

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2011:](#)

OUR VIEW: School days need not equal bad-air days

Here's a scenario very likely to occur in the next few weeks: School starts. It will be hot. And thousands of cars will converge twice a day, five days a week, on neighborhood schools. The highly concentrated tailpipe fumes from these cars will amass in the air, bake in the sun and drive up ozone levels. And we will end up with our first bad-air violation of the year. Or not.

The regional air district is rolling out a new effort to stem ozone violations by issuing Air Alerts 48 hours in advance of days when ozone is likely to be high. This presents a ripe opportunity for all of us to be clean-air Samaritans and help stave off unacceptably bad air -- and the expensive fines that inevitably come with it.

Regional data show that these air violations tend to occur in late August, when school starts, specifically between 2 and 5 p.m., when class lets out and the afternoon commute begins.

At a minimum, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District hopes that on Air Alert days, parents will resist idling in front of the school as they wait for their children, and others will put off running errands.

But we can do more than that. Because more than half of Kern County children arrive at school by private automobile, according to the Kern Council of Governments, we can put a dent in the air-quality problem by encouraging parents to carpool with other parents -- or ditch the car altogether if they live within walking distance, thereby reducing the number of cars headed to school.

Many schools have adopted the walking school bus program, which encourages groups of children to walk to school with one or more adults. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a route with meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers. Informal programs like the walking school bus are good for everyone's health, too.

Schools can play an even bigger role in fighting bad-air days. They can send home fliers asking parents to watch for Air Alerts, post signs the day before an air violation is likely to occur, and organize walking school bus groups if they aren't in place already.

Due to past air violations, the valley is already facing a \$29 million annual fine from the federal government. Businesses will shoulder \$10 million of the fine and residents the rest through an additional \$12 DMV fee taking effect this fall. If we can manage to go three years without a violation, the fine will end and the DMV fees will sunset. An effort is under way to have the annual fine repealed on the grounds that available measures have led to significant improvements in our air -- and the technology to completely eliminate violations simply doesn't exist yet.

Still, fine or no fine, it's in everyone's interest to avoid bad-air days. Whether or not the EPA's ability to levy such fines is rescinded, valley residents should feel better knowing they're capable of going three years without a bad-air violation by simply modifying their behavior.

Air Alerts will be issued by email, on the district's website and through local media outlets. Air officials hope valley residents will take these alerts to heart and change their habits this school year. We are confident they can, but schools will have to help play a role.

Officials: Bus costs won't have big effect on Tulare City School District

By Victor Garcia, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2011

A law allowing school districts to retrofit their buses to comply with air-quality regulations instead of buying new ones won't affect the Tulare City School District too much, district officials say.

All but one of its 23 buses have already been retrofitted or don't need to be retrofitted.

Assemblywoman Linda Halderman, M.D., R-Fresno, recently announced that Gov. Jerry Brown had signed her bill, which has saved school districts money by allowing them to retrofit their buses rather than purchase new ones in order to be compliant with air-quality regulations.

A bus retrofit, which costs about \$20,000, traps particulate air pollution.

"We had a grant for \$250,000 to do the retrofit," said Phil Pierschbacher, Tulare City School District assistant superintendent.

School districts are grappling with continued budget reductions and most are expecting further mid-year cuts if state tax revenue doesn't materialize.

The lone Tulare City School District bus without the retrofit is a reserve bus.

Tulare Joint Union High School District officials could not be reached for comment on Wednesday.

Halderman school bus retrofit bill signed into law

(Fresno) Business Journal, Wed., Aug. 10, 2011

A bill authored by Assemblymember Linda Halderman (R-Fresno) was signed into law today, helping schools to make air-saving retrofits to school buses without being forced into costly replacements.

Assembly Bill 470, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 2012, authorizes air quality management districts to use every \$2 of a vehicle registration fee to fund retrofit emissions control equipment on school buses in order to curb pollution.

Up until now, revenues from the last \$2 of the fee, which could be up to \$6 within each air district, was meant for specific programs that air districts believe will remediate harmful air pollution generated by vehicles.

Halderman's law makes that funding available for school districts under incentive programs like California's Lower-Emission School Bus Program to help them purchase emission control retrofits.

"This legislation proves we can make the Valley safer, cleaner and healthier for our kids without bankrupting local schools or burdening taxpayers," said Halderman, in a statement. "This measure isn't a tax, fee or mandate. It's help for school districts to improve children's health without straining local budgets."

School districts, in effect, could save over \$100,000 in the replacement of each outdated bus in order to meet California's clean air standards by installing the devices, according to the statement.

The funds could also be used to help replace onboard natural gas fuel tanks on school buses that are 14 years or older.

The law will remain in effect until Jan. 1, 2015 unless it is extended beyond that time.