

## **Air district: Season saw fewer no-burn days**

**Residents' efforts, rain helped cut total to 37 days, down from 49, official says**

By CHRISTINE BEDELL, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, March 1, 2005

After Monday, folks with fireplaces can feel free to light up as the second annual ban on burning comes to an end.

And the good news is that the number of nights burning was "discouraged" was down this year.

Because air quality was better, officials only frowned on local burning on 37 different days between November 2004 and February 2005, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Monday.

That's down from 49 days during the same period last season.

The district flat-out banned wood burning two days this season -- on Nov. 20 and Dec. 4. That's up from one day last season.

Rain and people's air-friendly behavior caused the drop in "discouraged" days and the relatively small number of "banned" days, said district spokeswoman Brenda Turner

It's hard to tell, she said, how much credit should go to Mother Nature versus the public. But those who voluntarily kept their fireplaces dark probably reduced the need for banned days, Turner said.

"People do respond to us telling them it's a 'discouraged' day," she said.

The air district issued 10 citations against people who violated the ban this season. The district dismissed some additional citations because the inspector hadn't actually seen smoke.

The people who were cited can either pay a \$50 fine or take an air-quality class that would wipe out the charge altogether, Turner said.

The 90-minute class will be similar to those offered to folks who get traffic tickets. The class will be held later this month.

Bakersfield resident Cliff Bolt, 61, is choosing the class after somebody turned him in to the district in November.

The retiree said he's annoyed with the wood-burning program because he's disabled and on a fixed income and therefore uses his fireplace instead of furnace for heat. It saves him \$175 a month, he said.

Bolt said he was denied an exemption from the program because his home has a furnace.

"It's very unfair, especially in my situation," Bolt said.

He said he's not convinced fireplace use contributes much to the pollution problem.

The district implemented the wood-burning program to reduce wintertime pollution, primarily dustlike particulate matter.

Officials say residential wood burning is a small part of the valley's annual pollution problem, but on certain winter nights, it causes up to 30 percent of urban particulate pollution.

Particulates can aggravate asthma and bronchitis, plus cause heart attacks and lung cancer.

Through media and other alerts, the district asks people not to burn when the so-called air quality index is expected to be between 101 and 150. At that point the air is considered unhealthy for children, the elderly and other "sensitive" groups.

It bans burning when the index hits 151 -- when the air is unhealthy for everyone.

In addition to homeowners cutting back on burning, the drop in "discouraged" days also owes some thanks to the surge of rain this year. Rain suppresses particulate matter.

Bakersfield received 5.21 inches of rain between November and February, compared with 3.79 inches between November 2003 and February 2004, said Ken Clark, a meteorologist with Accuweather.com.

The average is 3.69 inches, he said.

## **Rains help scrub Valley air**

By Scott Pesznecker  
Merced Sun-Star  
March 1, 2005

Rainstorms, wind and perhaps less traffic helped -- but most of all, Merced County's air was cleaner this winter because people listened.

Merced County joined two other counties in the northern San Joaquin Valley -- Stanislaus and San Joaquin -- to make it through a second straight season without air district officials ordering people not to burn wood in fireplaces and stoves.

That means air quality forecasts over the past four months never reached the level considered to be unhealthy for everyone.

"Definitely, people have heeded the advice of the district on days wood burning is discouraged," said Brenda Turner, public outreach spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "A lot of people have not burned in fireplaces on those days. That's helped keep the level down."

The air district's authority over wood burning ended Monday; the season runs annually from November through February. People who violate a burn ban can be fined \$50 to \$1,000.

No fines have been issued this season, air district officials said.

The district's goal with the wood-burning law is to keep the air clear -- as much as possible -- of tiny bits of soot and ash, called particulate matter. Particulates can harm people's health, and, if the count is high enough, violate federal law.

Although the district didn't issue any no-burn days in the three northern counties, it did issue more than a dozen alerts for people to refrain from lighting wood-burning fires. Those notices came when daily forecasts indicated the northern valley's air would be unhealthy for some.

The air district issued "burning discouraged" alerts 15 days in Merced County, compared with 13 last season. There were alerts on 28 days in Stanislaus County, compared with 32 last season, and 11 days in San Joaquin County, compared with six last season.

South of Merced County, the eight-county San Joaquin air district issued no-burn orders on three days, one more than year ago.

This season's no-burn orders came on Nov. 20 in Kern County, Dec. 3 in Fresno and Tulare counties; and Dec. 4 in Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties.

On those days, particulate matter concentrations "were not as high as they might have been in the past," air district meteorologist Evan Shipp said.

Soot, ash and other wood-burning pollutants in the air have been connected with heart problems and increased mortality rates.

The Valley has been one of the worst places in the country for such pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency ordered the wood-burning restrictions as the result of an environmental lawsuit.

Air district officials said the majority of residents are cooperating.

"We are really impressed with the degree of public cooperation on days when air quality is deteriorating," said Jaime Holt, air district public education administrator.

"The high level of compliance with both the voluntary and mandatory curtailments means people are breathing cleaner air."

## **Supervisors to vote on sludge plant project**

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, March 1, 2005

This afternoon, as toilet brushes likely wave in the audience, county supervisors will make a decision guaranteed to upset someone, somewhere.

Sludge, or treated human sewage, makes few jump for joy.

But exactly how a future biosolids composting plant outside Taft will impact the biosolids flow into Kern County wasn't clear by Monday evening.

A representative of Synagro Technologies Inc., the Houston-based company building the plant, said the operation will be positive for Kern because less sludge, overall, will be applied to farmland.

But local residents generally aren't warming to the project. Some say they're opposed to any Southland sewage heading north. Others are concerned about Synagro's environmental violations elsewhere, as well as the company's efforts to squelch information from a federal scientist whose studies raised possible health risks from land-applied biosolids.

Liz Ostoich, project developer for the suddenly controversial sewage plant, was audibly tired Monday afternoon.

The Synagro (pronounced SINN-ih-groh) staffer has been in damage-control overdrive since Friday.

That's when news of the planned composting facility, dubbed the South Kern Industrial Center, hit local media outlets seemingly out of the blue.

Supervisors unanimously approved the plant's permit more than two years ago. At that time, no one spoke against it.

This afternoon's vote seemed far more routine. It concerns a typically dry, public hearing on a \$35 million low-interest, tax-exempt bond for the project.

Ostoich will make her case before what's expected to be a large, vocal crowd at the 2 p.m. session.

Here are some of the project's pluses.

About 400 tons of sludge daily could be diverted from farmland application when the plant starts up early next year, she said.

Currently, about 1,200 wet tons of biosolids are trucked into Kern from Southern California every day. That's about 450,000 wet tons annually.

All waste brought to Synagro's South Kern plant will be treated to the highest level, called Class A.

Because of that, Ostoich said, it will be sold at higher prices than farmers like to pay. That means it will end up on golf courses, in city parks and medians and at nurseries around Southern California and as far away as Las Vegas, she said, rather than on local farmland.

"It's just a function of cost," Ostoich said.

To start out, the South Kern plant will process about 500 tons daily. In three to five years, it could get to the current maximum of 1,089 daily tons, or about 397,000 tons a year.

The high-end facility will operate entirely differently than a Synagro plant near Corona, in Riverside County, that has riled up neighbors, Ostoich said.

Here, trucks will be inside when they unload sewage.

Composting will also be enclosed during the first stage. Vacuum-like equipment will suck air through waste piles and route it through special filters that capture pollution and odors, she said. Special concrete lining will prevent groundwater contamination.

The Corona plant, by comparison, uses open-air waste stacks and is surrounded by 5,000 homes in a four-mile radius, she said.

Last spring, Riverside County officials got 58 calls in four hours on its odor hotline, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

A few years before that, Synagro sued Riverside County for violating its civil rights.

Synagro and the county have since settled litigation, and Synagro has agreed to close the plant in 2008, two years early.

Synagro also had problems in Pennsylvania. In 2003, the company was fined \$35,000 by state environmental regulators after violating storage and spreading rules in a half-dozen counties there.

The company also actively campaigned against former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency biosolids scientist David Lewis, a twice-vindicated whistle-blower fired by the agency in 2003.

Lewis' research uncovered a connection between respiratory illness and sludge sites before it was shut down by the EPA. A lawsuit filed by Lewis against the EPA is still being litigated.

One positive thing Kern won't get: a hosting fee.

Last October, Synagro agreed to pay the Rhode Island town of Woonsocket an initial \$1 million hosting fee and between \$350,000 to \$500,000 in annual royalty-type payments, according to *The Call* newspaper in Woonsocket.

Kern County will only get a one-time payment estimated at \$500,000 for road improvements on the roads immediately around the new plant, off of South Lake Road about 12 miles east of Taft.

Ostoich said the company has become more responsive to local needs in the wake of its problems in Riverside County and elsewhere.

"It's really driven home the need to be sensitive to the surrounding community," she said. "We've become more sensitive and concerned about people's perceptions and what impacts them."

Since Friday, she's been making good with city officials in Taft, who didn't learn about the plant until reading *The Californian* that morning. The company has offered to treat Taft's wastewater for free, and it wants to step in as a good corporate neighbor, she said.

Still, some unhappy residents will likely show up this afternoon.

The local Democratic Party is urging members to show up in force with toilet brushes to protest the plant.

Some residents, like Linda Miles, just plain don't like sludge.

"I am vehemently against allowing sludge in our county in any way, shape or form," Miles wrote in an e-mail.

Even if supervisors vote down the \$35 million bond scheme, which requires county and state approval but would be financed by private banks, the project will go forward with a different loan, Ostoich said.

Synagro already received a similar tax-exempt bond from the California Pollution Financing Control Authority in 2002. The authority authorized more than \$20 million for a biosolids plant in Sacramento.

The company also applied for another \$58 million from the pollution control authority in 2003. Ostoich said Synagro is no longer pursuing that application.

## **Fresno State projects look to better Valley health**

Tobacco use by Hmong, drift of pesticides studied.

By Jim Steinberg / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, March 1, 2005

Fresno State is increasing its emphasis on practical research to improve health and raise the standard of living in the San Joaquin Valley.

The use of research to upgrade the way Valley residents live is reflected in recently announced grants and in continuing work in various academic fields.

Subjects range from better teaching techniques to improving literacy among students to assessment and reduction of tobacco use by Hmong residents across California. Administrators at California State University, Fresno, say this and other "applied research" is the wave of the Valley's future.

Thomas H. McClanahan, Fresno State's associate vice president for research and sponsored programs, emphasizes that the public research grants are separate from a coming capital campaign that will concentrate on private donations.

Fresno State researchers recently received \$838,076 in grants, including one addressing the migration of pesticide residues from outdoors to the interiors of homes and apartments. Another multi-year study is interviewing Hmong residents in Fresno and across the state to determine how widespread smoking has become in that population. Although Hmong used tobacco in Laos for medicinal and ritual reasons, they did not smoke cigarettes until foreign soldiers and others introduced the practice, says Ge Thao, a program developer at Lao Family Community of Fresno.

"Our survey has a lot of cultural questions," he says. "How were they introduced to tobacco? Was it medicinal? To fight mosquitoes? Peer pressure? What brand? Were you introduced to smoking by the military?"

Thao says, "Before the war, some people smoked a pipe. If we understand why they smoke now, we can know how to provide counseling appropriately."

Professor Vickie Krenz of Fresno State's health science department has been working on the smoking study, which has contacted almost 5,000 minors and adults.

"The Vietnam War was the first introduction to smoking for most Hmong," Krenz says. "The military paid off soldiers with cigarettes, and they became a sign of respect and status. Cigarettes were used in negotiations for weddings. A healer or shaman might visit, and you showed respect by sharing cigarettes."

The more acculturated that Hmong immigrants became in the United States, the more likely they were to smoke, she says.

Krenz also is project director of a subcontract for the agricultural pesticide study.

The CSU Fresno Foundation entered the subcontract with Colorado State University to identify and enroll Fresno County families in the study of agricultural chemicals' movement from outdoor to indoor environments.

The project collects and analyzes outdoor soil samples and residential dust specimens under requirements for California's pesticide use reporting database.

"This does not address health outcomes," Krenz says. "We do not establish a link between environmental exposure and health outcome."

## **Commuter Website Hopes for Lots of Traffic**

**Aiming to increase the number of ride-sharers, five Southland counties have launched a site pulling together helpful transit information.**

By Gregory W. Griggs, Los Angeles Times, March 1, 2005

John Enriquez is a veteran carpooler.

With a home in northwest Bakersfield and a job 80 miles south in Santa Clarita, Enriquez gave up solo commuting 13 years ago when a co-worker moved nearby.

Three years ago, another employee in the city's street maintenance department relocated to Bakersfield, and the trio decided to buy a used car just for getting back and forth to work.

Enriquez figures it doesn't make financial sense to drive alone, which he estimates costs \$25 a day. By splitting all costs - about \$90 a week for gas and \$150 a month for maintenance, repairs and insurance - each man spends closer to \$8 a day, according to Dwight Wiggins, the carpool's bookkeeper.

"It's worked extremely well," said Enriquez, who appreciates the reduced stress of driving every third week. "What's really important is the wear and tear on the body. I wake up at 3:20 in the morning, and when I'm not driving, I get to take a little nap."

Statistics from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which oversees transit service in Los Angeles County, indicate carpools are the leading mode of transport for people registered with the agency's ride-share program, designed to steer people away from solo driving.

Although nearly 25,000 of those people take a bus or train on a typical weekday, more than 62,000 team up in personal vehicles, and almost 8,400 more commute as part of a vanpool. Together, car- and vanpoolers represent about 16% of the registered participants.

Hoping to increase those numbers to help alleviate roadway congestion and reduce air pollution, transit officials in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties recently introduced a website to provide coordinated information about carpools, bus and train schedules and updated traffic information.

The Jan. 24 official launch of CommuteSmart.info was accompanied by a \$1-million radio ad campaign paid for with a portion of funds set aside from vehicle registration fees to curb mobile pollution sources.

An initial three-week blitz on 17 radio stations, including five Spanish and three Asian-language stations, during morning and afternoon drive times featured commercials touting the new site.

To keep the Commute Smart.info name in front of the public, officials are sponsoring radio traffic reports all year and plan concentrated runs of the commercials in April and September.

The site was accessed by nearly 9,100 computers during the first week the ads were aired, and it received nearly half a million hits - a measure of each time a page on the site is viewed.

"The beauty of this Internet program is that they can get online whenever they want," said David Sutton, who manages commuter programs for the MTA. "We can service clients day or night. It's a really powerful tool."

Along with a database of about 141,000 potential carpool companions, CommuteSmart.info has an interactive bus and train trip planner covering the five counties, locations of park-and-ride lots, carpool lanes and maps of bicycle routes.

It also has a "commuter calculator" for an instant estimate of how much a motorist could save if he or she stopped driving alone. For example, it costs \$6,512 annually to commute 40 miles a day in a car that gets 25 miles per gallon, a tally that is halved with one passenger and shrinks to

\$1,628 with a daily carpool of four people.

Carolyn Ortman, the Orange County Transportation Commission's ride-share administrator, said a popular feature of the website is the real-time traffic and weather information.

Colorized maps of major freeways from Camarillo to San Juan Capistrano monitor the severity of traffic, accident updates and road closures. Pop-up boxes give estimates of how much time it'll take to get through traffic, and links to Caltrans cameras provide snapshots of road conditions.

Ernesto Martinez, a senior equipment mechanic in Laguna Beach, said he heard a Commute Smart.info commercial and got curious about a traffic backup on his way to his Midway City home. He called his wife, who checked the site and told him about an accident ahead.

"It was pretty darn accurate," Martinez said, adding that he had since visited the site to devise alternate routes when gridlock threatened his commute.

After reviewing his commuting costs, Martinez said he planned to ask his supervisors at work to consider starting a vanpool.

Caltrans estimates vehicles with two or more passengers using carpool lanes save more than 30 seconds for each mile traveled.

But Peter Faino of Palmdale, who has logged at least 550,000 miles over 19 years taking a vanpool to his job in Woodland Hills, said using the carpool lanes on the Antelope Valley and San Diego freeways doesn't net the time savings of years past.

"It might save 10 to 15 minutes," said the Northrop Grumman test engineer, who drives the van three days a week. "It used to be better, but it's getting crowded with a lot of people."

## **Traders Gather for Conference on Pollution**

By ARTHUR MAX, Associated Press Writer  
in the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, February 28, 2005

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) -- With trade booming and prices up, it's no wonder traders are anxious to talk about the world's latest commodity: pollution permits.

The 850 businessmen, government officials and bankers meeting in the Netherlands Tuesday are holding the first conference on the newly created market in greenhouse gases since the Kyoto Protocol on climate change went into effect.

Though only an exercise in networking, the size of the conference, to be opened by a Dutch Cabinet minister, reflects the explosion in trade in carbon dioxide, the waste product spewed into the air by heavy industry.

Under the climate agreement that took effect Feb. 16, 35 industrial countries must meet specific targets for reducing emissions of carbon and other gases blamed for trapping heat in the atmosphere and causing the planet's average temperature to rise.

The treaty allows countries and companies that cannot meet their quotas to buy carbon credits from others that produce less carbon than permitted, and thus have a surplus of allowances to sell.

By Monday, about 12,000 industrial plants across Europe were supposed to know their allotted allowances, but the deadline was apparently being missed in many countries.

But the treaty took several other important steps forward Monday.

The Netherlands posted its carbon registry where trades are recorded and companies can buy or sell credits on the Internet, becoming one of the first countries to have the Kyoto structure in

place. In Norway, Nord Pool opened the first carbon allowances exchange, operating as a platform the way other exchanges trade in metals, soya or stocks.

CO2 officially became a tradable commodity Jan. 1, although buying and selling in "futures" has been going on for two years. Eventually, companies will trade directly with each other or through banks and exchanges.

"The market is growing quickly," said Stian Reklef of Point Carbon, a Norwegian-based company that analyzes the trade and is sponsoring the conference.

Reklef said 8 million tons of carbon were traded this month, compared with 6 million in January and about 2.5 million tons in each of the preceding four months.

Prices also shot up, from 6.50 euros per ton (\$7.80) a month ago to 9.50 euros (\$11.40) on Monday.

Until now, Reklef said, the price fluctuated according to political developments, as the Kyoto Protocol went through an uncertain process of adoption and ratification.

"Now the price is being determined more by fundamentals, like temperatures and rainfall. It's settling into a normal market," he said. The current price was boosted by Europe's cold snap, he said.

Traders estimate that within two years the carbon trade will be worth 10-15 billion euros (\$12-18 billion) per year.

About 250 Dutch companies have been assigned caps, or limits on how much carbon they can produce, said Babette Graber of the Ministry for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

"They received their permits last week" after each company submitted a detailed plan for monitoring their emissions, Graber said. "Everything has been approved in time," she said, making the Netherlands one of the few countries in Europe to meet the Feb. 28 deadline.

## **In Brief**

S.F. Chronicle, Tues., March 1, 2005

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — San Joaquin Valley air pollution regulators have banned wood burning in fireplaces, stoves and heaters on only three days since November, in part because stormy weather helped clear the air.

Last season saw just two no-burn days. Both figures are considered extremely low.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District anticipated up to 25 no-burn days per season in Fresno County two years ago when the program started as a way to help clean the heavily polluted air of soot and ash that can cause severe health problems.

"The three days of wood-burning bans took place early in the season when we had typical high pressure conditions for these episodes," said district meteorologist Evan Shipp. "But, even then, the concentrations were not as high as they might have been in the past."

Officials said this year's wet weather helped clean the air. The period for residential wood-burning bans ended Monday.

"We could have another spike in the numbers if we get dry years," Shipp said. "But it looks like the trend is downward."

The Valley has become one of the worst regions in the nation for particulate pollution. The no-burn program was required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as the result of an environmental lawsuit.

[Commentary, The Madera Tribune, Friday, February 25, 2005](#)

## **Get a whiff of this great new fuel**

By Charles Doud – Editor and Publisher of The Madera Tribune

Don't be surprised if we find the solution to the energy problem to be biodiesel fuel, some of which may smell like French fries.

A company in Nevada, Biodiesel Solutions, sells FuelMeister machines to people so they can make biodiesel fuel which can run any diesel engine.

The home-made "green" diesel is manufactured from discarded cooking oil, most of which has been used to cook french fries. Some also may have been used to cook onions, egg rolls, fish or chicken, so if you don't care for french fries, there are other possibilities.

When you make this fuel in your FuelMeister, the cost is about 70 cents a gallon, according to The Associated Press. Of course that doesn't include the cost of the FuelMeister, which runs around \$4,000, depending on which model you buy.

It also assumes you get the used oil free from restaurateurs who now have to pay people to haul it away, because it is classified as hazardous waste.

One wonders how it could be that french fry oil, which we eat, could be hazardous waste.

Don't the restaurant inspectors and the environmental protection people ever talk?

Restaurant inspectors peer into a deep fryer and unless it smells like Quaker State, pronounce it okay.

Then the oil becomes hazardous waste when the environmental protectors get into the act.

Biodiesel only pollutes about 20 percent as much as regular diesel, which should make it popular with some.

Imagine pulling up to a pump and filling up with high-test McDonald's, Burger King or Jack in the Box.