

Triple-digit highs return

High pressure expected to keep temperatures up a couple of days.

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, August 22, 2006

A high-pressure area to the east of California will turn up the heat on the central San Joaquin Valley this week, pushing temperatures back into the triple digits for at least two days.

The high, sitting over the four-corners region of Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico, will gradually move west, and as it does, temperatures will move back into the 90s, more typical of late August, said Michael Bingham, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford. The average high temperature for today is 94, but the heat will be far from a record, he added.

For today, the weather service forecasts that the thermometer will hit 102, with a low tonight of 70 and a high of 102 again Thursday.

"We're still way off our records of 110 or so," Bingham said. "Certainly nothing like we had in July."

The weather service takes a more conservative approach to the forecast than AccuWeather Inc., which provides data for the Bee's weather page and predicts temperatures could go as high as 104 today and 109 Wednesday, but both agree on a cooling trend as the week goes on.

Air quality is expected to decline with the higher temperatures. Today in Fresno and Tulare counties, the air is expected to be unhealthy for sensitive groups, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. In Merced, Madera and Kings counties, the air quality forecast is moderate.

Residents clear air over pollution

By Jim Guy of the Fresno Bee

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The problem of pesticides' role in air pollution might be scientifically complex, but it hits home emotionally for Central Valley residents, if a Monday night forum on the issue is a good measure.

Representatives of the state Department of Pesticide Regulation heard from farmworkers complaining of chronic pain from agricultural overspray, those who blame pesticide companies for the problem and a grower who defended his industry at a Pesticide Air Initiative Workshop in Parlier.

The purpose was to get public comment about the department's strategy to reduce the role pesticides, particularly fumigants, play in producing the valley's serious air pollution problem.

The department estimates pesticides are the source of 6.3percent of the volatile organic compounds that pollute valley air.

The department has pledged to have a plan in place to reduce smog-producing chemicals from pesticide emissions to reach air-quality goals by 2008. Getting there involves an ambitious effort that will require reformulation of present chemicals, changing the way pesticides are applied and development of new technologies.

Some say department dragging its feet

Some at the session accused the department of not moving fast enough to clear the air.

Brent Newell, a staff attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said the department has been dragging its feet. He said the original state plan was to cut 20 percent of farm-produced smog by 1994 and that it took a ruling by a judge this year to hold the department's feet to the fire.

Paul H. Gosselin, chief deputy director for the department, disagreed.

"They can say that," he said, "but I think we put together a bold plan."

A solution won't come soon enough for Teresa Vina of Huron, who said pesticides are too much a part of her life in her home near the fields.

She said early-morning spraying is especially difficult.

"In the early morning, we all wake up feeling sick," she said.

Don't blame the grower, countered Wayne Western, who grows 2,400 acres of tomatoes near Firebaugh. He also questioned the department's estimate that one pound of fumigant into the ground ends up in valley air.

"As growers, we take every precaution to see that the pesticide goes where it's supposed to go," he said.

Port of Stockton scores commercial biodiesel facility Company hopes to tap into Central Valley's vast natural resources

By Ben Semmes

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, August 22, 2006

STOCKTON — A two-year-old biodiesel startup company has secured a lease at the Port of Stockton to build one of the state's first commercial production facilities.

"As far as timing, we are anticipating completing construction by the end of the year," said Lisa Mortenson, president and CEO of San Diego-based American Biodiesel Inc.

The facility will be at 809 Snedeker Ave., adjacent to a 40,000-square-foot warehouse on Rough and Ready Island, which was previously a Navy supply depot. The Stockton Port Commission has approved the company's lease for up to 23 years.

Production is expected to begin by the first quarter of 2007, Mortenson said, with a capacity of about 5 million gallons of biodiesel per year. The plant will have the capacity to quickly expand production to 10 million gallons per year after the first 12 months.

The company, which does business as Community Fuels, decided to build its first commercial plant in Stockton because of "its proximity to the agricultural community as well as major metropolitan areas," Mortenson said.

Mortenson said the company is also building a small research and development facility next to a waste water treatment plant in Sonoma County to do alternate feedstock research.

Biodiesel is a domestically produced fuel made from renewable sources, such as vegetable oil and animal fats, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. The fuel is biodegradable and, when used in place of ordinary diesel fuel, reduces carbon dioxide emissions and air contaminants, such as particulates, hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide.

Community Fuels will initially obtain its production supplies — primarily soy bean, canola, safflower and sunflower oils — from the Midwest, although Mortenson said she hopes to quickly transition to local sources.

"Our preference would be to purchase all feed stock within the Central Valley," she said. "We are very interested in speaking with regional farmers."
Incorporated in 2004 and backed by private equity, Community Fuels has spent the last two years working on engineering design, site selection and industrial permitting.

The biodiesel industry is booming, and Mortenson said the company hopes to take advantage of a growing number of consumers searching out alternative fuels.

About 75 million gallons of biodiesel was sold in the United States in 2005, up from only 500,000 gallons in 2000, according to the National Biodiesel Board, a national trade association.

Mortenson said the company plans to "design, build and operate" additional plants in California and is looking at Fresno, Bakersfield, Riverside and San Bernardino as possibilities.

"They are all on trucking corridors," Mortenson said.

While truckers are increasingly using biodiesel — which generally requires minimal modifications to existing diesel engines — the largest purchaser of biofuel in the country is the United States government.

"The city of San Francisco is running on biodiesel," Mortenson said. "You have a lot of school districts choosing to use biodiesel for their school buses."

Mortenson said the company is seeking process engineers — preferably with chemical engineering backgrounds — as well as an assistant production manager and a facility associate to work at the plant. The company expects to employ between 12 and 15 people at the plant, which will run 24 hours a day, Mortenson said.

USDA Visit Boosts Valley Biodiesel

Valley Voice, August 22, 2006

Tulare County - USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas Dorr toured valley ethanol and biodiesel sites this week and boosted the idea that biofuels could make a difference in the national economy and locally to benefit the rural economy here. "If we made B-20 biodiesel you would expand the fuel supply 20%," noted Dorr, with a 20% blend of biodiesel with regular diesel. "It's cleaner burning for our air and is good for engines too," he notes. Research shows biodiesel reduces carcinogenic air toxics by 75-90 percent compared to diesel.

Mr. Dorr toured the valley's only major operating ethanol plant in Goshen and visited a site in Mendota where a new farm cooperative is planning on building the valley's first major biodiesel facility. "I saw a lot of potential out there," says Dorr talking about an oil tank storage area in Mendota where the group wants to build a 5.5 million gallon biodiesel plant.

Manuel Cunha of Nisei Farm League says USDA could fund research to help the project that would test alternative crops that could be used to make the fuel including oilseed crops like canola, safflower, cottonseed oil, used restaurant oils and fats. "We want to know is whether we can grow these crops in rotation with others," says Cunha and that many of them can be grown with low water input. He says that "the air district wants to work with us" and that letters from county agencies promise to use biodiesel made by the co-op in their fleets.

Cunha says Nisei Farm League is working with California Cotton Growers Council on the project. Farmers will be the primary users of much of the biodiesel.

Cunha says the project could make far more than the 5.5 million gallon tank capacity on an annual basis to meet the need of California that uses 4.5 billion gallons of diesel a year. He says

the co-op will seek about \$400,000 in USDA research money to look at crop viability for tests through the Westside Ranch at Five Points and others.

Biodiesel is a diesel fuel replacement that is made from agricultural fats and oils and meets a specific commercial fuel definition and specification. Soybeans are the primary oilseed crop grown in the United States, and soybean oil makes up about half of the raw material available to make biodiesel. The other half consists of all other vegetable oils and animal fats.

Nationwide, the biodiesel industry has shown slow but steady success since the early 90s, however, in the past two years, it has grown exponentially. In 2004 there was approximately 25 million gallons of biodiesel sales. That increased to 75 million gallons in 2005. We are currently on track to exceed 150 million gallons in 2006. Likewise, we went from 22 biodiesel plants in 2004 to more than 60 biodiesel plants currently. There are over 40 more plants currently under construction, with another 30 projects in pre-construction.

Mr. Dorr says the government is boosting research for cellulose ethanol as well that he sees as 4 to 5 years off. He says USDA is interested in the use of methane from dairy waste to substitute for natural gas to fire up boilers citing a big project in Iowa.

The plant to begin operation next month in Sioux City Iowa will be the largest biofuel plant in the world using millions of gallons of livestock manure, collected in sealed trucks to be fed into anaerobic digesters - a process that has been used widely in Europe. Methane that would otherwise go into the atmosphere is sequestered and used to create energy.

EMISSIONS SPOT CHECK

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, August 18, 2006

CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES BOARD Field Representative Darcy Wehrman (above) checks for alterations on a big rig engine at the Port of Oakland on Wednesday.

Wehrman was one of nine field representatives who set up spot checks to ensure trucks accessing the port had proper emissions and safety records.

Wednesday's check resulted in 167 truck inspections with two citations for excessive smoke issued. At right, Field Representative Jimmy Owens checks for illegal diesel fuel in the tank of a big rig.

[N.Y Times editorial, Tuesday, August 22, 2006:](#)

A Victory for Cleaner Air

Americans who live in areas with substandard air won another important round last week in the tortured legal battle to force power companies, other industrial polluters and the Bush administration itself to obey the Clean Air Act. In a unanimous decision, a federal appeals court in Chicago upheld a controversial provision of the act that requires older plants to install modern pollution controls whenever they undergo physical or operational changes that increase harmful emissions.

The provision, known as New Source Review, has been critical to the efforts of New York and other Northeastern states to reduce air pollution from Midwestern power plants. But industry hates it, and the administration has spent the last five years trying to get rid of it. This effort seemed very close to success until the courts intervened, delivering two rebuffs in less than half a year.

The first rebuff came in March when a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit struck down an effort by the administration to redefine major modifications in power plants as "routine maintenance," thereby placing them outside the scope of the law and sparing the power companies the need to invest in pollution controls.

Thursday's decision, from a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in Chicago, turned on the question of how to measure emissions. The plaintiff in the case, Cinergy, a major Midwestern power producer recently acquired by Duke Energy, argued that the appropriate standard was the hourly rate of emissions. Judge Richard Posner, who wrote the decision, said that what counted was the plant's annual emissions, since a plant that had been upgraded could presumably be driven harder, producing more emissions over time.

Both decisions are likely to be appealed, and the Supreme Court has already agreed to hear a case in which the Fourth Circuit, faced with the same arguments that confronted Judge Posner, produced the opposite result. But the fact that a distinguished conservative jurist like Judge Posner came down so clearly and sensibly on the side of the law has given clean air advocates hope that they, and the law itself, may yet prevail.

[L.A. Times editorial, Tuesday, August 22, 2006:](#)

Terminal Gas Problem

There's one smart way to choose a site for California's much-needed liquefied natural gas terminal, so why is Sacramento dithering?

What's better for California, a liquefied natural gas terminal in the port of Long Beach that could potentially kill thousands of people in the event of a leak and fire, or a floating terminal beyond Oxnard that could cloud the coast from Malibu to Santa Barbara with tanker exhaust fumes? How about a system using submerged pipes and buoys that unloads natural gas after it has been converted from liquid form on a specialized ship?

If you don't know the answer, that's OK. Nobody else does either. But that won't stop state and federal planners from making blind decisions that could affect the lives of millions of people. Liquefied natural gas is an important energy source that burns cleaner than oil or coal. Currently, however, it is very hard to import to California. The gas is supercooled to a liquid state, allowing for transport on tanker ships, but the state has no terminals at which the tankers can unload. There are five proposals from energy companies to build such terminals — but although the state could use one or possibly two LNG terminals, it doesn't need five.

There is a common-sense solution, but it depends on logic, rather than politics, winning the day in Sacramento. That means it's in trouble.

Last year, state Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) sponsored a bill calling on a state energy commission to study all the LNG terminal proposals and rank them according to such criteria as their effect on the environment, public health, safety and security, as well as the degree to which they would meet California's energy needs and their relative economic benefits. Without such a study, regulators and politicians are likely to approve the projects that get out of the gate first and have the most generous lobbyists, rather than the ones that are best for the state.

Simitian's bill, SB 426, was approved by the Senate and barely squeaked through the Assembly in 2005. But the legislative session ended before the Assembly and Senate versions could be reconciled. Now the bill is back, but its future is uncertain.

Lobbyists for the energy companies seeking to build terminals have had an extra year to wield their influence. Organized labor is also now standing in the way because the partnership aiming to build the Long Beach terminal has agreed to use union labor for construction. These narrow interests don't like the bill because a study might rule out their projects. With less than two weeks

to go in the 2006 session, Simitian's bill is in danger of being buried in a committee until next year — by which time regulators may already have made critical decisions.

LNG terminals are not ordinary projects. They sometimes use untested technology, they're potentially dangerous and they involve giant tankers that spew air pollution. Which is why decisions about when and where to build them are best made with as much evidence as possible.