

## **Valley in compliance with federal air standard for first time**

The Stockton Record, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2006

It's official: The San Joaquin Valley has complied with a federal dust-pollution standard for the first time.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made the announcement Tuesday afternoon, calling it a "significant achievement" for the Valley and its notoriously dirty air.

The Valley hasn't violated particulate-matter limits since 2003, complying with federal rules that require three years of clean air to meet the standard.

Particulate matter, made up of tiny particles less than the width of a human hair, comes from soot, dust and ash. The particles can cause respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

Now the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District must focus on meeting rigid standards for even-smaller, fine-particulate matter as well as ozone, a precursor to smog.

"This is huge," district spokesman Anthony Presto said. "We're happy, but there's a lot more left to do."

In 1990, the district violated the particulate-pollution standard on 55 days. The number fell to eight days by 2002.

District officials have credited increased public awareness, restrictions on wood stoves and fireplaces, as well as rules requiring farmers and builders to avoid stirring up dust.

"Everyone living, working and doing business in the Valley contributed to this milestone," EPA air official Deborah Jordan said in a prepared statement.

Particulate matter is a problem mostly in the winter, when wood fires send soot into the stagnant Valley air, where the pollution hovers for days and endangers human health, officials say.

## **Clean air plan called impractical**

### **Critics say plan lacks funds to clean up area's pollution**

By Field Ruwe, For the Times-Delta

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2006

FRESNO — The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's \$7.5 billion plan to clean up the Valley's dirty air got a cool reception at a sparsely attended public hearing Tuesday from critics who called it overly ambitious, impractical and too expensive.

The District came up with the plan to meet new federal health-based regulations imposed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The Valley, which has one of the highest rates of asthma in the nation, is faced with the daunting task of reducing ozone emissions by 60 percent by 2013.

Tuesday's hearing, attended by about 15 people, was the first of three scheduled to gather public input to guide the District in revising the plan before its final submission to the federal government in June 2007.

Daniela Simunovic, representing the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment based in Delano, said lack of money renders the plan difficult to enact. She said it relies too heavily on incentives for polluters to clean up their problems.

"It is not acceptable," she said. "The proposal is heavily weighed toward incentive funding. For such a program to reach attainment you will have to have readily available funds. As it is now, you have no money of your own, which renders the plan difficult to execute."

She said the district needs to come up with another, more feasible plan.

The plan lacks incentives for farmers to replace older equipment that contributes to the pollution problem, said David Lighthall of Relational Culture Institute of Fresno, a nonprofit organization that seeks collaborative solutions to farm labor problems.

Lighthall said that 60 percent of the Valley's farm equipment is old and farmers cannot afford replacement without financial incentives.

"Mandating a replacement of farm equipment without any type of incentive programs is not going to happen," Lighthall said.

Madelyne Harding, representing Sherwin Williams, said that industry does not believe that the current plan is workable. She said industry, however, wants to work with the district "to obtain feasible and practical emission reduction."

## **Expect a few fires in sequoia monument**

### **Controlled burning will help reduce the intensity of future fires**

By Greg Ubbelohde, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2006

Between now and January, visitors to the Giant Sequoia National Monument may see smoke rising from the trees but shouldn't necessarily be alarmed.

The U.S. Forest Service is doing a controlled burn in some areas to reduce the potential damage future forest fires may cause.

"All of this is done to protect the communities in the mountains," said Denise Alonzo, spokeswoman for the U.S. Forest Service.

She said the burning creates a fuelbreak, a gap in the smaller forest vegetation that provides most of the energy for fires.

Firefighters will be burning hand piles, a pile of smaller trees and brush cut down and gathered by employees. Hand piles are usually no more than 6 feet tall and 10 feet wide, Alonzo said.

Depending on weather conditions, the burn could start as early as this week or as late as mid-November. Because of the large area being burned, the Forest Service may not be finished until January 2007.

The areas being burned include upper Bear Creek Road, Panorama Heights and parts of the White River timber sale area, Alonzo said.

Safety is a main concern during these burns, Alonzo said.

Jody Lyle, fire information officer for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, has experience with hand-pile burning. Before the piles are ignited, the Forest Service creates a shallow trench, about as wide as a large hiking trail around the pile to make sure the fire doesn't get out of control, she said.

They also plan burns in areas that have natural fire lines, where creeks or rock formations would stop a spreading fire.

"We have a go no-go burn-day checklist," Alonzo said.

The list has a few things they need to take into consideration.

One is air quality, Alonzo said. The Forest Service works closely with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to make sure they don't burn on days where Valley air quality is already at unhealthy levels, she said.

Visitors and residents may see some smoke in the burn areas, but it won't be contributing much to poor air quality, Alonzo said.

There's also coordination to make sure Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks aren't doing major burn projects that could affect the air quality.

Another important thing is the amount of moisture in the air and ground. The reason the burning may not start until mid-November and could take as long as January, is because the fire crews have to wait for the right conditions.

"We wait for the weather to be at a point where it's wet enough to go in and burn a hand pile and feel confident [the fire's] not going to go beyond that," Alonzo said.

The reason agencies like the Forest Service need to do prescribed burns is because about 100 years ago there was a nationally-adopted idea that all fires are bad, Lyle said. Crews got real good at putting forest fires out, even the natural fires that energize the landscape.

"For hundreds, if not thousands of years, these forests did see frequent fires that kept [undergrowth] lower," Lyle said.

Then, with the policy in place, undergrowth got built up — part of the reason summer forest fires in California have the power they do, Lyle said. Now agencies are trying to correct the problem.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2006:](#)

### **Editorial: Port-barrel spending**

#### **Voters alone shouldn't pay for port cleanup**

California's ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach are a maritime marvel. Visitors can't help being awestruck that 40 percent of the nation's total cargo is shipped through these ports every year.

These ports generate tens of thousands of jobs and provide much of the electronics, textiles, lumber and raw materials that fuel the nation's economy. But they also have a dangerous downside. They are sickening their neighbors. Thousands of ships, trucks and diesel-powered forklifts at these ports generate one-fifth of the particulate pollution on the South Coast linked to asthma and other diseases. Truck traffic has clogged nearby roads and highways, angering residents, who rightly believe that international corporations are getting rich off the ports while dumping the costs on California residents.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had a chance this year to strike a more equitable bargain with the big shippers and truckers, but he failed to deliver. Sen. Alan Lowenthal, a Democrat from Long Beach, helped push Senate Bill 927 through the Legislature. The bill would have set a \$30 fee on every container that passes through these two ports to pay for port security, air pollution programs and transportation improvements. Right before the bill-signing deadline, Schwarzenegger vetoed the legislation, saying it didn't properly specify how the money would be spent.

That's a fine excuse, but Schwarzenegger had all session to ensure that any fee passed by the Legislature was properly earmarked. That he failed to shape such legislation suggests he succumbed to intense lobbying by shippers and other businesses who aren't paying their fair share. Said Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster: "Our kids are getting asthma so someone in Nebraska can get a cheaper TV."

In defending his veto, the governor says he is moving forward with a multitrack strategy for all ports, not just Long Beach and Los Angeles. The linchpin of this program is Measure 1B on the November ballot, a \$19.9 billion measure that has \$1 billion in taxpayer-financed bonds to reduce air pollution at the ports and \$2 billion to improve goods movement.

The governor's aides are enmeshed in negotiations with shippers and other industries on transportation partnerships that, they say, will add private money to this investment. A strategic plan is promised by year's end. Meanwhile, the California Air Resources Board is working on regulations that could prompt various industries to spend \$6 billion to \$10 billion to reduce pollution at the ports.

This all sounds pretty rosy, but the sequence of events should give voters some pause. The governor wants taxpayers to front several billion dollars in public money to help fix port problems caused by private businesses. Voters are urged to do this on the vague hope that multinational corporations will later invest a similar or greater amount and not try to kill state regulations designed to protect public health.

In essence, voters are being urged to approve a faith-based bargain on the ports. This is unacceptable. If the governor wants Californians to invest in these ports, he and his industry "partners" need to show some of their hand, and publicly commit to significant private spending on the ports before Nov. 7.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Commentary, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2006:](#)

### **Measure R: The Clean-Air Initiative**

There has been a lot of emphasis on the road projects that will be funded if Measure R passes in November.

Another hugely important component of this local initiative, however, is the millions of dollars that will be generated for bike paths, public transit systems, cleaner-burning vehicles and traffic signal synchronization — all of which will help reduce emissions and clean our air.

Of the total \$652 million, 7 percent is designated for bicycle ways and 9 percent for public transportation. In Visalia alone, \$54 million has been set aside for bike paths and transit over the 30-year lifespan of Measure R.

The bike path projects can include the St. Johns, Cameron Creek, Packwood Creek and Modoc Creek bike paths, connecting Visalia to Tulare via the Santa Fe Bike Trail, connecting Visalia to Exeter via the K Road bike path and improving the bike path in Goshen, to name a few. These are already on the approved Bicycle Plan for the City of Visalia.

Measure R will also make possible improvements to public transit in Dinuba, Visalia, Porterville, Woodlake, Lindsay and Farmersville.

All of these efforts are intended to make it possible for more people to leave their cars at home, get healthy exercise and help clean our air.

Certainly, fixing potholes and making our streets safer is important. But I am gratified to see that the decision-makers who developed the expenditure plan did so with an eye not just to what has to be done, but what should be done — and that must include alternatives to the single-passenger vehicle.

The only reason I chose to support Measure R is because of the clean-air projects included.

Without these funds, we will never be able to finance the bike paths that we envision and need.

I encourage your support of Measure R on Nov. 7.

For a complete list of clean-air projects to be funded, see the expenditure plan at [www.voterroadrepair.com](http://www.voterroadrepair.com).

*Vicki Stasch is an activist involved in many community projects, including promoting alternative and public transportation.*

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2006:](#)

### **'Valuable choices'**

I commend The Bee for coming out in support of Proposition 84. We all stand to benefit from the passing of this proposition, which addresses critical concerns such as safe drinking water standards for smaller Valley towns, agricultural land preservation, urban greening projects and local and regional parks, as well as planning incentives to conserve water and improve air quality.

As a mother raising three sons and the keeper of the household checkbook, I can also appreciate that Proposition 84 will not raise taxes, yet direct much-needed state funds to the Valley. The valuable choices we make today affect our children and our children's children tomorrow. Please vote for Proposition 84.

*Cecelia Sheeter , Madera*