and around Kern County.

Particulates in the air have increased throughout the day and may affect sensitive groups, according to a meteorologist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Particle pollution can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks, acute bronchitis and increase the risk of respiratory infections.

Those affected by poor air quality are advised to take precaution, especially if they smell smoke. The health warning will remain in effect for the next several days.

Officials: Smoke from fires could taint Valley air

By Michael Miyamoto

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Oct. 26, 2007

Southern California's wildfires could soon take their toll on the Valley's air.

Local air pollution control officials have issued a health caution for today in Tulare, Kern, Kings and Fresno counties, as well as counties farther north.

"Because of the uncertainty of when these fires could be extinguished, the cautionary statement is in effect for the next several days," air pollution officials said.

A trough off the Northern California coast affected wind patterns and started bringing smoke from Southern California's wildfires into the Central Valley Wednesday, said Modesto Vasquez, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

The same weather and wind patterns are forecast through at least today, Vasquez said.

"There will likely be more smoke coming in," Vasquez said. The smoke is in the 10,000- to 15,000-foot elevation range.

"These fires are producing large amounts of smoke, which is resulting in increasing particulate concentrations," said Gary Arcemont, a meteorologist at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Residents of the Central Valley are advised to use caution.

"People with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality," air pollution officials said.

"Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion," officials warned.

Bad air travels in, out of Valley

Air cops hope to find out just how much

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Monday, October 29, 2007

STOCKTON - Breathe deeply on a windy day and you might inhale traces of exhaust from a stop-and-go traffic jam on the Bay Bridge.

Fire up your gas-powered lawn mower, however, and you generate your own pollutants that could contribute to haze hanging over Yosemite National Park.

The San Joaquin Valley is famous for its bad air. Now Valley air cops want to better understand how much of the nasty stuff blows in from out of town.

State reports show, however, that just as the Valley grudgingly receives pollution from San Francisco and Sacramento, so too does it send its own hazardous air to regions across the state, from the Pacific coast to the High Sierra.

"Air pollution does not respect county boundaries," said Lakhmir Grewal, air pollution control officer for Calaveras County.

A series of wildfires like those burning in Southern California spurred this latest study, approved last month by the Valley's Air Pollution Control District.

The latest fires, initially fueled by Santa Ana winds, blew most of the smoke out into the ocean and up the coast. Shifting winds late last week began sending that smoke north, into the Valley.

Events such as this make officials wonder how much pollution we get from the southern part of the state, or other regions, every day.

Air is like a river of water as it flows through basins and over mountain passes, said district air quality specialist David Nunes. It picks up whatever it encounters along the way.

Learning about imported pollution would be helpful, he said, because the district is struggling to meet federal ozone standards. This summer it was criticized for postponing compliance until 2023, saying it had no way to meet the target on time.

Ozone, a precursor to smog, forms when various pollutants combine and cook under the hot Valley sun. The Valley's bowl-like shape traps the air and makes matters worse.

With a better understanding of how many ozone-forming pollutants come from other areas, officials say they could work with other air districts to reduce upwind emissions.

Sounds nice, but the district should put time into solving its own problems, said Kathryn Phillips, who follows air quality issues for the conservation group Environmental Defense.

"We've got to take some responsibility for what we're doing," Phillips said.

That could include enforcement of existing regulations, and incentives to reduce pollution from both stationary sources like farms and factories, and mobile sources like automobiles, she said.

The California Air Resources Board says the Valley is polluted by just two outside areas, the Bay Area and Sacramento.

Delta breezes carry Bay Area pollution into the north Valley, where it mixes with Stockton-area emissions and heads south toward Fresno.

The same winds blow a mix of Bay Area and Valley pollution into the foothills and east over the Sierras.

Winds in the south Valley push pollution into the Mojave Desert, and sometimes west to the Central Coast.

Lightly-populated Calaveras County's bad air days can be blamed largely on upwind areas such as the Valley and Bay Area, said Grewal, the county's air pollution officer.

What's needed, he said, are consistent air pollution prevention programs in all areas.

"We shall comply (with air quality standards) as soon as the San Joaquin Valley does," he said. "It's a very fair statement."

El Tejon School Needs To Be Moved Away From Interstate 5 Air Pollution, Forum Told

By Gary Meyer

The Mountain Enterprise, Friday, Oct. 26, 2007

A panel of experts at the Mountain Communities Town Council meeting, Tuesday, Oct. 23 presented air pollution facts showing enough pollution in Lebec to cause concern for our mountain schools and sobering suggestions to begin corrective action.

Scott Nester and David Nunes of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) presented data collected by an air monitor installed in Lebec between February 2006 and March 2007.

Their charts showed that Lebec's ozone concentration levels rose in the mornings to a 3 p.m. average peak of over 84 parts per billion (ppb). The federal standard for ambient outdoor air is 80 ppb.

Another chart showed that the air quality around the monitor unit was on par with places like Shafter, Oildale, Burbank, and other locations in the Los Angeles area.

Charts based on state standards, however, show that Lebec had worse air than Los Angeles, Reseda and Glendora.

As startling as this information may be for residents of the mountain, Nester and Nunes said progress is being made in the San Joaquin Valley. There has been a decrease in toxic emissions since 1985. Measurements of Particulate Matter 10 microns or smaller (PM10) in the San Joaquin Valley show a dramatic drop in the number of days per year this pollutant exceeds the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. In 1990, it was at 55 days. During 2003 to 2006, that number remained at zero.

PM2.5, which is Particulate Matter 2.5 microns or smaller, did not show the same reduction in emissions and will take further work to toughen standards. According to Nester, the drop in PM10 emissions is the result of tightening standards and improvements in technology.

Jane Williams, Executive Director of California Communities Against Toxics, identified three significant stationary sources of pollution in the mountain communities: diesel trucks parked at the Flying J truck stop, the TXI plant (Pacific Custom Materials) in Lockwood Valley and the National Cement plant in the southwestern area of Tejon Ranch, near Highway 138 where the Centennial housing development is planned.

She encouraged audience members to organize an action program to obtain funding to solve some of the problems.

According to Williams, Proposition 1B, the Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality and Port Security Bond Act of 2006 can be used to solve a major problem here in our community.

"Proposition 1B includes one billion dollars to reduce emissions from goods movement activities," she said. "Some of that money can be used to help improve the air here."

Audience member Frank Williams (no relation) asked, "What would you do with that money if you had it?"

She responded that the truck stop should be "electrified," meaning it should be converted to electrical hookups so that trucks now left idling (emitting toxins into the air) could run their appliances and heating without running their engines all night.

Jane Williams says that the hundreds of diesel trucks which are parked daily with their engines running are making community members sick.

She asked how close El Tejon School is to the freeway. "Is it less than 500 feet from the freeway?" she enquired. Several audience members responded that the school playground is only 50 to 100 feet from Interstate 5.

"You have to move the school," she immediately answered. "You have to build a new school. You can't mitigate a school that is that close to a freeway."

Williams emphasized that there are things which can be done now, such as upgrading the Heating, Ventilation, Air-Conditioning (HVAC) system, "so that at least the air is cleaner inside," she said. "Don't wait to start doing things," she said. "Replace the HVAC system in three months. Plan for moving the school. The Proposition 1B money may be available to help with the truck stop."

The SJVAPCD has obtained \$100 million in Proposition 1B funds for the Central Valley, according to Nester.

You have good people here," Williams said, "Organize a team and go after some of that money."

Paula Regan, chair of the El Tejon Unified School District board of trustees, was not at the forum but was contacted afterward and read this report. "I'm uncomfortable responding to that right now. I don't have all the information. This is a part of a big global picture I have to look at," she said.

"A lot of things affect children," she added, "The pollution level is one portion. I would have to talk with our architects about [HVAC] filtering system plans. We are in the beginning stages of our building process. I'm sure Anita [Anderson, also on the ETUSD board] will bring it to us for study,"

-Additional reporting by Patric Hedlund

Bad air lingers from SoCal wildfires, prompting cancellations

By Noaki Schwartz, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Washington Post and other papers, Saturday, October 27, 2007

LOS ANGELES—As the wildfires die down and residents return home, lingering dust and soot-laden air is making it difficult for many to breathe even a sigh of relief.

Air quality remained poor in the central San Bernardino Mountains and parts of the San Bernardino Valley as well as swaths of Orange and Riverside Counties. In San Diego County, where only one of four major fires was more than 50 percent contained, the air was especially dismal Friday.

Satellite pictures continued to show a thick haze of smoke hanging over the entire region, affecting schools, events and the health of residents all over Southern California.

Joe Flynn, 48, worried about air quality as he prepared to return home to Ramona, northeast of San Diego, after a stay at Qualcomm Stadium where thousands of evacuees sought shelter this week. But the pull to get back to normal was even stronger.

"Sure I'm worried about breathing that stuff up there," he said. "It's not cool but everyone is dying to get back home."

Residents staying in areas with bad air were advised to avoid exerting themselves both indoors and outside. Children and those with heart and respiratory conditions were urged to stay indoors with the windows and doors closed and the air conditioner on.

"In the immediate aftermath of a fire, we're all at risk of the fine particulate matter we can inhale," said Julia Robinson Shimizu, a spokeswoman for Breathe L.A. "In general it's good to limit outdoor strenuous activity at least seven days after the fires have ended."

One of the biggest health threats with fires are the fine particles that are not visible to the naked eye. These particles can get into the lungs and make breathing an even greater struggle for people with asthma, bronchitis and emphysema.

Many schools across Southern California remained closed. Though school was in session at the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's largest with more than 708,000 students, children were monitored closely when they went outside.

Miles from any of the fires, smoke and dust from surrounding areas continued to hang like a heavy fog over the port city of Long Beach, making the sun appear a deep orange. Late this week a sea breeze pushed some of the polluted air inland improving conditions and finally allowing school children to venture outside.

"Here in California we're not accustomed to being inside for too long," said Christ Eftychiou, spokesman for the Long Beach Unified School District.

In Irvine, Velvet Revolver canceled a Friday concert with Alice In Chains at the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater because of the bad air. A press release also cited concerns that the hard rock fans' safety could be compromised with county resources spread so thin.

In San Diego, where fires still raged, the University of California San Diego Medical Center saw an increase in patients coming in with breathing troubles they believe were related to air pollution, but they didn't have statistics available, said spokeswoman Jackie Carr.

Still, there were signs that things were slowly returning to normal.

Classes at San Diego State University were scheduled to resume next week and Mayor Jerry Sanders said the Chargers would play Sunday's game scheduled at Qualcomm. The stadium can seat more than 70,000 fans.

Ross Porter, a spokesman for the American Lung Association of California, however, urged fans to use caution when deciding whether to attend.

"I don't see a big change between now and Sunday," he said. "Sometimes its better to sit quietly at home and watch it on TV."

A bad air day beats cabin fever

Although smoky skies have prompted health warnings, many in Southern California venture outside after days of being cooped up.

By Ari B. Bloomekatz, Andrea Chang and Tracy Weber, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers
L.A. Times, Sunday, October 28, 2007

Despite stern warnings that the air quality in much of Southern California is bad enough to make one sick, many residents Saturday opted to chance it -- deciding another day of cabin fever was worse.

"I realize the risk, but a morning like this is one of the few times I can come out and get some exercise," said writer Steve Becos, 51, as he shot baskets at Pan Pacific Park near The Grove shopping center.

But instead of joining the full-court game nearby, he said, "I'm taking it a little easy."

For a week, the region's massive wildfires have spewed unhealthful concentrations of soot, ash and other tiny particles into the air throughout the Los Angeles Basin. Strong winds have spread this dirty air far from the fires.

Health officials say that breathing such particles, especially during vigorous exercise, could cause them to lodge deep in the lungs and create serious health problems. The very young, the elderly and those with respiratory or cardiac ailments are most vulnerable.

Such warnings caused many residents this week to rethink their morning run or bicycle ride. Schools largely kept students indoors through recess and lunch, and some closed playgrounds after school. Some health food stores even did a brisk business in such post-fire herbal detoxes as "Heavy Metal Cleanse."

Saturday, however, parks and other outdoor areas were bustling. Some parents said they'd brave anything rather than face another long day of entertaining their children indoors. Others shrugged it off as the price of living in Los Angeles.

"We don't have good air quality here anyway," said attorney Wendell Hall, 38, after her 6-year-old daughter's soccer game at Pan Pacific Park, where hundreds congregated.

Even in San Bernardino County, where the air still reeked of smoke, Erasmel Carreno, 24, said the lure of catfish hiding out in Silverwood Lake outweighed the health risks.

"It's been smoky, I have a little bit of a sore throat," Carreno said outside Turner's Outdoorsman store where he was buying fishing hooks. He'd been out past 2 a.m. Saturday hoping for a bite.

"We didn't catch anything last night," Carreno said, laughing and vowing revenge that afternoon. "Those warnings are not going to stop us."

Loretta Mitchell said she wasn't worried about driving from her Lynwood home to San Bernardino

so that her two daughters could perform with their drill team, the Stylish & Genuine Stompers -- even though her youngest has asthma. "I'm not worried because they're inside," she said.

Some who fled the fires said Saturday they were just tired of being holed up in shelters and could use a breath of -- even if not so fresh -- air.

"We're evacuees, so there's nothing else really to do," said Brad Pattison of Lake Arrowhead, as he prepared to take his 8-year-old son Isaac fishing in the Yucaipa area.

"We're out of the smoke," Pattison said. "It's not as bad out there."

Although the air in most of Los Angeles County improved to moderate Saturday, the South Coast Air Quality Management District had advised people in much of Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties not to exert themselves this weekend.

For some, the advisories still held sway Saturday, even if they weren't near a fire zone.

Some youth sports league websites announced the cancellation of all games. The site for the American Youth Soccer Organization 33 Region, which serves the Encino area, had a link to the AQMD website and about a dozen comments from parents and others urging that games be canceled.

"Our children's health is more important than playing this game," read one posting. "I am an assistant coach and am encouraging our team to stay at home."

Daphne Subar of Studio City said she was relieved that all of her three young daughters' soccer games were canceled.

"They've been coming from school saying that their throats are burning, that their eyes are burning," she said. She was especially worried about her 12-year-old. "The kids get older, they are really running in these games," she said.

Some smoke-wary residents downwind of the fires sought even greater protection, hitting up health food stores such as Mother's Market and Kitchen in Irvine.

Assistant Manager Bryan Koch said he's been selling a number of herbal remedies including "Heavy Metal Cleanse" from Renew Life and "green" powders containing cilantro and spirulina, an algae. Some customers have been concerned that smoke from the nearby Santiago Canyon fire could carry chemicals from burning plastics and petroleum.

"A lot of them are looking for heavy metal detoxes," Koch said.

Wild Oats Market in Long Beach has sold lots of tiny containers called "neti pots" this week, used for natural irrigation of the sinuses, said Steven Kleindorfer, manager of the vitamin section. "Everyone felt like they couldn't breathe or they had allergies," he said.

But during an antiwar march in downtown Los Angeles on Saturday, protesters said there were more important things to worry about than dirty air.

"The air is probably really bad in Iraq," said Susan Jones, 73, a teacher in Ventura County. "In fact, it's probably worse in Iraq."

O.C. air quality remains unhealthy

Saddleback Valley residents should remain indoors today and Monday.

By SCOTT MARTINDALE
The Orange County Register, Sunday, Oct. 28, 2007

Even as firefighters gained ground today on the Santiago fire and the skies above Orange County began to clear, the air was still considered unhealthy for everyone in the area immediately surrounding the fire and was not expected to improve Monday, officials said.

Residents who could smell smoke, especially in the Saddleback Valley area, were advised to continue to remain indoors and not exercise, said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which oversees regional air quality in Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

"No one should be exercising, even indoors," Atwood said. "If you can still smell smoke, take it easy and reduce your outdoor activities."

In other areas of Orange County, air quality was forecast to be unhealthy for sensitive individuals today and Monday, meaning those with health problems like heart and lung disease or asthma should minimize outdoor activity.

The air in the Saddleback Valley area was expected to remain at unhealthy levels for everyone on Monday. Air-quality officials, however, could not predict what would happen later in the week, as the Santiago fire was still not fully contained, Atwood said.

As of Friday morning, officials reported 71 smoke-related health incidents and 19 heat-related incidents in Orange County hospitals. But because the situation had stabilized, officials stopped keeping track of the numbers, said Howard Sutter, a spokesman for the Orange County Health Care Agency.

On Saturday night, showers sprinkled over parts of Orange County and the Santa Ana winds were replaced by light breezes, providing a hint of relief for firefighters.

The light rain and the cloud cover also helped mix the pollutants and disperse them into the upper atmosphere, Atwood said.

Still, the dispersion was hindered slightly by an onshore wind flow, which replaced the Santa Ana winds Thursday and blocked smoke and pollutants from dissipating offshore.

Today's weather was not expected to hinder firefighting efforts.

"It's a little warmer and drier today than it was yesterday, but nothing significant," said Kris Concepcion, a battalion chief for the Orange County Fire Authority.

Residents today reported being slightly inconvenienced by the continued poor air quality, but glad to see blue skies again.

"I think (the air quality) is improving," said Bill Greenfield, 41, of Mission Viejo. "(We use) just an air cleaner in our house - that's it. And Claratin. It works fine."

Added Bruce Kane, 44, of Mission Viejo: "It reminded us of Tuscany. You take vacations out there and you get the nice smoky smell in the background. We closed the whole house up with the air filters on, and it's fine."

News you can use: San Diego County wildfires AIR QUALITY

San Diego Union-Tribune, Monday, Oct. 29, 2007

Information on air quality is available from the county Air Pollution Control District at (858) 586-2800, press 2, and sdapcd.org/air/forecasts/otoday.html. The telephone recording is updated daily at 4:30 p.m.

To minimize problems:

- Stay hydrated. Drink eight to 10 glasses of water a day. Keep a bottle of water with you as you drive or are outdoors and sip frequently.

- Keep windows and doors closed.
- Avoid throat sprays because they're too drying.
- Keep physical activity to a minimum.
- If you have one, wear a filter mask that covers your nose and mouth.
- Keep particle levels lower indoors by not using anything that burns, such as wood stoves, gas stoves and candles.

The air won't do you good

Anyone planning outdoor activities should think twice. Small children are particularly vulnerable.

By David Pierson, Marla Cone and Richard Winton, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers
L.A. Times, Saturday, October 27, 2007

Lenore Hittelman is in a quandary faced by many this weekend.

With the air still hazy with soot from the wildfires, do you allow your children to go play? The choice is made that much harder for the Irvine mother because her oldest daughter's soccer team is scheduled to play a crucial match Sunday that could determine which division their squad will land in next season.

"We know the air quality is bad, but if the team needs you, what do you do?" Hittelman said as she and her children drove to Tarzana to stay with family to escape Orange County's poor air. "It's a difficult decision."

Whether the activity is youth sports, a hike, a bike ride or simply running errands, the region's air pollution is forcing people to adjust their routines -- and in many cases, stay indoors as much as possible.

Since Sunday, the air throughout nearly all of the Los Angeles Basin has had unhealthy concentrations of particulates spewed by the fires and spread by strong winds.

By today, air quality is expected to improve to moderate in L.A. County, except Santa Clarita. However, it will remain unhealthy for children and other sensitive people in much of Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, according to the South Coast Air Quality Management District. In those areas, children, the elderly and anyone with respiratory or cardiac disorders such as asthma should not exert themselves, the AQMD said. Small children are particularly vulnerable because they have narrower airways and smaller lungs, and they inhale more pollutants than adults.

"We've entered a period with the wildfires where some judgment is required," Sam Atwood, an AQMD spokesman, said Friday.

Tiny particulates, whether from wildfire smoke, diesel exhaust or some other source, are a serious health threat because they can lodge deep in lungs. When particulates reach hazardous levels, hospitalizations, even deaths, increase from asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis, heart attacks and other respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

For many people, the risk is temporary -- headaches, stuffy noses, stinging eyes, coughs and shortness of breath. But for others, it can be life-threatening.

Studies show that in the days after wildfires, hospitalizations from asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis and heart attacks rise. Even healthy people often cough and experience headaches, stinging

eyes, stuffy noses and flu-like symptoms.

The air is worst in the fire zones, which include Orange County's Saddleback Valley, the San Bernardino Mountains, the San Bernardino Valley from Fontana to Yucaipa, and Riverside County between Corona and Temecula. In these areas, the AQMD has classified the air as unhealthful, meaning no one should exert themselves, and children, the elderly and people with asthma and other disorders should all remain indoors.

Any place where smoke can be smelled should also be considered unhealthful.

Many youth sports activities have been canceled close to the fire zones, but others are still scheduled for the weekend.

In Bellflower, Lorenzo Quezada was relieved when St. John Bosco High School's game against Mater Dei High School was canceled. His 15-year-old son, Steve, is a Bosco linebacker and has been feeling the effects of the bad air all week.

"The kids had been complaining about being out of breath, irritations of the throat and headaches even while running inside," he said.

The levels of particulates in much of the L.A. Basin this week were many times higher than they are on even highly polluted days when there are no fires. Because of winds driving smoke many miles away, the areas with the worst problems included Long Beach, Simi Valley, Riverside and parts of Orange County.

Frank Salisbury doesn't know if his sons' flag football games have been canceled today or not, but he's already decided that the boys won't go.

"The air's too heavy," Salisbury, 62, of Ladera Heights, said. "I wouldn't want them to play. If you don't have to, why do it? It's a health risk to go outside and do any activity."

Adults, particularly those who enjoy outdoor activities on weekends, face their own dilemma.

After much uncertainty, the San Diego Chargers announced Friday that the team would play its 1 p.m. Sunday home game against the Houston Texans as scheduled at Qualcomm Stadium. The Chargers have been practicing in Tempe, Ariz., since Wednesday because the stadium was being used as an evacuation center.

Yashar Kafi, 31, of Pasadena had just finished a six-mile run around the Rose Bowl on Friday afternoon and said he'd seen only half the usual number of runners outside the stadium in recent days. The typical scene of mothers pushing their children in strollers was absent. He said he found it harder to warm up and harder to breathe.

Christine Walker was sitting in a Pasadena park watching her 2-year-old son, Ryan, run circles in the grass. It was a relief to be outdoors after spending so much time in her home, she said.

"If I were in Orange County, I probably wouldn't go outside without a mask," said Walker, 30, who is pregnant. "But we can't stop going to the park and we can't stop living just because there's a fire going on."

A massive tree-planting drive scheduled for today was postponed in L.A. because of health concerns but will go on in parts of Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. The event, organized by United Voices for Healthier Communities, was two years in the making and aimed to put 6,500 new trees into the ground. But organizers had to heed the warning of one of the event's sponsors, the AQMD.

"The whole point was to clean the air," said the organization's chairman, Andy Trotter, laughing in slight disbelief at the irony. "A whole lot of people had already dug holes. Certainly the timing wasn't very good."

Whether events are canceled or not, organizers have been forced to address the air quality issue.

"Obviously we're very concerned," said Muna Coobtee, who organized an antiwar protest in downtown L.A. still scheduled for today. "We'll provide a lot of water and first aid just in case. But I think people want to be there anyway."

For Hittelman, the Irvine mother, the smoky air has changed many plans. A book fair at a school library, a meeting of mothers from the school of one of her daughters and a Halloween costume party were all canceled Friday.

She said she's been stir-crazy staying at home and feels even worse for her oldest daughter Kimberly, 13, who is athletic and isn't used to having to pass all her time surfing the Internet and playing video games.

"She hasn't been sleeping well," Hittelman, 37, said. "She isn't getting her regular exercise."

Of course, many parents said it's also important to put the bad air in perspective.

Susan Hetsroni, 46, who lives on L.A.'s Westside, said the disappointment of having sporting events for her three children canceled paled in comparison with the hardship faced by those who lost homes in the wildfires.

"Given what people are going through, this is a time to count your blessings," she said. "Your eyes may sting and you have to stay inside, but some people are desperately hurting."

Ash and soot could ruin your vehicle's finish

L.A. Times, Saturday, October 27, 2007

That foul air covering most of Southern California could be as damaging to your car as to your lungs.

Smoke, soot and ash from the wildfires will rule the skies for days, and the debris is falling like a constant mist and blanketing vehicles, possibly scratching and damaging paint.

Since the automobile is the second-largest monetary purchase after the home, motorists want to make sure they maintain their vehicle's paint finish to maintain the car's value," said Dave Skaien, spokesman for the Automobile Club of Southern California's repair program. "It's especially important to remove ash and soot from vehicles as soon as possible."

Because of the continually falling debris, vehicle owners may need to do more than one washing, Skaien said.

The Auto Club offered these car tips for the coming weeks:

- * Whenever possible, put the car in the garage or cover it, not only to protect it from ash but also to prolong the finish on the vehicle, the trim and the tires.
- * If you can't do either, gently wipe off the vehicle with a long-handled car duster.
- * Wash the vehicle thoroughly with warm water, a soft mitt, a towel or sponge and car wash soap.

Rinse the vehicle thoroughly and dry with a soft, clean towel or chamois.

* After the fires are over, inspect and, if necessary, replace the engine air filter, and have mechanics inspect and replace ventilation filters in the passenger compartment. A dirty air filter can restrict fuel economy and increase vehicle emissions.

* Check and, if necessary, change windshield wipers for the winter season. Make sure the wiper fluid reservoir is filled, and spray the windshield first to avoid scratching it.

* Keep the sunroof and windows closed. Outside of the fire areas, run the air conditioner on "recirculate" until the outside air quality significantly improves. Once the air quality is better, set the air conditioner on "fresh" or "vent" so you're moving outside air inside. If the interior smells like smoke, add a vehicle air freshener to mask the odor.

* Thoroughly vacuum floor mats and cloth surfaces. Wear a mask if necessary.

* Once the air clears, wax your vehicle in the garage after it's been washed and is cool. Car wax helps protect the finish against ash as well as hard-water spots and rain.

State regulations say boat pollution rule not tough enough

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, San Francisco Chronicle and Modesto Bee, Saturday, October 27, 2007

SACRAMENTO—State air regulators say a proposal to clean up California's polluting ferries, party boats and tug boats could be tougher.

They delayed a vote Friday on a regulation that would have forced the state's dirtiest vessels to begin replacing their engines by 2009.

The rule would have given about 600 vessels around California until 2022 to clean up their engines. But several board members wanted that to happen sooner for ferries that expose thousands of commuters to ship fumes.

The board agreed to consider a revised regulation at next month's meeting.

It's not smog : Bay Area feels effects of fire

By Julie Sevrens Lyons, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, October 26, 2007

Smoke from the Southern California fires is everywhere.

It's all along the San Diego coastline, where the sky is a burnt orange. It's several hundred miles out to sea. And while you may be surprised, it's even here in Silicon Valley, where tiny particles of smoke and soot show up in satellite images.

"There's a heck of a lot of smoke," said Gennet Paauwe, a spokeswoman for the California Air Resources Board in Sacramento. "And we have a little bit on our doorstep."

But unlike in Southern California, where residents are being cautioned to stay indoors, not exercise and wear masks outside, Northern California's air is still generally clean.

And forecasters don't expect it to get much worse. "It's well within the healthy range for all groups, including sensitive groups" such as asthmatics, said Karen Schkolnick, a spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Still, Paauwe said, even in the Bay Area it's important for people with respiratory or heart problems to take it easy in the next few days and pay attention to their bodies. "It's better to take caution than to have something terrible happen," she said.

Smoke from the wildfires contributed, in part, to that layer of haze encircling the Bay Area Thursday. It even reached as far inland as the San Joaquin Valley.

Even if you can't see it, smoke can pose a problem, experts say. The particulate matter — solid particles and liquid droplets — in smoke are very tiny, about 1/30 the diameter of a human hair. These particles can build up in a person's respiratory system, causing itchy eyes, runny noses, and aggravating heart and lung diseases. Fine particles have even been linked to premature deaths in people with health problems.

In San Diego, where about a dozen fires have burned more than 300,000 acres this week, sending plumes of thick brown smoke over much of the county, air quality has reached unhealthy to hazardous levels in some areas. The so-called "air quality index" is considered good if it falls between 0 and 50. Communities such as Chula Vista, Del Mar and Otay Mesa were all expected to hit 182 on Thursday. By comparison, Santa Clara Valley was expected to hover around 36 Thursday and hit 52 today.

"Everywhere you look, it's hazy," said John Lydon, who lives in Santee with his family. On Sunday, the day the first fires broke out, Lydon's smoke detector went off while he was carrying groceries inside, even though the closest fire at that time was still about 15 miles away.

"Even now," he said Thursday, "it doesn't seem to have cleared up that much."

Health experts are cautioning that it could be weeks before air quality improves in Southern California. After the Cedar Fire swept through that area four years ago, traces of the smoke lingered for weeks and ashes were kicked up by winds more than a month later. Even when the smoke is no longer visible, the tiny particles often linger in the air until a good strong rain washes them away.

"It's probably going to be at least a week — or two — before we're talking normal, healthy levels," said Ross Porter, a spokesman for the American Lung Association of California. "We want people to realize this is a persistent condition they're going to be working with through the holidays."

Jennifer Otilio has done everything she can to avoid the bad air. Early Monday, as the smoke was beginning to choke her northern San Diego County neighborhood, she packed up her three kids and two dogs and drove her Suburban straight to Los Gatos, where her parents live.

Four years ago, large fires in San Diego caused problems with her oldest daughter's asthma.

"My throat hurt Monday morning. You could already feel it," she said. And as they made their way up Interstate 5, windows tightly closed, "we saw smoke all the way up until the Grapevine."

As surprising as it might be for many people to hear that smoke can travel so far, scientists now know it can make its way a heck of a lot farther.

Smoke particles can remain suspended in the air for a very long time, said Tom Cahill, a professor of physics and atmospheric sciences at the University of California, Davis. Cahill teamed up with several other researchers to trace the origin of some air pollution wafting over the Pacific Ocean and determined it was from a massive dust storm. In China.

"Most of the fine particles at places such as Crater Lake National Park in the spring are in fact Chinese," Cahill said.

"Not just some. Most."

Yet Cahill said he also doesn't anticipate that residents here will see any negative health effects from the bits of Southern California smoke that have permeated the Bay Area's upper atmosphere.

It's a far different story down south, where residents have been turning up in emergency rooms with burning eyes and irritated lungs.

Dr. Thomas M. Dailey, chief of pulmonary medicine at Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara, said the legacy of these fires won't just be the acres burned or the homes destroyed.

"It's exposing an entire population in Southern California," he said, "to very unhealthy air."

Proposal seeks to curb car pollution

Plans include charging at peak hours, driving downtown

By Erik N. Nelson, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, October 27, 2007

If the Bay Area is to make a real contribution to the fight against global warming, it will require an aggressive program to discourage solo vehicle commuting, along with improvements in fuel economy and a new development paradigm that puts people near jobs and public transit, Bay Area leaders were told Friday.

Those ideas, which include a pricing package that increases the per-mile cost of driving during peak hours, were contained in a proposed framework for a regional transportation plan to take the Bay Area to 2035.

The cornerstone of the plan challenges Bay Area leaders to fight global warming by reducing the area's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels, and again 40 percent below that.

Rather than "hang your head and cry" about gloomy predictions about future population, congestion and air pollution growth, "our plan generally attempts to slow the rate of growth in congestion and achieve that improvement in the face of more of us, more cars," said Steve Heminger, executive director of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

The plan was presented as a jumping-off point for a lengthy process, ending in February 2009, of creating the MTC's federally mandated regional transportation plan through 2035. It was presented to several hundred Bay Area leaders at the "Bay Area on the Move" MTC transportation summit and Association of Bay Area Governments fall general assembly.

The emissions reduction is in line with the state's new global warming bill, which requires all areas of the state to drop to 1990 levels by 2020.

A key tool for reaching that goal will be cutting freeway congestion by 20 percent below 2006 levels.

Much of the reduction in traffic delay would come from a program to squeeze more highway capacity out of area freeways. Doing that will require continued improvements in ramp metering and other traffic management technology and closing gaps in the carpool lane network at a "positively bargain-basement" price of \$600 million, Heminger said.

Probably the most controversial component will come from making motorists pay for their contributions to rush-hour congestion.

Those contributions would total five times what the average motorist now pays to drive to work.

They would come in three forms: A gas tax that would average 23 cents a mile, tolls to enter congested areas paid electronically through FasTrak and parking surcharges levied during peak congestion times.

"It's designed to scare the dickens out of every elected official in the room," Heminger quipped to the gathering of leaders from all over the nine-county Bay Area.

But later, he said the point was to show that fighting global warming and other problems that come largely from vehicle traffic won't be easy.

"What we wanted to show folks is how aggressive you have to be to get even halfway to that target," Heminger said.

Another key component to reaching emissions targets will be coming up with a unified plan to channel development toward job centers, toward public transportation hubs and away from the tradition of sprawling suburbs ever farther from those key locations.

A third prong of the "Challenges and Choices for a Bay Area on the Move" concept is to mitigate some of the effects of higher commuting charges on lower-income residents with discounts.

The plan also recommends fostering more affordable housing to both help ease the impact on the poor and provide a way to get more commuters closer to work.

The concept of aggressive changes in the way Bay Area residents get around was widely praised by environmental and public transportation advocates at the conference, with some caveats.

The presentation asserted that improving freeway traffic flow would be the most cost-effective way of reducing emissions, with adding rail and ferry service costing 250 to 900 times more for each ton of emissions reduced.

"I think you're throwing some very cost-effective projects in with some real dogs" in making that estimate, said Tom Radulovich, a member of BART's board of directors and executive director of the transportation and environmental nonprofit Livable City.

Some transit projects, like a BART extension to San Jose, would be very inefficient, while others could achieve considerably more emissions reductions for less cost, Radulovich said.

Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Transportation and Land-use Coalition, also said existing public transit, just like freeways, can be made more efficient with a reasonable investment.

Henry Gardner, executive director of the Association of Bay Area Governments, noted the exodus of Bay Area residents to more affordable lodging in the Central Valley, only to drive back to the Bay Area each day for work. Governments from both regions should consider working together to stem that tide by bringing jobs to the Valley and more affordable homes to the Bay Area.

The big challenge, even to change development patterns within the Bay Area, will be to get the region's nine counties and 101 municipal governments to agree on land-use policy. Land-use rules across the nation have always been under local control, which is fiercely guarded by local officials and the voters who elect them.

All of these strategies to fight global warming will provide a major test of just how progressive the Bay Area is, Gardner said.

"The challenge for us," he said, "is are we going to be able to walk the talk?"

California air regulators adopt new global warming standards

By SAMANTHA YOUNG , Associated Press Writer

Thursday, October 25, 2007

SACRAMENTO — Car tires must be fully inflated, trucks fitted with aerodynamic devices and cargo ship engines silenced when docked at port under global warming proposals adopted Thursday by state air regulators.

The California Air Resources Board approved six new mandates that manufacturers, shipping and trucking companies will be asked to follow beginning 2010 as a way to help the state get an early start at cutting greenhouse gases.

The board also approved rules that nonprofit groups must follow if they want to get credit for growing trees or changing how private forest lands are managed to store carbon dioxide.

"We see a lot of proposals and schemes on paper to reduce emissions, but it's in California where rules are being put in place to reduce greenhouse pollution," said Bill Magavern of Sierra Club's Sacramento division who testified in favor of the regulations.

The new suite of global warming regulations - coupled with three other initiatives adopted in June - could prevent an estimated 16 million metric tons of greenhouse gases from going into the air, according to an analysis by the Air Resources Board.

That's about 9 percent of the target California is trying to reach under its 2006 global warming law to cut emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

"I think this set of measures we put out there is a big bite," said board chair Mary Nichols.

It's a much broader goal than initially was proposed earlier this year by the board. Regulators decided to expand the list after board members and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger were criticized by Democrats and environmentalists for moving too slowly to implement California's global warming law.

The additional regulations will come at a cost of billions of dollars for those who will be forced to buy new equipment or change how they do business, said Matthew Schrap, environmental affairs manager at the California Trucking Association.

Although they approved the regulations by an unanimous vote, several board members warned against moving too quickly on what they described as incremental rules. They suggested the board take a more comprehensive, industrywide approach when it crafts future global warming regulations.

"There is a greater chance to miss an unintended consequence, and that is a big concern of mine," said board member Sandra Berg, who is also president and chief executive officer of a paint company based in Los Angeles.

The new measures would require:

- Vehicles serviced for a tune up, smog check or oil change, to leave the shop with fully inflated tires.
- Gas-guzzling trucks and trailers to be fitted with aerodynamic devices like shield guards that are designed to make them more fuel efficient.
- Cargo ships docked at ports to turn off their engines and use electrical outlets for power.
- A ban on the chemical sulfur hexafluoride, which is used to make aluminum, magnesium and semiconductors.
- More stringent rules on using the greenhouse gas perfluorocarbon, which is used to make microchips and circuit boards.
- Changing the kinds of propellants that are used in spray cans.

In addition to the mandatory regulations, the board is also pursuing 35 other so-called early action measures that consumers and business could take on their own.

One of the biggest items was the adoption Thursday of forestry standards crafted last year by the California Climate Action Registry, a nonprofit group created by the state seven years ago.

The standards provide a method for land owners to measure how much carbon is be stored when forests are conserved, management practices are improved or trees are planted in areas where forests once grew.

"When it comes to offsets of carbon sequestering, there are a lot of cowboys out there," said Diane Wittenberg, president of the California Climate Action Registry. "We spell out how a project can measure reductions and certify those reductions."

The new forestry program will be limited to lands managed by nonprofit organizations, which critics complained was a small slice of the state's forest lands.

Regulators said they would address industrial forest lands, public lands and urban forests in later rules.

Furnace use singes air quality activists

By Martin Ricard, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, October 27, 2007

SAN LEANDRO — A gas-fired industrial furnace in west San Leandro has been cooking up some steam among two local environmental groups that are concerned the machine could pollute nearby residential neighborhoods.

The Healthy San Leandro Collaborative, along with environmental justice group Greenaction, have embarked on a campaign to halt Alco Iron & Metal Co.'s use of the furnace until the Bay Area Air Quality Management District allows residents to formally air their

concerns.

Michael Bercovich, counsel for Alco, said the metal recycling company was temporarily allowed earlier this year to operate its controlled pyrolysis cleaning furnace, which separates organic and inorganic material from metal to prepare it for recycling, and has proven the machine won't cause any pollution.

But the environmental groups' concerns have now caught the attention of government officials who want to make sure Alco's furnace really doesn't pose a threat to the community.

"I think this project is an example of how even though (the company) is not required to provide information (to the public), we still think it is important to provide that information to the community," said Bay Area Air Quality Management District spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick.

When Alco first applied for a permit to operate its furnace in April, the air district reviewed the machine to check how much pollution it would create.

After assessing the potential health risks related to the furnace, documents show, the air district found that it posed a cancer risk to residents of only 0.003 chances in a million — not enough of a risk required by the district for public notification.

It wasn't until the two environmental justice groups got word of the project and demanded more public input that the air district decided to allow residents to voice their concerns.

Now, Alco must wait until a 30-day public comment period ends before it gets the go-ahead to fully operate its furnace.

Bercovich said the debate surprised the company, especially because Alco is proposing to use the furnace only periodically. Nonetheless, he said, the debate has been healthy.

"I think (the problem) just comes from a lack of understanding how the machine works," he said.

The groups, however, still aren't convinced.

They blasted the air district for not consulting with residents before reviewing the furnace, calling the district's public notice "misleading, biased and in many places without factual basis."

That claim stems from the group's concern about the veracity of the air district's health risk assessment, which states that because the district couldn't find standards with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or California Air Resources Board to regulate the furnace, officials based their results on a similar EPA emissions test for a scrap electric wire incinerator.

"We want to see Alco stop using this (furnace) until it is proven safe or it is not proven safe," said Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction. "It just can't be a decision that government approves solely based on a pollutants claim. I think that's pretty outrageous."

But the air district says there is nothing underhanded about the way the process has been handled.

Schkolnick said the air district posted the public notice for Alco's furnace on its Web site along with ads in the newspaper. Officials also have contacted San Leandro city staff, who now are requiring the company to apply for a conditional use permit, as the furnace would be considered an expansion of the recycling business.

Schkolnick added that if the air district approves Alco's permit, the company will have to comply with strict regulations for the furnace limiting the kinds of materials it can burn as well as the amount of emissions it releases.

Coal use grows despite warming worries

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, October 28, 2007

JUNGAR QI, China — Almost nonstop, gargantuan 145-ton trucks rumble through China's biggest open-pit coal mine, sending up clouds of soot as they dump their loads into mechanized sorters.

The black treasure has transformed this once-isolated crossroads nestled in the sand-sculpted ravines of Inner Mongolia into a bleak boomtown of nearly 300,000 people. Day and night, long and dusty trains haul out coal to electric power plants and factories in the east, fueling China's explosive growth.

Coal is big, and getting bigger. As oil and natural gas prices soar, the world is relying ever more on the cheap, black-burning mainstay of the Industrial Revolution. Mining companies are racing into Africa. Workers are laying miles of new railroad track to haul coal from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming and Montana.

And nowhere is coal bigger than in China.

But the explosion of coal comes amid rising alarm over its dire consequences for workers and the environment. An average of 13 Chinese miners die every day in explosions, floods, fires and cave-ins. Toxic clouds of mercury and other chemicals from mining are poisoning the air and water far beyond China's borders and polluting the food chain.

So far, attempts to clean up coal have largely not worked. Technology to reduce or cut out carbon dioxide emissions is expensive and years away from widespread commercial use.

"Not very many people are talking about what do we do to live with the consequences of what's happening," said James Brock, a longtime industry consultant in the Beijing office of Cambridge Energy Research Associates. "The polar bears are doomed - they're going to museums. At the end of this century the Arctic ice cap will be gone. That means a lot of water rising, not by inches but meters."

Burned since ancient times, coal dramatically increased in use during the Industrial Revolution, when it became fuel for the new steam engines, gas lamps and electrical generators. Worldwide

demand for coal dipped at the end of the 20th century, but is now back up and projected to rise 60 percent by 2030 to 6.9 billion tons a year, according to the International Energy Agency.

Today, most coal goes to electrical power plants. In developing nations such as India, China and Africa, coal is the staple - and affordable - source of fuel with which families run their first washing machines and televisions. Worldwide electricity consumption is expected to double by 2030, the World Energy Council says.

In America, about 150 new coal-fired electrical plants are proposed over the next decade. In China, there are plans for a coal-fired power plant to go on line nearly every week. Emissions from these plants alone could nullify the cuts made by Europe, Japan and other rich nations under the Kyoto Protocol treaty, according to a report from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

In a developing country like China, coal is the backbone of the energy system.

Look at the port city of Shanghai, where the bitter tang in the air is not from salty sea breeze - it's the smoke from coal-burning stoves in the suburbs used for cooking and heating. From the shacks of migrant workers on the edge of town to modern factories and skyscrapers, China's biggest city is powered by coal. Even the ultramodern Maglev railway line runs on electricity from a coal-fueled plant.

China mined a record 2.4 billion tons of coal in 2006, up 8.1 percent from a year earlier. But even that can't keep boilers and blast furnaces stoked in an economy growing more than 10 percent a year. So China became a net coal importer for the first time this year. While Chinese authorities are closing down older, heavily polluting plants, they can't keep up with a massive expansion in urban housing and industry and the coal that feeds them.

China is the world's biggest consumer and producer of coal, but it's far from the only one. U.S. coal production hit a record 1.2 billion tons last year, according to the National Mining Association, and is forecast by the government to rise 50 percent by 2030. Yet the United States rejected the Kyoto Protocol, arguing that the required emissions cuts could slow economic growth.

For another measure, look at the ticker on the Web site of St. Louis-based Peabody Coal Co., the world's largest coal mining company, which tracks its growing sales second by second. Last year: 248 million tons sold. For 2007: On track for up to 275 million tons.

China's Shenhua Group is hot on Peabody's heels. On one day in June, a record 111 Shenhua coal trains left its mines in north-central China, the company said.

Rising demand can be met because coal is the Earth's most abundant fossil fuel, with reserves expected to last some 250 years - far longer than forecasts for petroleum. And whether in China, India, the United States or Europe, coal is available at home, away from the instability of the Middle East.

"The U.S. has under its own soil at least a 200-year supply of coal. China has a very long-term supply of coal," Steve Papermaster, co-chairman of the energy committee of President Bush's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology, told a recent conference in Shanghai.

For several years, cleaner burning natural gas appeared a promising substitute. But soaring prices and worries over the reliability of Mideast and Russian supplies have dimmed the promise of that option. Alternatives such as wind and solar power are getting cheaper but still can't compete with coal.

Most experts believe that whatever the costs to the environment and public health, coal is with us to stay.

"The question is not about putting a line through coal and saying we're not going to use it," said Milton Catelin, chief executive of the London-based World Coal Institute, an industry association.

"There's a future for coal. The developing world will have to use coal. They need cheap energy to get ahead."

The solution Catelin and others in the industry are pushing is clean technology, although they admit they are late to the game.

"The decade 1997-2007 was a lost decade" for clean coal technology, Catelin conceded. "We should have done much more. Now we're playing catch-up."

The need is clear. In the provincial steel town of Baotou, trucks heaped high with coal rumble into Shenhua yards, dumping their loads into huge sieves for sorting into various grades of quality and size. Wind gusts whip black soot into the sky, thickening the layer of smog from the city's smelters.

The U.S. and Chinese governments are subsidizing the development of technology that converts coal to a clean-burning gas before it is burned. But such plants still emit ample amounts of carbon dioxide, notes Qian Jingjing, an expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York and co-author of the report "Coal in a Changing Climate."

She and many other experts believe coal can only be made environmentally sustainable through the more experimental technology of capturing carbon dioxide emissions and storing them underground.

A joint government-private project in the United States aims to build such a "zero emissions" plant by 2012. Separately, Xcel Energy Inc. of Minneapolis, a major electric and natural gas utility, is studying building a carbon capture and storage power plant in Colorado.

Across the Atlantic, the European Union may require carbon capture and storage systems for all new coal-fired power plants, with a proposal expected by year end. The gas would be buried in aquifers, depleted coal mines or geological faults deep underground.

But the costs are daunting.

"It takes a lot of money since you have to go so deep," said Brock of Cambridge Energy Research Associates. "There is not one commercial carbon capture and storage project yet. It's yet to be proven."

With such high costs, few utilities will embrace these technologies without a strong push or subsidy from government. The U.S. Congress is weighing several proposals, but their fate remains uncertain.

The degree of public support for such policies remains unclear. Consumers may balk at having to pay more for electricity from "clean coal" plants, either through higher rates or taxes.

But there is growing awareness of the problem. In both the West and India and China, traditional utilities and new players are investing in wind and solar power. A subsidiary of coal giant Shenhua is building a 200-megawatt wind farm in the waters off China's east coast.

"The goal is to raise both efficiency and turn to renewables while backing out of coal in the process," said Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, an environmental think tank in Washington. "The question is, can we move fast enough?"

Meanwhile, in Jungar Qi, the house-sized mine trucks rumble on, rushing their multi-ton loads of coal to railways and coal yards. The biggest landmark in the city - the two huge smokestacks of its coal-fired power plant.

The board agreed to consider a revised regulation at next month's meeting.

U.N. Warns of Rapid Decay of Environment

By JAMES KANTER
N.Y. Times, Friday, October 26, 2007

PARIS, Oct. 25 — The human population is living far beyond its means and inflicting damage to the environment that could pass points of no return, according to a major report issued Thursday by the United Nations

Climate change, the rate of extinction of species, and the challenge of feeding a growing population are putting humanity at risk, the United Nations Environment Program said in its fourth Global Environmental Outlook since 1997.

“The human population is now so large that the amount of resources needed to sustain it exceeds what is available at current consumption patterns,” Achim Steiner, the executive director of the Environment Program, said in a telephone interview.

Many biologists and climate scientists have concluded that human activities have become a dominant influence on the Earth’s climate and ecosystems. But there is still a range of views on whether the changes could have catastrophic impacts, as the human population heads toward nine billion by midcentury, or more manageable results.

Over the last two decades, the world population increased by almost 34 percent, to 6.7 billion, from 5 billion. But the land available to each person is shrinking, from 19.5 acres in 1900 to 5 acres by 2005, the report said.

Population growth combined with unsustainable consumption has resulted in an increasingly stressed planet where natural disasters and environmental degradation endanger people, plants and animal species.

Persistent problems include a rapid rise of “dead zones,” where marine life no longer can be supported because pollutants like runoff fertilizers deplete oxygen.

But Mr. Steiner, of the Environment Program, did note that Western European governments had taken effective measures to reduce air pollutants and that Brazil had made efforts to roll back some deforestation.

He said an international treaty to tackle the hole in the earth’s ozone layer had led to the phasing out of 95 percent of ozone-damaging chemicals.

“Life would be easier if we didn’t have the kind of population growth rates that we have at the moment,” Mr. Steiner said. “But to force people to stop having children would be a simplistic answer. The more realistic, ethical and practical issue is to accelerate human well-being and make more rational use of the resources we have on this planet.”

Mr. Steiner said parts of Africa could reach an environmental tipping point if changing rainfall patterns turned semi-arid zones into arid zones and made agriculture much harder. He said another tipping point could occur in India and China if Himalayan glaciers shrank so much that they no longer supplied adequate amounts of water.

He also warned of a global collapse of all species being fished by 2050, if fishing around the world continued at its current pace. The report said that two and a half times more fish were being caught than the oceans could produce in a sustainable manner, and that the level of fish stocks classed as collapsed had roughly doubled over the past 20 years, to 30 percent.

In the spirit of the United Nations report, President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) of France outlined plans on Thursday to fight climate change.

He said he would make 1 billion euros, or \$1.4 billion, available over four years to develop energy sources and maintain biodiversity. He said each euro spent on nuclear research would be matched by one spent on research into clean technologies and environmental protection.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, Oct. 27, 2007:](#)

Tighter clean air rules

State and Valley agencies take more steps to help clean up skies.

State air officials tightened regulations on a number of air pollution sources this week, and the Valley's air district expanded a voluntary program to help clean the skies by reducing vehicle use and other polluting activities. In both cases, it's good news for anyone who breathes.

Valley residents have been asked for some time to "Spare the Air" on the worst days of summer pollution. Now the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wants everyone to take pollution-fighting measures every day during the summer. That means voluntarily reducing vehicular travel by carpooling, walking, riding bicycles and taking the bus. Vehicles are -- by far -- the single greatest villain causing the Valley's dirty air.

And it means we all need to turn those periodic changes in our behavior into regular actions. Once in a while must become everyday habit.

The air district is also asking residents to curb the use of such pollution sources as lawn equipment and charcoal lighter fluid for barbecues, and exercise greater care when using such mundane polluting agents as paint.

Fumes from paint cans are one source of the chemicals that combine to form ozone, the principal ingredient in the Valley's searing summer smog. Keeping paint cans tightly closed when not in use can reduce the damage they cause.

District officials also discussed the damage caused by drive-through lanes at fast-food restaurants. Sitting in a drive-through lane for more than 90 seconds with the engine idling is bad for the air. It's far better for the air -- and healthier for the people -- to park the car and take the short walk into the restaurant to order food.

The voluntary Spare the Air program has been around for a decade, and is just one of many steps Valley residents have taken that have resulted in cleaner air. Now it's time to push even harder to continue that progress.

The California Air Resources Board on Thursday took its own steps for cleaner air, mandating several measures that manufacturers, shipping and trucking firms must take in the fight to reduce greenhouse gases produced in the state.

CARB also promulgated new rules for some privately managed forests in order to qualify for credits for the carbon dioxide that the trees absorb.

Among the new measures:

- ? Vehicles getting a tune-up, smog check or oil change must leave the shop with fully inflated tires.
- ? Trucks and trailers must be fitted with aerodynamic devices to make them more fuel efficient.
- ? Cargo ships docked at ports must turn off their engines and use electrical outlets for power.
- ? Different propellants must be used in spray cans.

Altogether, the new rules will reduce greenhouse gas emission by some 16 million metric tons, or about 9% of the goal set for 2020.

None of this will come cheap, but the cost of doing nothing is even greater. It has taken us decades to foul the air we breathe, and it will take time and money to clean it up. But the alternative is to continue to pollute, which costs us hundreds of lives and billions of dollars every year. That's really no alternative.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Sunday, October 28, 2007](#)

Air board wants to involve public in reducing pollution

By DEEDEE D'ADAMO

As for other emissions reductions measures in the works, last year, ultra-low-sulfur diesel began appearing at the pump, which is greatly reducing emissions along the Highway 5 and 99 corridors. The new blend contains 97 percent less sulfur, which means huge reductions in oxides of nitrogen, or NOx, and particulate matter.

In the coming year, we also will begin soliciting local proposals under Proposition 1B, which earmarked \$1 billion

for goods movement pollution control. All told, this program is projected to reduce statewide combined emissions of NOx and diesel particulate matter by more than 250,000 tons during the life of the bond-funded equipment. We fully anticipate that a sizable chunk of this funding will wind up addressing truck and train emissions in the San Joaquin Valley.

So we're on the right track, but now comes the hard part: setting in place the specific measures. As we move forward, we are committed to running an open process that includes regular public meetings along the way. We have ambitious plans, but we can't carry them out without all of our partners, including communities, government and industry.

As a mother of three and a valley resident for more than 20 years, I am encouraged by the work everyone is undertaking to clear our skies sooner rather than later. Please join us as we move ahead on this crucial public health plan.

D'Adamo, a Turlock resident, is a member of the California Air Resources Board. She is an attorney and works for Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, Oct. 27, 2007:](#)

Thumbs up, thumbs down

Thumbs down to Fresno County Supervisors Phil Larson, Judy Case and Bob Waterston for wimping out on new dairy regulations. The trio formed the board majority that passed a weak ordinance for regulating emissions from new and expanding dairies in the county. It's another vote for the status quo, and against the interests of their constituents who must breathe the Valley's dirty air.