

Valley on track to meet fed rules on ozone by 2022

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

Also in the Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Friday, June 18, 2010

FRESNO — The San Joaquin Valley is on course to achieve the federal ozone standard by 2022 — two years ahead of schedule if improvements continue as they have in the past decade, air officials said Thursday.

There has been a 44 percent reduction in violations over the past decade, officials said, crediting tough rules, industry investments in clean-air technology and cooperation from the public. At that rate, the standard will be achieved early, officials said.

But steep challenges remain, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We're not hanging a 'Mission Accomplished' banner," he said. "We're still one of the worst air basins in the country."

The ozone update report was made at the district's monthly board meeting.

Over the past decade, the valley has ranked alongside the South Coast Air Basin with the most ozone violations. Last year, South Coast had the nation's highest number of ozone violations with 113. The valley was second with 98.

The violations are linked to a 1997 standard. Federal officials soon are expected to come up with a far more stringent ozone standard that might be impossible to reach by the deadline of 2031.

Basin traps bad air

Ozone is a corrosive gas that forms in warm, sunny weather when nitrogen oxides from vehicles combine with fumes from dairies, gasoline and solvents. The pollutant triggers lung problems, such as asthma.

The valley produces 40 percent fewer ozone-making gases than South Coast.

But this bowl-shaped region traps bad air, allowing pollutants to build up for days.

The air district approved a controversial ozone cleanup plan in 2007, followed by groundbreaking rules, such as fees and controls on pollution created by city sprawl.

But air activists say the district could speed the cleanup by pressing for more reductions from businesses and farmers. The activists say they suspect the district is soft on industries and deceptive in claims about improvements.

Activist Tom Franz of the nonprofit Association of Irrigated Residents on Thursday said the district made the ozone cleanup look more dramatic by starting its analysis in 1999, which had a lot of violations.

He said if officials had started at 1998, which had fewer violations, the downward trend would not have been as steep. Franz said he doubts the district could reach the goal by 2022.

Sadredin said he could have looked at the trend since 1980.

Industries have spent more than \$40 billion since then, and ozone-creating emissions have plummeted by 80 percent.

"There have been major improvements, and we need to acknowledge that," Sadredin said. "But we know we have significant challenges ahead."

Calif. advocacy groups allege civil rights violations in landfill expansion process

By Eddie Jiminez, Fresno Bee

Also in the Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, June 18, 2010

HANFORD, Calif. -- Kettleman City, Calif., advocacy organizations on Friday asked Caltrans and the U.S. Department of Transportation to investigate Kings County officials for alleged civil rights violations and racial discrimination in the approval of a hazardous waste landfill expansion near Kettleman City.

Complaints alleging the violations were sent to the two agencies because Kings County receives state and federal funding and is prohibited from practicing racial discrimination, said community groups and advocates at a news conference Friday in front of the Kings County Board of Supervisors building.

The complaints were filed on behalf of two Kettleman City advocacy groups - People for Clean Air and Water and Kids Protecting Our Planet.

The groups allege that Spanish speakers were discriminated against at hearings on Waste Management's proposed expansion. Spanish speakers were allowed two-and-a-half minutes each, because their comments had to be translated, while English speakers each received five minutes, said residents and their supporters. Also, documents on the proposed expansion were not translated into Spanish, they said.

In addition, Kettleman City residents felt intimidated by a heavy law-enforcement presence at hearings, they said.

"We just felt that systematically there has been racism throughout the whole process," said Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a Kettleman City resident and a member of People for Clean Air and Water.

Kings County supervisors approved the landfill expansion in December.

Environmental groups countered with a lawsuit to block those plans, alleging state civil rights violations.

"We're saying that the discrimination has to stop," Ingrid Brostrom, attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said Friday. The center filed the complaints on behalf of the Kettleman City groups.

Kings County officials and a Waste Management spokeswoman had no comment on the complaints.

Caltrans and the U.S. Department of Transportation could not be reached Friday for comment.

Civil rights complaint filed against Kings County

By Eiji Yamashita, staff writer

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, June 19, 2010

Residents of Kettleman City who live near a toxic landfill say their civil rights were violated when Kings County officials limited their participation in a hearing on the proposed expansion of the landfill.

Kings County approved a permit for Waste Management to expand its Kettleman Hills Facility last fall.

Some residents and activists claim they received less time to speak compared to English speakers and were not given translations of documents. They also claim they were intimidated by a large police presence at the meeting.

On Friday, the Center on Race Poverty & the Environment filed administrative civil rights complaints against the county with the U.S. and California Department of Transportation alleging "intentional discrimination" against the low-income Spanish-speaking residents. The complaints call for a thorough investigation and enforcement of civil rights laws.

"We're basically asking these agencies to step in here and ask the county to rescind the permit and ensure some of the discriminatory practices are remedied," said Ingrid Brostrom, an attorney for the center. "We are stepping outside of the court system, going directly to the agencies that fund the county, saying discrimination must stop here."

Community groups can ask government agencies that provide funding to a county to investigate claims of discrimination. If allegations were validated, Kings County could face consequences, including loss of key road funding from both federal and state agencies.

The complaints come in addition to an ongoing lawsuit against the county over the decision.

County officials on Friday declined to respond to the complaints. They did say they completed their due diligence to accommodate participation by all individuals during the permit process.

"I will say that this has been a three-year process, we've had over a dozen public hearings in Hanford and Kettleman City," said Deb West, assistant county administrative officer. "Spanish-language translations were provided for some documents, and everyone who had an opinion was given the opportunity to speak."

Caltrans and its federal counterpart have 180 days to respond to the complaints.

The group filed a similar complaint 16 years ago with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, but the agency has never responded.

Meanwhile, activists remained hopeful for timely responses.

"We're really thrilled and heartened by the fact that the Latino Legislative Caucus has announced they're going to be asking the state Attorney General to look into the racial discrimination," said Bradley Angel with the environmental justice group Greenaction. "We're also heartened by the fact that the Obama Administration EPA has indicated they are going to take these allegations more seriously. It's about time."

1,950 gas mowers dumped at Angel Stadium

By Eric Carpenter, staff writer

OC Register, Saturday, June 19, 2010

ANAHEIM – The cars and trucks – each carrying aging lawnmowers, many with grass clippings still attached – began flowing into the Angel Stadium parking lot at 8 a.m. Saturday. The stream of cars didn't stop for five hours.

By the end, nearly 2,000 lawnmowers had been dropped off, ignitions clipped and piled into four huge Dumpsters bound to be destroyed.

All that with the goal of helping Orange County breathe just a little easier – or cleaner, at least.

Air-quality officials sponsored the event, inviting residents to turn in their carbon-belching gas mowers in exchange for deeply discounted [zero-emission](#) electric models.

"For me, it's twofold – I feel like it's good for the environment and I couldn't pass up the deal," said Ivan Hansen, 39, of Mission Viejo.

Participants could select from one of four models by Black & Decker and Neuton – the two brands that won competitive bids to participate. A 36-volt model with a 19-inch motor that retails for \$450, for instance, was sold for \$165.

Saturday's event in Anaheim was one of 11 exchanges being sponsored by the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the only one in Orange County.

In the end, 1,950 gas mowers were turned in for electric models. The metal on the gas mowers will be recycled, officials said.

Proponents of the electric mowers say they have come a long way from their plug-in predecessors. The new varieties are cordless, don't require annual tune-ups like many gas mowers and typically only need the blade sharpened once a year.

Since the program began eight years ago, organizers estimate that they have scrapped more than 30,000 gas mowers, removing about 80 tons of smog-forming pollutants.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, some 54 million Americans mow their lawns each weekend and use about 800 million gallons of gasoline each year.

Because most gas mowers have unregulated emissions, they are responsible for an estimated 5 percent of the country's air pollution. Each one produces the equivalent pollution in a year of a new car driving 22,000 miles, according to the EPA.

Orange County has relatively good air quality for the region – still Southern California has among the worst air quality nationally, with some 120 days a year rated as "poor," said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the air-quality management district.

"This is a way for people to get involved and thinking about how to clean up the air where they live," Atwood said.

The air-quality management district is also instituting programs targeting gas leaf blowers and wood-burning fireplaces.

Orange County residents unable to attend the event at Angel Stadium can still register at any of the four remaining mower exchanges. They are scheduled for: June 26 in Pasadena; July 10 in Pomona; July 17 in Santa Clarita; and July 24 in Pacoima. (For more information, visit aqmd.gov).

Glenn Hollingshead, 43, said he's glad he made the drive from Tustin.

"We don't have a lot of grass, so this is perfect for us," he said.

Hollingshead said he's most happy that his new electric model will likely be easier to start.

"My 16-year-old son used to come in and say, 'I couldn't get it started,'" he said. "Now, no excuses."

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Saturday, June 19, 2010:](#)

Say what? Asthma risk increases for hamburger eaters

Can this be right? Hamburgers -- that all-American, calorie-laden diet staple foisted upon the consumer palate by the likes of sarcastic Jack, the Hamburglar and that scary, mannequin-faced Burger King guy -- are making us even sicker than we imagined? By aggravating our asthma?

They may indeed, according to researchers at Germany's Ulm University. Their study shows that kids who eat three or more burgers a week have a higher risk for developing asthma and wheezing than kids who eat burgers less often. And kids who subscribe to a more Mediterranean style of eating, with lots of fruits, vegetables and fish, have a lower asthma risk.

In a city like Bakersfield, where asthma rates as devastatingly high, this is big news. Asthma attacks account for more than 3,000 emergency department visits in Kern County each year --

nearly half by children, for whom respiratory problems are the No. 1 cause of school absenteeism.

The research, based on data from about 50,000 children in developed countries, suggests that the saturated fat in burgers causes inflammation in the airways, triggering asthma-related breathing problems. Conversely, some fats such as omega-3, found in fish, fruits and vegetables, protect against asthma.

It's not clear whether the role of hamburgers on asthma is direct or indirect. "It is possible that in higher-income countries, burger consumption is a proxy for obesity, which is a known risk factor for asthma," researcher Gabriele Nagel told WebMD. And this is odd: Meat consumption in general did not appear to influence asthma risk.

Better safe than sorry: Consider the Filet-o-Fish on your next visit to Mickey D's.

[Stockton Record, guest commentary, Saturday, June 19, 2010:](#)

Officials' trip to Washington will pay off for county

By Leroy Ornellas, San Joaquin County Supervisor

Every year officials from county, cities and agencies as well as community leaders travel to Washington D.C. to meet with federal officials and elected representatives to advocate for funding for local transportation and infrastructure projects. We spend an entire week ensuring that the feds get a firsthand look at these projects and that they understand the importance of these projects and the value they add to the quality of life for our communities. You rarely leave there with absolute assurances that a project will be funded or even supported, but you kick start the lengthy and sometimes cumbersome process. This year's journey was my seventh "One Voice" trip.

This year we touted 26 projects throughout San Joaquin County. These projects include the I-205/Lammers Road interchange in Tracy, Louise Avenue/I-5 interchange in Lathrop, Austin Road interchange in Manteca, I-5 widening in Stockton and the Lodi Lake Park Nature Area Protection Project. Other projects include the Ripon Surface Water Supply Project, Altamont Corridor, State Route 4 Corridor Improvements, MacArthur Drive Above Grade Crossing Project and the Atherton Road-West Gap Closure (a full list and descriptions can be found at www.sjcog.org). These projects will be paid for with your tax dollars, whether it is federal, state or local sales tax (Measure K) you are the purchaser of these projects.

We also lobbied for county specific projects, among them were solar projects for the county jail and ag center, a public health laboratory, a new juvenile camp for the probation department, as well as some county airport and hospital projects. We pressed the Veterans Administration to locate its planned Regional Outpatient Clinic and Community Living Center at the San Joaquin General Hospital campus.

The importance of our annual pilgrimage to D.C. cannot be overstated. Although there is a certain amount of turnover, a relationship develops and officials begin to recognize us and our projects. Forging these relationships is proving valuable in seeking federal funding for a study to improve Highway 4 through the Delta. I have long pushed for this project and believe the improvement of Highway 4 would have a positive impact on traffic congestion throughout the county, but especially the roads and highways of the south county most notably I-5, I-205 and I-580. An improved Highway 4 would more easily handle truck traffic to and from the Stockton Port and provide an alternate route for commuters of Stockton, Lathrop and Manteca. Challenges do exist such as, two lane bridges that pre-date World War II and unstable peat soil. A proper study should determine improvement feasibility.

Last year, three months into a new administration, there was a sense of giddiness and euphoria as officials took to their newfound positions. The term, "deer in the headlights" would have been appropriate. Also, there was a faint odor of printing ink in the air, no doubt due to all of the new

money being printed, which could have explained some of the giddiness. This year those officials seemed quite comfortable in their positions of authority. The city itself has a different look with large cranes throughout, reminding me of the never ending building in Las Vegas. There is certainly no economic slump in Washington, D.C.

I had the opportunity to take part in meetings with several elected officials. There was Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., who was in a bad mood and somewhat condescending. I found Speaker Nancy Pelosi to be elegantly understated and yet scary powerful.

Preceded by the speaker was a congressman who was telling us in a forceful tone about his face-to-face meeting with the president and his demands before he would vote for certain bills. Once the speaker walked in, he melted like a snow cone in August.

I found Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-MD, to be a well spoken southern gentleman. The scary thing was that Hoyer was the only person in Washington I heard utter the words, "private sector."

Leroy Ornellas represents the fifth district on the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors. He is also on the Governing Board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.