

Rule meant to reduce bad air focuses on employers

By Jason Kotowski, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, May 9, 2010

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is hoping that a rule it adopted last year will prod businesses to take steps to help reduce what's long been among the nation's worst air quality.

Rule 9410, also called Employer Based Trip Reduction, provides a wide variety of options businesses can choose from to encourage employees to make fewer trips during the workday. Suggestions range from carpool programs, shuttles and employer-organized lunch delivery to on-site services like child-care, banking, health facilities and dry cleaning. There are about 80 options in all.

"We tried to structure the rule in a way that it gives employers a lot of flexibility," said Jessica Fiero, senior air quality specialist at the district.

The rule won't apply to all companies. There have to at least be 100 "eligible" employees at one worksite, Fiero said, meaning full-time employees who arrive at work between 6 and 10 a.m. Farm workers are exempt.

The rule focuses on those hours because that's when a lot of traffic congestion and high emission levels occur, Fiero said. Companies that fall under the rule must register with the district by July 1.

A points system has been set up so companies of differing sizes have to reach a certain number of points to be in compliance with the rule, which is being phased in over the next few years, Fiero said. Companies with 100 to 249 eligible employees must get 44 points, while companies of 250 or more eligible employees must get 66 points, Fiero said.

Points are earned through the options set up under the rule. For example, on-site child care is worth seven points, on-site dry cleaning one point and employer-provided bicycles two points.

Fiero said companies also get points for any programs they're already doing. And if companies at first aren't in compliance, the district is going to work with them instead of immediately imposing a fine.

Some companies, such as State Farm Insurance, are way ahead of the game.

The company has a full-service cafeteria, oil change and car wash service, on-site credit union and ATM machine and numerous other services for its employees, said Glenn Lynch, supervisor in the administrative services division.

"We're well positioned to meet the requirements for the first couple years of the program," Lynch said.

Future plans include creating a database showing which employees live in the same area so they'll have the option to contact each other and organize a carpool, Lynch said. There are already people carpooling to their jobs at State Farm, but there isn't a formal, company-sponsored program.

Lynch said the district did a good job in creating a program that doesn't put a heavy financial burden on large companies and provides obtainable goals.

Lucinda Wasson, director of public health nursing at Kern County's Public Health Department, said their staff is required to carpool when going to field visits and clinic programs at district offices. Whether meetings are held in or out of town, staff need to ride together.

She said employees have been fine with the policy because they understand the need to reduce emissions. And Wasson said she's all for the district's rule.

"I think it's a great idea," she said. "We have such a significant problem with respiratory diseases and poor air quality."

Kern Council of Governments Rideshare Coordinator Anne Schoolcraft said there are a lot of resources available to help companies meet their points requirements. Schoolcraft said carpooling, biking or, if possible, walking to work are great alternatives to driving by yourself each day.

And even if a person can only carpool one day a week, that's still one day when they're reducing emissions in the air and making a difference, Schoolcraft said.

"Whatever you can do helps," she said.

For more information on alternative methods of transportation or to register in a carpool database, go to www.commutekern.org.

The following are ways to save money on gasoline:

- Carpool whenever possible.
- Make sure tires are inflated to the correct pressure.
- Maintain a constant pressure on the gas pedal instead of accelerating up and down.
- Never let the car idle while running into a store or doing other errands.
- Use the air conditioner instead of opening the windows when driving at higher speeds.
- Practice trip linking. Schedule errands when driving home from work or school.

Source: Kern Commuter Connection

Lawsuits rip feds' air-cleanup efforts in Valley

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 6, 2010

Air-quality activists filed three lawsuits Thursday against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, claiming federal officials are neglecting cleanup plans for the San Joaquin Valley.

Two suits were filed in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, challenging EPA's approval of the Valley's cleanup plan for the one-hour ozone standard. Such appeals of approved air plans go directly to the appellate court.

Activists say officials failed to analyze the vehicle rules accounting for the biggest ozone reductions. Now the Valley, one of the nation's most-polluted air basins, is on the verge of missing the Nov. 15 cleanup deadline for the standard.

"We are suing EPA today because EPA has approved a plan that has failed," said Salvador Partida of the Committee for a Better Arvin, representing a city that frequently violates the ozone threshold.

"The Valley will not meet the 2010 deadline."

The third activist lawsuit asks U.S. District Court in Oakland to force EPA to make a decision on the Valley's plan to stop violations of the eight-hour or daylong ozone standard. Activists say EPA should have accepted or rejected the plan a year ago.

EPA officials had not seen the court papers Thursday and could not comment. But the agency is working hard with state and local air authorities clean up the Valley, said Kerry Drake, associate director of the EPA's regional air division, based in San Francisco.

"The San Joaquin Valley is one of our highest priorities," he said.

The nonprofit watchdog Center on Race, Poverty, & the Environment, with offices in the Valley and San Francisco, also filed a notice of intent to sue EPA over the Valley's particle pollution cleanup plan.

In the one-hour ozone lawsuit in San Francisco, the center represents Committee for a Better Arvin, Comité Residentes Organizados al Servicio del Ambiente Sano and Association of Irritated Residents.

All are based in the Valley.

The Valley-based Medical Advocates for Healthy Air and the Sierra Club filed a separate action in the one-hour ozone case in San Francisco.

The Medical Advocates and Sierra Club also are the plaintiffs in the eight-hour ozone action filed in Oakland. They are represented by Oakland-based Earthjustice, another nonprofit watchdog.

Environmental groups sue EPA over valley pollution

The Associated Press

S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, May 7, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO—Lawsuits filed by environmental groups are claiming that federal regulators are failing to properly respond to pollution in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Two lawsuits filed Thursday in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and a third filed in U.S. District Court in Oakland are challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's approval of pollution-reduction plans in the state's farm belt.

The lawsuits assert that EPA could do more to fight pollution by forcing California Air Resources Board and local air quality control boards to better monitor the region.

EPA officials didn't return a telephone call placed after hours in Washington, D.C.

The lawsuits were filed by Earthjustice lawyers on behalf of Medical Advocates for Healthy Air and the Sierra Club and several community activists.

Activists sue EPA, say it is ignoring San Joaquin Valley cleanup

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

In the Sacramento Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Friday, May 7, 2010

Air-quality activists filed three lawsuits Thursday against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, claiming federal officials are neglecting cleanup plans for the San Joaquin Valley.

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New plant will be a (natural) gas

Work could begin in July

By Daniel Thigpen

Stockton Record, Monday, May 10, 2010

LODI - Now that state energy regulators have OK'd a new power plant in Lodi - which, when built, will be the largest in San Joaquin County - construction could begin in July.

The Northern California Power Agency, the public agency financing, building and operating the planned 296-megawatt natural gas plant, says that the Lodi Energy Center will be the most efficient of its kind in Northern California.

It is scheduled to go online by 2012. The advanced turbine technology will be cleaner and faster than older natural gas plants, officials say.

Power points

Natural gas is a fossil fuel, so the Lodi Energy Center will emit pollutants. But officials say the plant will be the most efficient of its kind in Northern California. Here are some facts officials cite in their support for the plant.

- Natural gas turbines [emit the most pollutants](#) each time they start up. Older plants take about four to six hours to start up when flipped on, said Ken Speer of the Northern California Power Agency. The Lodi Energy Center, Speer said, will take only about an hour to start up because the technology has advanced.
- The "fast-start" technology, Speer said, also means the power plant is more flexible to meet fluctuations in electricity demand. It also can be shut down more often if demand increases for renewable energy sources, he said.
- In its application to the California Energy Commission, NCPA officials said they ruled out other energy sources. There are no geothermal or hydroelectric resources in San Joaquin County, they said, and not enough biomass fuels, such as wood waste, locally to meet power demands. Coal and oil are dirtier to burn, they said, and solar and wind are too static a power source to meet fluctuations in electricity demand.

Here's a look at how the \$452 million plant will work, and other facts related to its operation.

Tips from local experts on asthma relief in the Valley

By Brandon Santiago

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, May 7, 2010

This spring is shaping up to be one of the worst allergy and asthma seasons in several years according to reports released by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA reports that asthma is a serious, life-threatening respiratory disease that affects more than 20 million Americans. Rates of asthma have risen sharply over the past 30 years, particularly among children ages 5 to 14.

So the month of May has been declared National Allergy and Asthma Awareness Month, and in response to the growing asthma problem, EPA created a national, multifaceted asthma education and outreach program to share information about environmental factors - found indoors and outdoors - that trigger asthma.

All across the nation and until the end of this month, events and forums are being held to help educate the public about prevention, symptoms and dangers of asthma. World Asthma Day was held earlier this week, this year's goal being to reduce exposure to indoor asthma triggers and improve the quality of life for 6.5 million people by 2012.

Locally the biggest issue for those with asthma and those at risk to get it is the fact the air quality in the Central Valley is very poor. Recently the American Lung Association released the State of the Air 2010 report card on air quality, ranking cities most affected by outdoor air pollution.

This year, Hanford was ranked the eighth most polluted city by year-round particle pollution. Other Valley cities made the list as well, such as Bakersfield, Visalia and Fresno, ranked second, fourth and sixth respectively.

"It's obvious why asthma rates are increasing, because each year the air quality, ozone levels and particulate matter are getting worse year by year," said Dr. Malik Baz of Baz Allergy, Asthma & Sinus Center, which has several locations in the Valley including Hanford.

Baz said asthma can occur at any age and is caused by the swelling of the inner lung lining because of allergic and environmental triggers. He said allergies is the main cause of asthma and good control of allergies has been known to stabilize the presence of asthma and in some cases prevent it.

"Allergies and asthma, for the most part, go hand in hand. It is very rare for someone to have asthma and not have allergies," Baz said. "Usually only adults over the age of 40 develop asthma without allergies, and that is rare. Almost all of cases of asthma in children are related to or triggered by allergies."

Baz said many new treatments for asthma actually treat allergy symptoms, because suppression of those symptoms decreases swelling and inflammation of the lungs.

"It is just unfortunate that most asthma problems occur in spring, during usually the busiest time for students with all their exams and testing and stress about graduating," he said. "Asthma and allergies are very mentally exhausting and emotionally taxing. They decrease ability to focus and concentrate, and increase irritability causing students to do poorly and its not their fault."

Bill Legere, a certified asthma educator for Adventist Health and member of the Kings County Asthma Coalition, said the other major issue is that asthma has so many triggers along with allergies.

"There's such variety ranging from emotional stress, to exercise, to cold air, to household cleaners and pool chemicals and more," Legere said. "You could put 25 people in a room with asthma and have them each exposed to a possible trigger and more than likely each might respond to a different one."

He said that's what makes managing asthma tricky. Everyone needs to know what their individual trigger is in order to know how to properly treat it.

"I suggest keeping an asthma diary. Every time you have symptoms or an attack, write it down with all the details; where you were, what you were wearing, what the weather was like and such," he said. "Pretty soon after a few entries I guarantee you will see a pattern."

Legere said the Valley is not particularly kind to those with asthma.

"The Valley unfortunately is host to the entire spectrum of asthma triggers from allergies to extreme heat; everyone just needs to be aware of pollen and mold counts and air quality for each day in order to take the necessary precautions," he said.

Valley officials present wish list in Washington, pressing Capitol Hill for funds Representatives state case for money for Highway 99, high-speed rail, other projects.

By Michael Doyle, Washington Bureau
Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, May 6, 2010

WASHINGTON -- San Joaquin Valley officials have brought a billion-dollar wish list to Capitol Hill this week, though they know they'll be lucky to get a fraction of what they're asking for.

Representing eight Valley counties, officials want money for upgrading Highway 99. They want high-speed rail funding. They'd like help with cleaning the region's air. Housing assistance would be nice, too.

"It doesn't hurt to let them know early and often what you want," Jesse Brown, executive director of the Merced County Association of Governments, explained Wednesday.

Brown is one of about 20 representatives of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council pressing for federal dollars this week.

It's the latest chapter in regional lobbying, though it involves some tried and true techniques.

Individual Valley counties sent delegations to Washington earlier this year. Often operating under the name "One Voice," or something similar, the county delegations sought congressional support for their respective priorities.

Now in its second year, the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council's Washington lobbying trip extends this idea to the broader region between Stockton and Bakersfield. The mayors, county supervisors, county executives and planners refer to their venture as the "Valley Voice" effort.

"The only projects we talk about are the ones we can agree on," Stanislaus County Supervisor Jeff Grover said. "If we can't agree on it, we don't talk about it."

Highway 99 is priority No. 1. In briefings conducted in a fifth-floor House office Wednesday, and over dinner hosted Wednesday night at the popular Johnny's Half Shell restaurant, the Valley officials made their case for \$1 billion worth of specific Highway 99 work.

This includes, for instance, spending \$205 million to widen the highway to six lanes between Prosperity and Goshen in Tulare County and \$73 million for widening it to eight lanes from north Modesto to the San Joaquin County line.

The goal is to get as many of the specific Highway 99 projects as possible folded into a transportation authorization bill.

These bills are supposed to be passed every few years, though deadlines sometimes slip.

"I'm just not sure we're going to have a transportation bill this year," cautioned Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia.

Nunes' morning presentation was followed by an appearance by Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, as the delegation tried touching all of the regional bases.

The Valley delegation is also going off-road, pressing for federal help with a proposed short-haul railroad designed to take farm goods to the Port of Oakland. Officials want the federal government to pick up half of the cost of a proposed high-speed rail system for which California voters have already approved \$9.9 billion.

Legislatively, the Valley officials want the region designated as a new "air quality empowerment zone" that would potentially free up federal grant funding.

"We know that money is tight, and it's going to be a battle," acknowledged Madera Mayor Pro Tempore Robert Poythress, "but if we weren't here as a coalition voicing the importance of these projects, we would be further behind the eight ball."

Leaders upbeat at Great Valley Center's annual conference

By Garth Stapley, The Modesto Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, May 8, 2010

MODESTO -- Despite rocky times, the Central Valley has much to be proud of and good things coming, speaker after speaker told a relatively small audience Thursday at the Great Valley Center's annual conference.

For the first time in 13 years, the think tank based in Modesto is holding its yearly gathering of policy-makers and community movers and shakers here.

This year's theme, "Valley Up," is putting a decidedly upbeat spin on a region beset by high unemployment, obesity rates and numbers of foreclosed homes. Presenters acknowledged challenges but focused on what's going right, such as improved air quality, more access to the Internet, more high school students heading to college and increased regional planning.

"I valleyed up when I got here from the Bay Area" many years ago, said Luis Molina, Stanislaus County Board of Education chairman.

He was among several to use the new rally cry to describe a can-do attitude, in the vein of "man up" or "cowboy up." Molina spoke proudly of a regional collaborative and the Stanislaus Military Academy as model education programs.

Modesto City Councilman Joe Muratore sang the city's praises while telling a crowd of a little more than 100 that Modesto has a lot of pride and promise. As for the crippling recession, Muratore said, "If you want to change a large organization, you have to do it in times of crisis."

Whether people stayed home because the conference was not held in Sacramento or because they're not traveling as much these days was anyone's guess. Previous conferences have drawn several hundreds of participants, or several times the number that came to the Gallo Center for the Arts.

"We wanted to shake things up this year," said David Hosley, Great Valley Center president, who acknowledged in November that he was taking a gamble with the move. It could be temporary, he said at the time.

Another new feature: interactive audience polling on top issues, with instant results.

Seventy-six percent of respondents don't trust government leaders to contain urban sprawl, and people who think quality of life is improving in the Valley barely outnumbered those who don't.

Election: Incumbent J. Steven Worthley, challengers Juan Guerrero, Brian Rouch, Don "Donny" Barton and Maggie Florez vie for District 4 Tulare County supervisor seat

By David Castellon

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, May 7, 2010

Maggie Florez

- Age: 40
- Residence: Visalia

Florez did not respond to request for an interview.

J. Steven Worthley (incumbent)

- Age: 56
- Residence: East of Dinuba
- Family: Married 30 years to Vicki L. Worthley. Father of four.
- Occupation: Tulare County supervisor since 1998. He's a lawyer, handling will and probate cases in his spare time.
- Education: Bachelor of arts degree in history from Occidental College, Los Angeles, 1975; juris doctorate degree from the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law, Sacramento, 1978.
- Interesting fact: Worthley was awarded his 10-year-pin as a county employee during Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting, nearly a year and a half after his actual 10 year-anniversary.
- Politics: Worthley said his interest in county politics began with work as legal counsel for Sequoia Forest Industries in Dinuba dealing with government agencies.

An appointment and re-election that kept him on the Dinuba Elementary School District board for more than 12 years further piqued his interest in politics, and he ran successfully in 1997 for the supervisor seat vacated by Charles Harness.

"I would probably describe myself as a fiscal conservative and a private-property-rights advocate," he said.

Property rights come up a lot in county government, he said, from granting permits to making land-use decisions.

"I'd say I'm a much better supervisor today than I could have possibly been [when first elected] because of my experiences," Worthley said.

Worthley is vice chairman of the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District's governing board, and would become chairman if re-elected. He said he would work to continue cleaning the Valley's air while trying to avoid regulations that are overly restrictive for farming businesses.

Priorities if re-elected

- Work to get the county General Plan approved, possibly this summer.
- Continue fiscally conservative county policies that have prevented the severe financial fall-out experienced by some other counties. County officials are working to avoid an estimate \$6 million budget shortfall next fiscal year.
- Work to make the county friendly to industry by reducing red tape.

Juan Guerrero

- Age: 52
- Residence: South of Yetttem

- Family: Married 32 years to Stella Guerrero. Father of three, with five grandchildren.
- Occupation: Tulare, Kern and Fresno county gang-intervention supervisor for Proteus, Inc. Director of the Wittman Community Center in Visalia.
- Education: Associate of arts degree in liberal studies from College of the Sequoias, Visalia, 1980.
- Interesting fact: Guerrero's mother told him his first name came from the Virgin of San Juan de los Lago. A shrine to the virgin in central Mexico is one of that country's most visited pilgrimage sites.
- Politics: As an employee for Proteus helping people in northern Tulare County get job training, adult education and other services, Guerrero said he spent a lot of his work time and free time working with residents to obtain childcare services and combating the area's drug problems.

Guerrero said Supervisor Charles Harness was an important ally who inspired him. When Harness did not seek re-election in 1997, Guerrero ran for his seat. He lost to Worthley.

Guerrero joined Visalia Unified school board in 2001 but lost his re-election bid last year.

As a supervisor, Guerrero said he would be "basically a community servant."

"I work a lot with the community," he said.

Priorities if elected

- Promote jobs in the north county, particularly agriculture jobs.
- Lobby hard to get to state to again reimburse counties for the Williamson Act property-tax breaks long provided to owners of farm land. That funding was cut off this fiscal year due to the state's budget problem, and Guerrero said layoffs at large agriculture businesses could follow.
- Hire gang mediators as a gang-prevention measure.
- Replace the county's chief administrative officer, Jean Rousseau. Guerrero said Rousseau has given bad advice to supervisors regarding their meeting and fiscal practices.
- Seek a 20-percent rollback of supervisors' pay.

Brian Rouch

- Age: 32
- Residence: Dinuba
- Marital status: Single
- Occupation: A managing member of Inerg LLC., Visalia. The company helps locate and acquire sites for electrical power plants for communities.
- Education: Graduate degree in political science from Boston College, with a focus on energy policy, 2006; undergraduate degrees from Trinity Western University, British Columbia, in political science and philosophy, 2002.
- Interesting fact: From middle school through high school, Rouch (rhymes with "now") ran a tree-trimming business with friends. He used some of the money he earned to help start Inerg.
- Politics: Although this is Rouch's first run for elected office, he has worked with the city of Visalia on its general plan as well as on the city's Growth Task Force because of his experience in land-use issues and business development, he said.

"That's where my experience comes from — in business," Rouch said. "That's probably why I'm a fiscal conservative. When you earn your own money, you are very conscious of how other people are spending it."

He said he's also concerned about the plight of the needy.

"I was raised as a Christian, was taught we need to take care of those legitimately unfortunate," he said, mentioning specifically those without access to good food or water.

Priorities if elected

- Revamp rules for waste haulers in the county by creating a competitive bidding process for trash contracts and requiring haulers to dump their trash in Tulare County dumps rather than outside-the-area dumps that charge lower fees. He said he'd use \$3.4 million of the \$5 million a year he expects to be generated to cover Williamson Act reimbursement losses and offset public safety cuts.

Gas mowers a menace, to Earth and us

By Sandy Bauers, The Philadelphia Inquirer
In the Sacramento Bee, Monday, May 10, 2010

In the growing movement to replace chemical-guzzling lawns with greener domains - think rain gardens with native species - one environmental evil of the lawn is often overlooked: the gasoline mower.

These things, it turns out, are the smokestacks of garden equipment.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, mowing your lawn with a typical gasoline-powered mower for one sweaty hour unleashes as many hydrocarbons as driving the average car almost 200 miles.

Hydrocarbons are the chemicals that on hot summer days - when most people mow their lawns - contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone, or smog.

Environmental problems also contribute to health problems.

Smog can cause shortness of breath, wheezing and coughing. It can exacerbate chronic lung problems such as asthma and emphysema.

So mowers "are running typically at the absolute worst time for breathers," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clear Air Watch, a national advocacy group.

The EPA has issued new mower rules, requiring tiny catalytic converters, but they don't take effect until next year.

There's an alternative, and I don't mean those little push mowers that my grandfather had, although they certainly have a fan base among super-ecos and fitness devotees.

I mean electric mowers. To be sure, the early versions had their limitations, chief among them the power cords.

O'Donnell has used one for 17 years. Reaching the edges of his lawn requires three extension cords, which means the project inevitably involves tangles and cursing. But he still loves it.

Electric mowers now have rechargeable batteries. Neuton and Black & Decker are two of the major companies that make the mowers. Typically they'll mow a third of an acre - the average size of the U.S. lawn - per charge.

In 2008, Neuton mowers were part of two industrial innovation museum exhibits in Chicago and Washington. But the mowers were already getting plenty of attention in more practical circles.

In recent years, dozens of regional air pollution agencies around the country have begun lawn mower trade-in programs, offering electrics at a reduced price if people fork over a working gas model.

They incorporate catchy little phrases urging residents to "mow down air pollution" or "get your grass off gas."

California's South Coast Air Quality Management District - recall the brown haze of Los Angeles - has been doing it for eight years, and last year's offering of 4,800 mowers sold out in four days.

This year, the agency is offering 9,380 mowers. Four models that normally would cost \$349 to \$499 sell for \$100 to \$165.

The agency and the state make up the \$1.6 million difference.

When this year's program is over, 37,800 gas lawn mowers will have been ditched.

"To take thousands and thousands of these polluting machines out of people's backyards and send them to the scrap heap and replace them with zero-emission rechargeable battery mowers is a big step in the right direction," said spokesman Sam Atwood.

If the pollution savings don't motivate you, here are some mowers with a high fun factor. Several companies offer robotic electric mowers that zip around an area defined by special markers, chomping on the greenery as they go.

One is even solar-powered.

Not everyone is instantly awed by electric mowers.

Carrie Edwards of Linwood, N.J., won a Neuton in a raffle sponsored by the regional Clean Air Council in 2008.

When the mower arrived and they opened the box, her husband and sons sniffed. They thought it looked girlie.

So at first, they stuck with gas. She figured it was a macho thing. "They just think they have to get out there with the stinky old lawn mower."

But Edwards didn't. "You just push a button. There's no cord-pulling, there's no gas, there's no smell," she said.

Neither was there spillage - one more environmental woe for gas lawn mowers.

Best of all, perhaps, she found the mower lessened another kind of pollution: noise.

"It's like a hum," Edwards said of the machine. "You don't disturb anyone."

How could this not catch on? Sure enough, the other day, Edwards noticed that one of her sons had cut the lawn. He'd used the battery-powered mower.

Visit Sandy Bauers' blog at <http://go.philly.com/greenspace>.

[Guest Commentary, Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, May 8, 2010:](#)

Readers' Forum: Bay Area air quality and health closely related

By Jack Broadbent and Linda Civitello

We are just finishing Air Quality Awareness Week, but many Bay Area residents are focused on the pollen in the air rather than pollutants.

A wet winter and spring followed several historically dry years to create the highest pollen counts in the Bay Area in a decade. Anyone with allergies and asthma has been sniffing, sneezing, wheezing and scratching their eyes, bringing to light a dramatic example of the relationship between air quality and our health.

Unfortunately, air pollution can have a similar impact on your health regardless of whether you suffer from allergies or asthma. In many cases, the consequences are even more severe. Pollutants like ozone, the main ingredient in smog, and particulate matter, tiny particles that can be inhaled into our lungs, are serious threats to our health.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently found that lower levels of these common pollutants pose a bigger threat than previously thought. Numerous scientific studies have linked these pollutants and other toxic substances to lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, heart attacks, strokes and early death as well as increased hospitalizations, missed workdays and lost productivity due to breathing problems.

The problem is even more acute for communities with high unemployment, heavy diesel traffic and minority populations. In fact, the California Air Resources Board recently tripled the estimate of premature deaths in California from particle pollution to 18,000 annually, more than car accidents and homicides.

That should be a wake-up call for the Bay Area.

As a region, we need to understand the full consequences of driving alone to work or on errands. The Bay Area's 7.1 million residents who take more than 3.5 million vehicle trips each day still generate the majority of harmful pollution.

Rules and regulations have helped reduce major sources of pollution in the region, but they can't act alone. It is critical that we take responsibility for our actions by first understanding our role in contributing to air pollution and then changing our behavior in ways that will reduce the impact to our health and the health of our community.

That's why the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Breathe California were proud to support Air Quality Awareness Week.

The air district urges Bay Area residents to "Be Air Aware." To further underscore the importance of air quality in the Bay Area, the air district launched the start of the Spare the Air smog season last Monday. Visit www.sparetheair.org or www.baaqmd.gov to learn how you can reduce air pollution for a healthier Bay Area. Additional information can found on the websites of the U.S. EPA, Breathe California, the American Lung Association and 511.org.

Bay Area residents need to each take action — driving less, carpooling, using public transportation, biking or walking more, installing solar, using compact fluorescent light bulbs, increasing insulation, installing "cool roofs" on buildings and reducing our electric consumption are just a few ways to reduce pollution.

By working together, we can all enjoy a more sustainable, breathable and healthy quality of life. Making a small change in our behavior seems like a small price to pay to help everyone breathe a little easier. For this reason, it is important for all Bay Area residents to remember to Spare the Air everyday.

Jack Broadbent is executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Linda Civitello, CEO, Breathe California Golden Gate Public Health Partnership.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, May 7, 2010:](#)

Activist lawsuits are about giving public a voice

By Mark Grossi

What's really going on in these lawsuits filed by activists? Read the story I wrote about them.

The story gives you the basics, but the subject is pretty complex to fully describe in a news story, so here's a little more about why activists keep suing and often winning:

The lawsuits are all about following the U.S. Clean Air Act and giving people a chance to get into the process.

The argument now centers over the state pollution control rules on vehicles -- engines and fuel standards. To make standards tougher than the national benchmarks, the state needs a waiver of the federal law. Sounds backward, but that's the way it works.

In all the back-and-forth about the waiver, federal officials have not taken action on those regulations in ozone cleanup plans. EPA must either accept or reject them.

Until the agency takes action, activists cannot challenge those rules in court under the Clean Air Act.

Why is that such a big deal? Without that ability to challenge in court, the state Air Resources Board can approve tough standards, and then back off if there are big arguments about them.

Activists say that exact scenario is developing right now in the fight over diesel engine regulation.