

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sunday, March 4, 2012:](#)

Ranch takes double hit: from CARB, terrorists

By Lois Henry

Ludicrousity alert! Ludicrousity alert!

No, that's not a real word, but you'll be using it too by the time you finish reading this tale about the California Air Resources Board, Harris Ranch and a cowardly act of terrorism.

Oh, I should clarify: The cowardly act of terrorism was done by true criminals, as opposed to CARB, which isn't technically a crime syndicate but, as I've reported before, often employs a legal form of intimidation to achieve its ends. More on that in a bit.

Gotta have your background first.

The state gives truckers grants to replace old, polluting trucks with newer, cleaner burning ones.

That's just the carrot. There's a stick, too – a big one.

Truckers have to replace their vehicles on CARB's schedule no matter what the condition of the truck is. By 2015, you can't operate a truck older than a 2010 model. No matter how much life your 2007, 2008 or 2009 model has, it will have to go.

Since this is a statewide rule, reselling old trucks in California is becoming virtually impossible, so you can't recoup anything from your old equipment.

Even the "carrot" of incentive money only pays half the cost of a new truck.

CARB divvies up the incentive money between local air districts, which then dole out the \$50,000 to \$65,000 per-truck grants to qualifying applicants.

And here's the key rule in this case: each truck slated for replacement has to be operable and in use to be eligible. The state then destroys those old trucks.

Last year, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District approved 750 replacement grants, including 14 trucks owned by Harris Ranch.

Then the terrorists struck.

In the wee hours of Jan. 8, unknown assailants snuck onto the Harris' feed lot near Coalinga and torched more than a dozen cattle trucks.

The trucks burned to the ground.

Seven of those trucks had been on the Air District's approved replacement grant list.

Based on statements in an anonymous email that was sent to various websites in the days afterward, the attack appears to have been the work of animal rights activists.

The email gleefully takes responsibility for the destruction and mentions the "horrors and injustices of factory farming."

The terrorists' antics were bad enough, but CARB's later actions seemed to cheer them on.

Days after the fire, CARB staffers told the Air District to retract its Harris Ranch approval and deny the grants on those seven burned up trucks.

Why?

Because the trucks were *already* destroyed.

They no longer existed. Hence, they weren't causing any pollution and didn't merit replacement grants.

What?

No trucks = no pollution = thank you, terrorists!

"This is not good government," Seyed Sadredin, director of the Air District, told me, using the mother of all understatement.

The Air District had gone out to Harris Ranch the day after the fire and gathered the VIN numbers, mileage amounts and driving records of all seven trucks. It even had Harris store the chassis, just in case. There was no doubt those trucks had been operable and in use just hours before the terrorists torched them.

But CARB insisted the grants be denied.

Sadredin has been waging a campaign ever since, trying to get CARB to see reason. Good luck with that.

"This is not the first time this has happened," CARB spokesman Stanley Young told me of CARB's denial. "We are operating under very strict guidelines and have to make sure we have a vehicle capable of making it to the scrap yard."

There have been previous instances of trucks being destroyed or stolen and CARB pulled back the grants on those as well, Young said.

There is a small loophole truck owners can crawl through, sometimes.

"Typically, we require a substitute truck of similar vintage," Young explained.

Meaning, the owner has to go out and buy another truck.

Wait, I need a recap.

1. CARB dictates how old your truck can be and how long you can operate it.
2. You might be able to get a grant for half the replacement cost if you qualify.
3. Even if you're approved, if your truck is destroyed or stolen, in order to keep the grant you then have to spend more money on an older and more polluting truck.

Oh my.

Why not just use all that grant money to buy all the offending trucks straight out and scrap 'em?

Anyhow, CARB relented somewhat and offered the substitute truck loophole to Harris. CARB's Young said they're negotiating.

I told Young that forcing an owner who's just had a bunch of trucks torched to buy new trucks in order to satisfy some bean counter's interpretation of the letter of the law really seemed like kicking a guy when he was down.

Well, he mentioned, the trucks are often insured.

Yeah, that makes CARB's stance sooooo much more reasonable.

As an aside, only two of the seven Harris Ranch trucks were insured beyond straight liability. Harris had offered, at one point, to reduce its grants by whatever amount it recouped from that insurance. CARB still said no.

CARB does recognize that this is an unusual situation, Young said, but the agency's duty is to get as many old, polluting trucks off the road as possible.

Well, then the terrorists who hit Harris Ranch handed CARB quite a bonanza.

A Harris Ranch spokesman preferred not to comment until getting a final settlement from CARB.

I don't blame him.

Meanwhile, Sadredin has continued to try and get CARB to "do the right thing" and honor the original grant approvals.

This is an example, he said, of the cultural differences between CARB and the Air District.

"We deal directly with the public," he said. "ARB is isolated. They're not as directly accountable."

It shows.

Record number of burn prohibitions issued over dry winter

By Sabra Stafford, staff writer

The Turlock Journal, Friday, March 2, 2012

The ninth season of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Check Before You Burn program ended Wednesday with a record number of burn prohibitions issued over the winter months.

The dry and unseasonably warm winter created stagnant air conditions that kept particulate matter like soot, ash, dust and other miniscule materials hovering over the Central Valley and resulted in a string of burning curtailments.

"Considering the abnormal conditions this winter that dealt not only us but air districts statewide one blow after another in terms of air quality, this rule was especially critical in minimizing, to the extent possible, this dangerous form of pollution," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's air pollution control officer and executive director.

Check Before You Burn runs from November through February each winter and restricts the use of residential wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates in order to prevent the build-up of fine particulate matter.

During winter wood burning is the largest single source of fine particulate matter, which is a harmful form of pollution that has been linked to chronic lung disease, respiratory illness, heart attacks and premature death.

Each day during the season, wood burning forecasts are issued by county that determine if open-hearth fireplaces, wood-burning stoves or inserts, or pellet stoves can be used. Curtailments also apply to outdoor chimneys and fire pits. Violations of these prohibitions result in fines, although exemptions are available to residents for whom wood burning is their sole source of heat or if they have no access to natural gas.

Residential wood burning can pump as much as 17 tons per day of this pollutant into the air basin. A Valley-wide wood burning curtailment results in air pollution reductions equivalent to taking 140,000 trucks off the road, according to the air district.

There were 51 burn prohibitions issued in Stanislaus County this year, compared to 25 for last year. There were 152 notice of violations issued in the county this season. Last year, there were 54 issued.

"It has been a difficult season for everyone in the Valley, and it bears repeating that despite the conditions that escaped our control, the willingness of residents to refrain from wood burning prevented even more dire air quality conditions from forming," Sadredin said.

Tracy earns funds for green vehicles

Stockton Record, Monday, March 5, 2012

TRACY - The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has awarded the city a \$100,000 grant to purchase five alternative-fuel vehicles.

Grant funds are part of a program to help government agencies and public institutions meet clean-air projects that directly affect the air quality for Valley residents.

District records show pollution has declined 80 percent from factories and businesses and 60 percent from mobile sources such as cars and trucks since 1980, but the Valley remains one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation and is out of compliance with federal clean-air standards.

Using such alternative-fuel vehicles is expected to help the area improve its air quality.

Summit to clear air about asthma in S.J.

Daylong event shares innovative research, tips on ways to cope

By Joe Goldeen

Stockton Record, Monday, March 5, 2012

AM STOCKTON - If all 115,000 residents of San Joaquin County with asthma decide to attend the upcoming free asthma summit, the organizers will have to find a new venue.

"Connecting Community to Combat Asthma" is a one-day, two-part health summit for professional health care providers and those interested in learning more about the incurable, chronic disorder that causes a person's lung airways to swell and narrow, leading to wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness and coughing.

An asthma attack can be triggered by something as innocuous as pet hair, dust, mold, pollen, a common cold, tobacco smoke or a sudden stressful situation.

The Valley's poor air quality also contributes to the region's higher-than-average rates of asthma.

The asthma summit will be held Saturday at the San Joaquin County Office of Education Wentworth Education Center, 2707 Transworld Drive. It's a project of San Joaquin County Public Health's Obesity & Chronic Disease Prevention Taskforce.

The first session, from 7:30 to 10:30 a.m., offers continuing medical education credits for physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, health educators and pharmacists.

Lodi physician Ronald Kass, board certified in pulmonology and internal medicine, will update participants on asthma guidelines, while Stockton allergist George Bensch will lead a discussion, "Origins and Pathways of Asthma: Is it my imagination or is there more of it?"

The free session for the public begins at 9:30 a.m. with registration, followed at 10 a.m. with a panel discussion explaining asthma, how pervasive it is in the county, the latest treatments and how schools deal with students with asthma.

Anthony Presto with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will discuss air quality in the Valley at noon, followed by sessions on physical activity and medication management. Respiratory Works will provide its Interactive Lung Health Learning Center, especially aimed at educating children.

Health information booths staffed by a variety of agencies will be available. The summit ends at 2 p.m.

The morning session includes a free continental breakfast while the midday activities include free lunch, available only by registering in advance by today.

To register, send your name, organization if any, mailing address, phone and email address by fax to (209) 468-4960. For more information: Mikey Kamienski, Charterhouse Center for Families, at (209) 476-1106.

Study links heavy diesel exhaust to lung cancer

The Associated Press

In the Fresno and Modesto Bee, Friday, March 2, 2012

WASHINGTON -- There's new evidence that exposure to exhaust from diesel engines increases the risk of lung cancer.

Diesel exhaust has long been classified as a probable carcinogen. But the 20-year study from the National Cancer Institute took a closer look by tracking more than 12,000 workers in certain kinds of mines - facilities that mined for potash, lime and other nonmetals. They breathed varying levels of exhaust from diesel-powered equipment, levels higher than the general population encounters.

The most heavily exposed miners had three times the risk of death from lung cancer compared to workers with the lowest exposures, said the study released Friday by the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

But even workers with lower exposures had a 50 percent increased risk, wrote lead author Debra Silverman, an NCI epidemiologist.

"Our findings are important not only for miners but also for the 1.4 million American workers and the 3 million European workers exposed to diesel exhaust, and for urban populations worldwide," Silverman wrote.

She pointed to some highly polluted cities in China, Mexico and Portugal that in past years have reported diesel exposure levels that over long periods could be comparable to those experienced by miners with lower exposures.

Litigation from some mining companies had delayed release of the study findings.

A separate industry group not involved in that litigation said Friday that the study looked back at mines using decades-old equipment, and there's far less pollution from diesel engines today.

"Diesel engine and equipment makers, fuel refiners and emissions control technology manufacturers have invested billions of dollars in research to develop and deploy technologies and strategies that reduce engine emissions, now ultimately to near zero levels to meet increasingly stringent clean air standards here in the United States and around the world," said Allen Schaeffer of the nonprofit Diesel Technology Forum.

[Modesto Bee commentary, Saturday, March 3, 2012:](#)

SLY: Being a Stanislaus County supervisor a big job that few seem to want **By Judy Sly**

In order to become a county supervisor, Vito Chiesa had to spend about \$240,000 and defeat a popular former sheriff, Les Weidman. In order to win a second term, it appears Chiesa will have to ... do nothing.

With only a week left in the filing period for the June election, no one has stepped forward to run against Chiesa, and there aren't even any rumblings of a challenger.

Supervisors Jim DeMartini does have an opponent, as we've reported before. He is Daniel Padilla, a water engineer who ran unsuccessfully for the Ceres City Council last fall. And Riverbank Mayor Virginia Madueño told me Friday she still hasn't decided whether to run against Bill O'Brien.

With all three incumbents in the race, the filing deadline for the board seats closes Friday afternoon.

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Some people seem to think that being a county supervisor is a cushy job, with only once-a-week meetings. That's a myth. All five supervisors have to serve on a variety of committees as part of their job.

O'Brien's schedule this year is remarkable: He's chairing the Board of Supervisors, the Modesto Regional Fire Authority and the North County Corridor joint powers authorities, the Stanislaus Council of Governments executive committee and the StanCOG policy board, the county's General Plan Update Committee and the Health Exec Committee, and — this is big — [the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board](#). He is the incoming chairman of the 911 Joint Powers Authority and vice chairman of Local Agency Formation Commission. He's also serving on 13 other committees, but not as chairman. And he still has a day job in the family's supermarkets.

It's time-consuming, but these guys must like it. They want another term.

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Interesting Board of Supervisor races are shaping up in adjoining counties. All three incumbents in Merced County have at least one challenger. Up in Tuolumne County, a Summerville High School senior told the The Union Democrat that he plans for run for District 4, against incumbent John Gray. Nolan Matter is 18 and the election is just days before he graduates from high school.

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Where does Stanislaus County fall on the political spectrum? The Public Policy Institute of California (www.ppic.org) has created an interactive political geography map that colors us purple and labels us "conservative liberal."

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Monday, March 5, 2012:](#)

HITS & MISSES: Step up and help victims of tornadoes

MISS: Aggravating but worth it

Despite an increase in days when fireplace burning was banned, Kern County and the rest of the San Joaquin Valley experienced more air pollution than in the past few winters. Air officials have blamed the situation on a dry winter, which allowed pollution to build up in the air and create long stretches of poor air quality. In wetter years, winter storms tend to break up bouts of stagnant, dirty air.

While this is an unfortunate setback, we agree with officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, who say the air would have been worse had wood burning been allowed

unabated. No-burn restrictions are irritating to many people but they serve a purpose: to tame pollution episodes and protect everyone's health.