

Air district looks to reduce pollution at charbroiler restaurants

By Andrea Castillo

Fresno Bee, Saturday, December 26, 2015

Smoke rises from Dog House Grill on Shaw Avenue at Chestnut Avenue across from the Save Mart Center in northeast Fresno.

Billowing smoke and the scent of sizzling meats might be familiar to anyone who drives down East Shaw Avenue in Fresno past Dog House Grill.

Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District notice it, too. They're tasked with noticing all kinds of smoke, even the emissions coming from barbecue restaurants like Dog House Grill that are a small fraction of the Valley's total particle pollution, known as PM-2.5.

Even so, the air district, which must reduce overall pollution emissions by 283 tons per day – more than 80 percent – by 2024, is looking at regulating those restaurants. The air district already regulates chain restaurants like Burger King that use under-fired char-broilers, using technology that filters out dangerous particles.

Regulating restaurants like Dog House Grill would save less than half of 1 ton of PM-2.5 per day in the eight-county air district region.

"We have such a big air-quality challenge here that we truly take the 'no stone left unturned' adage to heart," said air district spokeswoman Jaime Holt.

PM-2.5 causes hundreds of premature Valley deaths and can lead to a host of other significant health issues, such as pulmonary heart disease and cancer. Most pollution in the Valley comes from cars and trucks.

The air district is looking for restaurants to participate in a pilot program to test the new technologies, with most or all costs covered. Officials hope to determine whether the technologies produce the anticipated reductions and weigh the costs with benefits.

So far, only one restaurant has agreed – The Habit Burger Grill in Stockton. Air district executive director Seyed Sadredin said the agency is in talks with two or three other restaurants.

Sadredin said the agency will decide by 2017 whether the regulation is worth pursuing further.

"This really highlights the difficulty that regions such as ours face with respect to the federal Clean Air Act," he said.

Commercial BBQs target of air quality

By Dennis Wyatt

Manteca Bulletin, Sunday, Dec 27, 2015

The smoke — and smell — of commercial BBQ operations in Manteca and other San Joaquin Valley communities are in the crosshairs of a proposed San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District effort to reduce airborne particulate matter.

Reducing pollutants from such BBQs that have become a common feature among smaller valley restaurants in the past decade is a component of the district's overall strategy to meet federal health-based air quality mandates. And while district staff projects perhaps several hundred restaurants in the entire San Joaquin Valley will fall under the rule, it may end up impacting at least some of the prolific smaller BBQ operations in Manteca.

Charbroiling equipment rules already in place for restaurants since 2002 are likely to expand to mom and pop operations in 2017. The new rule is expected to exempt commercial endeavors that generate a "small" number of charbroiled steaks and burgers although the amount hasn't been clearly defined. In the neighboring Bay Area air quality district those restaurants that buy at least 1,000 pounds of meat every week are regulated by air pollution rules.

The district has noted a variety of technologies for capturing emissions from under-fired charbroilers have been developed or improved in recent years. To ease the transition to the pending standards, the District

is seeking a small group of Valley restaurant partners to participate in a demonstration program. Participating restaurants will be provided funding for the full cost of purchasing, installing, and maintaining installed systems during a demonstration period covering two years of operation. Participating restaurants will be allowed to keep the equipment after the demonstration period has concluded.

So far, only one restaurant has signed on in the eight-county air quality district — Stockton's Habit Burger Grill.

The district is under the gun to cut overall particulate emissions by roughly 80 percent or 238 tons by 2024. While most particulate matter pollution comes from cars, trucks, trains, and farm equipment the district estimates 500,000 pounds come from commercial charbroilers.

The district's Check before You Burn program that regulates when wood fireplaces can be used has reduced such pollution by 15 percent in cities like Manteca, Ripon, and Lathrop.

The drop in particulate pollution has been tied to a decline in heart disease throughout the valley.

Charbroilers come under San Joaquin Valley air district's microscope

By Garth Stapley

The Modesto Bee, Sunday, December 27, 2015

You might like the billowing smoke and scent of sizzling meats wafting from your favorite steakhouse or barbecue pit. But that smoke might not like your lungs and heart.

Although such emissions amount to a fraction of the San Joaquin Valley's air pollution, regulators could clamp down on commercial charbroilers in coming years. First, it would be nice to know whether new technology works well enough to require restaurants to use it.

So the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is looking for a handful of eateries to volunteer for a pilot program testing devices with fancy names like electrostatic precipitators, cyclonic extractors and diesel particulate filters. The air district would match participating restaurants with gizmo manufacturers.

The idea has attracted no takers so far in Stanislaus County; in fact, the only restaurant with a contract in the entire eight-county Valley is a Habit Burger Grill in Stockton.

Derek "Doc" Taylor isn't wild about the idea of monkeying with his time-honored, tried-and-true slow-cooking pit in front of Doc's Q'in Pit Stop on west Modesto's Maze Boulevard. "We use real wood and 19 different herbs and spices – mmm, it'll make you want to hug your momma," Taylor said.

Air district spokeswoman Jaime Holt thinks the offer is a good deal for restaurants because her agency will pay for the pilot equipment. If it works, and if the air district next year decides to regulate under-fired charbroilers, that restaurant would be sitting pretty, for free.

"If restaurants might be interested, send them our way," Holt said.

The catch: These devices can require wall and roof renovations, taking an income-producing grill out of commission for a couple of days or more. That might be too much to ask for a restaurant getting by on small profit margins.

Also, not all eateries will qualify. Most fast-food joints with chain-driven charbroilers resembling conveyor belts have been regulated since 2002 and need not worry about the potential new rule. Nor would eateries producing small amounts of charbroiled steaks and burgers.

The air district has not yet proposed limits; an agency handling air quality in the Bay Area regulates restaurants with under-fired charbroilers that buy at least 1,000 pounds of meat per week.

Regulators figure a couple of hundred restaurants in the eight-county Valley could become subject to a future rule, Holt said.

"There is a possibility that if a rule comes out down the road," Holt said, participating restaurants "would be ahead of everyone, with (new equipment) pretty much paid for. But we want folks to know we're being very soft-handed right now. We have no plans to go after your backyard barbecue."

The air district must reduce overall emissions by 283 tons per day – more than 80 percent – by 2024. Commercial charbroilers produce less than half of 1 ton of particulate matter pollution, known as PM 2.5, which claims hundreds of premature Valley deaths and can lead to a host of other health problems such as pulmonary heart disease and cancer. Most pollution comes from cars and trucks.

A recent California Air Resources Board report credited the air district's restrictions on wood fireplaces and heaters for reducing PM 2.5 by 12 percent throughout the air basin and up to 15 percent in cities. That helped reduce hospital admissions for heart disease in seniors by 7 percent and by 16 percent for coronary artery disease, the report found.

The restrictions, known as the Check Before You Burn program, prohibit burning when air quality worsens from November through February, unless people have cleaner-burning devices registered with the air district.

[Fresno Bee Editorial, Saturday, December 26, 2015:](#)

The age of the all-electric Valley is upon us

If we finally are to cleanse our Valley air and make this a more healthy place, we must get belching old cars off the streets and start adding electric cars and plug-in hybrids to our garages.

We wish the path to ending premature deaths and our high asthma rates weren't so narrow. But the reality is that a combination of the Valley's bowl shape and warm, sunny weather are the perfect recipe for forming ozone.

What is ozone and why is it bad for us?

It is a corrosive gas that can irritate the lungs and trigger breathing problems, asthma and heart ailments. The Environmental Protection Agency says that a new tougher ozone standard introduced earlier this year will prevent more than 200 premature deaths in 2025, when most of the nation will have complied with the stricter rule.

But our ozone problem is so bad that the EPA has given the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Quality Control District until 2037 to meet the higher standard.

Reducing our ozone to the new mark of 70 parts per billion – down from 75 parts per billion, a standard we have yet to achieve – will require us to use cars, trucks, buses, tractors and trains that run on electricity.

"We will have to eliminate emissions associated with fossil-fuel combustion," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the Valley air district.

So, the age of the all-electric Valley is upon us.

Change is never easy, but change we must. It helps that the Valley air district has incentive programs to push us in the right direction. These are in addition to the state and federal incentives we cited in a Dec. 23 editorial.

For example, the district's "Drive Clean!" program can give an additional \$3,000 for the purchase or lease of an all-electric vehicle (with lower amounts for plug-in hybrids). Combined with state and federal rebates, this allows someone interested in going electric to walk into a new-car showroom with \$13,000 in incentives.

A person in a low-income household who is driving an old beater, otherwise known as a gross-polluting vehicle, can qualify for \$22,500 in district, state and federal assistance for buying or leasing an electric car.

The district determines eligibility for its \$9,500 incentive to take gross polluters owned by low-income households off the road at its Tune In Tune Up events.

Employers, too, have an important role to play. The air district provides up to \$50,000 a year to businesses and public agencies that invest in charging stations for electric vehicles. There is a caveat: The charging station must be available for public use at least part of the time.

Our region has a reputation for being skeptical about new technologies. We typically don't jump on the bandwagon until after others have gone before us.

This time we need to step up and become early adopters.

All of us will benefit from cleaner air, but our children, the elderly and those suffering from heart and lung ailments stand to gain the most, says Gina McCarthy, administrator of the EPA.

And for those who say we can't afford to go electric, we say, do the math. Be sure to include all the incentives – as well as the staggering costs of missed school days, employee absences, emergency room visits, extended hospital stays and premature deaths.

Upcoming Tune In Tune Up events

Jan. 23, Stockton, San Joaquin Fairgrounds

Feb. 6, Porterville Fairgrounds

Feb. 20, Bakersfield, Kern County Raceway Park

Feb. 27, Madera Fairgrounds

March 5, Turlock Fairgrounds

March 19, Fresno, site to be determined

Additional information: <http://valleyair.org/grants/pass.htm>