

## **Air District supports alerts, bus retrofits, lawn equipment**

By Kellie Schmitt, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Aug. 19, 2011

As the first day of school approaches for many Kern County students, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is preparing for its new "air alert" program.

During a Thursday meeting, district board members discussed air alerts, a program that will notify valley residents before an ozone violation likely will occur, in the hopes of changing their behaviors.

In previous years, ozone levels soared during the start of the school year, when many parents drove their kids to and from school and idled their cars in the parking lots.

"We are doing OK right now, but we're still afraid of next week with back to school and potential high temperatures," said Samir Sheikh, the district's director of strategies and incentives.

Some officials and commentators said it'd be hard to convince parents not to drive their children on their first day back.

"It's almost human nature, the first day of school, driving your children," said chairman J. Steven Worthley.

But there are other ways around that. Staff members are working with school districts to develop a "walking school bus" whereby families gather at one home and walk their children to school together. Ann Johnston, the board's vice chairwoman, suggested staggering school start dates to avert "the back-to-school driving crisis."

Board members also discussed how to promote air alert messages. Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, suggested developing a smart phone app that would notify users when there was an impending alert.

For every year that the valley fails to fall within EPA standards -- meaning 125 parts per billion during a one-hour period -- it faces a \$29 million fee. But, if the district can go three years without an ozone violation, the EPA will lift the fine.

On Thursday, the district approved a new project that would retrofit some of the state's school buses with a diesel particulate filter. The local air district will manage the \$1.5 million project for schools statewide.

Schools must apply for the retrofit funding, which can climb to \$20,000 per bus.

"A lot of the pollution comes out of the bus and back into the bus," Sheikh said. "But anyone driving behind a bus will tell you they're breathing that stuff, too."

The board also approved a project that will target commercial lawn and garden equipment and the pollutants they produce. The district will use \$250,000 in grant funding to buy about 715 pieces of zero-emission equipment.

Even as residential use of zero-emission lawn and garden equipment grows, commercial use is still limited, according to a district report. The hope is that this project will let commercial users, such as landscaping businesses, try out the equipment.

The project is designed "to expose these companies to the new technologies, make them more comfortable with them, and demonstrate their use," Sheikh said.

## **Air district funds give marine highway project boost**

By Alex Breitler  
Stockton Record, Friday, August 19, 2011

The Port of Stockton's marine highway project got another shot of funding Thursday, this time from San Joaquin Valley air cops, who hope to reduce the number of diesel-belching big rigs traveling daily over the Altamont Pass.

The project would allow some cargo containers to be shipped on barges rather than relying entirely on trucks.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District approved another \$750,000 in funding on top of a \$13 million federal grant already landed by the port. The air district's money will help satisfy the federal requirement for matching local funds.

Under the terms of the grant, the marine highway must be open for business by February.

"We're very excited about the project, and we do appreciate the support of the air board staff," Port Director Richard Aschieris said earlier this week. "This will be a great service to the Central Valley."

Most often the air district uses its public funds to change out the old dirty engines of vehicles across the Valley, thus directly reducing pollution.

But in this case, air-quality officials say there's good reason to push for a new infrastructure at the port.

Today, shipping goods by truck from the Port of Oakland to a distribution center in or near Stockton often requires no fewer than four trips over the Altamont Pass.

To begin with, a truck from the Stockton area must head west to Oakland to pick up the container of goods. It then must drive back to Stockton, where the cargo is unloaded off the container, and then back to Oakland to drop off the empty container, before the truck finally comes back to Stockton.

Imagine that process repeated 1,600 times each day. That's the number of containers that move between the Valley and the Port of Oakland on a daily basis.

Under the new plan, two 140-ton cranes, several stories high, will allow the Stockton port to load hundreds of containers onto two barges that would make weekly trips to and from the Port of Oakland.

Up to 350 containers could be transported in a single trip on the marine highway.

Besides cleaning the air, supporters say the project should open up a new line of business for the port, which right now handles mostly bulk cargo as opposed to containers. Port officials have estimated the marine highway will generate nearly 340 construction and permanent jobs.

Some members of the air district sought assurance Thursday that the project would not siphon jobs from the trucking industry.

But in the end the board approved the funding without any dissenting votes.

Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston, who serves on the air district board, said the marine highway will take the city back to the days before Interstate 580, when barges were frequently used to send goods up the San Joaquin River to Stockton.

"I believe this is going to be a project that we're all going to be able to look at and say, 'We had a part in history,' " she told the board Thursday.

The marine highway from Stockton to Oakland is part of a greater \$30 million plan that also includes the port in West Sacramento.

## **Alerts To Warn Valley Residents Of Bad Air San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Will Send Out Alerts**

kcra.com, late Wednesday, August 17, 2011

STOCKTON, Calif. -- The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is expected to issue alerts on days when ozone exceeds healthy levels.

The district board may approve the measure at a meeting Thursday.

The alerts will go out over TV, radio, on freeway signs, and even on Facebook and Twitter.

The district was fined \$29 million for past violations, and drivers must pay an additional \$12 in vehicle registration fees to pay off the costs this year.

Residents will be asked to cut back driving, sitting in drive-through lines and also refrain from mowing the lawn with gas mowers.

So far this year, the district has not seen any violations, but last year experienced seven non-attainment days.

The district covers eight counties from San Joaquin County to Kern County.

