

Favorable weather conditions help suppress blaze's growth

By Omar Shaikh Rashad

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The Dixie Fire — the 14th largest wildfire in California's history burning in Butte and Plumas counties — grew 9,000 acres after a night of relatively quiet fire activity.

The 217,581-acre blaze was 23% contained Wednesday morning as the Dixie Fire's own smoke and light rainfall helped firefighting efforts.

Despite slightly increasing humidity levels, a decrease in cloud cover Wednesday afternoon was expected to help firefighters attack the blaze from the air, Cal Fire officials said.

So far, the wildfire has destroyed 35 buildings and 19 other minor structures. It has also damaged five others. The fire has not caused any known injuries or fatalities.

Officials anticipate weather conditions to worsen later this week, as the region is facing low humidity, temperatures in the 90s and gusts of up to 25 mph.

Valley Air District runs incentive programs to reduce car emissions, promote new tech

By Ravyn Cullor

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Transportation makes up almost 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in California, and the San Joaquin Valley Air District is offering three incentive options to mitigate the massive role passenger vehicles play.

According to a 2018 California Air Resource Board report, 28% of all greenhouse gas emissions in the state are from passenger vehicles, followed by in-state power generation and heavy duty vehicles, at 9% and 8% respectively.

Vehicles are also massive contributors to dangerous pollution in the Valley. Brian Dodds, program manager of grants at the San Joaquin Valley Air District said mobile sources, like transportation and farm equipment, make up for 85% of nitrogen oxide pollution, which causes brown smog and is one of two components in summer ozone creation.

To alleviate the emissions, the Valley Air District offers three programs to either reduce emissions in conventional combustion-engine vehicles or help residents switch over to more efficient cars.

"We'll repair old vehicles which are high polluting, replace those that are older and not repairable or we offer rebates for those who don't qualify for a replacement to encourage adoption of new technologies," said Heather Heinks, outreach and community manager.

Information on all three programs can be found at valleyair.org/drivecleaninthesanjoaquin/. District phone operators and materials for all the programs are available in English and Spanish.

Repair

Dodds said the repair program, called Tune In and Tune Up, is designed for vehicles which aren't passing emission testing because they need fixing. He said as long as a repair is needed to improve the emissions, the district will cover the cost.

Prior to the pandemic the program was run as weekend events where car owners could get tested, diagnosed and serviced, along with hundreds of other people. Now, owners can call 1-800-806-2004 or complete an online form to get mechanic locations and information.

"We had to rethink how we get access to people who need the repair service," Heinks said. "Now you can start the conversation any day and you don't have to wait in line."

A car owner can call the service, be directed to a mechanic in their area who can test and diagnose the vehicle and the repairs are covered, as long as they affect the emissions, Dodds said.

The program doesn't have a model year or income cap, though Dodds said it's often utilized by people who own older vehicles.

Replace

For those who own a high-emissions vehicle made in or before 1999, which can't pass state testing, there is a program to get thousands of dollars to replace it. Vehicles have to either have failed emissions or have received a voucher from Tune In and Tune Up.

Dodds said the program is specifically designed for low-income households and disadvantaged communities. Households could be eligible for between \$2,500 and \$9,500, depending on their income level and place of residence.

The amount a household can receive for a new vehicle is based on its income in relation to the federal poverty level for the household size. The program is available to individuals whose household income is at or below 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Additional funds are available to those at or below 300% and 225% of FPL. Those in disadvantaged communities are also eligible for more money.

Funding depends on what kind of vehicle it's going towards, including a conventional vehicle which meets fuel consumption standards, hybrids which get 20-34 miles per gallon and 35 or more miles per gallon, and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles and electric vehicles.

The replacement program is the lowest on funding of the three, Dodds said. They are expecting to receive more money from the State later this year.

Car owners can apply on the website.

Rebate

For those who do not qualify for replacement funds, the district offers a rebate on the purchase or lease of "new, clean-air vehicles." Rebates include up to \$3,000, depending on the type of vehicle.

The program covers electric vehicles, hybrids, zero-emissions motorcycles and natural-gas powered vehicles in more than 100 models.

Heinks said the program is great for people who are interested in new vehicle technology but not ready to buy because they can receive a rebate for leasing.

Applications for rebates are available on the website.

Other efforts

Outside of funding for vehicles themselves, Heinks said the district and other organizations are making a push to make electric vehicles more viable for Valley residents.

Heinks owns an electric vehicle and has received a rebate from PG&E to cover the cost of the higher-voltage charger installed in her garage, which recharges her battery more quickly. Other utilities are making similar efforts to incentivize electric vehicle use, she said.

The district is also providing funding for businesses and municipalities which want to add charger sites. Encouraging more charging stations helps grow the charging network, which makes electric vehicles more reasonable for Valley residents, Heinks said.

Dodds also said the district has staff ready to help Valley residents through the application process for any of their programs.