

Valley avoids summer ozone spike for first time

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

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For the first time on record, summer passed here without a dangerous peak in dirty air. Could it finally be time to celebrate a historic moment — the San Joaquin Valley no longer in violation of the federal one-hour ozone standard?

It's not a done deal yet.

Air-quality activists say the local air district still must explain a sudden improvement in the notorious smog trap of Arvin in Kern County after an air monitor was moved.

"You can't just move a monitor and claim you cleaned up the air," said Tom Franz, the Kern County leader of the activist group Association of Irrigated Residents.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is working on an explanation and will submit it to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which will review it.

The district did a lot of extra monitoring over the summer around Arvin. Officials say the preliminary data shows the air has cleaned up, even next to the site of the old monitor.

If the analysis holds up and ozone doesn't spike in October, the Valley appears to have achieved the one-hour federal standard.

An exceedance at this point in the year seems unlikely, experts say, since the air is much cleaner now than it was a dozen years ago — the last time ozone breached the one-hour threshold in October.

But why all the fuss over the one-hour standard? It was abolished in 2005 and replaced by the more health-protective eight-hour standard. Federal law still required the Valley to make the old standard by 2010.

Like every other ozone cleanup deadline in the past, the Valley missed it. A \$29 million annual penalty was triggered.

The penalty, paid mostly by Valley residents in vehicle registrations, will go away if the standard is achieved. And the Valley's public-relations nightmare might be at a turning point after years of headlines describing this region as one of the dirtiest air basins in the country.

In fact, this 25,000-square-mile geologic bowl has long been one of the two most polluted places in the country, the other being the South Coast Air Basin in Southern California.

The bowl shape and hot, stagnant summers allow pollution to build up for days. In stifling 1996, the Valley exceeded the one-hour standard 56 times. Ozone remained above the health threshold for more than 280 hours.

This would be the first year that the Valley puts up zeroes for those numbers.

"I know it seemed hopeless years ago," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "But businesses have invested billions of dollars in technology. Residents are paying attention to our air alerts. And we have many of the most advanced rules in the country."

Nobody is saying the air-quality fight is over, least of all health advocates and air-quality activists. It may take another decade to make the tougher eight-hour standard, which this region has exceeded more than 80 times this year.

Health advocates say ozone remains a real problem here. It's a corrosive gas that attacks the lungs, triggering asthma, bronchitis and heart problems. The gas is particularly harmful to people with sensitive lungs as well as children and the elderly.

Air-quality activists say the district should not be taking bows for air advances. The toughest rules are often started by environmental lawsuits that force the EPA and the district to take action, they say. Farm pollution rules are among the examples they cite.

Air-quality lawsuits have been filed almost continuously over the last 12 years, including a challenge to the Valley's attainment of the PM-10 standard, aimed at coarse particles such as dust.

Activists lost the PM-10 challenge, but they forced regulators to defend decisions that waived high readings due to unusual wind events.

No one has talked yet about suing over attainment of the one-hour federal ozone standard. One possible issue is the Arvin monitor.

At times, the old monitor showed Arvin was the Valley's ozone hot spot — sometimes it was the nation's ozone hot spot.

The monitor was moved after the California Air Resources Board lost its lease in a squabble over a different air-quality issue with the landowner, Arvin-Edison Water Storage District.

The farmers on the district's board were not pleased with new diesel engine rules, which require expensive filters and truck replacement. State air board officials came before the board to answer questions about the science involved, but board members were unmoved.

"The answers were not satisfying," said general manager Steve Collup at the time. "So board members decided they didn't want to be part of this monitoring anymore."

State officials moved the site two miles away near a school. They took readings from both old and new monitors in 2010, as they prepared to shut down the old site.

Ozone concentrations were 11% lower at the new site, and it showed no exceedances of the one-hour standard that year. At the old site, however, the one-hour threshold was breached twice.

"It's an outrage to pretend there's nothing wrong with this picture," Franz said.

The district this summer placed more than 20 temporary monitors all through the area east of Bakersfield and in Arvin, including a spot across the street from the notorious monitor.

District leader Sadredin says a preliminary look at the data shows the whole area has cleaned up. One of the temporary monitors was set up across the street from the Arvin-Edison district site. Sadredin said its readings actually were lower than the ones from the new monitoring site.

The EPA would make the ruling on the Valley achieving the ozone standard. The agency will study the district's analysis, said Kerry Drake, an associate director in the agency's regional air division in San Francisco.

"You can't make a standard by moving a monitor," he said in answer to a question. "We will look closely at the report."

PG&E buys unique electric trucks from Stockton manufacturer

Central Valley Business Times, Friday, Sept. 20, 2013

Electric Vehicles International of Stockton has the state's biggest electric company as a customer with Pacific Gas and Electric Company signing up for the utility industry's first electric hybrid drivetrain Class 5 trucks.

The "Range Extended Electric Vehicle" utility trucks, developed by EVI in partnership with PG&E and the California Energy Commission, were designed, built and tested in the heart of the Central Valley at EVI's manufacturing plant in Stockton.

The REEV features an all-electric range of 45 miles and fuel savings of up to 30 percent when the units are operating in hybrid mode.

PG&E accepted delivery of the first two REEV units this summer, and purchased two additional units after a successful initial demonstration of the vehicles.

"California's alternative and renewable fuels and vehicle technology program is putting more of the cleanest vehicles into service today," says Janae Scott, a member of the California Energy Commission.

“The investments that the Energy Commission is making covers initial costs of these trucks, gets innovative technologies to market sooner, and furthers California’s lead on clean transportation.”

EVI, formerly headquartered in Toluca, Mexico, moved its operations to Stockton in 2009 to take advantage of various statewide and regional incentives designed to assist alternative-fuel truck and bus manufacturers in reducing prices for its customers.

Beyond statewide incentives such as the Hybrid and Zero-Emission Truck and Bus Voucher Incentive Project offered by the California Air Resources Board, EVI has partnered with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to reduce the costs of clean vehicles even further based on the district’s pledge to match other government incentives.

“Our decision to relocate to Stockton was the best choice we could have made and we are proud to bring new jobs to the San Joaquin Valley and to help reduce air pollution in this highly affected region,” says Ricky Hanna, president and CEO of EVI.

PG&E plans to eventually replace all 942 of its conventional fuel Class 5 vehicles, including bucket trucks, flat beds, and other service trucks, with plug-in electric hybrid models, which would save the utility nearly \$3.5 million in fuel costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 9,000 metric tons annually. In addition to the fuel savings and environmental benefits that PG&E anticipates as it deploys these trucks in increasing numbers, the trucks also offer up to 75 kW of exportable power that could be used to provide power to the grid during planned or unplanned outages, and the utility is working closely with EVI to move that number even higher.

“These cutting-edge trucks not only will help us reduce our fuel costs as well as our carbon footprint, but in the event of an outage, we would be able use their exportable power capacity to supply electricity to homes and businesses,” says Dave Meisel, senior director of transportation and aviation services for PG&E.

[Sacramento Bee Capitol Alert Blog, Sat., Sept. 28, 2013:](#)

Jerry Brown signs bills extending fees to reduce emissions

Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation Saturday extending a fee on vehicle registrations and tire sales to pay for programs designed to reduce emissions.

Assembly Bill 8, by Assemblyman Henry Perea, D-Fresno, will extend until 2024 a \$3 increase in vehicle registration fees that was scheduled to expire in 2016. It requires the California Energy Commission to spend as much as \$220 million in vehicle registration fee revenues over the next decade to fund the development of up to 100 hydrogen-fueling stations.

Brown also signed Senate Bill 359, by Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, which includes \$20 million for rebates to Californians who purchase a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle or battery or fuel cell electric vehicle.

The Democratic governor said last week that he would sign the measures, and they were among a package of bills promoted by his office as supporting the state’s “burgeoning electric vehicle market.”

“Today, we reaffirm our commitment in California to an electric vehicle future,” Brown said in a prepared statement.

While the Perea bill provides funding for the development of hydrogen stations, it also repeals the California Air Resources Board’s authority to require oil refiners to ensure the availability of hydrogen fueling stations once a certain number of vehicles are on the road. The Sierra Club objected to stripping the air board of that authority, according to a legislative analysis.

Brown also signed Assembly Bill 266, by former Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield, D-Woodland Hills, and Senate Bill 286, by Sen. Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, extending by four years, to 2019, allowances for certain clean air vehicles to use carpool lanes regardless of how many people are in the car.

