

Valley bad-air alerts coming to Facebook, Twitter **Valley air board is expected to approve social media notices**

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2011, and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2011

A blitz of bad-air alerts will fill Twitter, Facebook and maybe even flashing freeway signs on a half-dozen summer days when ozone peaks dangerously in the San Joaquin Valley.

The local air board on Thursday is expected to approve the alerts, which amount to a plea for you to drive less and shave down those ozone peaks.

And there is a reward if ozone violations are avoided – your vehicle registration fees will get cheaper a few years from now.

A fee hike of \$12 soon will appear on renewal notices for Valley vehicle registrations. The hike is part of a \$29 million annual penalty levied because this region still violates a defunct federal ozone standard – which must nonetheless be achieved.

The \$29 million will be used to help reduce the Valley's ozone pollution with such measures as diesel engine replacement in trucks and school buses. The annual penalty will continue until there are no more one-hour violations over a span of at least three years.

There have been no one-hour violations this year. Since vehicles create much of the ozone problem in Valley cities, air officials say, less driving during bad-air episodes might help avoid the violations completely this year.

"Vehicle owners have a direct stake in this," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air activists like the idea of public alerts – such as the previous district program called Spare the Air. Through the newspaper, radio and television, the program notified residents of unhealthy air days.

But the district abandoned Spare the Air three years ago in favor of hourly email alerts to schools, parents, teachers and the public. The alerts are sent throughout the year when air quality changes, and they will continue.

Activists say Spare the Air should have continued as well. They said they have not decided yet whether they like the district's additional alert system.

"They dropped the ball when they stopped Spare the Air," said Kevin Hall, executive director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition. "We need to get back to a true public warning system. I'm not convinced yet that this new idea is it."

In the new alert system, air officials will use newspapers, television and radio to let the public know when the air is becoming badly fouled with ozone.

Notifications also will be done through the district's website, toll-free phone number and social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook. People also can sign up for emailed air alerts – as the public does in the district's current alert system for schools.

South Coast Air Basin in the greater Los Angeles area also uses social networks and email to alert the public, as well as an iPhone application.

Sadredin said Valley air officials have talked with the state Department of Transportation about using digital freeway signs to alert the public about an ozone episode. Officials have not yet decided on using the signs, he said.

The effort is necessary even though the one-hour ozone standard was abolished several years ago in favor of the stricter eight-hour ozone standard. Federal law requires the Valley to achieve the one-hour standard anyway.

One-hour violations often happen in August, although five of the seven violations last year occurred in September. The Valley is ripe for ozone spikes in August and September because the weather often is hot and stagnant, allowing pollution to build up.

Such episodes often require two or three days to develop, so there should be time to warn the public, Sadredin said.

"We think we can give people 48 hours of notice when one of these episodes starts," he said.

Ozone can trigger asthma and other lung illnesses, particularly for children and people with breathing problems. Air officials are worried that the August ozone spikes are connected to additional traffic at the start of school.

To reduce ozone, officials also suggest carpooling, avoiding drive-thru lines, bringing lunch to work instead of going out and shutting off the engine when waiting to pick up children from school.

Sadredin said the district will ask businesses whether they can shift work schedules to shut down pollution-creating equipment, such as boilers.

"It's not going to work for everyone," he said. "People in farm-related businesses might be in the middle of harvesting. The idea is to do whatever you can."

(The following also was included in the Modesto Bee article)

Air Alert System

Beginning Thursday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will implement a new warning system to notify residents of impending periods of bad air.

- **WHEN:** Alerts will be called when the air is dangerously close to exceeding federal ozone standards.
- **WHERE:** Alerts will be called from San Joaquin County in the north to Kern County in the south.
- **HOW:** Residents will be notified through newspapers, Web-based media and social networks.
- **WHY:** The eight valley counties are being fined \$29 million by the federal government. By engaging the public to drive less, air officials believe they can meet the standards and avoid the fine.

Sun rises on Avenal solar farm

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2011

A new, vast solar energy resource is putting Kings County on the map for renewable energy. NRG Solar and Eurus Energy America Corp.'s 45-megawatt solar farm — a joint project between the two companies — is about to go online, making it the first utility-scale photovoltaic generation to be operational in the county.

The project, which spans 500 acres just outside the Avenal city limits, is also by far the largest solar farm in California, according to the companies.

NRG and Eurus recently declared construction complete on their photovoltaic generation facility, and said it's ready to start feeding electricity to California's power grid.

The companies are now awaiting the county's final sign-off before they can officially begin their commercial operation, said Jeremy Kinney, senior planner for Kings County.

"They are on the verge of coming online," Kinney said. "They are just making sure everything runs smoothly before they get the final building permit and go online."

The final clearance should be given "in the very near future," Kinney said.

The Avenal solar project is made up of three separate solar farms, the 20-megawatt Sun City, the 19-megawatt Sand Drag and the nine-megawatt Avenal Park. Pacific Gas and Electric Co. plans to buy the energy generated by the facility under a 20-year power purchase agreement.

When operating at full capacity, the three-part project would generate enough power to meet the needs of 36,000 homes while creating 200 new jobs, according to NRG.

"Only two years ago, NRG began its expansion into solar power by bringing online the largest photovoltaic plant in California at that time — today, we repeat that accomplishment by commencing

operations at Avenal,” said Tom Doyle, president of NRG’s Solar and West Region, in a statement released last week.

Eurus Energy America’s president/CEO Mark Anderson also released a statement last week saying: “Our ability to deploy capital and generate jobs locally in California, while also helping the state in its drive towards a clean energy-based economy is due to the collective efforts of many, including Kings County, the city of Avenal and PG&E.”

Kings County’s west side is on the way to becoming a solar powerhouse, as domestic and international companies rush to invest in new projects. The Avenal project was the first in a series of utility-scale solar farms that are in various stages of development.

There have been 14 different solar proposals made in Kings County over the last two years, Kinney said. These projects represent a total of 918 megawatts worth of electricity and about 10,000 acres, he said.

GWF’s proposal for a massive 125-megawatt solar farm on 1,000 acres near the Naval Air Station Lemoore — which has already gotten its permit approved — is likely next in line for construction.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2011:](#)

New study doesn't hit the mark for air pollution deaths

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

Don't be surprised if you see some coverage soon about a new study claiming that fine particulate matter (PM2.5) could be killing thousands of Californians every year.

The study will likely be touted as "confirmation" of previous work that first made PM2.5 a health scare in the early 1990s.

Don't be further surprised if this new study is then used by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to gin up more regulations that will make it harder to drive a diesel truck or run most businesses in this state.

That's how it works: A study says we're all gonna die and CARB rides in to slay whatever dragon a handful of scientists claim to see.

Before you get all puffed up, I'm not some kind of air pollution advocate.

Our approach to cleaning the air must be reasonable, however. And that's where I say we've gone off the rails, chasing ever smaller returns at an ever greater cost.

I think a close examination of the science bears me out.

Right now, we're in a period when the public can read and comment on the new study. But that rarely happens.

Yet it's a crucial moment. It's when scientists claim there is an identifiable link between air pollution and premature deaths. That link is called the hazard ratio.

The hazard ratio is then used to come up with an actual number of human beings who -- supposedly -- will be felled by too many whiffs of PM2.5. The costs of those deaths are then weighed against regulatory costs. That ratio then justifies the rules.

For example, in 2006, CARB said diesel PM2.5 and ozone from ports and goods movement caused 2,400 premature deaths a year (see box for more info on death estimates) at a cost of \$19 billion. They proposed a host of rules -- at an annual cost of between \$200 million and \$300 million -- to cut emissions. So, for every \$1 invested toward reducing pollution, there would be \$3 to \$8 in benefits from avoided health costs, mostly from premature deaths, CARB said.

This new California-specific study, by Michael Jerrett, C. Arden Pope and a group of other like-minded air pollution scientists, pegs the hazard ratio for all causes of premature deaths at 1.08.

Which means that exposure to PM2.5 (at concentrations of 10 micrograms per cubic meter) elevates our risk of dying prematurely by 8 percent -- maybe.

The authors called that significant, and it could be. But, oh those devilish details, how they can change the balance.

Jerrett and Pope looked at PM2.5 and premature deaths under eight other models, each of which came back with zero effect of premature death.

Only one model showed any effect worth noting. It was a model no one had used before called "conurbation" in which California was carved into five big pieces.

Jerrett told me he had to create these conurbations to make up for the fact that death rates overall are far lower in urban areas like Los Angeles than in rural areas like Kern County.

OK, so they have one model out of nine that shows any kind of effect.

A deeper look, however, shows the range of uncertainty for even that model hits the zero mark. As in, PM2.5 isn't putting anyone six feet under before their time.

Another weakness: they used data from 1982 to 2000. Our air quality has improved vastly since the 1980s, or even the 1990s.

Two other recent California studies (Zeger, 2008 and Lipsett, 2011) both using more up-to-date data from 2000-2005 show no effect of premature death from PM2.5.

I say the Jerrett's and Pope's conclusion of a "significant" effect is a pretty big reach, especially considering how costly CARB regulations can be -- expensive filtration devices and requirements that operators phase out entire engine models by buying whole new fleets, etc.

Since this conurbation model is so new (Jerrett didn't even list it in his methodology outline when he got funding for the study from CARB) and the effect seems so slight, I wondered if the authors would recommend further study before CARB uses the study to craft new policies.

Nope.

His model is "state of the art" and represents the "best estimates available" of premature deaths from PM2.5 exposure, Jerrett said.

Pope was more circumspect saying public policy is a judgement call and his work is just focused on the science.

Yeah, but science is the foundation for regulations. Well, some science anyway.

CARB has routinely ignored other studies that show no effect of premature death from PM2.5. Now they've put out numbers that suggest the new rules will lead to 291 fewer deaths a year?

I don't see it.

