

Decision on air move nears

Pollution status may be settled Thursday at air district's board meeting.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

(Published Wednesday, December 17, 2003, 5:37 AM)

Activists are accusing air authorities of not fully investigating the San Joaquin Valley's much-anticipated move into the country's worst-polluter category alongside smoggy Los Angeles.

The decision on the move, which is recommended by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff, could happen Thursday at the district's monthly board meeting in Fresno.

The worst-polluter status would delay the smog cleanup deadline from 2005 to 2010. The later deadline would prevent millions of dollars in business penalties and keep \$2 billion in road-building funds flowing to the Valley.

"They've assessed this from an economic standpoint," said lawyer Brent Newell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. "But what's the effect on public health? Will there be a delay in the cleanup? Where's the analysis?"

Air district staffers say they have answered Newell's questions: The district can't achieve clean air until national fuel and engine standards tighten in 2006 and 2007. Vehicles are the Valley's biggest air problem.

Meanwhile, the district will move as fast as possible on other smog cleanup rules. Authorities said there would be no delay.

But Newell said he has seen no proof. He again will raise questions Thursday when the board is expected to vote on volunteering for the lowest status, moving from the "severe" to "extreme" category for smog violators.

The meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. in the district's headquarters, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., and will be beamed live to audience rooms in Modesto and Bakersfield.

A coalition of business and agricultural groups is urging the board to approve the request for the 2010 deadline, saying the 2005 deadline poses unacceptable hardships on Valley residents and businesses.

There is more at stake than money, said Newell, a San Francisco-based lawyer who represents a Valley group called Association of Irrigated Residents. Expensive sanctions for missing the 2005 deadline may further reduce pollution and clean the air faster, he said.

The financial penalties, estimated at \$36 million by 2007 for the business community, would help pay for mass transit and other pollution-fighting efforts. Another sanction would require large new and expanding businesses to pay more for pollution reduction.

About \$2 billion in federal road-building money would be withheld, except for projects that promote the environment or safety.

Perhaps the most onerous sanction is a federal cleanup plan. Using the power of such a plan, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency threatened Los Angeles in the 1990s

with restrictions on driving and the purchase of gasoline. The threats were never carried out.

How much pollution would the sanctions remove?

"We asked them in 2002 to do an analysis on pollution reduction, but they haven't," Newell said. "They should do an environmental impact report."

Such a report is not required, said district planning director Dave Jones. The district is only asking the federal government for a shift in status, he said, not creating a project.

But would the air get cleaner faster if the Valley just kept the 2005 deadline and allowed the federal government to take over?

"We don't think so," Jones said. "The Valley would just lose control of our district to the federal government. You don't want to put your faith in EPA."

The reporter can be reached at mgrossi@fresnobee.com or 441-6316.

IF YOU GO

What: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board meeting

When: 9 a.m. Thursday

Where: 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave.

Valley air takes turn for worst

San Joaquin district may request downgrade to 'extreme' designation

By Dave Myhra - SAN JOAQUIN BUREAU - (published in the Tri-Valley Herald December 17, 2003)

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY -- The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, may on Thursday, be the first district in the United States to ask for a downgrade in its air quality rating.

Currently, the Valley's air designation is "severe," the district wants to downgrade that to the worst designation, "extreme."

If that happens, the Valley will be the only area in the U.S., besides Los Angeles, to carry that designation.

The downgrade, if approved, will have some positive effects though.

At a "severe" rating, the Valley is expected to meet clean air standards by November 2005, under threat of penalty.

"That's not realistic, there's no way that it can be done," said Anthony Presto, public education representative for the Air District's Northern District.

If the downgrade is not requested and approved by the California Air resource Board and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, businesses in the Valley face \$36 million a year in penalties.

Those fees would be spread out among businesses depending on how much air pollution they put out.

Not coming into attainment in time also would cause the loss of \$2.2 billion in federal highway funds to Valley governments.

A downgrade to "extreme" will give the air district until 2010 to make sure the air meets standards.

"The district feels that that's (possible)," Presto said.

After 2005, the district will have the assistance of new programs for emissions reduction put into effect by both the California Air Resource Board and federally.

These two agencies have the ability to regulate car and other mobile emissions, which produce about 60 percent of the Valley's air problem.

The new emission standards promised by the two agencies are crucial to cleaning up the Valley's air, district officials said.

Make no mistake, though, until that time, the district is going to do its best in its efforts to clean up the air.

"Staff members will continue to propose all feasible control measures for the governing board's approval," Pollution Control Officer Dave Crow said.

The governing board will meet starting at 9 a.m. Thurs-day to begin looking at whether to recommend that the air quality level be downgraded.

However, there is little doubt about what the decision will be.

"The reality of it is this, there isn't much choice, the district cannot achieve attainment by 2005, and we don't want all the Valley businesses to suffer," so they are going to vote to downgrade the air quality," Presto said.

Study Probes Air Pollution, Heart Disease

Associated Press

(Published in the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, December 17, 2003)

Air pollution in U.S. cities causes twice as many deaths from heart disease as it does from lung cancer and other respiratory ailments, a surprising new study suggests.

The statistical analysis was published Tuesday in *Circulation*, a journal of the American Heart Association.

"It certainly did surprise us when we first observed these results," said lead author C. Arden Pope III, an epidemiologist at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. "We just sort of anticipated that breathing particles into your lungs would most likely have a direct impact on your lungs."

Still, Pope stressed that the lungs are intricately involved. For example, lung inflammation from breathing polluted air can lead to heart disease.

The study analyzed data from a survey of 500,000 adults who enrolled in an American Cancer Society survey on cancer prevention in 1982.

It expands on a study by Pope and others published in the March 2002 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Researchers said that study contained the strongest evidence yet linking air pollution with lung cancer deaths.

In this round of research, Pope and the others looked at the incidence of heart attacks and other cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory diseases. They then crunched those numbers with air

pollution data for more than 150 cities kept by the Environmental Protection Agency. Even after taking into account other risk factors, such as smoking, diet, weight and occupation, the scientists found that air pollution increased the chances of heart disease.

"This link was stronger for cardiovascular disease than respiratory disease," Pope said. "Substantially more than two-thirds of deaths due to air pollution are cardiovascular deaths, or heart diseases, if you will, versus respiratory deaths."

The pollution risk is from what scientists call combustion-related fine particulate matter - soot emitted by cars and trucks, coal-fired power plants and factories.

Pope said his findings are consistent with other research that suggests air pollution provokes inflammation and speeds up narrowing of the arteries.

Ralph Delfino, a University of California at Irvine epidemiologist, said the study is "quite important."

"I think it should serve not as the last word but as an encouragement to do more intensive investigations," he said.

County air board may lower status from 'severe' to 'extreme'

Published by the San Joaquin News Service, Wednesday, December 17, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board will consider Thursday whether to downgrade air pollution status in the San Joaquin Valley from "severe" to "extreme," in part to give the district more time to meet federal air standards and avoid sanctions.

The new designation, which would have to be approved by the California Air Resources Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, would describe the valley's air as among the worst in the nation. The Los Angeles area is the only other region in the country with extreme nonattainment status.

The new extreme designation would give the district until 2010 to meet the air quality requirements.

The northern San Joaquin Valley delegation of the air pollution district governing board, including San Joaquin County Supervisor Jack Sieglock, tried this summer to form a new air area to avoid the extreme label. But members of the southern delegation defeated that effort.

Under the severe classification, the air basin would have to meet new air-quality standards by 2005. Failing to meet the deadline could result in the loss of \$2.2 billion in federal highway funds, according to a written statement from the district.

State and federal governments will have new controls on sources of air pollution in place by 2005, according to district officials, who stressed in a written statement that the extreme designation will not result in reducing efforts to clean up the valley's air.

Tracy resident Bob Sarvey, a former advisory board member for the district, said he opposes the new designation and postponement of what the district should be doing now to clean the air.

"To me, it's a mistake," he said.

The district oversees pollution-emitting stationary sources such as factories, refineries and other industries, which contribute to the smog problem in the valley.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District governing board will meet at 9 a.m. Thursday at 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno.

People can attend the meeting via video teleconference at the district's northern region office, 4230 Kiernan Ave., Ste. 130, in Modesto.

For more information, call 557-6400.

By Reed Fujii - Staff Writer

(Published in The Stockton Record Wednesday, December 17, 2003

Development of Rough and Ready Island in Stockton should directly generate 15,000 to 20,000 new jobs during the next 10 years, positions that likely will be filled mostly by San Joaquin County residents, given the area's high unemployment rates.

Converting the former Navy base into a regional transportation and commercial hub, however, will also generate significant of traffic congestion; air, noise and light pollution; and erase a bit of local military history.

That's the dichotomy facing local officials as they plan the future of the 1,459-acre island, according to a draft environmental impact report.

Port commissioners may accept the report's finding of significant adverse impacts and still approve development of the island but must make a finding of "overriding considerations" to explain its actions.

There is certain to be significant opposition to such a move, particularly from some people living across the Stockton Deep Water Channel from the port and who have filed two lawsuits over shipping activities at Rough and Ready Island.

Fight against expansion

Talking after 11 p.m. recently over the constant, low rumble of a ship's engine and the occasional screeching of metal on metal as bagged rice was being loaded less than two football fields away, Riviera Cliffs neighbors Ann Chargin, Richard Hackett and Sherry Shields vowed to fight the port's expansion plans.

"They've attacked my family. They're destroying my life," Hackett said of the noise, light and air pollution caused by the increased shipping activity over the past three years. He and his neighbors also mentioned the unending vibrations they feel inside their homes when a ship is in port with its engines idling.

Hackett said he has already spent \$40,000, "and we've just started. The way they operate (the port) is taxation without representation." (The port collects no taxes but operates entirely on income from shipping operations and leasing land and buildings to various businesses).

The port does what it can to address the neighbors' concerns, said Gordon Palmer, deputy port director, trying to minimize disturbances from maritime activities. However, as the environmental report found, some problems will remain.

"There is light and there will be noise," Palmer said last week from his office.

Still, ships operate along the Rough and Ready wharf only part of the time. And some of the port's improvement plans may provide additional relief.

Noise, light pollution

Because much berthing area along the 6,000-foot wharf has silted in over the years, ships primarily use about one-quarter of that space. Unfortunately, that puts them directly across from Riviera Cliffs, one of four areas designated in the draft EIR as most susceptible to certain suffer from the noise, light and exhaust pollution from maritime activities. The other neighborhoods are Atherton Island, homes at the west end of Smiths Canal and the west edge of Brookside.

The port hopes to dredge the full length of the wharf, a project that is part of the EIR's consideration.

If that is completed, Palmer said, "We can decentralize our berthing activities to try to reduce our impacts on the neighbors, so they're not concentrated all in one place."

The Riviera Cliffs neighbors said also city and county officials have been generally unresponsive to their complaints, even though both share responsibility for the port through their appointment of the members of the Port Commission.

Steve Gutierrez, San Joaquin County supervisor for District 1, said the conflicts arising from the port's development underlines the need to avoid ill-advised land-use decisions where home and schools, for example, abut power plants and sewage-treatment plants.

Job-building opportunity

"We really don't want to create in the future these kinds of mixed-use situations," he said. It's unacceptable that neighbors along the Deep Water Channel have to deal with noise and lights, as well as residents of the Boggs Tract neighborhood having to put up with the heavy truck traffic rolling past their homes, he said.

But given the current circumstances, Gutierrez said he favors proceeding with the port's development plans and doing as much as possible to ease the impact on area residents.

"Rough and Ready Island and the Port of Stockton (are) a significant job-building component in the county. It would be irresponsible to ignore the fact that they need to build out," he said. "We're doing the best that we can under the current circumstances."

Plans to build create a new entry to Rough and Ready Island by building a bridge and improving Daggett Road south to Charter Way would divert much of the truck traffic now rumbling through Boggs Tract.

It alone, however, is not a complete solution to the problem of traffic congestion.

"This is the direction we should be moving in, but don't turn your back on the people of Boggs Tract," Gutierrez said.

Brainstorming EIR

The draft EIR -- which examines both the Port of Stockton and city of Stockton's plans for the island as well as specific street improvement and port dredging projects -- identified seven general areas in which the development would create significant environmental impacts.

- * Development of about 500 acres of open land would include the loss of 272 acres of prime farmland.

- * There would be more than 50,000 additional vehicle trips per day to and from Rough and Ready Island, creating unacceptable traffic congestion at three area intersections, as well as putting additional pressure on already overburdened freeway systems, particularly on Interstate 5 at Charter Way and the Crosstown Freeway and at the Crosstown and Highway 99 interchange.

- * Air pollution from the vehicle traffic, as well as ships, boats, trains and heavy equipment such as cranes and forklifts, would adversely contribute to the region's smog.

- * Noise and vibration generated by the traffic and increased shipping activities at the port will affect neighborhoods along the north bank of the Stockton Deep Water Channel, on roadways leading in and out of the port.

- * Additional ship traffic will bring in a higher risk of invasive exotic species establishing themselves locally and threatening native plants and animals.

- * Demolition of the former Navy base to make way for development means the loss of the historic and cultural value of the original buildings.

- * Ships operating at night generate light pollution, as well as noise and exhaust. While the port may control lighting on its own facilities on the docks, the ships are beyond its authority to regulate.

Public comments on the report are being accepted by the port now through Jan. 20.

Copies of the EIR are available for review at the port office, 2201 Washington St., and the downtown Stockton Cesar Chavez Library, 605 N. El Dorado St.

Reporter Joe Goldeen contributed to this story