

Air district praised for smog testing

Fresno Business Journal, Friday, July 13, 2012

A coalition of business and labor leaders recognized the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for a program to reduce emissions from old vehicles. The Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Award, given out each year by the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance (CCEEB), lauds the air district for its Tune In & Tune Up program.

The CCEEB, which aims to advance strategies for a sound economy and a healthy environment, will present the award during a special reception on July 17 in Olympic Valley, Calif.

The air district oversees eight Valley counties managing regional efforts to meet federal air quality standards for ozone and particulate matter.

For the past year, one of those efforts has included the Tune In & Tune Up program that provides smog check testing and \$500 repair vouchers to help low-income drivers reduce their vehicle emissions.

Working together with Valley Clean Air Now, the air district has held 15 Tune In & Tune Up events, giving away more than 2,900 repair vouchers and testing about 4,900 vehicles.

Funding is available through California's Vehicle Repair, Retirement, Replacement for Motorists Program.

Each event is estimated to reduce about 3,000 tons of carbon monoxide, 300 tons of hydrocarbons and 150 tons of oxides of nitrogen from the air annually.

The next Tune In & Tune Up events will take place July 14 at the Kern County Fairgrounds and on Aug. 4 at the Stanislaus County Fairgrounds.

Participants are only required to bring in their vehicles, which can be tested for emissions within minutes.

San Joaquin Valley Air District Honored for Smog Check Program That Repairs Polluting Vehicles for Low-Income Drivers

Wall Street Journal Market Watch, The Auto Channel and other publications, Thursday, July 12, 2012

SAN FRANCISCO, Jul 12, 2012 (BUSINESS WIRE) – California business and labor leaders today recognized the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) for its low-income vehicle repair program that cleans up the region's oldest and dirtiest passenger cars and trucks. Tune In & Tune Up is a voluntary program that provides convenient Smog Check testing and \$500 repair vouchers to help low-income drivers pass Smog Check. Over the past year, the SJVAPCD and its partner Valley Clean Air Now held 15 events, reaching more than 5,500 participants, testing about 4,900 vehicles and giving away more than 2,900 \$500 repair vouchers. Each event results in the reduction of about 3,000 tons of carbon monoxide, 300 tons of hydrocarbons, and 150 tons of oxides of nitrogen from the air annually.

For its efforts, the SJVAPCD has been awarded the prestigious 2012 Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Award by the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance (CCEEB). CCEEB President Jerry Secundy announced the award winner by saying, "Tune In & Tune Up achieves some of the most cost-effective mobile source emissions reductions anywhere in the state. This is absolutely critical for meeting air quality standards. But more importantly, the program provides real dollar benefits to low-income drivers and families, enabling them to safely repair and register their vehicles, and helps to clean the air where they live, work and play. This is the type of balance between economy and environment for which CCEEB and the Pat Brown Award stands."

The award selection committee applauded the Tune In & Tune Up program for its out-of-the-box approach to collaboration and public-private partnerships. A number of other business and environmental groups supported the program's nomination, including the American Lung Association, Fresno County Department of Public Health, the City of Arvin, the Bakersfield Downtown Business Association, the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce, the United Way of San Joaquin Valley, Goodwill Industries of San Joaquin Valley, and Charterhouse for Families. Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall said, "The program targets those in the community who may not have smog certificates or the financial resources to seek repairs. Tune In & Tune Up focuses on assisting car owners obtain repairs that are otherwise out of reach."

The SJVAPCD will be honored at a special reception on Tuesday, July 17 in Olympic Valley, California. For more information about Tune In & Tune Up, go to http://www.valley-can.org/tune_in_tune_up.php. For more information about CCEEB and the Pat Brown Award, go to <http://www.cceeb.org/events/pba.html>.

Founded in 1973 by the late Governor Brown, CCEEB is a coalition of California business, labor and public leaders that strives to advance collaborative strategies for a sound economy and a healthy environment.

TCAG may extend COS bus program

Agency will vote on Monday; students get free rides

By David Castellon

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, July 14, 2012

Tulare County Association of Government officials say giving College of the Sequoias' students access to public buses throughout the county without having to pay for individual or monthly fare has been a great success.

In fact, it has been so successful, that on Monday TCAG's board of directors will vote whether to allocate \$50,000 of the organization's money to help keep the COS Student Transit Pass Program operating through the community college's fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters.

The money would come from TCAG reserves, unspent transportation dollars and contributions by Tulare County and the eight Tulare County cities that are members of the organization, Executive Director Ted Smalley said.

The group coordinates government money and seeks out additional money for transportation-related projects in the county from road improvements to public transportation programs.

"Nobody's talking about canceling the [Transit Pass] service, but transit agencies are asking if we are looking at different revenue sources to fund the service," Smalley said.

"Good planning doesn't mean you have to wait for a problem to start before working on it," he said, adding that maintaining the pass program is a high priority for TCAG's board of directors.

"From our perspective, it's been fantastic," said Brent Calvin, who until earlier this month had served as interim superintendent and president of COS and currently is an academic dean.

COS students voted in February 2010 to tack on \$4-\$5 to their semester tuition fees to help pay for the pass program, intended to promote bus ridership by students, as well as to help students without other transportation options to get to and from school.

The combined student fees add up to about \$50,000 a year, while the college itself contributes about \$15,000 to the program, Calvin said.

That money goes to partially offset losses to local bus services losing revenue from students that don't pay daily bus fares or buy monthly passes.

Under the program, students can show their current student identification cards to bus drivers and not be charged when they get on any buses in Tulare County or Kings County, the latter of which runs to COS' Hanford campus.

In the program's first semester in spring 2011, 115,199 bus rides were given to COS students.

That number grew to 154,614 rides in the fall 2011 semester and 152,725 in the spring 2012 semester, TCAG reports.

"The bottom line, this is a huge success. We are getting college [students] to ride this bus," Smalley said.

He noted that a spring 2012 survey of 12,622 COS students showed that 16 percent used their identifications to ride buses, and 409 reported that they wouldn't have attended the college if the program wasn't available.

In addition, 695 identified themselves as new bus riders, Smalley said. "I think this is vital for students."

He added that students who will attend COS' Tulare campus, currently under construction, will be able to use the passes when the new site opens in spring 2013.

But keeping the program going is a concern, said Calvin, whose college had its budget cut by \$4.5 million in the last fiscal year, which ended June 30. And COS could lose another \$2.7 million if in November, California voters don't pass Gov. Jerry Brown's initiative to raise sales and income taxes.

"Any time, in this fiscal climate, we're always worried about keeping everything going," he said.

The Porterville City College is in the early stages of discussions to launch its own transit pass program for students there, Smalley said.

"Everybody I know — especially our board — is a unified voice, wanting to see this continuing to be a successful service," Smalley said.

As such, he said, TCAG is in discussions to "partner" with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to contribute additional money to the Transit Pass Program, as it puts fewer drivers on roads here and reduces air pollution.

SoCal sludge to be trucked to Kings County

The Associated Press

Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Sunday, July 15, 2012

FRESNO, Calif.—Sewage sludge from dozens of Southern California cities will be heading to the San Joaquin Valley as part of the region's latest mega-composting project, the Fresno Bee reports.

The Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, which serves nearly 5.7 million people in 78 cities, has purchased about 4,500 acres of farmland, or a little more than seven square miles, in Kings County, the newspaper said.

Plans call for trucking up to 500,000 tons a year of the waste, or biosolids, to the site called Westlake Farms, where it will be mixed with wood debris and turned into compost.

The compost will be used to fertilize fields of cotton, wheat, pomegranates, pistachios and other crops, officials at the sanitation agency said.

Though the \$120 million project has survived the appeal process over its county-issued permit, and environmental groups settled a lawsuit over air-quality concerns years ago, environmentalists and some residents of nearby Kettleman City remain concerned over the project.

"We're watching this sewage sludge very closely," said Delano-based lawyer Caroline Farrell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, which filed the air-quality lawsuit against the composting project years ago.

A biosolids-mixing building will filter the sludge for odors and air pollutants, and a special fabric will trap ozone-making gases on composting piles, sanitation officials said.

"This is a top-notch, Cadillac system," said Ajay Malik, supervising engineer with the agency. "We have addressed the concerns about this project."

The facility will be developed in phases, with about 100,000 tons of waste being shipped a year to Kings County during the first phase, officials said.

Eventually up to 500,000 tons of biosolids and about 400,000 tons of green waste, or prunings could be shipped to the facility on an annual basis. Combined, they could produce more than 300,000 tons of compost each year.

The first sludge will probably be shipped to the facility late next summer.

Heat islands surrounded on all sides by perspiration

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Friday, July 13, 2012

There is not a single tree on Jim Lewallen's block. Looking east down Main Street, he spots a towering palm perhaps three blocks away. To the west, he can make out the forested grounds near the county courthouse.

"It's pretty hot, and the reason is there's so much concrete around here. Concrete on the ground, concrete on the buildings, concrete all over the place," said Lewallen, 53, an artist who spent Thursday painting in the air-conditioned lobby of the Main Street Manor apartments.

Lewallen lives on an island of sorts, and it's too warm for his liking.

A weather experiment

The Record attempted to document the urban "heat island" effect Thursday by surveying temperatures inside and outside of Stockton. Rural areas ranged from 100 degrees to 101 degrees; areas within city limits ranged from 103 degrees to 107 degrees.

- Holt and Whiskey Slough Road, 10 miles west of downtown Stockton: 100 degrees (4:15 p.m.)
- Wilhoit Road, five miles southwest of downtown Stockton: 101 degrees (4:25 p.m.)
- El Dorado Street at Jackson Street, one mile south of downtown Stockton: 107 degrees (4:40 p.m.)
- Weber and Sutter streets, downtown Stockton: 103 degrees (4:45 p.m.)
- Channel and E streets, two miles east of downtown Stockton: 103 degrees (5:10 p.m.)
- Beecher Road just south of Highway 26, eight miles east of Stockton: 101 degrees (5:20 p.m.)
- Highway 26 at Baldwin Lane, five miles east of downtown Stockton: 101 degrees (5:30 p.m.)

Stockton's official high temperature, measured at the Stockton Metropolitan Airport, was 104 degrees.

Downtown Stockton is hotter than surrounding neighborhoods and farmland.

You can probably feel the difference when you're driving into or out of the city, especially in the early evening, when coolness spreads more quickly over the green farm fields and Delta waters outside Stockton, while the concrete and asphalt urban center still smolders.

It's no trick of the mind.

And it's no joke, either. Urban "heat islands" pump up demand for energy, forcing residents to pay more to keep their air conditioners cranking. The extra heat also adds to the San Joaquin Valley's already woeful pollution levels. And for some, it can be deadly.

An Environmental Protection Agency study found that major cities are anywhere from 2 degrees to 5 degrees warmer than surrounding rural areas. At night, the difference can climb as high as 22 degrees.

No scientist appears to have ever measured Stockton's heat island. While it's likely not as severe as those larger cities, one leading expert says downtown Stockton is probably at least 1 degree to 2 degrees warmer than the rest of the region.

Anyone who has walked across a blacktop surface on a 100-degree day knows why. Pavement and dark-shaded structures absorb heat. When air moves into the area, instead of cooling over grass or water, it roasts over city streets and swirls into the "canyons" between buildings, where it cannot escape.

Night brings some relief but fails to offset all the heat that collects during the day.

And so the islands grow hotter and hotter as long as any given heat wave continues.

This week's heat wave should break today, with temperatures dipping back into the 90s. But in the long term, urban heat islands may grow more severe as cities such as Stockton expand outward, replacing farms and open land with more pavement and more rooftops.

It is another consequence of sprawl, said Arthur Rosenfeld, a professor emeritus of physics at the University of California, Berkeley, and a leading expert on urban heat islands.

Case in point: Los Angeles, where endless outward growth has pushed the city's core temperature up 7 degrees over the past 60 years.

"Every city in the world is getting hotter as it grows, with the single exception of Palm Springs, which is cooled by the golf courses," Rosenfeld said. "Los Angeles is going up 1 degree every 8 years, which is faster than global warming. This is more life-threatening than global warming."

And the lives that are threatened are primarily those of inner-city residents who are often poorer and perhaps more elderly than those in cooler suburbs, he said.

Then there's air pollution. On Wednesday, at the peak of this week's heat wave, every monitoring station from Stockton to Bakersfield recorded violations of the federal standard for harmful ozone (smog).

Ozone forms when pollutants from vehicle tailpipes, factories and other sources mix in the atmosphere and cook under a hot summer sun. The dome of heat encapsulating Valley communities aids that process.

It's a serious enough problem that the Valley Air Pollution Control District last year issued guidelines to help cities simmer down. The guidelines encourage building "cool roofs" or white roofs that reflect heat instead of absorbing it, and planting more trees.

As for trees, insolvent Stockton has had enough trouble maintaining the existing urban forest, not to mention expanding it.

Trees provide more than shade. They also cool the atmosphere by "sweating" water into the air. According to a paper by Rosenfeld, one properly watered tree can release 40 gallons of water per day, cooling the atmosphere enough to offset the equivalent of 100 brightly blazing light bulbs.

Lewallen worries about people, especially the elderly, who live in his downtown neighborhood and perhaps don't have air-conditioned lobbies in which to spend the hottest days of the year.

"They go unnoticed," he said.

Firefighters hold training exercise on Liberty Road

By Katie Nelson

Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, July 13, 2012

Flames erupted in a field just north of Liberty Road early Thursday morning as firefighters trained in the already sweltering summer sun.

The Cosumnes Community Service District Fire Department, along with one truck from the Woodbridge Fire District, have been training all week in a field along Liberty Road, just east of Lower Sacramento Road, to learn how to properly extinguish fires, according to Cosumnes Fire Capt. Brian Brown.

Using a driptorch, firefighters lit the field's grass and let it burn before using their hoses and lots of water to properly put out the blaze.

A driptorch is a tool used in wildfire suppression, controlled burning, and other forestry applications to intentionally ignite fires.

The driptorch is made up of a canister for holding fuel with a handle attached to the side, a spout with a small loop to prevent fire from entering the fuel canister, a valve to allow air into the canister while fuel is leaving through the spout and a wick from which flaming fuel is dropped to the ground.

The wick is ignited and allows the fire to be directed as needed.

Though the firefighters were hoping to train again tomorrow, due to heavy smoke in the air from other wildland fires north of Galt, it is looking like training may be cancelled, Brown said.

"We have to check each day for quality," he said. "If conditions aren't right, we don't burn."

Imperial County leads state in treatment of children with asthma

Youngsters in the region are far more likely than those elsewhere to go to the ER or be hospitalized for the chronic respiratory disease. Experts don't know why.

Los Angeles Times and excerpted in the Hanford Sentinel, Monday, July 16, 2012

CALEXICO, CALIF. — As the relentless wind stirs up piles of dust and dirt and creates a gigantic funnel of haze in the vast, sweltering Imperial Valley, children like Marco Cisneros battle to breathe.

Marco wheezes and coughs and reaches desperately for his inhaler, but the medication doesn't always give him the relief he needs. Often, his mother has to call 911.

Since being diagnosed with severe asthma six years ago, Marco, who lives in this border town east of San Diego, has visited the hospital nearly 50 times. He has been airlifted on several occasions. The illness has affected much of his childhood, preventing him from playing sports, going to friends' houses and attending school for days at a time. Blowing out the candles on his 8th-birthday cake earlier this year, Marco had just one wish: "I just want to run."

For children with asthma in California, there is no place worse than Imperial County. They are far more likely than children in any other county to end up in the emergency room or hospitalized. Kids go the ER for asthma at a rate three times higher than the state's average, according to the Department of Public Health.

"Imperial stands out," said Meredith Milet, an epidemiologist with the department. "There is obviously a disparity.... There is just a need for something to change. It should be possible for it to be different for the kids of Imperial."

Severe childhood asthma is also a major problem elsewhere in California, including the smog-filled Central Valley. Heavily agricultural Fresno, Merced and Bakersfield, for example, all rank high in the nation for the worst cities for asthmatics. Imperial County is different because it leads the state for asthmatic children going to the ER and being hospitalized, but experts are unable to pinpoint the cause.

Doctors and public health officials said that a combination of whipping winds, pesticide-tinged farmland dust and large numbers of low-income families lacking health insurance contribute to high rates of asthma hospitalizations and ER visits.

Whatever the reason, uncontrolled asthma and frequent hospital visits aren't just an issue for those with the disease; many children are covered by Medi-Cal, meaning taxpayers often pay the tab for care.

In Imperial County, about 63% of asthma-related ER visits and 67% of the hospitalizations, for both children and adults, are paid through Medicare and Medi-Cal. Each hospitalization costs, on average, about \$16,600.

The county spans nearly 4,600 square miles of mostly desert in the southeastern corner of California, just north of Mexico and west of Arizona. The county is hot and dry and depends largely on agriculture. About 20% of the 177,000 residents live in poverty.

One in five of Imperial County's children ages 5 to 17 has been diagnosed with the chronic respiratory disease, which cannot be cured but can be managed with medication. Uncontrolled asthma can lead to hospitalization and in rare cases, death. In 2009, a 16-year-old girl died after an asthma attack.

Asthma is so prevalent among the students at Barbara Worth Junior High School in Brawley that the principal sends air quality alerts to his teachers and regularly cancels outdoor activities. Students keep inhalers in multiple locations on campus, and paramedics respond to asthma attacks several times each year.

"It impacts everything," Principal Luis Panduro said. "It is a major issue."

One student, Joseph Leon, 13, who has been to the hospital numerous times and misses several weeks of school each year, started an effort to have youths with severe asthma wear identifying bracelets and to get more training for both teachers and students.

At El Centro Regional Medical Center, nurses look outside and know immediately how busy their pediatric unit will be. Is it cold? Are the farmers burning their fields? Is it windy? Of every 10 patients, nurse Jessica Ruiz estimated that seven are being treated for asthma.

Imperial County is known for its poor air quality, in part because of its unpaved roads, agricultural tilling and industrial pollution from Mexico. The county's air pollution control district has made progress in improving the air quality, but it still far exceeds federal health standards for airborne particulates. And that, according to the EPA, can increase the number and severity of asthma attacks among residents.

Kimberly Calderon, a nurse practitioner, said the valley is like a giant bowl, filled with a hazardous stew of pesticides, fertilizer and dust. "All that smoke and air lingers and doesn't go anywhere," she said.

In addition to the bad air, youths also frequently end up in the hospital because of asthma triggers such as cigarette smoke, mold or pets, or because they don't know how to correctly manage the disease, said Luz Tristan, a physician in Calexico.

"They don't think a daily medication is needed, so they will stop taking it as soon as they feel well," she said. "It's denial and poor compliance."

Some patients also don't have insurance or regular doctors so they use the ER as a way into the healthcare system and to get to specialists, said Afshan Baig, chief medical officer of the Brawley-based Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, where a third of the pediatric patients have asthma.

The hospital isn't the best place to treat asthma, she said. "It's like any other chronic disease — the better we can manage it in an outpatient setting the better it is for the patient."

County public health department officials said they are consistently working to reduce hospitalization rates from asthma. "It is a health issue that has been ... a concern to our community for some time now," said Paula Kriner, an epidemiologist with the department. "It has a cost in terms of hospitalization. It has a cost in terms of medical care and quality of life."

One of the county efforts is run by Aide Fulton, a nurse who visits families at the hospitals and their homes to educate them about the disease and keep them out of the ER. Fulton has spent years working with Marco Cisneros' family, even helping the family move to subsidized public housing with fewer asthma triggers. Nevertheless, Marco's asthma continues unabated.

Marco, who is covered by Medi-Cal, regularly sees doctors and specialists and has shelves full of medications. The family lives in fear of the next asthma attack, and his mother said she wishes she could make his childhood more normal. Last year, she and her husband bought him a bicycle, but he is afraid to ride it. He tried to play soccer, but he could only run a few seconds before needing his medication.

"He asks me, 'When am I going to be cured?' " said Susana Tolentino. "I would like a doctor who is magic, that they would tell him that he wouldn't have any more asthma crises."

Norma Valenzuela, who lives in El Centro, knows about asthma crises too. Three of her four children have the disease.

Valenzuela said she does her best to avoid going to the hospital, but it doesn't always work. She keeps her sons indoors as much as possible and when they do go outside, she first hoses down the yard. When they have trouble breathing, they don't go to school. Esteban, 13, missed about one-third of last school year.

Esteban said having asthma is "kind of normal" for him, even though he sometimes gets scared of all the doctors, nurses and medications. He knows that as long as he lives in Imperial County, his asthma won't improve. "The environment here is dusty and dirty and bad for us," he said.

But Valenzuela said the family lives in subsidized housing and can't afford to move. So she just carefully monitors the boys' medication and watches for signs of an asthma attack.

"I'm trying not to go to the ER too much," she said. "It's less traumatizing to them if I can try to control them at home."

Ask the Californian

By The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, July 16, 2012

Q: On the east side of Fairfax Road south of Panorama Drive, land is being graded. There doesn't appear to be any dust control resulting in dust and dirt drifting up to homes on the bluff.

Why is that area being graded and is there any provision to have water trucks spray the area to help keep the dust under control?

-- Darlyn Baker

Q: There is a huge amount of dirt being moved around on both sides of Fairfax Road, just north of Alfred Harrell Highway. What are they doing there?

-- *Bob Braley*

A: Rick Millwee, Bakersfield construction superintendent, answered:

The only project that we have in the general area of these two questions is an excavation operation to move soil from a hill on the east side of Fairfax Road for placement as a cap to the old sanitary landfill.

Dust control provisions, including placement of water within the excavation operation, are being implemented by the contractor during this process. City staff and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff are monitoring this operation for compliance with state law for dust control.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Monday, July 16, 2012:](#)

Editorial: Speak your mind on health of your lungs

Lydia Rojas' 15-year-old daughter suffered an asthma attack so severe she died.

Even though he had never smoked, 33-year-old Robert Linkul of Sacramento contracted a rare form of cancer that forced the removal of the lower lobe of his left lung.

Vallejo fifth-grader Jaxin Woodward is an avid runner, but severe asthma forces her to curtail her passion for the sport.

These are just a handful of California residents who are set to testify before federal Environmental Protection Agency officials in Sacramento on Thursday.

The hearing is one of two EPA is holding across the country to gather information about its proposed new standard for protecting the public from fine particulate pollution, one of the more deadly forms of air irritants. These microscopic bits of dust, soot, metals, acid, pollen and molds can damage lungs, aggravate asthma, trigger cancers and hasten death.

EPA has proposed a standard for fine particles that the American Lung Association complains does not go far enough to protect public health.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress have introduced legislation that would force the agency for the first time to factor in feasibility and cost when setting air pollution standards.

Cost and feasibility are appropriately considered now, but at the state and air district level where final environmental rules are drafted and implemented. The federal Clean Air Act requires the EPA to consider health science only when setting standards.

The law is intended to give the public an unvarnished assessment of what is needed to protect it from the damaging impacts of air pollution.

Nowhere is the debate over air pollution standards and the methods used to determine those standards more important than in California. Residents of our state breathe the dirtiest air in the nation.

At the southern tip of the San Joaquin Valley, particulate pollution is particularly severe. In late summer the primary source of particulates is diesel truck emissions. In winter, it's wood smoke.

The American Lung Association says that nationwide tougher standards would prevent 35,700 premature deaths, 2,350 heart attacks, more than 23,000 visits to hospitals and emergency rooms, 1.4 million cases of aggravated asthma and 2.7 million days of missed work or school.

Children like Woodward would benefit the most. Their young lungs are still developing. Bits of soot and ash breathed deep can lodge in airways and even enter the bloodstream, impeding lung development with debilitating repercussions that last a lifetime.

People who breathe the air in California and have a direct stake in this debate have a rare opportunity this week to weigh in on it.

Public hearing

The EPA's Sacramento hearing begins at 9 a.m. Thursday at the California Air Resources Board, 1001 I Street.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, July 13, 2012:](#)

Even for Valley, Thursday's ozone was special

By Mark Grossi

The air turned scary corrosive for two hours in northwest Fresno on Thursday, and it was nearly as bad in many other places. In the Valley where breathing ozone is a way of life, this was special.

The episode triggered a now-familiar debate. Maybe readers can help sort it out.

Kevin Hall, who heads the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, asks: Why isn't there some kind of warning system above and beyond the everyday communications about the Valley's summer ozone problem?

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District already has a ground-breaking online system to tell people hourly how bad the ozone is. Follow it, and you will know how bad the air is getting.

But that's not enough, says Hall. The district warns people about unusual dust problems. Why not ozone too?

"Either the Valley air board is asleep at the wheel or its members have simply chosen to look the other way," he said.

District leader Seyed Sadredin said despite the unusual conditions -- hot temperatures and a cloud cover that led to stagnation in the air -- the ozone readings are still much lower than in the past during such episodes.

"Nonetheless, Valley residents, especially the sensitive population, should make a habit of checking the District's RAAN website and take action to protect themselves accordingly," he said.

The system is quite a tool. I use it all the time. But does Hall have a point? Should there be something more on special days like Thursday? Let's hear from readers.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Saturday, July 14, 2012:](#)

Let's improve our region

An ominous cloud of impure, unhealthy air hangs over our homes and lives in "our treasured fruit basket of the nation." The \$29 million fine for air quality violations is money that could be used in far better ways.

This is a big reason we must work to oppose all gravel mining in Fresno County.

Other reasons include: the increase of dust and particulates in our air, the huge drain on our limited water supplies, the increased wear and tear on our country roads, the desecration of a sacred site (Jesse Morrow Mountain), an apparent disregard for property owners' aesthetics and the changing of an inspirational, beautiful trip to General Grant and Sequoia parks.

Granted, the citizens and volunteers who give of their time and energy to promote the well-being and the benefit of living in this area do not have at their disposal the thousands of dollars spent in public relations efforts, as do the firms wishing to get approval for mining operations.

Let's work to keep the ambience of our Valley.

Ethel K. Harder, Reedley

