

Visalia-Porterville area called 2nd smoggiest in U.S.

By Donna-Marie Sonnichsen

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2011

A report listing the Visalia-Porterville area as the second smoggiest in the country may be right, but it also needs to be taken in context, says the chairman of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board.

"It could be considered fear-mongering. The initial reaction is to head for the hills or head for the coast," Steve Worthley said in reaction to the report.

"I understand it's true, but it doesn't reflect the actual condition or what's been happening for the past 20 to 25 years. You can be more relaxed [about the statistics] when you keep them in context," said Worthley, who is also a member of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors.

Environment Californian's report released Wednesday listed six California cities in the top 10 smoggiest metropolitan areas in the country. Four are in the Central Valley region.

Riverside-San Bernardino had the dubious distinction of being ranked first. Bakersfield and the Los Angeles-Long Beach area tied for third place, while Fresno was ranked fifth and Sacramento 10th.

"We've removed 80 percent of air pollutants from the air and to meet the current ozone standards, we would have to reduce another 80 percent of the remaining pollution," Worthley said.

He said the district has made great strides imposing some of the strictest and even cutting-edge rules in the country, but "even if we applied every known scientific approach, it would still not contain [the problem]."

"It will take new things to come about that have not yet been invented or discovered to help us over the top and, in the meantime, we will continue to do what we can implementing the rules and procedures."

He said that while diesel emissions are the single biggest problem, the area's geographical location within three mountain ranges can "act like a lid over the top of the Valley. Inversion forms a layer that holds everything in with no way of escaping. Add heat and you have the perfect formula for ozone."

He said great strides have been taken with stationary sources — like the discovery of pollutants released from dairy feed stacks by finding new ways to stack the feed, reducing the amount exposed to air and therefore the amount of pollutants.

"Until the research was done, nobody even knew this was an issue," he said. "Our goal is to find win-win opportunities."

"We are dedicated to moving the ball in the right direction and, at the same time, recognize the limitations of science and finance. Ozone is naturally occurring. Even without human activity, you would have ozone and, as long as you have economic activity, you will have emissions. You can't destroy the economy in the name of clean air."

Worthley pointed out that while rules and procedures adopted since the agency was founded in 1992 have reduced stationary emissions 90 percent, mobile sources, such as vehicular traffic is the "biggest problem over which we have no control."

But the agency does release air alerts when required, like it did this week, asking residents to limit driving and not idle cars while waiting for students after school or at drive-thru windows.

The latest alert was the third this year.

Meanwhile, the Environment California report also found that there were 110 days in 2010 in California when at least part of the state experienced smog levels exceeding the national health standard.

Smog is formed when pollution from cars, power plants and industrial facilities reacts with other pollutants in the presence of sunlight. It is of particular concern when warmer temperatures lead to the buildup of higher concentrations of pollution.

The report warned that on days of elevated smog levels, children, the elderly and people with respiratory illness suffer the most.

Listing several health risks, the report noted that children who grow up in areas with high levels of smog may develop diminished lung capacity and be at greater risk of lung disease later in life.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2011:](#)

Portable air monitors a key step for Arvin

Valley air regulators are doing the right thing by deploying portable air monitors to Arvin in response to concerns raised by residents there about how well a permanent monitor is gauging air quality.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District moved the permanent air monitor in Arvin to a new location earlier this year after losing a lease on the land where the monitor had been stationed.

The monitor has recorded much cleaner readings at the new location, leading some Arvin residents and air advocates to question whether the equipment was purposely moved to a part of town with less pollution in order to reduce valleywide clean-air violations -- which can result in steep federal fines that get passed on to valley businesses and residents.

In response, Arvin residents have secured funding to do their own air-quality monitoring using buckets that capture air samples.

The portable monitors that regulators are sending to Arvin will provide official data and the valley's top air officials said the permanent monitoring station may be moved if the mobile units find more polluted air in other locations of the city.

Tensions have increased between Arvin residents and the valley air district in recent years over the amount of action taken by the air district to address the fact that the small, predominantly minority community has experienced some of the highest pollution readings of any community in the nation.

By deploying the new monitors, the district is demonstrating its willingness to work with residents in Arvin. We hope this move will foster more trust and better cooperation between these two groups who share the same commitment to clean air.

San Joaquin Valley records first ozone violation

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. -- Air pollution officials are saying that excessive heat, stagnant air and vehicle exhaust combined Wednesday to push the San Joaquin Valley over the federal smog limit for the first time this year.

The Fresno Bee (<http://bit.ly/pojwly>) is reporting that recording stations in Fresno and Parlier violated the one-hour limit for ozone, which can cause asthma and lung problems.

The region was fined \$29 million annually last year for failing to meet the limits set by the Clean Air Act.

Officials had hoped that by appealing to residents to limit driving and avoid idling vehicles, the valley could avoid a violation in 2011.

Beginning next year drivers will bear the brunt of the violation having a \$12 fee added to vehicle registrations to help pay for the fine.

House GOP bill would roll back air-pollution rules

By Renee Schoof and Halimah Abdullah – McClatchy Newspapers

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2011

WASHINGTON -- The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote Friday on a bill that has mushroomed recently into a plan to block the Obama administration's two main rules to clean up air pollution from power plants and change the way the Clean Air Act has worked for 40 years.

House Republicans who crafted the bill say environmental regulations harm economic competitiveness. In recent days, they've added amendments that would stop new air-pollution regulations that operators of coal-fired electric plants have objected to for years. Environmental and health groups call it an extreme attack on the air pollution law.

The amendments would eliminate two air pollution rules for power plants that are nearly ready to go into effect after years of delays. It also would require the Environmental Protection Agency to base acceptable levels of pollution on economic, as well as health, considerations.

"The complaint is that EPA does all the benefits, many of which are questionable, but has refused to look at the collective cost or (electric) reliability impacts," said Jeff Holmstead, a lobbyist for the electric power industry who was the EPA's air administrator during the George W. Bush administration.

The EPA has said it plans to take the combined effects of the upcoming rules into account as far as it legally can.

The TRAIN Act – for Transparency in Regulatory Analysis of Impacts on the Nation – began as a requirement for a new federal committee to analyze the cumulative effects of environmental regulations before they take effect, but amendments have expanded its reach.

One, by Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Energy and Power, would force the EPA to redo the two pending regulations: One would reduce air pollution that crosses state lines in the eastern half of the country, and the second would limit mercury and other hazardous air pollutants from power plants for the first time nationwide.

Whitfield said earlier this year that he was "especially concerned about what impact these rules will have on the coal producers in my state and the jobs tied to the industry that plays such a vital role in meeting our energy demands, as well as the impact on electricity consumers."

The interstate pollution rule is scheduled to take effect Jan. 1. The EPA estimated it would save up to 34,000 lives a year. The mercury and air toxics rule, which is to be finalized by November, is expected to save 17,000 lives a year.

Air pollution can trigger asthma attacks and increase the risk for lung diseases, heart attacks and strokes.

Another amendment would change the way the law sets acceptable levels of pollution.

Under the 1970 Clean Air Act, the EPA sets standards for major air pollutants based only on what's necessary to protect public health with an "adequate margin of safety." Once the level of unhealthy air is set, the agency takes cost into account in determining what methods industries can use and how long they'll have to reduce the pollution.

The amendment by Rep. Bob Latta, R-Ohio, would require the EPA to consider feasibility and cost when setting the amount of pollution in the air that's acceptable. This change would negate a unanimous 2001 Supreme Court ruling that the Clean Air Act doesn't allow the EPA to take costs into account when it's setting air standards.

John Walke, an attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, wrote in a blog that the change would force the EPA "to set unprotective air quality standards for smog and soot and lead pollution that are at odds with health science, based on cost complaints by polluting industries."

Air pollution rising at national parks

Agustin Armendariz, California Watch

In the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2011

Air pollution in national parks is at a three-year high, and two California parks have recorded the worst readings, according to a report by the National Parks Conservation Association.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, located next to each other, exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency standard for ozone pollution 68 days so far this year, the most of any of the national parks that monitor air quality. Joshua Tree National Park came in second, with 49 days above the EPA standard.

These readings are not only high among national parks, but also for the state as a whole. According to data maintained by the California Air Resources Board for 2010, the number of days exceeding the ozone standard at Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks was equal to that of readings in Arvin, just outside of Bakersfield. Last year, both stations recorded 66 days above the ozone standard.

While high by today's standards, the rates are lower than they were in the late 1980s, when some areas of the state logged 100 or more days with ozone above acceptable levels, according to Air Resources Board data.

"Breathing ozone, a primary component of smog, can trigger a variety of health problems, including chest pain, coughing, throat irritation and congestion," according to the EPA.

The Air Resources Division of the National Park Service says it has air monitoring systems set up in almost 70 national parks around the country and works with other monitoring networks to gauge the air quality of the nation's parks.

According to the park service, Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks "experience some of the worst air pollution of any national parks in the U.S.," since they are "downwind of many air pollution sources, including agriculture, industry, major highways, and urban pollutants from as far away as the San Francisco Bay Area."

Although far out in the eastern desert, Joshua Tree "is affected by air pollution generated in the Los Angeles air basin that moves inland with the predominant westerly winds," according to the park service.

The National Parks Conservation Association report called attention to two legislative measures moving through Congress that would weaken the EPA's air quality regulations.

"National park visitors should not have to worry about having an asthma attack while hiking in American treasures like the Grand Canyon and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks," Mark Wenzler, the association's vice president for climate and air quality programs, stated in the report.

[Vida en el Valle, Harvesting Health Blog, Sept. 21, 2011:](#)

Taking clean air into their own hands

Soon, residents of the Kern County city of Arvin will be taking the job of monitoring their contaminated air into their own hands, the Bakersfield Californian first reported Sept. 15.

With the training and guidance of El Cerrito-based non-profit Global Community Monitor, Arvin residents will begin testing their own air quality. Using a grassroots air monitoring program known as "bucket brigades," residents will test the air they breathe for particulate matters 2.5 and 10 – both of which can get deep into the lungs and cause serious health problems. Residents can also use the monitors to find out what pollution sources are emitting those particles.

Arvin, which is located at the base of the San Joaquin Valley, has earned national recognition for having some of the worst air quality in the country. Residents have told me about the high incidences of asthma and Valley fever in their city, which is 89.9 percent Latino.

The air monitor in Arvin was recently moved, resulting in improved air quality readings – but residents say there have been few actual improvements.

"We know that Arvin is one of the most affected communities in the nation," said Gustavo Aguirre, of the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment in Delano. "Now that the monitor that they used to have was moved away from the community, it looks like the air is good in Arvin, and that's not the case. This is something the community really, really needs."

The bucket brigade project will inform Arvin residents of the true quality of their air, and allow them to advocate for changes, said Denny Larson, executive director of Global Community Monitor. In past campaigns, he said, the project helps increase community participation in air quality issues, and increases involvement with regulatory agencies.

"The community is going to be setting the campaign debate about what specific things they want to get done in Arvin," he said. "The bucket brigade is a tool to help the community achieve its goals. It's largely driven by what they want to do."

An initial meeting for the project will be held next month.

And here's a little more good news: In the second year of this project, Global Community Monitor will explore expanding the bucket brigade project to other Valley communities that breathe polluted air. Stay tuned for more information!

Valley had summer's first air violation Tuesday

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee staff writer

In the Fresno Bee and Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

Heat and dirty air Tuesday triggered the first violations of an expensive ozone standard this summer in the Valley – and the problems could continue today.

With temperatures predicted in the high 90s and triple digits, there could be more violations. That could mean additional years that the Valley will have to pay a \$29 million annual ozone fine.

The region will pay the fine next year for the first time after failing to meet the one-hour federal ozone standard – the highest reading in a day – by a 2010 deadline. Drivers will pick up a majority of it with a \$12 fee on their vehicle registrations.

To avoid violations and an extension of the fine, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is blitzing residents with a warning to cut back on driving.

"The higher temperature is definitely affecting us," said executive director Seyed Sadredin.

But there's too much emphasis on the \$29 million fine, said Kevin Hall, executive director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, which includes health and environmental advocates. He said the air district's board of directors should be doing more to protect people's health.

"The air board's message to the public has been focused on ending financial sanctions rather than protecting our kids' health," he said. "We have had reports of youth sports teams' afternoon practices happening throughout the region."

On Tuesday, Fresno and Parlier violated the one-hour threshold for corrosive ozone, which can trigger asthma and damage lungs, skin and eyes.

But in the complex world of the U.S. Clean Air Act, that's not enough extend the \$29 million fine beyond next year.

The law says the annual fine would only be extended if there were more than three violations at any monitor over a three-year period – 2010 through 2012.

If the Valley gets through the rest of the warm season and next summer without violations at a few key monitors, the region will meet the federal standard. And the fine will go away.

Clovis is the only place in the Valley with three violations since 2010. If there is one more this year or next year, the \$29 million fine will continue at least until 2013.

There are other monitors with one violation – Parlier, central Fresno, north Fresno and Hanford. If one of them has three more violations this summer or next, the fine will be extended.

Such violations don't always occur in September, but the air can quickly turn corrosive. Last year, there was a sudden spike in one-hour violations during a heat wave in the last few days of September.

But this year for the first time, the Valley had no August violations of the one-hour standard, which air officials said was a sign of progress.

Air quality advocates, such as Hall, said the improvement was an illusion because the state moved the Kern County monitor in Arvin.

The old monitor had recorded the highest number of violations in the country over the last decade. The new monitor, two miles away, does not record nearly as many violations.

But air officials said the improvement had more to do with their new Air Alert notification program, which sends out bad-air warnings through text, Twitter, Facebook, email, radio, television and newspaper announcements. An alert was triggered this week and continues through Friday.

"We need the public to help out right now," said Sadredin. "We're not out of the woods yet."

