

From the Smog Blog,

Fresno Bee, May 27, 2008, 11 a.m.

Make an air video, get famous

Design a 30-second video promoting healthy-air living and you might see it on local television.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wants people to get creative in answering the question: "What is a healthy air life?"

That's a pretty wide-open question. The answer could include riding the bus, car care, telecommuting, altering your workout schedule to avoid bad air, barbecuing with propane instead of charcoals, using water-based paints instead of petroleum-based paints, replacing your water heater and many other ideas.

There must be many ways to be clever showing about showing a shift from charcoals to propane to grill your burgers. Suggest a few on that subject or others by commenting on this blog. Get the ideas flowing, fellow breathers.

The deadline for the video entries is June 13, 2007 at 5 p.m. Entry forms, official rules and other related materials can be found at www.healthyliving.com <<http://www.healthyliving.com/>> or <<http://www.myspace.com/valleyairdistrict>>www.myspace.com/valleyairdistrict.

If you have any questions, contact the District at 559-230-6000 or e-mail stefanie.sorrells@valleyair.org <<mailto:stefanie.sorrells@valleyair.org>>.

Activists sue over latest ozone standard

Legal watchdog Earthjustice filed suit today against the federal government over the new ozone standard, which was more lenient than government science advisers had advocated.

The lawsuit is no surprise. Congress asked a lot of questions last week to find out how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency decided on setting the threshold -- a threshold that will take decades for the San Joaquin Valley to achieve.

One interesting sidelight: You can read [the entire lawsuit](http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal_docs/petition-for-review.pdf) <http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal_docs/petition-for-review.pdf> in about 30 seconds.

Why? In Clean Air Act lawsuits like this one, the suit is filed with a simple statement directly in the circuit court of appeals, in this case it was in the District of Columbia. That's so anyone, including you, could easily protest such a big federal decision on air quality.

However, you can be sure that in the coming months, there will be a lot more detail about the case. If you're going to file this kind of a lawsuit, you're going to need a lawyer and a lot more than a single sentence.

The new rules of the road

By Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Tracy trucking company owner Steve Grobe boasts four decades in the business. Though he's old enough to retire, he planned to work into his 70s. But proposed regulations that crack down on diesel emissions from industrial trucks could do in his 14-year-old trucking company, Green Valley Transportation, by 2012.

The 65-year-old said Tuesday that he'll probably retire sooner than planned.

With diesel up to a \$5-a-gallon average and transportation workers across the state demanding an increase in long-stagnant wages, proposed air quality rules that require expensive retrofits to curb diesel emissions could put California truckers in a tighter spot than many can handle, according to many industry experts.

In Tracy, at least a handful of companies like Grobe's could risk going out of business, as the cost of trucking anything anywhere gets more expensive.

Under proposed regulations, trucking companies will need to retrofit diesel trucks built before 2007 with \$13,000-to-\$20,000 computerized soot filters, among other upgrades, including some aimed to improve aerodynamics to lessen the industry's collective carbon footprint.

In March, the California Air Resources Board held a series of briefings across the state to explain the impending restrictions to transport workers. Final drafts of the regulations will be submitted in October and will possibly go into effect by 2012 — which effectively sets the date for Grobe's retirement.

The required retrofits or truck replacements would probably cost the state's trucking industry between \$3.6 billion and \$5.5 billion, according to the air board. That would raise the price of transported goods by just pennies for consumers, the board added.

Truckers, though, believe the hike would be more dramatic.

"This will greatly, and negatively, affect our business," said Ed Davis, a safety director at First Class Service Trucking Inc., another local trucking company.

Davis said many in his line of work value sustainability but built their livelihoods on an industry that, by the air board's estimate, causes in California 1,000 premature deaths annually from exposure to diesel exhaust. About 3,700 Californians die each year from generic particulate pollution, which in southern San Joaquin County is dangerously high by federal air quality standards, says the air board and the American Lung Association of California.

Davis said he's conflicted about the proposed restriction to what air board officials call one of the most unregulated sources of diesel emissions in the state. Several Tracy truckers and truck mechanics echoed his sentiment.

"We all want to breathe cleaner air," Davis said. "We all want our children to breathe in cleaner air. I'm not one to say if the regulations are reasonable or not. I'm too involved."

A 1994 model diesel truck, worth \$11,000, would require up to a \$20,000 retrofit, according to the regulations. For many companies, like Davis', it's easier just to buy a new fleet.

The regulations would demand emissions cuts in two phases. Under the first phase, trucks made before 1998 will need to be retrofitted by 2010 to match emissions standards in 2007-model trucks. The second phase would require that by 2021 all trucks and buses meet emission standards of those made in 2010. That means owners would need to retrofit their fleets twice or buy new trucks to comply.

The California Farm Bureau Federation says regulations already drive up the cost of food and its production nearly tenfold compared to most states. The bureau predicts that produce will become even pricier under the stricter pollution control standards.

Last week, Davis and his company's owner, Jim Alves, flew to Texas to look at some new \$130,000 semis.

"We're just going to stay a step ahead," Alves said. "It makes sense to just get newer trucks and phase out the old fleet."

Though Davis and Alves agree that something needs to be done to curb diesel pollution, they said it's unreasonable to deem 2007 trucks as substandard, which they would be under the 2012 regulation, if adopted by the air board.

The new filters are mechanically innovative, though, said Bob Woolsey, a truck mechanic for 40 years and an employee at Grobe's company for the past 14. It's just the cost, he said, that's the downside.

When nitrous oxide, hydrocarbons and other particulates build up in a truck's engine, the filter automatically recycles and re-burns them as fuel instead of releasing the soot in plumes of black smoke. A computer monitors the build-up and triggers the re-burn.

The result: Emissions you can practically inhale, Woolsey said.

The filter's price would be more like \$30,000 per truck counting installation, he added. That's much more than the air board projected in its first few proposals.

Like catalytic converters in cars, platinum and other precious metals are an important component to the particulate filters, which makes the devices especially expensive.

It would cost about \$1,050,000 to bring Woolsey and Grobe's fleet of 35 trucks up to par. With a 5 percent profit margin last year, Grobe said there's no way he can stay in business.

To make matters worse on the business end, emissions standards would become so stringent by 2015 that the retrofits would be obsolete just three years after they're implemented, Woolsey added.

"I'm all for helping the Earth," he said. "But the reality is they demand we put on these \$30,000 retrofits and then they'd phase out those trucks anyway by 2015. What can you do?"

The cost will just get passed down the line to consumers, he said. And that'll be much more, eventually, than the few extra cents on the dollar projected by the air board, he added.

For the past five years, Grobe has already been selling off his fleet to Mexico, Russia and Vietnam. From 50 trucks two years ago, he's downsized his fleet to 35. In 2012, he plans to sell the rest, probably at a loss, to Mexican buyers.

The state air board does have a few pools of grant and loan money available for smaller trucking companies. Much of the money is paid for through vehicle registration fees. In all, there should be about \$500 million available by 2010 for trucking companies.

Grobe and Davis, though, say they'll never see a dime of it unless they restrict their business to certain parts of the state. Grobe's company, which trucks to all 48 contiguous states, wouldn't qualify.

But even if truckers have to foot the bill, it's a small price to pay for the public health benefit, said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, senior policy director for the lung association.

The proposed regulations, she said, "have been desperately needed for a long time."

Diesel exhaust is very damaging, she said, with its soot, ash, dust, metals and tiny particles that infiltrate deep into the lungs. It can cause lung illnesses and diseases, heart attacks, strokes and stunts lung capacity in children who grow up exposed to diesel exhaust.

"There might be children living near some of these roads that get a lot of industrial traffic," she said. "They might not know it, but they could grow up with respiratory problems, especially in the valley.

"These trucks are the largest source of diesel emissions in the state. And they're finally regulating what's really the largest source of diesel pollution here."

Groups sue government over new smog rules

By H. JOSEF HEBERT - Associated Press Writer

Sacramento Bee, Modesto Bee, S.F. Chronicle & Contra Costa Times, Wed., May 28, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Health and environmental organizations filed a lawsuit Tuesday arguing that the Bush administration failed to protect public health and the environment when it issued new smog requirements.

The lawsuit maintains that the Environmental Protection Agency ignored the recommendation of a key advisory panel of scientists who had recommended more stringent smog standards.

The suit was filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit by Earthjustice on behalf of a number of environmental and conservation groups and the American Lung Association.

Eleven states filed a parallel suit against the EPA in an effort to overturn what Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal called weak ozone standards. The states were Connecticut, California, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island. Other plaintiffs were the District of Columbia, the city of New York and Pennsylvania's department of environmental protection.

The EPA in March issued tougher health standards for ozone, commonly known as smog, requiring that airborne concentrations be lowered from a maximum 84 parts per billion to 75 parts per billion.

But an EPA science advisory board - and most health experts - had recommended a limit of 60 to 70 parts per billion to adequately protect the elderly, people with respiratory problems and children.

The EPA also did not go as far as the science panel had recommended in setting a separate standard to protect the environment, especially plants, forests and wildlife, from smog. The EPA lowered the standard equal to the primary standard safeguarding public health, but it rejected a more beneficial "seasonal standard" urged by conservationists.

EPA and White House officials have acknowledged that the seasonal standard had been opposed by the White House Office of Management and Budget, which oversees government regulation. The issue was settled after President Bush intervened directly on behalf of the White House staff only hours before the rule was announced.

David Baron, an attorney for Earthjustice, said the Clean Air Act "requires EPA to adopt standards strong enough to protect our lungs and our environment" and that the EPA standard fails to do so.

"The EPA's decision to disregard the overwhelming evidence and the advice of respected experts is a decision that we cannot allow go unchallenged," said Bernadette Toomey, president of the American Lung Association.

Other health and environmental organizations involved in the lawsuit were the Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, National Parks and Conservation Association and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Johnson, appearing last week at a House hearing, defended his decision, calling the new rules the most protective smog requirements ever issued by the agency and significantly tougher than the standard they replaced, which was issued in 1997.

Johnson has said that he took into account recommendations by the advisory panel of scientists, but simply disagreed with them. The business community had been lobbying hard to keep the old smog standard of 84 parts per billion.

This is only the latest of a number of recent high-profile lawsuits against the EPA in connection with air pollution and climate-related rules.

Environmentalists and a number of states also have challenged in court the EPA's refusal to allow California to limit greenhouse gas emissions from cars; its rules regulating mercury from power plants; and its drawn-out deliberations over whether to regulate carbon dioxide under the Clean Air Act.

Valley residents meeting only 3 of 22 health goals

By DOUG HOAGLAND - THE FRESNO BEE

In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 28, 2008

San Joaquin Valley residents have lost ground in key measures of their health, but achieved progress in others, according to a study released Tuesday.

More adults are binge drinking, and more adolescents are having sex, often without using condoms, the study concluded. Furthermore, there is no progress in treating adults for depression and providing flu shots to seniors.

Now the good news.

Fewer adults and adolescents are using tobacco, though valley rates still are higher than in California overall. More children and adolescents are getting immunized. [And air quality is getting better, though this remains one of the most polluted areas in the nation, as the study acknowledges.](#)

The study, "Healthy People 2010," profiled the health of people in Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties.

It compared health data from 2001-03 to 2004-06 in the eight counties and measured progress, or lack of it, against 22 public health goals that the surgeon general set in 2000 for the nation to reach by 2010.

The valley has met only three of the 22 goals: adult physical activity, adolescent tobacco use and adolescent immunizations.

"We only have two years to achieve these goals, and our findings indicate that we are failing as a region," said Marlene Bengiamin, one of the authors of the study. She is a senior researcher for the Central Valley Health Policy Institute at California State University, Fresno.

There's no government penalty for failing to reach the 2010 goals, but money and lives will be lost if progress isn't made, Bengiamin said.

For example, if the valley doesn't meet the 2010 goal of reducing obese adults to 15 percent of the population -- 65 percent of 18- to 64-year-olds were obese, according to 2005 data -- cases of diabetes and cardiovascular disease will continue to rise, said Karen Pfister of San Joaquin County Public Health Services.

Pfister and other health care professionals said Tuesday that the valley's rural poor often can't see doctors or get other medical care because of inadequate transportation, lack of insurance and language problems.

North Highlands firm to pay \$6 million to settle air permit dispute

By Dale Kasler

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, May 28, 2008

A North Highlands bridge contractor has agreed to pay \$6 million to settle charges that it operated diesel-powered equipment without proper air permits.

MCM Construction Inc. agreed to the settlement with the state attorney general's office and Mendocino and Ventura counties. MCM will pay \$4 million in penalties and spend \$2 million buying newer, cleaner equipment.

The state said it was the largest environmental settlement involving portable engines.

The company was accused in a lawsuit of operating diesel-powered cranes and other equipment without the proper air permits.

MCM's actions were "potentially very damaging to the environment," Attorney General Jerry Brown said in a press release announcing the settlement.

Ed Puchi, the company's treasurer and general counsel, said "there was no pollution" and the company's engines "were not exceeding any emissions standards." The company merely failed to obtain the air permits, some of which MCM believes weren't needed anyway, he said.

Puchi also denied the state's charge that MCM damaged salmon spawning habitats while working on the Van Duzen River in Humboldt County.

He said the company agreed to settle "to stop the bleeding on the legal fees, on the defense costs."

As part of the settlement, MCM agreed to obtain all necessary permits before operating any portable equipment.

It also agreed to spend \$2 million replacing some of its engines and retrofitting its headquarters to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. The upgrades are to be made by the end of 2012.

Puchi said MCM was planning to make those changes anyway, in accordance with state regulations, but over a longer period of time.

Bay Point voices environmental justice issues

By Paul Burgarino, East County Times

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Residents here have many local environmental concerns, but their top worries came as a surprise to Alberto Cabral.

The 18-year-old helped gather information for a survey of which environmental justice issues worried Bay Point residents most. The survey found that industrial pollution and illegal garbage dumping were the top two concerns, followed by poor water quality.

"Honestly, I was expecting most people would be worried about the water," the Bay Point resident said. Cabral also said he was surprised that the quadrant of Bay Point his small group polled spoke predominantly Spanish.

The survey results of 140 residents conducted door to door by students at Gateway High School will be presented at a community forum about Bay Point environmental justice concerns tonight. The forum is put on by a coalition of East County community groups, including the Bay Point Family Health Center, Contra Costa Health Services, CCISCO and La Clinica de la Raza.

The goal of the survey and workshop is to educate Bay Point community members on environmental justice and how residents can prioritize issues to improve their condition, said Roxanne Carillo, manager of the Contra Costa Health Services Healthy Neighborhoods Project.

Previous town hall meetings have focused on specific issues such as industrial safety and water quality, she said.

"This is the first time we're laying out all the issues," said Wendy Jo Cervantes, an outreach worker with the Healthy Neighborhoods Project.

Bay Point was the focus of the study because there tends to be disproportionate health inequities in areas with lower income and minorities both nationally and internationally, said Michael Kent, the county's environmental hazard ombudsman.

"There are several areas in Contra Costa County where this plays out, including Bay Point," he said.

About a third of Bay Point residents live below the poverty line, according to a 2007 county report on community health.

"The idea is to identify the concerns people have and help them to advocate for what they want improved," Kent said. "We're not trying to drive or dictate any kind of response; we're simply giving them access to information so they can say how they want to tackle that problem."

People are concerned about being upwind from factories such as General Chemical and refineries such as Shell Oil in Martinez in case of potential accidents. Residents also are cognizant of trash around Bay Point because of dumping by people from other communities, or those within the community, and abandoned homes, Carillo said.

Those issues, along with water, "are the hardest things to change," Cervantes said.

Earlier this year, Bay Point residents - who pay the most for water in central and eastern Contra Costa despite county health officials saying their water quality is the worst in that area - saw their water rates spike by 6.18 percent. The increase could have been higher, but residents came out in droves last year in opposition to the plan and current water conditions.

Last month, water supplier Golden State Water Co. said it would use chloramine, or chlorine and ammonia, in water treatment to reduce levels of harmful pollutants. The company also suggested it was agreeable to adding fluoride to the water, provided that it fully recovers related capital costs and operating expenses.

Cabral said he hopes the survey helps induce change.

"I know I'm thinking about the environment more, trying not to pollute the air by driving and litter," he said. "Hopefully, we can help keep the community clean."

IF YOU GO

? What: Bay Point environmental justice workshop

? Where: Riverview Middle School, 205 Pacifica Ave.

? When: 6 to 8 p.m. tonight

? More Information: Call 925-313-6810

Mayor renews efforts to reduce benzene released in Houston

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, May 28, 2008

HOUSTON-The mayor of Houston said Tuesday that the city will continue to oppose chemical industry attempts to receive or renew emissions permits.

Mayor Bill White renewed his criticisms of the city's powerful chemical industry, saying he also wants local plants to set public goals for reducing emissions of the carcinogen benzene.

White also acknowledged that air monitoring sites in the Houston Ship Channel area are showing lower levels of benzene in recent months, but said the levels are still not low enough. He asked

Ship Channel plants to continue reducing the amount of toxic pollutants released into the air and criticized the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for not doing enough to address the problem.

"TCEQ should immediately require industry to say how much benzene it plans to put in the air," White said in a story in Wednesday editions of the Houston Chronicle.

TCEQ spokesman Andy Saenz said that, "With all the resources devoted to the Houston area, we can say there has been significant progress in air quality, including air toxins."

White said he will lead city opposition by filing objections when plants apply for emission permits or renewals, and will also take some polluters to court. He is also asking that the largest polluters "set annual goals for benzene for each of the next five years and make those goals known to the public." White said plants should install fence-line monitors "so neighbors will know what crosses the fence."

Donald Empfield, general manager of Houston Operations at Sunoco and chairman of the East Harris County Manufacturer's Association, said he appreciated the mayor pointing out that air quality monitors show that some chemical plants are making progress. The manufacturer's association believes that TCEQ, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the county are the appropriate regulatory agencies-not the city, Empfield said.

The mayor's remarks this week were the latest in an ongoing dispute between his administration and chemical plants over benzene and other pollutants.

In November, a report from the Houston Regional Air Quality Task Force recommended 18 steps for reducing toxic chemicals in the city's air such as benzene and chlorine. The measures include petrochemical plants installing infrared cameras to identify emissions from roof storage tanks and other equipment. The task force also called for new programs to reduce car and truck emissions.

Risks: Study Ties Dirty Air to Blood Clots in Legs

By NICHOLAS BAKALAR

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Exposure to air pollution increases the risk for deep vein thrombosis, the blood clots that commonly occur in the leg veins. And the worse the air pollution, the higher the risk.

Researchers studied 871 D.V.T. patients in the Lombardy region of Italy, comparing them with 1,210 healthy people.

They tested levels of particulate air pollution - dust, soot and other tiny bits of matter suspended in the air - in areas where the patients lived, using monitors at 53 sites over a one-year period. The study was published May 12 in The Archives of Internal Medicine.

After adjusting for various health factors, the researchers found that for each increase of 10 micrograms per cubic meter in particulate matter, the risk for D.V.T increased by 70 percent. The effect of air pollution was smaller in women and not apparent at all in those using oral contraceptives or taking hormone therapy. Oral contraceptives themselves increase the risk for blood clots, but air pollution had no added effect.

"It's a risk to live where pollution is high," said Dr. Andrea Baccarelli, the lead author and an assistant professor of environmental health at the University of Milan. "But air pollution is not the only risk for D.V.T. Rather, this emphasizes the need for having a healthy lifestyle. That's important wherever you live, but even more important if you live where pollution is high."

Forum to help cultivate green building future

By Jamaal Johnson, The Argus

In the Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, May 27, 2008

All three cities of the Tri-City will be represented at "The Green Advantage: South Alameda County Green Builder and Developer" forum in Newark on Wednesday.

The forum will include public agencies from Hayward, San Leandro and unincorporated areas of the county.

"We are trying to make it more clear what the green building policies are," said Union City's Senior Planner Carmela Campbell.

From 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the consortium will be held at the new Ohlone College campus in Newark on 39399 Cherry Street. Tickets cost \$30 in advance and \$40 at the door.

The event will highlight and provide information for visitors and developers about green building policies in the southern section of the county in the several cities that are participating.

In addition, there will be information about the advantages, challenges and future of building green.

Developers will get a chance to give input about the current policies of going green - the disadvantages and advantages.

Many times developers are confused about what guidelines to follow in different jurisdictions, so this event will give builders an overview of programs and policies in a handful of cities, said Union City's Assistant Planner Avalon Schultz.

Visitors will also get a chance to tour the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified Ohlone College facility. About 30 percent of its power comes from solar panels, and recycled jeans are used as insulation.

"When we are speaking about going green, we are generally referring to Building It Green, a nonprofit that has its own system (Green Point Rated) dealing with energy efficiency, renewable resources and indoor air quality," Schultz said.

Vendors will also be on hand to feature their products and allow visitors tutorials.

Union City Mayor Mark Green will be the keynote speaker.

For more information, call Schultz at 510-675-5321.

To register, visit www.acgov.org/cda/planning/green.htm.

Telecommuters save money, cut pollution

By Sue Doyle, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Sunday, May 25, 2008

It was less than five miles from his home in West Hollywood to his meeting in Century City, but it still took Michael Poles 45 teeth-grinding minutes to drive there.

A construction consultant who usually works from home, Poles was frustrated by the bumper-to-bumper drive and astounded that so many motorists make that kind of commute every morning and every night.

"We're sitting in gridlock and idling expensive fuel and being unproductive and trying to be productive on our cell phones," said Poles, an advocate of telecommuting.

According to the Consumer Electronics Association, an estimated 40 percent of the U.S. work force could work from home, using the phone and Internet to connect with corporate offices and co-workers, clients and customers.

That's an estimated 2.2 million people in metropolitan Los Angeles, where the nation's worst rush-hour congestion keeps motorists idling in traffic an additional 72 hours a year.

But only 246,000 - about 4 percent of the region's work force - telecommute, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Telecommuting would reduce workers' fuel usage by an estimated 517 million gallons, which - at \$4 per gallon - equates to about \$2 billion in savings.

It would also mean less pollution - 4.5 million pounds less - in the air, say Kate Lister and husband Tom Harnish, a Carlsbad-based couple who wrote "Undress 4 Success: The Naked Truth About Working From Home."

"Think about what it would do to the GNP (gross national product). And what about accident rates?" said Lister, whose hatred of pantyhose and water-cooler talk prompted her to begin working from home 20 years ago.

"As you begin to reduce traffic on the highways, the amount of congestion will go down."

But providing the infrastructure to help support telecommuting isn't among the \$60 billion worth of traffic improvements that transportation officials say are needed by 2030.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority CEO Roger Snoble said even he can't get approval for the \$40,000 in technology that would allow teleconferencing of the Metro meetings, saving officials and constituents the time and gas spent driving downtown.

However, key officials with city government and Metro met last week with San Fernando Valley business leaders, asking them to encourage telecommuting as well as the use of mass transit.

"The government alone can no longer tackle this problem," said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who heads the Los Angeles City Council's Transportation Committee.

"We have to do this together."

While Georgia grants qualifying businesses up to \$1,200 in tax credits for each employee who works from home, the Golden State offers no such incentives.

However, some businesses allow telecommuting simply for the peace of mind it brings employees.

Instead of having to drive to their office in Beverly Hills, for instance, employees of Fox Interactive Media can arrange with their managers to telecommute from home or other locations, said Jeff Perkins, senior vice president of human resources.

And the option of telecommuting is also presented to some out-of-town job candidates worried about the city's well-deserved reputation for traffic jams.

"It's a benefit for us as we try to attract talent," Perkins said. "We don't rule anything out."

In fact, about 20 percent of U.S. companies offer telecommuting on a full-time basis, up 3 percent from just four years ago, according to a benefits survey by the Society for Human Resource Management.

At Woodland Hills-based Health Net, the perk helps employees balance their personal and professional lives, and managers have not seen any drop in work productivity from telecommuters, said Brad Kieffer, spokesman for the health insurance provider.

"It allows us to provide a greater work-life balance," Kieffer said. "That's important, especially in commuter-clogged areas like Los Angeles."

Lister said successful telecommuting programs require an adjustment in management style that gauges success by productivity rather than attendance.

"Management is stuck back in the days of managing sweat shops and typing pools," she said. "They feel a loss of control. We all know that results-oriented management is the way to go."

Even the U.S. government is getting aboard, with Congress passing a law in 2000 asking that all eligible federal workers be allowed to telecommute.

It's unclear from the law how many employees are considered "eligible," but about 6 percent of the 1.8 million federal workers now telecommute, said Cindy Auten, general manager of Telework Exchange, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit working on the project.

While the law was initially aimed at improving the work-life balance for employees, officials came to realize another benefit after telecommuting workers kept agencies operating during Hurricane Katrina and other calamities.

"That has become one of the biggest drivers now. However, it didn't start out that way," said Auten, who lives 70 miles from the office and works from home nearly every day.

"It started as an employee benefit, and now it's moved on to an agency benefit as well."

Cloud lingers after air quality officials announce new plan Clean air activists say proposal to reduce fine particles by 2014 not good enough for Valley residents.

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, May 23, 2008

Clean air activists have screamed for tougher pollution rules not just in Merced County, but the entire San Joaquin Valley.

And on Thursday, they weren't satisfied.

The California Air Resources Board approved the San Joaquin Valley Air District's plan to clean up fine particle pollution by 2014 -- a plan that isn't stringent enough, said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program associate for the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition.

"We're here to remind you people are dying -- you know that all too well," she said to the board in Fresno before it made its decision.

PM-2.5, or fine particle pollution, can penetrate deep into the lungs to aggravate asthma, contribute to heart disease and cause premature death.

Mary-Michal Rawling, program manager of the Asthma Coalition, reminded the board that two people in Merced County died this year from asthma-related illnesses.

And according to the county's first "Asthma Report Card" -- released May 6 on World Asthma Day -- about 745 county children visit the emergency room because of asthma-related illnesses every year.

Although the state air board approved the plan, stating it "met all legal and technical requirements under the federal Clean Air Act," it directed the air district to add backup measures strengthening regulations on fireplaces, boilers and industrial engines.

"I don't think this was sufficient," Rawling said, adding that the contingency measures were ones the air district was going to add anyway. "It doesn't give us any added benefit. It didn't take into account what the scientists are saying."

She was referring to an announcement made by the state Air Resources Board about a recently released public health study. The two-year study showed that fine-particle pollution is 70 percent more lethal than scientists had suspected.

State officials said the airborne soot prematurely kills up to 3,000 Valley residents each year, nearly triple the previous estimates.

This information was presented Thursday at the board meeting in Fresno, and activists said it should be proof enough to delay the air district's plan.

Advances in medical research have allowed scientists to better gauge the health effects of pollution, the new study shows. The Air Resources Board in the study revised the statewide PM-2.5 mortality estimate from 8,200 annually to 24,000.

Bart Croes, chief of the state air agency's research division, said the study could probably be used to help push for lower PM-2.5 health thresholds. The federal level is 15 micrograms per cubic meter.

While some scientists believe people would be safer at half that level, more research is needed to establish this.

"We really don't know what the health-protection level is," Croes said.

This comes after other studies confirming Merced County's pollution problems. The county recently received failing grades from the American Lung Association for ozone and short-term particle pollution.

Merced was one of seven metropolitan areas -- including New York City, Detroit and Chicago -- that landed on two of the three "worst" pollution lists.

PM-2.5 particles, which often hang in the Valley fog during fall and winter, are so small that 30 of them could fit on the width of a human hair.

The minuscule particles can come from fires, vehicles and chemicals that combine in the air. They are considered more dangerous than ozone or smog.

Most of this pollution is created in the Valley when chemicals combine in the air. Oxides of nitrogen from vehicles combine with plumes of ammonia coming mostly from dairies to form a chemical speck called ammonium nitrate, which accounts for nearly half of the region's PM-2.5.

Based on old estimates, a researcher at California State University, Fullerton, said the Valley's annual health-related costs for PM-2.5 exceed \$3 billion. Much of these costs were associated with the economic effect of losing so many people.

"Looking around at all the dust in the sky and the Valley today -- it's a little depressing," Michal-Rawling said. "We have a lot of work to do and we don't have a plan that's strong enough to do it."

Fresno Bee reporter Mark Grossi contributed to this report.

More about PM-2.5

WHAT IS IT: Air particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter are referred to as "fine" particles and are believed to pose the greatest health risks because of their small size (approximately 1/30th the average width of a human hair).

WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? Sources of fine particles include all types of combustion activities (motor vehicles, power plants, wood burning, etc.) and certain industrial processes.

WHO IS AT RISK? Roughly one out of every three people in the United States is at a higher risk of experiencing PM-2.5 related health effects. One group at high risk is active children because they often spend a lot of time playing outdoors

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Board approves particle pollution plan for Central Valley

By Garance Burke, Associated Press Writer
Contra Costa Times, Friday, May 23, 2008

FRESNO, Calif. -State air quality managers approved a disputed plan Thursday to clamp down on airborne dust, smoke and soot-microscopic pollution particles that are linked to thousands of early deaths in the San Joaquin Valley every year.

The Air Resources Board voted unanimously to approve the air cleanup plan at its meeting in Fresno, on a day when thick dust storms and smoke from nearby wildfires obscured vision along the roads slicing through the region.

California's farm belt has some of the highest levels of fine particulate pollution in the country.

The new proposal aims to clean up the air by keeping families from using their fireplaces for up to 35 days each winter and requiring large local employers to encourage a portion of their workers carpool.

It relies heavily on a draft state regulation that will curb emissions from diesel-powered trucks and buses, which the board is expected to make final in October.

Diesel exhaust is the major source of fine particulate matter, which sinks deep into the lungs and is closely linked to respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

As a condition for approving the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's draft plan, board members ordered the local agency to include stronger safeguards to cut back pollution generated by industrial boilers and diesel engines on farms.

"We do want to hold their feet to the fire and tell them that if they don't meet the deadlines that we've given them for adopting these additional rules then we will have to take stronger action," said board chairwoman Mary Nichols. "Even at low levels, the health risks are still very high."

Nichols said the plan will allow the area to meet federal standards for fine particle pollution-airborne specks that are just one-thirtieth the width of a human hair-by the deadline of 2014.

The plan will not become official until it wins final approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Air quality advocates and community members said the board's action on Thursday didn't go far enough to protect public health.

The board's own scientists released new research Wednesday showing that as many as 24,000 deaths in California each year are linked to chronic exposure to fine particulate pollution. The soot particles kill at least 3,000 valley residents every year, almost triple the previous estimate, said Bart Croes, chief of the state agency's research division.

"When you see data showing that these fine particles are killing three times more people than was previously thought, we feel like there's plenty of reasons to do more sooner," said Tim Carmichael, senior policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air, a statewide group. "It remains to be seen whether EPA will think that this plan is acceptable."

Carmichael and others had pleaded with the board to reject the plan, or to amend it to do more to regulate dairies, wineries and diesel pumps on farms, which are among the many sources of air pollution.

Some help will be arriving soon: Also Thursday, the board approved distributing more than \$221 million in state funds to local agencies to reduce nearly 30,000 tons of diesel pollution. Those moneys represent the first installment in the \$1 billion voters endorsed in approving Proposition 1B.

Members voted unanimously to direct the following sums to the state's four major trade corridors:

- \$122 million to the Los Angeles/Inland Empire
- \$55 million for the Central Valley
- \$31 million for the San Francisco Bay area
- \$13 million for the San Diego/Border region

The bulk of that money will go to retrofit and replace old diesel engines on trucks, agency officials said.

Other funds will go to install low-emission locomotive engines, and to build electrical infrastructure at the Port of San Diego that will allow cargo ships to plug in at the port, instead of leaving their engines running once they dock.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, May 28, 2008:](#)

More evidence in the air

State researchers have offered further evidence of what we long suspected: The dust and soot in our air is killing us. In fact, it is far worse than previously assumed.

Up to 24,000 deaths per year in California can be associated with regular exposure to fine-particulate pollution, known as PM 2.5. That's triple the previous official estimate of 8,200.

A review by state researchers of several major studies from the past five years addressing the problems presented by the tiny particles -- which tend to lodge deep in the lungs -- finds that the mortality connection is stronger than prior estimates.

The studies discovered that rates of heart attacks, strokes and other serious diseases increase exponentially from exposure to the smallest increases in amounts of metal or dust.

Californians who are subjected to high levels of airborne particulate matter lived, on average, 10 fewer years the researchers found. But when these tiny particulates are reduced, even for a limited period of time, the death rates drop.

Kern County, which has one of the worst particulate-matter problems in California, has the highest death rate for coronary heart disease in the state, and by a wide margin.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has wisely indicated a willingness to target diesel trucks, industrial plants and residential wood burning. As inconvenient (and potentially costly) as these restrictions may prove to be, is anything the more important than cleaning up the valley's air? In light of the new health findings, we think not.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, May 28, 2008:](#)

Stop-and-go traffic pollutes

Waiting at a traffic signal when no one is crossing from the other direction wastes time and gas. Waiting also fouls the air and is becoming increasingly costly, given the high gas prices.

Each day I wait, like everyone else, for traffic lights to change. Frequently, I approach traffic lights with a group of other cars and the traffic light doesn't recognize that we are approaching, even though no one is crossing in the other direction. Hence, we all have to stop, unnecessarily.

What is being done to improve the timing of traffic signals in Bakersfield? Are traffic lights available which would better react to oncoming traffic?

When I hit a button, my garage door opens. Could cars be equipped with similar buttons which would alert traffic signal systems about oncoming traffic in all directions and be programmed to minimize delays?

Why aren't ground sensors placed further back from intersections so as to anticipate oncoming traffic? Why aren't the cameras at intersections working better?

The paper should assign a reporter to investigate and report whether our current traffic signal system could be improved to save us time and gas money and improve air quality.

LOUIS WILDMAN, Bakersfield

[Tri-Valley Herald Editorial, Wednesday, May 28, 2008](#)

Lesson on health care

MediaNews editorial

ONE OF THE BENEFITS of federalism is that it gives individual states the freedom to enact their own government programs, serving as laboratories of democracy. Often programs in one state are copied by others or have even become national policy.

For example, California took the lead decades ago in requiring [smog control devices on automobiles](#). [Now such pollution controls are national policy](#). Wisconsin's welfare reforms laid the foundation for national welfare reform under the Clinton administration.

We now have an opportunity to examine a bold health care reform that was enacted in Massachusetts two years ago and went into effect last July 1. It is providing valuable information on possible similar reforms in California and nationally.

Under the Massachusetts reform, everyone is required to obtain health insurance. The idea is to remove the economic burden on hospitals and other health-care providers of caring for uninsured patients, especially those who use emergency rooms as their primary source of medical attention.

Massachusetts also has set up a state-run health insurance system called Commonwealth Care designed for low-income residents. It uses a sliding scale of subsidies for everyone under 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$63,000 for a family of four.

The hope of former Republican Gov. Mitt Romney and the Massachusetts Democratic Legislature was that by eliminating

"free-rider" use of emergency rooms, costs and insurance premiums would drop, making coverage more affordable for more people. Also, the insurance mandate was supposed to result in universal coverage. Unfortunately, a considerable gap opened between hope and reality.

While the number of uninsured has dropped from about 660,000 to 350,000, Commonwealth Care has accounted for 60 percent of the growth in individual insurance over the past year.

That means many people are still using the "free" services of emergency rooms. Insurance premiums have not significantly changed and the cost to the state is skyrocketing.

The anticipated cost of operating Commonwealth Care was \$472 million, which the Legislature appropriated. However, that figure falls far short and the governor is seeking another \$153 million, making the total cost \$625 million.

For next year, the governor wants \$869 million for the state insurance program, which he believes still will not be enough. Estimates of cost overruns over the next decade are \$4 billion.

Also, it is likely that the state program is displacing private insurance for many people as well as providing new coverage for uninsured residents.

What Massachusetts failed to do is help direct uninsured people toward using private insurance providers and HMOs. Instead, the state made it more difficult for private insurers to offer low-cost basic policies by imposing costly mandates on them.

Had the state worked with private HMOs and insurance coverage first and then subsidized low-income people, the results could have been considerably better. Instead, the emphasis was on universal care, which has failed to succeed.

The lesson here is not to give up on health care reform, but to examine what does and does not work.

The Massachusetts experience with health care reform, flaws and all, offers valuable information for state and national policy makers. They should not ignore it.

[Letter to LA Daily News, Wednesday, May 28, 2008:](#)

Be wary of carbon fees

Hidden on page A21 of Thursday's Daily Breeze is an article that should be expanded and spread across the front page: "Bay Area sets fees for gases" states that the Bay Area Air Quality

Management District for the nine Bay Area counties has voted to impose fees (taxes) of 4.4 cents for every ton of carbon dioxide businesses emit.

That doesn't sound like much, but it is an illegal tax that could spread across the state rapidly.

Businesses don't pay taxes; they must transfer them to the consumer.

There is no scientific proof that CO2 is an air pollutant. Satellite and airborne measurements show little radiation absorption below 15micron wavelengths, which are reflected only by the deserts. Climate models meant to scare the public seem to ignore the natural climate variations and only project the effect of temperature rising in a straight line from 1970 to 1998. The models ignore the fact that global temperatures have fallen in the last decade.

Now, it is politically incorrect to deny manmade global warming. How does that affect us? The project cost of the Koyoto Protocol is \$3.7trillion worldwide by the year 2020. Countries that signed on will not make the 2012 goals for fear of going bankrupt. George Bush saw the economic consequences and refused to sign, but all of his potential successors plan to do so. The sale of carbon credits distributes wealth without reducing emissions. Consumers pay more for fuel because the market speculators realize that our resources of coal and natural gas cannot be used without emitting CO2.

Polar bears are protected to prevent petroleum exploration and production in the northern territories.

It is up to the citizens to become educated about the global warming conspiracy.

Robert Houston, Torrance

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses New England designs a "green" city, restricting the use of vehicles and using bicycles instead. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Diseñan una ciudad 'verde' en Inglaterra

El príncipe de Gales elige una arquitectura tradicional georgiana

La Opinion, Friday May 23, 2008

Con ayuda de un consorcio privado, el príncipe de Gales ha diseñado una ciudad ecológica inspirada en la arquitectura británica de la era georgiana.

La ciudad, que se llamará Sherford y tendrá 12 mil habitantes, ha recibido ya permiso de construcción de las autoridades del condado de Devon, en el suroeste de Inglaterra, informa el diario The Guardian.

Turbinas de viento suministrarán la corriente, la energía solar calentará el agua de la cocina o el baño, [se restringirá el uso del automóvil y se dará prioridad a la bicicleta.](#)

Sherford ha sido diseñada por el heredero del trono británico en colaboración con un consorcio privado del que forma parte el Royal Bank of Scotland.

Al igual que ocurre en Poundbury, otra ciudad de nueva planta en el condado de Dorset, que Carlos de Inglaterra comenzó a construir hace 10 años en su ducado de Cornualles, los edificios de Sherford están inspirados en viejas ciudades inglesas.

El primogénito de Isabel II, que detesta los rascacielos modernos, dice querer construir "lugares que hagan que la gente sienta que les pertenecen".

La Foundation for the Built Environment, una organización presidida por el príncipe y la constructora Red Tree, pretende que la mitad de la energía de Sherford provenga de fuentes renovables in situ, en especial de turbinas eólicas y biomasa.

Dos terceras partes de los materiales de construcción que se empleen serán de los alrededores de la ciudad, y las emisiones de carbono de los hogares y los negocios que se instalen allí serán un 60% inferiores a las que exige la legislación actual.

Los tejados de muchas de las casas estarán cubiertos de plantas o de una capa de grava para que los insectos y los pájaros busquen allí refugio. Tres de cada cuatro edificios estarán dotados de paneles solares y habrá, además, una granja de productos orgánicos.

Cuando se propuso la construcción de Sherford, los habitantes de la localidad vecina de Brixton presentaron tres mil objeciones, pero la oposición inicial remitió después de que se involucrase a aquellos en el diseño de la nueva ciudad.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Honda's new combat vehicle. The automotive industry will launch a new hybrid gas-electric 5 passenger sedan.](#)

Viene el 'Honda de combate'

La empresa automotriz lanzará un nuevo híbrido gas-electricidad

AP

La Opinión, Friday, May 23, 2008

TOKIO-Honda, segundo fabricante de carros del mundo, anunció el lanzamiento del nuevo híbrido gas-electricidad, que se pondrá a la venta a principios del 2009, en mercados de Europa, Estados Unidos y Japón, por los próximos tres años.

El presidente de Honda Motor Co, Takeo FuKui, dijo que el nuevo modelo sólo se venderá en su formato híbrido y que será un sedán de cinco-puertas, de cinco pasajeros, nueva tecnología, y que además redujo el tamaño y el peso del sistema híbrido convencional para mayor eficacia y un 30% menos en consumo de electricidad.

Honda planea vender unas 500 mil unidades de este nuevo modelo y de el ya conocido Civic, sólo en versiones híbridas.

El nombre del nuevo automotor no se ha dado a conocer, pero tendrá uno de combate y muy moderno como su estilo ratificó el señor Takeo.

El precio del nuevo híbrido no se conocerá si no hasta fines del 2008, cuando la empresa lo ponga a la venta el mercado norteamericano por el sistema de renta con opción a compra.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that poor air quality affects 90% of Latinos in the United States. A group of activists have decided to use their bicycles as a form of transportation to reduce air pollution in various cities in the US.](#)

La contaminación del aire afecta a un 90 por ciento de los latinos de EEUU

Washington, - Un grupo de activistas reivindicó la bicicleta como medio de transporte para reducir la contaminación de las ciudades estadounidenses, que actualmente afecta a un 90 por ciento de la población latina del país.

Terra, Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Miembros de la Red de Acción por un Ambiente Saludable (HEAN, por sus siglas en inglés) recorrieron en bicicleta las calles de Washington, equipados con medidores para valorar la calidad del aire y exigir un medio ambiente sin contaminación.

La Alianza Nacional para la Salud de los Hispanos, aseguró que muchas enfermedades como el infarto de miocardio, el asma, el enfisema y las alergias están estrechamente relacionadas con la contaminación.

Estudios facilitados por La Alianza demuestran cómo el exceso de contaminación en la comunidad hispana empieza a notarse, especialmente entre los niños.

Los menores latinos con asma -una enfermedad sobre la que los niveles de ozono en el aire actúan muy negativamente- sufren más ataques y son un 63 por ciento más propensos a ser hospitalizados que los niños asmáticos de otras comunidades.

Según explicó el director del Programa de Salud de La Alianza, Edgar Gil, "ir al trabajo en bicicleta debiera ser un ejercicio saludable, no un riesgo para mis pulmones o la salud de mi corazón".

Gil denunció el quietismo de la Agencia de Protección Medioambiental (EPA, por sus siglas en inglés) para reducir los niveles de contaminación de las ciudades, especialmente sobre la presencia de ozono en el aire.

"Se trata de tomar las medidas pertinentes para no tener que curar a la gente más adelante - añadió-, para prevenir y no tener que lamentar".

Para denunciar el exceso de contaminación, Gil instaló en su ciclo el "Eco Pack", un equipo portátil creado por la HEAN y compuesto por un GPS y tres sensores que miden la composición del aire.

Desde la HEAN piden la reducción de un cuarta parte del máximo permitido de ozono en el aire - establecido en 80 partículas por millón- que, según este experto, excede los límites de lo salubre.

"Por no hacer el cambio de 80 a 60, más o menos, unas 5.000 personas morirán cada año", dijo.

El "Eco Pack" forma parte de una iniciativa a nivel nacional de la HEAN, que ha distribuido estos aparatos entre estudiantes de secundaria de todo el país con el objetivo de que midan la calidad del aire y del agua de sus ciudades.

De esta manera, la organización confeccionará un mapa sobre los niveles de contaminación en Estados Unidos que servirá para comparar la calidad del aire con la incidencia de determinadas enfermedades asociadas con la contaminación.

El programa se ha puesto en marcha en cuatro de las principales áreas urbanas del país: Brooklyn (Nueva York), Brownsville (Texas), Detroit (Michigan) y Watsonville (California).

Asimismo, el director del Programa de Salud de la Alianza aseguró que, a través de este programa, la HEAN también quiere incentivar la participación de los jóvenes en los problemas medioambientales.

"Les estamos educando en el control y cuidado del medioambiente y quién sabe cuántos de ellos llegarán a ser científicos algún día -manifestó- y solventarán algunos de los problemas que amenazan nuestro entorno y la salud de nuestra comunidad".

La Alianza es una asociación fundada en 1973 y formada por profesionales médicos y centros de salud de todo el país, que atienden anualmente a más de 15 millones de pacientes latinos.

La misión de esta organización es servir de recurso de información acerca de la salud de la comunidad hispana de Estados Unidos y abogar por la mejora de sus condiciones sanitarias.