

County air quality near top of lung association "worst" list

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Tulare County's air quality was ranked among the worst in the American Lung Association's annual State of the Air report released today.

The rankings:

U.S. Cities Most Polluted by Short-Term Particle Pollution

1. Pittsburgh, Pa.
2. Los Angeles/Long Beach/Riverside
3. Fresno/Madera
4. Bakersfield
5. Birmingham, Ala.
6. Logan, Utah
7. Salt Lake City, Utah
8. Sacramento
9. Detroit, Mich.
10. Baltimore, Md./Washington, D.C./Northern Virginia

U.S. Cities Most Polluted by Year-Round Particle Pollution

- 1) Los Angeles/Long Beach/Riverside
- 2) Pittsburgh, Pa.
- 3) Bakersfield
- 4) Birmingham, Ala.
- 5) Visalia/Porterville**
- 6) Atlanta, Ga.
- 7) Cincinnati, Ohio
- 8) Fresno/Madera
- 9) Hanford/Corcoran
- 10) Detroit, Mich.

U.S. Cities Most Polluted by Ozone

- 1) Los Angeles/Long Beach/Riverside
- 2) Bakersfield
- 3) Visalia/Porterville**
- 4) Houston, Texas
- 5) Fresno/Madera
- 6) Sacramento
- 7) Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
- 8) New York, N.Y./Newark, N.J.
- 9) Baltimore, Md./Washington, D.C./Northern Virginia
- 10) Baton Rouge, La.

For more information visit www.stateoftheair.org.

Council visits Fresno for regional planning event

By Corey Pride, Los Banos Enterprise

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, May 02, 2008

Nearly the entire City Council visited Fresno last week to discuss a regional plan for handling growth in the Central Valley.

"I insisted we all go because I think if you're not present when the decisions are made then you don't have anything to say," Mayor Tommy Jones said.

Every council member except Joe Sousa, who had a previous commitment, attended the Blueprint Executive Forum on Friday. The meeting consisted of government officials throughout the Valley coming together with state representatives to discuss the future of Central California.

About two years ago counties in the valley began to form a plan to deal with population growth and its impacts. The plan, called the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint, is designed to establish goals in the areas of economic development, land use patterns, transportation, infrastructure and environmental planning.

Jones said Friday's meeting was important because it was an opportunity to let the state know what the Valley needs to accommodate population growth.

"We have to make sure the state listens. We want the thing to be from the bottom up, not the top down," Jones said.

Through an e-mail Councilman Tom Faria agreed with Jones that Los Baños' involvement in the Blueprint is critical.

"Essentially, if we want to be able to determine how the growth will take place, we need to be involved now, rather than later," he said.

Jones said the state will tell cities where it believes growth should be located, but municipalities must get what they need from the state if they are going to grow properly.

Jones said a housing/jobs balance is one of the items being sought in the blueprint.

"We don't want the housing if we don't have the jobs," he said.

He said another benefit to having more jobs in the Central Valley is less pollution would be released into the region's air because there would be fewer commuters traveling long distances to work daily.

Councilwoman Anna Brooks said the blueprint concept is a good one because it allows the Valley to present a united front to the state.

"When the growth comes to Los Baños it's going to come to other cities as well. We can share resources," Brooks said.

She said what she took away from the meeting is a better understanding of problems being faced by Merced County's neighbors. Brooks said she listened to officials from Madera County discuss the issues they are facing related to the prisons in their jurisdiction. She said while Merced County does not have those issues, it's nevertheless enlightening to know what problems those type of facilities present.

Brooks said one of the more important issues looming for Los Baños is being able to convince the state to provide a station in the city for its planned high-speed train system. Despite some criticism that such a move would exacerbate traffic problems, Brooks said she supports the idea.

"We have to envision this way out into the future. We'll have a bypass by then," Brooks said.

Councilman Mike Villalta said his focus in participating in pushing the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint is to make sure Los Baños gets what it needs to aid the movement of goods along the east-west trade corridor, which he says includes Highway 152 and other thoroughfares outside of the city.

Villalta said he's been to two blueprint meetings since he's been on the council. In his opinion their value depends on how seriously the state takes the recommendations.

"It is worthwhile if the concerns are taken away and aren't shelved someplace," Villalta said.

Asthma event to clear the air

The Merced College event will feature information and activities.

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, May 02, 2008

Pollution has been a hot topic in the air lately, and Merced's first-ever World Asthma Day event will only bring more attention to it.

But the focus, of course, will be placed of those suffering the affects of pollution and other health triggers -- asthmatics.

The event won't be all doom and gloom, organizers say. There will also be fun and games, in addition to education about the problem.

Merced College Volleyball and the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition will present World Asthma Day on Tuesday at Merced College. Face painting, volleyball and raffles for items such as an electric lawn mower and natural gas barbecue are all part of the day.

An interactive "asthma circuit" will take visitors from booth to booth to learn more about the condition, what causes it and how to keep it under control.

And the city will be presented with an "asthma report card."

"We get so caught up in our day-to-day lives that we forget about the air we breathe," said Connie Mull, a nurse and health services manager for the Merced County Office of Education Head Start program. "People who have asthma have different triggers. In order to help, you need to know what those triggers are so you can avoid them."

She said she was amazed by how many children in her program have asthma: 10 percent. Each child has an "action plan," which provides a listing of their triggers and medications.

Mull and Noemi Flores, health educator at Livingston Medical Group, will be in booths at Merced College on Tuesday to provide more information about making your own action plan.

"In there it has a phone number of a doctor, a listing of medication," Flores said. "It would say something like, 'If the patient's coughing, wheezing, having shortness of breath, give this medication every 20 minutes.' Or, 'If they have purple lips, difficulty speaking, give them this medication and call 911.'"

The event is not only for those diagnosed with asthma, said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program associate of the Asthma Coalition.

It's for family members and friends of asthmatics, too.

"If you just know someone who has asthma, learn more about what they are facing," she said. "If you have it, learn ways to control it."

And those who don't know if they suffer from the condition -- but suspect they might -- should definitely stop by.

There will be an asthma screening booth with a spirometry test. This free test will measure the force of air a person breathes, helping them determine if they have asthma.

Ways to fight air pollution will also be highlighted.

Attendees can bring bicycles by the Merced Bike Coalition booth for a free checkup.

If residents' bikes work properly, they will be more encouraged to ride bikes instead of driving their cars, Kelly-Ortega said.

A point of the event, she added, is to let people know that asthma can be controlled. Her children have asthma, but continue to play soccer.

"It shouldn't prevent you from living a normal life," she said. "If you have control of asthma, you should be able to do what everyone else does."

State Homeland Security to give Metrolink \$9 million

L.A. Daily News, Friday, May 02, 2008

California Homeland Security Director Matthew Bettenhausen will hand over a \$9 million dollar check to Metrolink May 2 at the Glendale Metrolink Station to be used for a variety of safety and security enhancements.

The funds come from voter-approved Prop 1B, a measure which Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger strongly advocated to improve infrastructure, security, and public safety.

"From day one I have said that public safety is my number one priority. That is why I championed Proposition 1B and added security funds to the measure for port and transportation security," said Governor Schwarzenegger. "We must continue our efforts to upgrade the state's security infrastructure to protect lives and the economy of California."

One billion of the nearly 20 billion dollars approved will be allocated to enhance security and safety in the ports and mass transit systems. California voters approved Proposition 1B in November of 2006, which enacted the Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality, and Port Security Bond Act of 2006. California's ports handle nearly half of the nation's containerized goods.

No Breath of Fresh Air For Large U.S. Cities

Sometimes it's better not to be Number 1

Washington Post, Friday, May 2, 2008

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has been named the nation's sootiest city by the American Lung Association, overtaking longtime soot king Los Angeles, California.

"It's not that Pittsburgh has gotten worse, it's that Los Angeles has gotten better," the association's Janice Nolen said.

The "State of the Air: 2008" report, based on air-quality measurements, looks at three pollution measures: soot, or short-term particle pollution; year-round particle pollution; and ground-level ozone, caused by vehicle exhaust, among other factors.

The eight U.S. metropolitan areas said to be the most polluted by every measure were Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Fresno, Visalia-Porterfield and Hanford-Corcoran, all in California; Washington-Baltimore; St. Louis, Missouri; and Birmingham, Alabama.

The cleanest cities were Fargo, North Dakota, and Salinas, California.

New EPA Standards Would Cut Amount Of Lead in the Air

Agency Scientists Urge Stricter Limits

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post, Friday, May 2, 2008

The Environmental Protection Agency yesterday proposed tightening the federal limits for lead in the air, but the proposal fell short of what its own scientists said is required to protect public health.

Lead, which is emitted by smelters, mining, aviation fuel and waste incinerators, can enter the bloodstream and affect young children's development and IQ, as well as cause cardiovascular, blood pressure and kidney problems in adults. The United States has not changed its atmospheric lead standards in 30 years, but the Bush administration is under a court order to issue new rules by September.

U.S. emissions of lead have dropped from 74,000 tons a year three decades ago to 1,300 tons a year now, largely because leaded gasoline was taken off the market. Since 1990, however, more than 6,000 studies have examined the impact of lead on public health and the environment and have revealed that it has harmful effects at lower concentrations than previously thought.

In a conference call with reporters yesterday, EPA Deputy Administrator Marcus C. Peacock announced that the agency is proposing to cut the current standard of 1.5 micrograms of lead per cubic meter of air to a range of between 0.10 and 0.30 micrograms per cubic meter.

"We are writing the next chapter in America's clean air story," Peacock said, adding the new standard would be "up to 93 percent stronger than the current standard."

Environmentalists criticized the administration for proposing a range of lead levels that exceeds what an independent scientific advisory panel and the EPA's scientific staff identified as the maximum amount of lead that should be in the air. Both groups said the new standard should not exceed 0.20 micrograms of lead per cubic meter of air, and EPA staff members said it could be set as low as 0.02 micrograms.

The two groups also recommended that the agency average lead emissions from any given source over a single month, rather than over three months, as EPA officials proposed yesterday.

Avinash Kar, an attorney for the advocacy group Natural Resources Defense Council, called the rule "a flawed proposal" even though it is "moving in the right direction."

"According to EPA projections, emissions of 60 pounds of lead from a single pollution source could cause a median loss of up to three IQ points in children," Kar said. "Thousands of children across the United States live near lead plants emitting more than 60 pounds of lead every year. In fact, some plants emit tons of lead annually."

Frank O'Donnell, who heads the advocacy group Clean Air Watch, said the agency engaged in "statistical trickery" by providing a range of possible lead limits and lengthening the period over which polluters could average the amount of lead they put into the air.

But Rogene Henderson, who chairs the independent air advisory committee, said she was pleased with EPA's decision. "They heard us," she said.

Robert J. Meyers, principal deputy assistant administrator at the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, said officials tried to "tease out" how much of the lead in the air comes from atmospheric emissions, as opposed to the lead in pipes, paint and other sources. Adults and children inhale lead from the air, which then works its way into the bloodstream from the lungs, but people can also ingest lead that has been deposited in the soil or on surfaces in the home.

The EPA estimates that the proposed rule would apply to 16,000 sources of lead nationwide and, depending on what standard is eventually adopted, between 12 and 23 U.S. counties would fail to meet the stricter standards.

Jeffrey R. Holmstead, who directed the EPA's office of air and radiation from 2001 to 2005 and now heads the environmental strategies group at the law firm Bracewell & Giuliani, said the 60-day comment period on the rule that will start once it is published in the Federal Register "will be even more important than usual."

"Most people thought the lead issue had been solved, and it's only recently that people have begun to focus on it," he said in an interview. "They're really taking comment on a broad range here."

The agency is also soliciting comments on setting the standard higher or lower than the proposed range, up to 0.50 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

EPA wants tougher lead rules

By H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, USA Today and other papers, Friday, May 2, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency proposed a major tightening Thursday of the health standard for airborne lead, saying that current allowable concentrations do not adequately protect public health, especially children.

The lead health standard has not been changed since the initial requirement was enacted 30 years ago. Since then, lead pollution has dropped substantially, largely because it was banned for use in gasoline. Lead emissions still are an air quality problem, largely from industrial sources, the agency said.

"Our air isn't lead-free yet, so our efforts must continue," said EPA Deputy Administrator Marcus Peacock. The proposal, which would cut allowable airborne lead concentrations by up to 93 percent from today's standard, is expected to be made final by mid-September.

An EPA staff report more than a year ago suggested a broad range of options, including one that would have eliminated the lead standard altogether.

But the EPA, which in recent months has come under sharp criticism from health advocates for not being tough enough on mercury and smog air requirements, decided that the lead standard needed to be made tougher, not scrapped.

The decision was praised by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which noted the proposal also would require additional monitoring of lead levels in urban areas and near lead sources, and emphasized the need for greater protection for children.

But others said the EPA didn't go far enough since the top range of its proposed standard exceeds what a science advisory panel had recommended.

"EPA is making progress ... but this standard still falls short of what's needed to protect the public," said Avinash Kar, an attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said the proposed requirement still "would leave children in harm's way."

Peacock said lead emission into the air has declined by 98 percent since the first standard was imposed in 1978.

But, he said, annually about 1,300 tons of lead continues to be released and research has shown that even low levels of exposure to children is damaging.

Lead can be inhaled or ingested after it settles out of the air. Once in the body it rapidly is absorbed into the bloodstream, adversely affecting many organs, health experts say. Lead exposure affects the nervous system, results in learning disabilities, lower IQs and is most damaging to children. It also can result in heart problems, high blood pressure anemia and memory loss among adults.

The EPA proposed to lower the allowable concentrations of lead in the air to a range of between 0.10 to 0.30 micrograms per cubic meter, compared to the current human health standard of 1.5 micrograms per cubic meter. That means if the air does not meet that standard it will not be considered protective of public health and states or local governments must find ways to reduce lead emissions.

An EPA science advisory panel on lead in 2006 said any acceptable range should not exceed 0.20 micrograms per cubic meter.

The lead standard was the first air quality standard for health to be issued under the Clean Air Act in 1978. Unlike the standards for ozone or soot, it has not been changed even though the law said the health standards should be reviewed every five years.

In 2004, a federal court, in a lawsuit brought by the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, directed the EPA to review the lead standard. The group's members live near a major industrial lead emitter.

The EPA issued a staff paper in late December, 2006 giving a range of options from tightening the standard to eliminating it altogether. A panel of EPA science advisers strongly recommended that the lead standard needed to be "substantially lowered" and strengthened.

The court ordered the EPA to issue a proposed rule by May 1, a deadline the agency met Thursday. The court also directed that the EPA issue its final rule by September.

Facility to change garbage into gas

Waste Management to convert methane into liquified natural gas

By Janis Mara, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, May 2, 2008

In a feat of modern-day alchemy, methane generated by garbage rotting at the Altamont Landfill near Livermore will be converted to clean fuel for garbage trucks at a \$15.5 million onsite facility starting in 2009.

Houston-based Waste Management Inc. and Linde North America, a subsidiary of a German company, are working together to create what the two describe as the world's largest facility converting landfill gas to clean vehicle fuel.

Hundreds of garbage and recyclable collection trucks dumping garbage at the site will run on the clean fuel, the companies said. The novel approach will mean fewer greenhouse gases will be released into California's air, both from decomposing garbage and vehicle emissions, to the tune of 30,000 tons per year, the companies said.

A Linde-designed system will suck pollutants out of the gas and cool it to 260 degrees below zero, turning it into a liquid. Waste Management will use the liquefied natural gas in its own trucks, possibly also selling some of the estimated maximum of 13,000 million gallons the facility is expected to produce daily.

The system could go into action as soon as next year if it's approved by Bay Area air quality officials, the companies said.

The project is a "very significant step toward helping meet (Gov. Arnold) Schwarzenegger's new low-carbon fuel standard," Linda Adams, secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, said in a statement.

Class action suit filed against steel plant

By Doug Oakley, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, May 2, 2008

Seventy nine year-old Rose Evans has lived in west Berkeley for 47 years, but only recently did she figure out that the awful smell in the air might be coming from the steel plant down the street.

"Some times it smells so bad you start feeling sick and your eyes start watering," Evans said. "I didn't know what it was until those people came along and left a flier on my doorstep."

The flier, left by community activists who are fighting Pacific Steel Casting, described the symptoms that she, her late husband, seven children and five grand children have experienced over the years: a dry cough, sore throat, itchy skin and a plain old wretched feeling.

Now Evans is the lead plaintiff in a class action suit against the company. She has lived two blocks from the plant on Camelia Street for the last 45 years.

The suit is seeking damages that probably will go "far into the millions," according to Berkeley attorney Timothy Rumberger. It seeks an end to the alleged toxic air emissions the plant puts out. And it offers the company an alternative to fixing the pollution _ relocate.

The class action is the fourth pollution-based lawsuit in 18 months the plant has had to answer.

It was sued by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for violating state emissions standards, by a nonprofit called Communities for a Better Environment for violating the federal Clean Air Act and by nine neighbors who filed small claims suits.

In all of those suits, the plant has come to court-mandated settlements, and has vowed to cut emissions as a result. The small claims suit, in which area neighbors won settlements ranging from \$1,500 to \$5,000 is being appealed.

A spokeswoman for Pacific Steel declined to comment on the current suit.

For its part, the company has invested millions in air filtration devices and even allowed community groups to sift through its scrap metal to weed out potentially dirty pieces which could cause air pollution when they are melted down.

And it pays the city of Berkeley about \$1 million a year in taxes and fees on about \$100 million in yearly sales.

For all that, it continues to foul the air, activists say.

Rumberger said so far he has over 100 people who have joined the suit. It is open to anyone who lives downwind of the plant in an area roughly bounded by 2nd Street, Page Street, Kains Avenue, Marin Avenue and Buchanan Street in both Berkeley and Albany.

"The focus of this suit is on the nuisance caused by the tremendous quantities of emissions that are not being contained on their site," Rumberger said. "If your neighbor is emitting pollutants and they are landing on you, they should be stopped from doing that."

Rumberger said he is submitting evidence of dangerous heavy metals pollution from Pacific Steel from a number of agencies and groups who have done air sampling around the plant in recent years. Those include The California Air Resources Board, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Global Community Monitor and Pacific Steel's own health risk assessment that it was ordered to do by the state of California.

"One of the reasons a class action suit has been delayed is because the science hasn't been there," Rumberger said. "I have to give credit to Global Community Monitor for getting a grant from the air district to do the air testing. Without that science we didn't have the level of proof to go forward in court, and now we do."

Evans said she was happy to be lead plaintiff in the suit just to get rid of the smell. She has been breathing it for so long now, sometimes she figures she just gets used to it; until she goes somewhere else and breathes some fresh air.

"I tell you, you smell it for so long, you don't know what you are smelling," Evans said. "But if you go some place and come back you say 'what is that smell?'"

Tesla rolls out its long-awaited electric sports car

By JOHN ROGERS, Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Friday, May 2, 2008

LOS ANGELES — It's safe to say Jeremy Snyder gets a charge out of the little two-seat Tesla roadsters whenever he pulls one off the lot, and it's not because each comes equipped with an all-electric engine.

As Snyder, head of client services for Tesla, put the pedal to the metal and took one of the sleek new automobiles down a sidestreet Thursday, its lithium-ion battery-powered engine didn't give off any sparks. But it did emit a constant, powerful-sounding hum, one resembling a much quieter version of a jet taking off.

"Accelerate pretty good?" Snyder, knowing the answer, asked as he put the car through its paces.

"I call it a turbine sound," he said of the engine's distinctive hum. "Because it's an electric motor it's got 100 percent torque all the time. So it just pulls you like when you're taking off in an airplane."

After nearly two years of development, the Tesla roadster, with the sleek lines of a high-end Ferrari or Porsche, and carrying a sticker price of \$109,000, officially moves from the drawing

boards to the market next week when Tesla's first "car store" opens just around the corner from the University of California, Los Angeles.

"Because it's Hollywood and glamorous, this is the flagship store," Snyder said of opening the first in Los Angeles' tony Westwood neighborhood where Beverly Hills, Brentwood and Hollywood practically intersect.

The next store is expected to open in a couple months near Tesla's corporate headquarters in the Silicon Valley city of San Carlos, where the car was developed with venture capitalist money that included \$40 million kicked in by Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin. More stores are planned for Chicago, New York and other cities by early next year.

Although a fully loaded model can set a buyer back as much as \$124,000, that's still relatively cheap compared to a high-end Ferrari.

The car, meanwhile, goes from 0 to 60 mph in just under four seconds and tops out at a speed of 125 mph. It gets 225 miles to a charge and can be fully recharged in 3 1/2 hours, which Tesla officials say should allow most people to easily drive it to work and back home, then recharge it at night like they do a cell phone.

Driving it from Los Angeles to San Francisco, however, would require stopping at say Fresno and plugging its adapter cord into a motel room wall socket.

Because it's powered by a 6,831-cell lithium-ion battery pack, though, it has no emissions.

The car's name derives from inventor Nikola Tesla, an early pioneer in the field of electricity.

People buying the cars so far, said Doreen Allen, the company's national sales manager, are "a mixture of celebrities, early adopters, people of high wealth, as well as environmental enthusiasts."

Tesla officials say they include Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, actors George Clooney and Kelsey Grammer and musicians Will.i.am and Flea.

It will be awhile, however, before anyone who buys a Tesla next week can drive it right off the lot.

"Delivery is running about 15 months," Allen said, adding the company was surprised by the demand.

Tesla says it produced about 600 models this year and immediately sold them all. It is planning to increase production to about 1,500 next year.

Eventually the company also plans to produce cheaper cars.

"There's a model in the works right now, a five passenger sedan that will be styled comparable to the roadster but a lot roomier to accommodate families, and that is slated for 2010," Snyder said.

EPA plans tougher airborne lead limit

After adopting a standard 30 years ago that led to a 98% drop in atmospheric lead, the agency plans a further reduction that would affect up to 23 counties.

By Marla Cone, Staff Writer
L.A. Times, May 2, 2008

Building on one of its all-time success stories, the Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it plans to adopt a more stringent health standard for airborne lead to protect the nation's children.

Under the long-awaited proposal, the amount of lead allowed in the air would be dramatically lower than the current limit, which was adopted 30 years ago. Nationally, airborne lead has dropped nearly 98% since the original standard prompted the phase-out of leaded gasoline.

Inhaling or ingesting small doses of the metal can damage developing nervous systems, reducing children's IQs and causing learning disabilities and behavior problems. Since the original standard was adopted, numerous scientific studies have shown that children's brains are altered at much lower levels of lead in the bloodstream than previously thought.

Only one place in the U.S. -- Herculaneum, Mo., which has the nation's last remaining lead smelter -- had readings last year that violated the current standard for lead. Under the EPA's new proposal, as many as 23 counties could be thrown out of compliance, which means local officials there would have to adopt new regulations for smelters, foundries, mines and other industries.

None of the counties that would violate the new standard are in California; all are in the Northeast, the Southeast, the Midwest, Colorado, Utah and Texas. The Salt Lake City area is the farthest west.

Two years ago, the EPA was under fire from environmentalists and some members of Congress for including in its review the option of eliminating the lead standard. A coalition of U.S. battery makers had urged the agency to remove lead from its list of air pollutants.

In a report last November, EPA staffers recommended against that option and told top agency officials that they should set a much more stringent standard to protect children from lowered IQs. "The overall body of evidence [on lead health effects] clearly calls into question the adequacy of the current standard," the EPA staff report said.

EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson agreed, proposing Thursday to set a new standard within the range of 0.10 to 0.30 micrograms of lead per cubic meter of air. The current standard is 1.5 micrograms, exceeded only by Missouri's Jefferson County, which recorded the nation's highest reading last year with 1.93, EPA data show.

The new proposal is "up to 93% stronger" than the current standard, said Marcus C. Peacock, the EPA's deputy administrator, who added that it would "keep clean-air progress moving forward."

The EPA is under a court order to issue a final new standard by September. The agency will hold public hearings on its proposal June 12 in St. Louis and Baltimore.

Environmentalists, however, remain concerned that the upper limit under consideration is more lax than what the EPA's scientific advisors recommended. The scientists had said the standard should be no weaker than 0.20 micrograms.

Also, the EPA left some room for changing its mind, seeking advice from the public over the next 60 days about whether to adopt weaker or stronger alternatives, including levels as high as 0.50 micrograms. It also asked for comments about "when, if ever," the standard should be eliminated.

The proposal "is generally a step in the right direction, but it is still flawed," said Avinash Kar, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "This new standard simply doesn't go far enough."

Frank O'Donnell of the group Clean Air Watch said, "Although at first glance this looks promising, EPA's proposal has all the makings of a bait and switch." He speculated that the EPA would adopt the least stringent number in the range, as it did recently with a smog standard.

Most urban areas -- including Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties -- are well below the proposed limits. Lead there was at a maximum of 0.02 to 0.03 micrograms in 2005-06, an order of magnitude below the proposal, according to EPA data.

But only about 100 counties test their air for lead. The agency plans to require areas with more than 1 million people or with large sources of emissions to monitor the air for lead.

Only trace amounts of lead remain in gasoline and diesel fuel. But it still pollutes the air from smelters, foundries, mines, metals processing, cement plants and other industrial facilities, as well as some general aviation aircraft.

About 16,000 industrial sources release a total of about 1,300 tons of lead into the air each year, the EPA said.

In addition to breathing lead, children often ingest it from old paint, toys and drinking water from lead solder pipes, but those sources are regulated by other laws. Children face the most risk up to about age 6.

Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA is required every five years to review health standards for six major air pollutants, including lead. But the agency repeatedly missed its deadlines, and environmental groups in Missouri sued, winning a court order that required a proposal by Thursday.

E.P.A. Proposes New Limits on Lead in the Air, the First Revision in 30 Years

By Matthew L. Wald

N.Y. Times, Friday, May 2, 2008

Washington — For the first time in 30 years, the Environmental Protection Agency has proposed a new limit for lead concentrations in the air.

The agency is under court order to complete a new rule by Sept. 1, because of a lawsuit brought by environmentalists.

Air, however, is no longer the most common source of major exposure to lead, which can cause I.Q. loss, kidney damage and other serious health problems. In most places, water and lead paint are more troublesome sources.

Lead emissions in the air have dropped by more than 97 percent in the last three decades, because the United States banned lead as an additive in gasoline. That step was taken to allow cars to have catalytic converters, which cut the ingredients of smog, and reduced lead in the air as a side benefit.

Still, high lead concentrations exist in scattered places with iron and steel foundries, copper smelters, mining operations, waste incinerators and concrete plants, according to Lydia Wegman, an expert at the Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards. In addition, she said, gasoline with lead is still used in small airplanes.

Depending on the level at which the new standard is set, officials can identify two dozen counties that would be out of compliance. But they cannot be certain how many other counties may fail because the network of monitoring stations has been cut back.

Two counties, Jefferson in Missouri and Delaware in Indiana, still violate the old standard, which is 1.5 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

On Thursday, the E.P.A. proposed a standard between 0.1 and 0.3 micrograms per cubic meter, or one-5th to one-15th of the old level.

Robert J. Meyers, the assistant administrator for air and radiation, said the standard was reviewed in the early 1990s but not revised. Late last year, the E.P.A. raised the idea of eliminating the standard entirely.

A lawyer at the Natural Resources Defense Council, Avinash Kar, said his group was pleased that the agency had dropped the effort to abandon the standard. But he said the higher end of the proposed range, 0.3 micrograms, was above the level unanimously recommended by the agency's panel of outside scientific advisers.

"It's generally a step in the right direction, but still flawed," Mr. Kar said.

Senator Barbara Boxer, the California Democrat who is chairwoman of the Committee on Environment and Public Works, said the proposed standard was not strict enough to protect children. "Once again, the Bush administration has failed to heed its scientists," Mrs. Boxer said.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, May 2, 2008:](#)

Air board must be aggressive

Cost of pollution outweighs cost to retrofit older diesel engines.

The Valley air district board came up short again Wednesday when it adopted a cleanup plan for deadly particulate matter and chemical pollution. The plan would put the Valley into safe levels for pollution by 2014 -- if it works.

One problem with the new plan is that it relies on the state instituting an aggressive new standard for diesel pollution from trucks -- something that's hardly a given.

The staff of the state Air Resources Board released a draft of the new rules earlier this year that won praise from environmentalists and the medical community. But the trucking industry and its allies in agriculture and the state Chamber of Commerce are already chipping away at the plan, citing the high cost of retrofitting or replacing older diesel engines. Older engines pollute far more than newer models.

They're right about the cost. It takes between \$15,000 and \$30,000 to retrofit an older truck with new technology, and a brand new truck can easily run \$150,000 or more. But there are some state funds already available to help defray those costs, and others ought to be found. In any case, the health and economic costs of not cleaning up diesel engines far outweigh the price tag for retrofitting and replacement.

Whatever new diesel rule the state adopts won't be settled until the fall. And then it won't actually take effect until 2014 -- just as the Valley district hopes to meet the particulate matter standards. But what if it doesn't work out that way?

The problem is acute now. The fine particles -- called PM-2.5 -- are so tiny they can be absorbed directly into the bloodstream from the lungs. There, they cause all manner of illness, and as many as 1,000 premature deaths in the Valley each year. Those costs are part of the \$3 billion-plus Valley residents pay each year because of our bad air.

Activists insisted for months that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wasn't doing all it could to reduce particulate pollution.

In the end, a familiar pattern emerged: The air board, top-heavy with supervisors from the eight counties in the district, adopted a less aggressive approach than it might have. One positive note: Dr. John Telles, the newest member of the district board, was one of three dissenting votes. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger recently appointed the Fresno cardiologist to fill a new seat reserved for a health expert. He was joined by Henry

T. Perea of the Fresno City Council and Arvin council member Raji Brar.

The board action came on the same day the American Lung Association's annual State of the Air report card was released. The report noted some improvements in the Valley's air quality, which is good news, but it also underlined the problem.

Bonnie Holmes-Gen of the American Lung Association of California put it succinctly: "You're still receiving an 'F,'" she said. "The air is unhealthy."

In other words, we still have a very long way to go. And the persistent, nagging reality is we're not moving as fast as we could.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, May 2, 2008:](#) Synchronize those stop lights to save gasoline

At a time when gas prices are soaring and the Valley's air quality is a concern, I am surprised that the Fresno City Council and the mayor haven't taken up the issue of seeing that all traffic signals are timed and signs posted indicating the speed necessary to maintain traffic flow.

And why hasn't the City Council pressed the company who installed those failed traffic camera poles to have them removed? Some of the same people who should have made this happen already are trying to get re-elected.

Dennis Housepian, Fresno

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Friday, May 2, 2008](#)

Drill for oil; look at alternative fuels

Barack Obama blamed high gas prices on the political establishment. But who is going to investigate Sens. Obama and Hillary Clinton on their opposition to oil drilling? Drilling on 2,000 acres out of 19 million could reduce gas prices by about 40 cents per gallon if Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is tapped. Voting against this drilling were Obama, Clinton and both California senators.

Also, the Bakken Formation is a massive oil reserve in North Dakota and Montana. It's the largest domestic oil discovery since Alaska's Prudhoe Bay and has the potential to eliminate all American dependence on foreign oil. Those billions of barrels will cost Americans just \$16 per barrel!

Denny Klein's invention, which converts water into HHO by combining water and electricity, will produce a car that, on a 100-mile trip, used only 4 ounces of water. This was presented to Congress and has been on TV. Instead, we get ethanol. "It's a crime against humanity that food should be diverted to biofuels," said India's finance minister.

The Wall Street Journal has pointed out that over the next 30 years, emissions from corn ethanol will be twice as high as from gasoline.

Put pressure on Congress to take advantage of our resources.

POLLY WRIGHT, Groveland

[Tri-Valley Herald, Letter to the Editor, Friday, May 2, 2008](#)

Letters from our readers

The Saturday Forum of April 12 letters regarding "reasons, solutions to rising gas prices" were mostly do-nothing type, frivolous, or uneducated.

Out of 16 letters only two make sense — "more efficient cars" by Juergen Struck and "Get out of Iraq" by Ed Chainey.

As the second solution undoubtedly will restrict inflation of the dollar and increase supply of cheap oil, it will not save us from a disaster related to gas consumption.

For years, the American people were advised to get out of the gas guzzlers and switch to efficient cars. It doesn't work. This encourages the automobile and oil industries to impede any progress in production of the efficient cars.

Struck is right, the Europeans are paying twice as much for gasoline, but the mileage on their small cars is more than twice per gallon of gas.

Here, I would like to learn while we are promoting various gasoline substitutes, nobody is promoting a conversion of coal to gasoline?

In America we have abundance of coal. Adolf Hitler conquered Europe driving his war machine on gasoline made out of coal.

Coal to gasoline process is quite clean. Can anyone educate me on this subject?

Yan S. Pawlak, Clayton

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Letter to the Editor, Friday, May 2, 2008:](#)

Bike lanes for Visalia would be progressive

Following is a copy of an e-mail I wrote to the City Council members regarding the inclusion of bike lanes on Acequia.

This decision has already been made by the council, but there have been rumblings of dissent from the business community. This is my response:

Dear Council members,

I am writing to express my unflagging support for the council's previously approved decision regarding the inclusion of bike lanes along Acequia Avenue. While I was strongly supportive of the alternative that called for continuous lanes along the entire relevant length of Acequia, I was pleased with the council's wise decision to compromise.

I believe that the Chamber of Commerce and Kaweah Delta District Hospital should be equally willing to accept the compromise. The city has done a lot to increase the availability of parking through the addition of several parking structures. Compared with the positive effects of including bike lanes along Acequia, I believe the loss of street parking spaces to be an acceptable outcome. Many of these positive effects have been enumerated already by many well-spoken citizens; I will speak to what I believe to be the core of the issue.

Our economy is in the midst of fundamental change, as the era of cheap energy draws to a close. We have the opportunity to progress willingly into the new era, by thinking of ways to plan our cities, our industry and our way of life that do not depend on the unlimited supply of fossil fuels that we have grown accustomed to consuming so voraciously. Bicycle transportation is a no-brainer. It's low-tech, it's cheap, it's enjoyable, it's good for our bodies, and just about everybody already owns a bike. Best of all, as a form of "alternative energy," it's possible now - we don't have to wait for science to develop a way to mass-market bicycles.

At this critical juncture, does Visalia wish to exhibit a progressive spirit that embraces a variety of solutions to the energy crisis, or an obstinate, inflexible attitude that stubbornly insists that the most important element to a city's growth is ease of automobile transportation (and parking of said automobiles)?

To some citizens, this might seem like a small issue with only minor implications for Visalia's growth, but it has major implications for Visalia's reputation as a forward-thinking, community-oriented, environmentally responsible city.

We've got traffic congestion problems. We've got quality-of-life problems. We've got health and obesity problems. [We've got air pollution problems](#). And let me tell you, as a cyclist in this town, we've got cyclist-safety problems. And yes, maybe we have a little bit of a parking problem downtown, at peak business hours. But if we change our attitude about the bottom line, and consider that five of those six problems could be addressed by discouraging the use of private cars for every little errand, and even for commuting, then the loss of 35 parking spaces starts to seem like a small price to pay. Maybe it even looks like a good thing.

JESSI SNYDER, Visalia

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA proposed stringent measures for the control of air pollution in order to protect the healths of infants in the US. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Mayor control a la contaminación para cuidar la salud infantil

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, May 02, 2008

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental propuso medidas más estrictas contra la contaminación del aire para cuidar la salud de la población infantil estadunidense.

El administrador nacional de dicha agencia, Stephen Johnson dijo que los niveles de plomo en el aire deben establecerse entre una y tres décimas de microgramo por metro cuadrado de aire.

De adoptarse la medida, el reglamento reduciría, como máximo permitido, a una quinta parte la contaminación por plomo que ahora está permitida.

El estándar actual concede hasta 1.5 microgramos de plomo por metro cuadrado de aire.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses residents and authority clash on air issue; Valley Air District approve Plan PM2.5](#)

Residentes y autoridades chocan sobre el aire

Zaidee Stavely

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, May 01, 2008

Las autoridades del aire del Valle de San Joaquín aprobaron ayer un plan para regular la materia, partícula 2.5. El Valle de San Joaquín está entre las zonas con el aire más contaminado de todo el país, y las partículas 2.5 se consideran particularmente peligrosas por ser tan pequeñas. Para dar una idea, casi 30 partículas de este tipo caben en el grueso de un cabello humano. Residentes y activistas criticaron el plan del Distrito diciendo que depende demasiado de una regulación de camiones que implementará el estado de California.

"Se van a tener que esperar hasta 2014 para agarrar las reducciones del estado", dijo Liza Bolaños, vocera de la Coalición de Calidad del Aire del Valle Central. "Lo que nosotros estamos pidiendo, es que hagan algo aquí mismo en nuestro valle antes de ese tiempo porque no podemos esperar".

El plan del referido Distrito ahora pasará a manos de las autoridades estatales.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses grades given to counties of California by the American Lung Association.](#)

Asociación Americana del Pulmón califica a condados en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, May 01, 2008

La Asociación Americana del Pulmón, o de salud pulmonar presentará hoy desde el Valle Imperial de California sus calificaciones para cada uno de los condado en el estado.

El Valle Imperial, con una población predominantemente latina, ha tenido en los últimos años una calificación de "F" en la calidad del aire que respiran sus residentes.

La asociación basará las calificaciones para los 58 condados de California en reportes de análisis de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental en los últimos cuatro años.

Al acto de la asociación en la ciudad de El Centro asistirán representantes de Mexicali, México, del Comité del Valle, ambientalistas y del centro médico regional, entre otros.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Los Angeles loses its title as the most contaminated city to Pittsburgh.](#)

Pittsburgh, la más contaminada

Los Ángeles perdió el envenenado título

EFE

Univision, Thursday, May 01, 2008

LOS ANGELES - Tras una década en lo más alto de la lista, la región de Los Ángeles (California) ha sido superada por la zona metropolitana de Pittsburgh (Pensilvania) como el área más afectada por partículas contaminantes, según un estudio publicado por la Asociación Americana del Pulmón (ALA).

"Se siente bien"

En una rueda de prensa celebrada hoy en Echo Park (Los Ángeles), el alcalde de la ciudad, Antonio Villaraigosa dijo estar "orgulloso" por decir que, "por primera vez", se siente "bien" por ser "el número dos".

Según el documento, desde 2004 a 2006 el área de Los Ángeles que incluye desde Riverside (al este) hasta Long Beach (al sur) tuvo menos períodos de 24 horas con partículas contaminantes que Pittsburgh, conocida como la ciudad del acero por su gran industria.

No obstante, la región angelina sigue líder como la que más daño provoca en los niveles de ozono y en el cómputo global anual. "Aún estamos en la lista", agregó Villaraigosa. "Tenemos que seguir hacia adelante, hay trabajo por hacer aún".

Mala nota

De hecho, casi todas las regiones del sur de California recibieron una nota de "F", el equivalente a nueve o más días en los que el nivel de calidad del aire es calificado como "dañino".

En el estudio de ALA se advierte del efecto del ozono en los pulmones. "Imagina poner ácido directamente en un ojo", dijo el doctor Tony Gerber. "Es igual de corrosivo".

Las partículas contaminantes, que quedan atrapadas en los pulmones, las componen residuos sólidos y líquidos en el aire que provienen de las emanaciones de la gasolina de los coches, las plantas de carbón o de quedar madera o bosques.

Miles de muertos

Alrededor de 8,800 muertes prematuras anuales en California están relacionadas con el ozono y las partículas contaminantes, según el doctor Sonal Petel, alergólogo y pediatra del hospital White Memorial al este de Los Ángeles.

El condado de San Bernardino obtuvo los peores registros de ozono, seguido de Kern, Riverside, Tulare y el centro de Los Ángeles.

Sin embargo, durante la última década, las partículas contaminantes en California se han reducido en casi un tercio, según el estudio.

Malos presagios

"Mientras el área metropolitana de Los Ángeles continúe su tradición a la hora de controlar la polución del aire de forma agresiva, tarde o temprano más ciudades nos sobrepasarán en esa lista", afirmó Sam Atwood, portavoz del Control de Calidad del Aire en la Costa Sur.

"En una ciudad tan conocida por el humo y la contaminación, hemos logrado un progreso significativo", señaló el alcalde de Los Ángeles.

"Esperamos estar fuera de la lista completamente en los próximos años", concluyó.