

Deadline to meet pollution standards

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Growers in the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which includes Merced County, have until January 2010 to replace older, high-polluting, Tier 0 diesel engines greater than 50 horsepower with EPA-certified Tier 3 or Tier 4 engines.

The rule is the latest installment in complying with District Rule 4702, which regulates air pollution emissions from ag engines not used in tractors or ag implements, such as irrigation pump engines. Growers statewide will need to meet a similar requirement by January 2011 under parallel rules by the State Air Board.

In addition, San Joaquin Valley growers after January face more onerous permitting requirements if they plan to install or modify ag engines, depending on whether they qualify as a "significant polluter." The cutoff for "significant polluter" will be lowered from 12.5 tons per year because of the severe nonattainment for ozone status of the San Joaquin Valley.

Contact the SJV Air District at (559)230-6000 for additional information.

Man makes pitch for off-road facility

By Chistine Bedell, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2009

Bakersfield city staffers were tasked Monday with looking into the possibility of allowing about 80 acres of city-owned land at Mount Vernon Avenue and Highway 58 to be used by off-road motor vehicle and bike enthusiasts.

But staffers warned they already have concerns about the idea.

David Rogers of Bakersfield, an off-roader, pitched the idea to city staff and City Council members David Couch and Jacquie Sullivan at a meeting of the city Community Services Committee.

Half the area in question is a sump, the other half the site of a decommissioned sewer treatment plant, according to city Public Works Director Raul Rojas.

Rogers said there's precedent for turning such properties into off-road motorcycle and other vehicle riding areas when conditions are right (such as when they're dry). Volunteers would prepare the site for and coordinate events, he said.

"Cities all over the state are doing it," Rogers argued.

City Manager Alan Tandy, though, offered up a list of potential roadblocks here including [air quality restrictions](#), noise concerns (the site is near a county animal shelter), insurance requirements and -- if any city money is needed -- Bakersfield's lean municipal budget.

Rojas expressed concern the project would create pollution problems and noted that "in the 90s - in the mid-90s - this sump was full."

In the end, Rogers was asked to give city staff more information about how such off-road facilities work in other cities. Rogers had talked about ones in Tulare and Porterville.

Couch pointed out today's regulatory and fiscal climate may be a lot different here, now, compared to when those cities' facilities were developed.

He asked staffers to look at whether other areas might be suitable for an off-road facility.

Local off-roaders have long been looking for a riding site in Kern County. Rogers said they're hoping to find multiple, relatively small sites because their efforts to get approval for one big site haven't been successful.

Residents urged to check rules before burning wood

By Bill Lindelof

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

The effort to keep *Sacramento* air clean by limiting fireplace smoke on certain days is in effect.

The *Sacramento* Metropolitan Air Quality Management District's "Check Before You Burn" program began Sunday and continues through Feb. 28.

The air district restricts or prohibits wood burning in the county when particulate matter pollution is forecast to be unhealthy.

The "Check Before You Burn" program covers unincorporated areas of the county and the cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Isleton, Rancho Cordova and Sacramento.

There are four stages in the program: all burning prohibited, no burn unless exempt, burning discouraged and legal to burn.

First-time violations result in a \$50 fine, or violators must pass a wood smoke awareness course.

To check before burning wood in fireplaces, wood stoves and fire pits, the air quality district suggests residents call (877) 662-8765, go to www.airquality.org or check the back page of The Bee's Our Region section.

Houston is close to meeting federal smog limits

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

HOUSTON—Houston is cleaning up its smoggy act.

Houston, once considered to have the dirtiest air in the nation, for the first time could meet federal limits for lung-irritating smog, based on a three-year running average.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency the data is preliminary and will be reviewed, The Houston Chronicle reported. But the initial information indicates "the news is good," said EPA spokesman David Bary.

Ozone, the key ingredient in smog, is produced when nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds, which are released from vehicles and smokestacks, heat in sunlight.

The limit is 84 parts per billion, or 84 molecules of ozone for every billion molecules of air. Houston's air measured 84 parts per billion through Monday.

Bryan Lambeth, senior meteorologist for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, said the region probably will not have enough more smoggy days this year to move the average above the limit.

"It's not certain, but I would put it at 90 percent or higher," Lambeth said of the region's chances of ending 2009 in compliance.

Gov. Rick Perry in 2007 convinced the federal government to grant Houston more time, until 2019, to comply with smog standards set in 1997.

State officials attribute Houston's cleaner air to more stringent regulations that took effect in 2007, industry cleanup efforts and new pollution controls.

The weather also helped to short-circuit smog-forming conditions since 2007, plus the economic downturn led to fewer emissions from heavy industry and vehicles, federal regulators said.

Houston, the nation's fourth largest city, a decade ago replaced Los Angeles for the unwanted crown of smoggiest city.

"We still have plenty of work ahead of us," said Karl Pepple, the city's director of environmental planning. "I don't want to lose momentum."

"Let's applaud ourselves now," said Matthew Tejada, executive director of the Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention. "Then let's see where we are in a few years."

Gore expects Obama to attend Dec. climate talks

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Former Vice President Al Gore says he believes President Barack Obama will attend the December climate talks in Copenhagen to emphasize his administration's commitment to safeguarding the environment.

In an interview Tuesday on ABC's "Good Morning America," Gore said that while he had not spoken to Obama about the global talks, "I feel certain he will" attend.

The Copenhagen talks are aimed at negotiating a follow-on agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, which required 37 industrial nations to cut carbon emissions by an average 5 percent from 1990 levels by 2012, when the accord expires. The U.S. rejected Kyoto as unfair and harmful to the U.S. economy, even though Gore was one of the negotiators.

GOP senators absent at start of climate debate

By Dina Cappiello and H. Josef Hebert - Associated Press Writers

In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Republicans boycotted the start of committee debate Tuesday on a bill to curb greenhouse gases, protesting that the bill's costs have not been fully examined. The action put a spotlight on the difficulties Democratic leaders face in moving climate legislation this year.

Republican Sen. George Voinovich of Ohio attended the session for 15 minutes to explain the GOP's argument for staying away. He insisted the tactic "is not a ruse" to block the bill, but concern that its widespread impact on the country has not been made clear.

But Sen. Barbara Boxer of California, the panel's chairman, argued the EPA already has provided "a full blown economic analysis" and that Majority Leader Harry Reid has promised further studies when the bill is merged with other legislation. She insisted, "We're not rushing. We are taking our time."

The partisan rift in the Environment and Public Works Committee, which delayed votes on amendments to the legislation, exposed the sharp divisions in the Senate over how to address global warming. Democrats also have been split on the issue. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., who said he had deep reservations about the bill also was absent.

Boxer had hoped to push the legislation out of her committee this week, so it could be merged with provisions from five other committees and demonstrate to the world some progress in Congress before the international climate conference begins in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel in an address to Congress said Tuesday there is "no time to lose" when it comes to global warming and that the United States and Europe must lead if an international agreement on curtailing greenhouse gases is to be achieved. She said if developed countries act, she expects China and India to take action as well.

She made the same plea to President Barack Obama at the White House earlier in the day - as did European Union leaders in separate meetings at the White House. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso called an international climate deal "a defining moment" for this generation of world leaders.

Obama has repeatedly called on Congress to pass climate legislation. But the issue has become bogged down in the Senate over strong opposition from Republicans - and some Democrats as well - who fear the loss of jobs and higher energy prices.

The Democratic bill calls for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and industrial facilities 20 percent by 2020 and 83 percent by mid-century. Polluters would be given pollution permits that they could trade among themselves to ease the economic effect of the transition from fossil fuels.

"This is not a ruse to prevent this committee from marking up a climate bill. Rather this is a genuine attempt ... to have the best information available as we debate and amend the bill that will have consequences for every person in the country," said Voinovich whose state is especially vulnerable because of its reliance on coal and manufacturing base. He said an analysis by the EPA cited by Boxer was inadequate, made "unrealistic assumptions" and was based on a House-passed bill that he said is significantly different from the bill before the Senate panel.

But Boxer disagreed and said the bill she has co-authored along with Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., was "90 percent the same" as the House version that has been fully examined by the EPA. That EPA analysis estimates modest cost to households from higher energy prices of \$80 to \$111 a year.

"There is no reason at all for additional analysis and spend more taxpayer dollars doing it when the work has been done," said Boxer. She called the GOP boycott a delaying tactic and promised, "we're going to be here every day until they join us."

Democrats have a 12-7 majority in the committee and enough votes to advance the measure. But an attempt by Boxer to ram the bill through committee without Republican participation could backfire when the measure gets to the floor where it will be combined with other climate legislation.

On Monday, the ranking Republicans on five other committees that will have some say in climate legislation also called the EPA analysis unsatisfactory and said senators should not be expected to vote on a bill "without a full and complete analysis of the likely effects." They warned in a letter to Boxer that failure to accommodate GOP senators seeking further studies "would severely damage rather than help" the chances of getting the bipartisan support needed to get a bill through the Senate.

Developers abandon plan for SD power plant

By Dale Wetzel - Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Monday, November 2, 2009

Developers of a \$1.6 billion electric power plant in northeastern South Dakota abandoned the project Monday, saying they were unable to recruit other investors after one of the principal utility backers pulled out.

The Big Stone II plant, planned for construction next to an existing power station near Milbank, S.D., was meant to supply about 550 megawatts of power to utilities in North Dakota, South Dakota and southern Minnesota.

It had the necessary permits from state regulators to begin building, but financing the plant's construction proved to be too difficult, project officials said.

Representatives of environmental groups celebrated the project's demise, saying continued development of a large, coal-fueled power station went against national trends favoring wind power and other renewable energy sources.

"This is happening in the context of coal plants around the country being abandoned," said Margaret Levin, state director for the Minnesota North Star chapter of the Sierra Club.

"I would certainly attribute this outcome to an increased understanding ... that we have got to switch away from coal and other dirty forms of power," Levin said.

Supporters of Big Stone II said the end of the project could force utilities and their customers to buy more expensive electricity.

The project included construction of new and upgraded high-voltage power lines in southern Minnesota that could carry power from new wind-powered generators as well as from Big Stone II.

Steve Kolbeck, vice chairman of South Dakota's Public Utilities Commission, said construction of Big Stone II and improvements to the nearby power plant would have cut total pollution from the site while greatly increasing its output.

"If we could have gotten it built ... we could have actually made the air cleaner up there," Kolbeck said.

A group of seven utilities were partners in the project when it was announced in June 2005. Planners said they hoped to begin construction of a 630-megawatt plant in 2007 and have the plant operating by 2011.

Two partners, Great River Energy, of Maple Grove, Minn., and the Rochester-based Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, withdrew in 2007. The project's death blow, however, did not come until last September, when Otter Tail Power Co. withdrew. The Fergus Falls, Minn.-based utility was the project's original managing partner.

Otter Tail's president, Chuck MacFarlane, said the slumping national economy and uncertainty about future federal environmental regulation made it difficult to finance the new power plant.

On Monday, Big Stone II's remaining partners - Montana-Dakota Utilities Co., of Bismarck, N.D., Missouri River Energy Services, of Sioux Falls, S.D., Heartland Consumers Power District, of Madison, S.D., and the Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, of Blue Earth, announced in a brief statement that the plant would not be built.

Mark Hanson, a Montana-Dakota spokesman, said the plant's output had been scaled back to about 550 megawatts. The remaining partners had agreed to take about 350 megawatts, but other takers for the remaining 200 megawatts could not be found on short notice, Hanson said.

"This was a lot of hard work and a very thorough process," Hanson said. "It's disappointing when you have a fully permitted project that is considered the (most economical) option, and it would have been environmentally sound."

South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds, in a statement relayed by spokesman Joe Kafka, said that while the project's demise "is not a surprise, it is still a disappointment."

North Dakota and South Dakota now are likely to lose up to 1,000 megawatts of electric transmission capacity that could be used to expand the wind power industry in both states, Rounds said.

"This may very well set back wind generation plans until new transmission capacity is established," he said.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Editorial, Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2009:](#)

Today's vote is most important

Local government matters most.

Decisions at the local level are much more likely to affect people's daily lives than anything that happens at state and national levels.

More than one candidate in today's municipal elections in Visalia have made that point in their campaigns. And they're right.

The folks who will be elected today will make the decisions over the next few years that will either make our community a better place to live or make it a place we detest.

With so much at stake, why would anyone fail to take the opportunity to select the people who will make those decisions?

When people take showers, water their lawns, flush their toilets, discard their garbage, take their kids to a soccer game, drive to the store or walk around the block, they are using city services. When they get protection from criminals, fire, flood, vicious animals, [polluted air](#), blight, derelict cars or gang violence, they are receiving city services. When they enjoy Visalia's downtown restaurants and entertainment; are employed in businesses at the industrial park; attend local theater or art events; and have easy access to facilities such as Kaweah Delta Hospital, they are enjoying amenities that were created by city government.

The city creates and enforces standards for housing, traffic, lighting, business, land use, property development and dozens of other things we encounter every day.

Visalia's 26,000 school-age children and their families receive services from Visalia Unified School District, which is obvious. Less obvious are all the other things by which we all benefit from our school district's services: athletics, musical concerts and plays, parades and rallies, school libraries, playgrounds and athletic fields, and a variety of programs that help the disabled, at-risk youth, families, seniors, adult students and English learners. School facilities provide assembly places for meetings, concerts, rallies, fundraisers for nonprofits and more.

Most important, our public schools make for an educated, engaged population, and the district's employees are among the most educated, sophisticated and productive citizens in our community. Imagine our community without the people who sustain our schools.

Most people take all those things for granted, but their functioning is the ultimate responsibility of the people who will be elected today to the Visalia City Council and the Visalia Unified School District board of trustees.

This year's campaign did not feature any passionate issues other than those that characterize most campaigns: the need for more government efficiency and less waste and the challenge of providing services under the limitations of the taxpayer's ability to fund those services.

The poor economy and state-imposed cutbacks muted much of what was proposed in this campaign. Most candidates talked about reduction, not expansion. Their visions for change have been put on hold.

That might make it appear that not much was at stake in this election. But steering local government during this period will be even more important than presiding over grand projects in more prosperous times. We need to be able to count on our leaders to make tough choices at a time when the basic services we depend on are threatened more than ever.

City of Visalia voters today will select three of the City Council's five members — a majority of the council. Those three people could in effect determine the course of the city's development for the next four years and beyond.

Visalia Unified School District voters have choices in two of the four seats on the ballot (two candidates are unopposed). They are not a majority, but those two can influence policy tremendously.

If you haven't, get out today and vote. The candidates deserve to know that they have the support of their fellow citizens.

And we all deserve to help choose the folks who will make the decisions that guide our lives.

Additional Facts

How to vote

- What: Election Day
- When: Polls open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m.
- Where: Polling places are listed on your sample ballot. To find your polling place online, go to www.tulareco@elections.org, and click on "Poll Site Lookup."
- Who: Citizens of the United States must be 18 years or older and registered to vote.
- By mail: Vote-by-mail ballots (formerly called absentee ballots) can be filled out and returned today to any polling place between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. Or they can be returned to the Elections

Office at 5951 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia. Ballots must be received by the Elections Office today to be counted.

- Information: Elections Office, 624-7300.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Monday, Nov. 2, 2009:](#)

First burn ban of the season for Fresno County

By Mark Grossi

The first wood-burning ban of the fireplace season is today for Fresno, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Kern counties.

You can't burn wood in fireplaces, wood stoves, fireplace inserts and pellet-burning devices until midnight today.

Kings County had the San Joaquin Valley's first wood-burning ban on Sunday.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District makes the wood-burning forecasts on a county-by-county basis. You can call 1 (800) 766-4463 to find out if you're allowed to burn.

Wood burning pumps tiny specks, called particulate matter, into the air, and the pollution can cause a number of health problems.