

Health roundup: Data compares local hospitals; valley avoids air violations despite heat

By Rachel Cook, staff writer
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Local air district officials proclaimed Monday that the valley endured last week's heat wave without violating a smog standard that can trigger hefty federal fines.

With temperatures blazing above normal conditions, the weather was "ideal" for generating ozone, which could lead to a violation of the one-hour federal ozone standard, according to a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District news release.

Air district officials praised businesses and the public for cutting down on emissions, noting that smog-producing pollution from valley businesses has fallen 80 percent since 1980. In turn, air quality has improved and the valley's number of exceedances of federal standards has dropped, the news release said.

In 2012, the valley had just two exceedances of the one-hour ozone standard, down from 56 in 1996.

Breaching the federal standard comes at a high cost. Valley businesses and residents will pay off a \$29 million annual penalty from a handful of exceedances in 2010 through fees, the news release said.

Exceedances of the one-hour ozone standard remain a problem in late summer, air officials said, particularly with back-to-school traffic. The air district will work with schools and parents to keep traffic and idling down with an outreach and incentive program, the news release said.

The district also issues "Air Alerts" when there is a risk of violating the one-hour ozone standard. During an alert, residents are encouraged to reduce emissions by abstaining from idling while taking students to and from school, carpooling, and not using drive-throughs.

Businesses and governments are encouraged to move operations like lawn care to early morning or late evening, allow for flexible work schedules, encourage employee carpools, use telecommuting and join the district's "Healthy Air Living Partner" program.

Volvo to Offer Dimethyl Ether Engines

Light & Medium Truck, Mon., June 10, 2013

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Volvo Trucks said it will begin selling trucks powered by dimethyl ether starting in 2015.

At a press conference at the state Capitol here on June 6, Volvo officials said they have already begun field-testing DME trucks with one fleet and will soon add a second test in conjunction with food-store chain Safeway Inc., a fuel producer and a local governmental agency in California. The DME-powered engines will be installed in Class 8, over-the-road trucks.

DME is a fuel that can be produced from organic waste or can be processed from natural gas.

"We believe the fuel shows great potential for the North American market and, when produced from biomass, it can provide a 95% reduction in [carbon dioxide] compared to diesel," said Göran Nyberg, president of Volvo Trucks' sales and marketing efforts.

Volvo's first DME trucks have been running over the road in North America since December at a bulk tanker fleet owned by Martin Resource Management Group.

Company officials said that grocery chain Safeway will begin running two of its VNL models equipped with 13-liter engines that have been modified to run on DME.

At the press conference, officials from Volvo, Safeway, Oberon Fuels and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District discussed the test. The trucks will run in the San Joaquin area, and the district agency contributed \$500,000 to the test.

Volvo said the trucks will run on fuel produced by Oberon, which it said has developed portable, small-scale production units that can cost-effectively convert biogas and natural gas to DME.

Volvo's original interest in DME was spurred by its Swedish roots, since it can be produced from so-called "black liquor," a hazardous waste produced by paper producers. Several paper manufacturers have plants in Scandinavia, and the process allows them to convert the waste into a useful fuel.

"The Oberon process enables previously wasted resources to be converted to clean-burning DME," said Neil Senturia, CEO of Oberon.

DME can be made from a number of feedstocks, such as food, animal and agricultural waste, as well as from natural gas.