

Tighter emission standards for S.J. Valley getting closer

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record Mon., August 30, 2010

Valley communities must reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks by 5 percent per capita over the next decade under a draft proposal to be considered by state regulators next month.

The plan also calls for a 10 percent decline by 2035.

But can it be done? The San Joaquin Valley faces unique hurdles in designing communities that encourage walking, biking or public transportation.

"This is going to be a challenge for us," said Andrew Chesley, executive director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments. "One of the things we suggested was that they set the targets in such a way that they are still achievable. Quite honestly, ... 5 and 10 percent, based upon the information we have, are not achievable numbers."

The Valley's targets are lower than larger metro areas in California.

But, unlike the Valley, other regions have mature transit systems and already embrace higher-density housing.

"None of them have had the same tough times the Valley has had in terms of job growth and foreclosures," Chesley said.

The numeric targets are required by the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, or SB375, which aims to make neighborhoods of the future less dependent on single-occupant vehicles.

The law is separate from AB32, the landmark greenhouse gas reduction law of 2006. Proposition 23 on the November ballot would delay implementation of AB32 until unemployment drops, but would not affect the 5 to 10 percent reduction for transportation under SB375.

The California Air Resources Board said in a statement that the new targets are "ambitious, achievable and very good news for Californians" - a historic shift from sprawling to sustainable communities.

The San Joaquin Valley targets, in particular, may change as more data become available, officials say. Ultimately, planners will have to find ways to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled in each region.

John Beckman, chief executive officer of the Stockton-based Building Industry Association of the Delta, said a 5 percent reduction would force changes in how homes are built and how neighborhoods are designed, raising buildings costs by \$2,000 to \$7,000 per unit.

"It's uncomfortable, it'll be inconvenient, but we'll do it," he said.

Beckman said the bigger issue is how the existing city, and its residents, will achieve the per capita reduction.

"Your life is going to change in some way," he said.

Supporters argue the big-picture benefits of curbing sprawl.

The nonprofit Urban Land Institute says the law will, in the long haul, save money for cities and households. A coalition of Valley physicians also has argued in favor of aggressive reductions, citing air quality benefits and improved quality of life for residents who may, in the future, have easier access to walking trails.

The process of determining targets took 18 months, and it may be up to three more years before cities produce plans to meet those targets.

Chesley served on a 21-member committee that recommended a Valley target of 1 percent to 7 percent. The state air board apparently decided those numbers were not ambitious enough, he said. And the numbers may yet change again.

"The push is to raise targets, not lower them," Chesley said.

Air district proposes \$10 vehicle registration fee to help reduce air quality fines for Valley businesses

By Valerie Gibbons, Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2010

The Valley's largest businesses could be slapped with nearly \$29 million in federal-government fines because of last week's soaring temperatures.

Air-quality violations during last week's 110-degree-plus temperatures may cause hundreds of businesses to pay up, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said. There were two violations of the one-hour ozone standard, which measures the peak level of ozone during an hour's time, said Jaime Holt, a district spokeswoman.

The standard is one of several air-quality measures the federal government uses to assess polluted air in the Valley.

Because of the Valley's ongoing smog problems, stationary sources of pollution — such as oil refineries, large factories and agricultural-production facilities — are subject to fines of tens of thousands of dollars, Holt said. About 300 businesses are vulnerable if the EPA decides to levy fines this fall, she said.

Air-district officials are trying to work out a compromise, however, since smog levels have exceeded federal standards only two days this summer.

"In years past we had more than 30 days when we didn't meet the standard," Holt said. "Now we have one or two days. This really isn't fair."

Penalties are nothing new to the Valley. Air-district officials were warned by federal officials in 2002 to clean up the region's air or face fines.

Since then, a host of new rules have taken effect, including new regulations governing agriculture and restrictions on ag burning.

"The Valley's employers are already using the most cutting-edge technology available," Holt said.

Air-district officials hope to tack a \$10 fee onto vehicle registrations in the San Joaquin Valley to help spread out the cost of the EPA penalties. The district maintains that 80 percent of the Valley's smog comes from mobile sources.

"It spreads the pain out a bit," Holt said.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Monday, Aug. 30, 2010:](#)

A little more about ozone and the \$29 million penalty

By Mark Grossi

A reader delicately pointed out that my story on the Valley's ozone violations this week was confusing. What's a one-hour violation? What's an eight-hour violation?

And why did the Valley get stuck with a \$29 million fine for the violation on Tuesday?

Good questions, and I'm sorry I didn't have room to go into them.

A one-hour violation is a reading that exceeds 125 parts per billion during any one-hour period. The one at Parlier on Tuesday was a whopping 141.

An eight-hour violation is a reading that exceed 75 parts per billion as an average of eight one-hour readings. I call it the daylong standard. The Valley violates that one often.

If there had been no violations of the one-hour standard this summer, the \$29 million penalty would have been postponed for a year. There was a second violation of that standard during the torrid part of the week.

Finally, the \$29 million fine is assessed because the Valley hasn't achieved the one-hour standard yet. The area needs three seasons in a row without violations -- there hasn't been one yet.

Businesses are responsible for the \$29 million penalty, but the air district is considering adding a \$10 charge to vehicle registration to pick up most of the cost. Vehicles are 80% of the ozone problem, officials say.