

## LA Babies Get Lifetime's Toxic Air in 2 Weeks-Study

Reuters News Service, September 16, 2002

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - A two-week-old baby in the Los Angeles area has already been exposed to more toxic air pollution than the U.S. government deems acceptable as a cancer risk over a lifetime, according to a report on Monday by an environmental campaign group.

The study of air pollution in California by the National Environmental Trust also said that even if a young child moved away from California, or if the air had been cleaned up by the time he or she reached adulthood, "the potential (cancer) risk that a child rapidly accumulates in California from simply breathing will not go away."

California, known to be the nation's smoggiest state, already has a potential cancer risk to adults that is hundreds of times above levels seen as acceptable by the Environmental Protection Agency

But the report said children were more vulnerable to pollutants than adults because, pound for pound, they breathe more air, drink more water, eat more food and play outdoors more than adults.

"A baby born in California will be exposed to such high levels of toxic air contaminants that the child will exceed the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) lifetime acceptable exposure level for cancer at a very early age, and will exceed the lifetime acceptable exposure level by many multiples by age 18," the Washington D.C.-based environmental campaign group said.

The "Toxic Beginnings" study divided California into five geographical areas. It concluded that in Los Angeles an infant would have reached the EPA's one chance in one million limit of contracting cancer from contaminants in 12 days, and in Sacramento it would take 23 days.

It said diesel exhaust -- from trucks and cars, school buses, and farm and construction equipment -- was still the worst source of air pollution. But it also took into account chemicals emitted by dry cleaners and factories as well as pesticides, adhesives and lubricant oils.

The National Environmental Trust urged federal and state policy makers to make cleaning up the air a priority.

"The overwhelming policy implication of these findings can be reduced to one word: URGENCY," it said.

It recommended that regional and local governments emphasize alternative technologies and fuels, replace diesel school buses and other municipal vehicles with cleaner alternative fuel models and enforce existing laws on fuel emissions.

## Kids' risks from smog overblown

**Experts discount cancer claims in study as alarmist**

By Kevin McCusker, Visalia Times-Delta, September 17, 2002

A recently released report on the risks California children face from airborne carcinogens is misleading and alarmist, according to experts.

The National Environmental Trust released the report, entitled "Toxic Beginnings: Cancer Risks to Children from California's Air Pollution."

"[The report] certainly comes across as if [California is] in some incredible risk or unique situation," said Dr. Jonathan Buckley, a pediatric epidemiologist with the University of Southern California and a researcher for the Children's Oncology Group. "It does seem somewhat alarmist."

The report addresses exposure to airborne carcinogens in the San Joaquin Valley, the Sacramento Valley, the San Francisco Bay area, San Diego and the South Coast.

According to the report, newborn infants in the San Joaquin Valley reach their acceptable lifetime exposure to toxic airborne contaminants in their first 23 days.

That means babies are 17 times over their acceptable lifetime exposure levels by their first birthdays. Girls will be 197 times over their acceptable lifetime exposure levels by their 18th birthday and boys will be 206 times over their acceptable lifetime exposure levels by their 18th birthdays.

The situation is slightly better in the Sacramento Valley and worse in the other three areas addressed in the report, with the South Coast's situation being the worst.

But the report does not provide comparisons with other parts of the country, nor does it tie the exposure to the pollutants with actual incidents of cancer.

"The pollutant that is really driving [the report] is diesel particulates," Buckley said. "They're dealing with lifetime risk of cancer and how diesel particulates affect lifetime risk of cancer, but they're presenting it as risk to children."

"The best evidence is in terms of lung cancer, but children don't get lung cancer. In terms of lifetime risk, they're talking about an increased risk later in life ... but this really isn't born out by what they're presenting."

Carcinogens released by the burning of diesel fuel include 1,3-butadiene, benzene, carbon tetrachloride and formaldehyde, which have been linked to lung cancer.

California's lung cancer incident rate is actually lower than the nation's, according to information from the American Cancer Society. From 1994 to 1998, California's incident rate for lung cancer among men was 65.8 per 100,000 people and among women the rate was 43 per 100,000 people.

The national rate was 72.6 for men and 43.5 for women.

And only seven states had lower incident rates for men and 15 states had lower incidence rates for women of the 44 states for which information was available.

"As far as the alarming nature of [the report], it does not offer a perspective on cancer risk in general," said Jerry Martin, a spokesman for California's Air Resources Board.

"One case of cancer in a million is acceptable risk, according to the [federal Environmental Protection Agency], but 330,000 cancer [cases] in a million is what the national average is."

"We have the world's best air-pollution control program here in California, and that includes air toxics."

The NET report recommends that the Air Resources Board work harder to reduce diesel emissions, but such a program, the only one of its kind in the country, already exists.

"We're the inventors of the program," Martin said. "It requires cleaning the fuel and requiring all diesel engines to be retrofitted within the next decade with anti-pollution controls that will cut their exhaust. [The goal is] 75 percent reduction in toxics from diesel by 2010, and we're on target for that."

A call to the NET was not returned Monday.

## **Study: Valley babies face high exposure to airborne toxins**

By MICHELLE TERWILLEGGER, Bakersfield Californian, September 16, 2002

Babies in the Central Valley get more exposure to toxic chemicals by age 1 than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency deems acceptable for a lifetime, according to a study by a private, environmental group.

But a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board in Sacramento said EPA standards for toxic chemical exposure are unrealistic and the findings of the study are misleading.

The National Environmental Trust, based in Washington, D.C., released a study last week that examined the amount of potentially cancer-causing agents in the air of five California regions, including the San Joaquin Valley.

The federal EPA defines the acceptable lifetime exposure to a toxic chemical as the level that causes no more than a one in 1 million chance of developing cancer.

According to the trust's study, infants in the San Joaquin Valley reach that lifetime level within their first three weeks and by age 1 have been exposed to 17 times that level. In other words, by age 1, the child has a risk of developing cancer due to chemical exposure at 17 in 1 million.

By age 18, the cumulative risk level rises to about 200 in 1 million.

Most of the toxins in high concentrations come from diesel fuel and other vehicle emissions, according to the study.

"It points to the need for reduction in emissions," said Tom Natan, research director of the National Environmental Trust.

Infants and children are exposed to a heavier amount of airborne toxins because they breathe more air compared to their body weight than adults do.

The study suggested that toxin exposure limits should change to accommodate a child's exposure level, which would mean drastically cutting toxic chemical levels, in some cases by half. "We tried to see what was going on in regards to children," Natan said. "If you protect children's health, you'll be protecting adults' health, too."

Jerry Martin, spokesman for the California Air Resources Board, said he appreciated the trust's interest in air quality, but said the study didn't tell the whole story.

The average American has a one in four to one in three chance of developing cancer, or 250,000 in 1 million to 333,000 chance in 1 million, he said.

Considering those figures, the risk for developing cancer due to toxin exposure pales in comparison, Martin said.

He also said the EPA standard -- the one in 1 million cancer risk -- was impossible to meet right now.

"That's a very good goal, but in most cases that's not very practical," Martin said. "In many cases, technology and medical science have no real way of reducing a person's risk to one in 1 million."

Bakersfield oncologist Dr. Ravi Patel said the study's findings should be taken in a larger context. For example, published studies have linked benzene exposure to leukemia, but researchers estimate that even 75 years of exposure to high urban levels of benzene -- released in vehicle emissions -- wouldn't even begin to double someone's chance of developing leukemia.

"You can't extrapolate that just because we have this (pollution), the risk is there," Patel said.

Natan acknowledged the environmental trust cannot show how many more cancer cases would develop because of toxic chemicals, but he said more could and should be done to reduce the risks of toxic emissions.

"They said we couldn't make cars that aren't 30 miles to the gallon," Natan said. "We simply have to decide if we want to do it."

Bob Kard, director of compliance with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, agreed there was room for improvement.

"I really think it's a team effort," Kard said. "The public, especially in their driving habits. They need to change those habits. As the population grows and as the valley fills in, unless we change habits, it's tough to make it any better."

Incidentally, the National Environmental Trust believes other urban areas may have the same sort of toxic concentration levels, but the organization found California's data from air monitoring stations the most readily available for study.

"Anyplace you have ozone or smog problems, you are likely to see some of the same kind of trends that you see in California," Natan said.

## **New director will steer Fresno transportation**

By Pablo Lopez, The Fresno Bee, *September 17, 2002*

A Florida airport executive has been hired to run Fresno's airports, including its long- overdue airport concourse, **and to figure out a way to increase the city's bus ridership.**

As transportation director, Ronald "Noah" Lagos, 51, will oversee Fresno Yosemite International and Chandler airports and **Fresno Area Express.**

The job pays \$117,000 annually.

Lagos, the vice president and chief operating officer at Sarasota Bradenton International Airport, will start Oct. 21.

He replaces Charles Hayes, who was fired in April after he breached airport security and couldn't contain a litany of construction problems with the concourse. City officials have never said why Hayes was dismissed.

Mayor Alan Autry said Lagos will help the city develop a comprehensive transportation plan that includes a modern mass transit system.

Lagos conceded he doesn't have experience running a municipal bus system, but contends his airport experience will help him in both jobs because riders want the same thing: a quality product, low fares and good customer service.

Though the city faces marketing challenges with its airport, Lagos said, a modern concourse with four jetways will help attract new air carriers.

But the \$42 million concourse is running far behind schedule. It was supposed to be open in February. In May, the city's interim transportation director, Severo Esquivel, estimated the concourse would be done by Sept. 27, although he called that date a "moving target." Now Esquivel is saying the concourse could be completed in mid-October. A grand opening is scheduled for early November.

"It's going to be done right and it's going to be beautiful," said Esquivel, who declined to estimate how much the project will run over budget.

The 200 or so large windowpanes that will make up the 56-foot-high north wall still aren't in place.

The first floor, a series of rooms for airlines and their employees, has been largely done for months. The walls of Sheetrock riddled with mold from last winter's rain are long gone.

When the first floor was inspected, 1,287 deficiencies were noted. So far, 800 have been corrected, Esquivel said.

On the second floor, the area that will house the restrooms and the food/beverage center are in place. But crews are still busy spraying fire retardant, painting, jackhammering and doing other chores. The terrazzo flooring also needs to be polished.

Lagos said he is familiar with the concourse, having visited Fresno this summer. He also understands overdue projects, having been involved in the construction of a new terminal and the extension of a runway in Sarasota.

The project, which included a 6,000-gallon saltwater aquarium, was completed in 1990 at a cost of \$58 million.

"The terminal came in late and over budget," he said. "But when it was all said and done, everyone agreed it was beautiful."

Lagos' career at the Sarasota airport began in 1988. As chief operating officer, his responsibilities included police, fire, security, planning and noise abatement.

City Manager Dan Hobbs said Lagos received "high marks" after a national search. His strengths include negotiating with labor unions, airline carriers and tenants; addressing the media; and spearheading the airport project.

Dan McClure, chairman of the board that governs the Sarasota airport, also praised Lagos, saying he is personable and efficient.

"He's knowledgeable about his position," McClure said. "We hate to lose him."

As Fresno's transportation boss, Lagos will manage a department with 423 employees and an operating budget of \$40 million. At the Sarasota airport, about 60 miles from Tampa, he has a \$12 million operating budget and directs 90 staffers.

The Sarasota airport is served by five major air carriers and four commuter airlines providing 15 to 20 daily departures. The airport is managed by the Sarasota Manatee Airport Authority and serves a two-county population of about 525,000 residents.

Fresno Yosemite International, which serves the Valley's six-county region, has seven air carriers and nearly 50 daily departures.

Though the number of flights differs, Lagos said, the number of airplane seats leaving Sarasota and Fresno are about the same -- 2,300 a day.

Lagos said he knows the challenges ahead because he has had to deal with them in Sarasota. For 10 years, the Sarasota airport had declining ridership, basically because it had to compete with the larger Tampa airport, which provided more flights and lower fares, Lagos said.

In Fresno, Lagos said he looks forward to running an airport that has no direct competition, but has had trouble getting more airline carriers and lower fares.

Lagos also will oversee Fresno Area Express, which operates 18 routes with a fleet of 102 buses.

A recent department survey shows that the 223 FAX bus drivers missed an average of 280 hours of work each year because of injury and sickness. The unscheduled leave has increased by almost 19% the past two years, costing the city about \$1 million in overtime annually to drivers who fill in for missing workers.

In the wake of last year's fare increase from 75 cents to \$1, annual ridership has dropped from 13 million trips to 11.8 million.

## Valley smog blows whistle on games

**Afternoon events are halted with air advisory.**

By Jim Davis, The Fresno Bee, *September 14, 2002*

High school football is played in the central San Joaquin Valley in rain, mud and sometimes even fog.

But not in bad air.

Athletic directors in Fresno, Clovis and some surrounding communities canceled junior varsity games and other outdoor events Friday, reacting to an air quality health advisory.

"What can you do?" asked William Acuna, Roosevelt High School athletic director. "Healthwise, it's better for the kids that we do this -- we don't want anyone collapsing or hurting themselves out there."

Even so, students complained about missing their games. Diego Galindo, a Parlier High sophomore, was set to play right guard in his school's first home junior varsity game.

"We were really pumped up to play," Galindo said. "I think it's really dumb -- who really cares about the air?"

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the advisory early Friday based on its forecast. It called for schools in Fresno, Clovis and southeast Fresno County, including Selma, Reedley, Sanger and Parlier, to quit outdoor activity from 3 to 7:30 p.m.

But the air quality never got as bad as predicted.

Evan Shipp, the air district's supervising meteorologist, said that if the district had waited too late to call the advisory, it would have been impossible to get the word out.

"We were trying to err on the side of good public health," Shipp said.

The advisory did not extend into Madera, Kings, Tulare or western Fresno counties.

When a health advisory is called, state law requires kindergarten-through-grade 12 schools to curtail outdoor activities like athletics. Varsity football wasn't affected because games weren't scheduled to start before 7:30 p.m.

The advisory is called when the amount of pollutants reaches 145 parts per billion air particles.

Thursday evening, the district's station at Parlier recorded a high of 148 parts per billion. Shipp said a warm air system trapped polluted air around the Fresno area.

Friday's high recording in Parlier was 130, and Shipp said air quality should continue to improve.

While football games have been canceled in Southern California because of air quality, local officials said they could not remember canceling football games in Fresno County.

David Wright, Selma High's athletic director, said his school has canceled practices, but "it didn't happen on Friday night football."

The advisory caused athletic directors to scramble. Some schools rescheduled games; others canceled them altogether.

Some varsity football games were pushed back to 8 p.m. so players could warm up and stretch outside; other schools started games at 7:30 p.m., but the players stretched inside gyms.

A 32-team boys water polo tournament started Friday at the two outdoor swimming pools at Clovis West High School. Clovis West Athletic Director Karen Sowby said tournament officials juggled the schedule so teams played before and after the advisory hours, and rescheduled some games for early today.

"It's been a real Friday the 13th around here," Sowby said.

Her school also rescheduled its junior varsity football game with Central for 10 a.m. today.

But Parlier wasn't rescheduling its game with Sierra as of early Friday afternoon.

"Me and my friends were all talking about it," said Galindo, the sophomore. "I mean, football is football. Everyone wants to see it played. Who cares about the weather?"

Parlier freshman Andrew Escalera was going to play his first game in front of his parents. He had to call to tell them the game was canceled.

"I don't think anything is going to happen to us, dude," Escalera said. "No one's dying or anything. Just let us play."

But bad air can cause medical problems. Dr. A.M. Aminian, a Fresno allergist, warned that the combination of air pollution, high amounts of pollen and high temperatures can be harmful.

He said that a person exercising breathes three times as much as a person at rest and the pollutants can irritate the lungs and bronchial tubes. The doctor said it can be especially dangerous for people with respiratory problems like asthma.

"These people can get irritated lungs, they can't breathe very well, and they're at risk for having major respiratory problems," Aminian said.

Clovis West's Sowby said, "It constantly surprises me how many children are affected by asthma and respiratory disease that you used to not see. I think they're being cautious, and that's fine with us."

[Side Bar to story above:](#)

#### BAD AIR DAY

Fresno area school districts canceled outdoor events after an air quality health advisory was issued Friday. The canceled events included these high school junior varsity football games:

Centennial at Edison

Exeter at Reedley

Yosemite at Roosevelt

Redwood at Buchanan

Bullard at Clovis

Clovis West at Central

Hoover at Sanger

Greenfield at Selma

Sierra at Parlier

#### HEALTH ADVISORIES

The number of health advisories called in the past five years by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District:

|      |    |
|------|----|
| 2002 | 7  |
| 2001 | 3  |
| 2000 | 5  |
| 1999 | 2  |
| 1998 | 16 |

[Fresno Bee Editorial, September 15, 2002](#)

### **Clearer picture on air**

**There is growing awareness of the seriousness of pollution problems.**

There is palpable evidence that Valley residents are taking that crucial first step in the thousand-mile journey toward cleaner air -- an awareness is plainly growing that we cannot continue, that we must do something, and that steps once regarded as radical may soon be seen as necessary.

For one thing, people seem to talk about the air quality more, and the sort of passive acceptance that characterized many people in the past appears to be giving way to a more aggressive attitude. People still talk about being able to look to the east and see the Sierra Nevada outlined clearly just about every day in years gone by, but now it's said with a harsher tone than the wistful acceptance.

Perhaps that's because the evidence of the problem has become so overwhelming. One weather forecast after another talks of "unhealthful air tomorrow." Unhealthful -- as in, "It is doing damage to you." Leave a car outside and see the patina of dust coat it faster than was once the case.

The greatest evidence of all, and the most chilling: Fresno has the highest incidence of childhood asthma in the nation. The air we breathe is killing some of our children, and doing damage to the rest. That's intolerable.

But it does seem that we're are getting it, or at least beginning to do so. An example: Fresno Mayor Alan Autry recently visited The Bee's editorial board to talk about a plan he has for helping to clear the air. Like much of what Autry brings to the public arena, it is visionary. Like most visions, it will probably need a good deal of fleshing out before it can be put into operation.

But what Autry proposes is, well, breathtaking in a way. He speaks of convening city and county leaders from across the region, in much the same way he gathered local mayors a while back, to forge a regional approach to air quality improvement.

He ticks off the list of areas where incremental gains -- which add up to a substantial whole -- can be made against pollution: more and better mass transit, carpooling, flexible schedules, better farming practices -- just simply walking to more places.

He acknowledges the progress recently made in getting Bay Area residents to help with the fraction of our problem that blows in from the north. Autry speaks of such ideas as monorail trains, and takes pains to assert that such notions are not pie-in-the-sky, as they have been called in the past.

Can we imagine an earlier mayor of Fresno saying that? That's no knock against Autry or any of his predecessors. It's simply a measure -- an encouraging measure -- of how this debate has shifted.

We may not actually build monorails; some other solution or set of solutions may emerge as better choices. But our willingness to think big is a healthy sign. We've got a big problem to fix, and it will take big ideas and even bigger efforts to fix it.

**Fresno Bee Editorial, September 17, 2002**

## **No time to waste**

**Greater efforts must be made to clean up the Valley's filthy air.**

Evidence that we have a deadly air quality problem on our hands here in the Valley continues to mount. A new study suggests that babies born in the Valley breathe in enough pollutants in their first three weeks to last a lifetime. And on Friday, some high school football games and other outdoor school activities were canceled when the local air pollution control board issued a bad air advisory early that day.

In both cases, the danger may have been overstated. At least one local expert disputed the usefulness of the study, and the air turned out to be less bad than expected Friday afternoon.

But Dr. Stephen Stephenson, a pediatric oncologist and medical director at Children's Hospital Central California, didn't disagree that the air is a problem for the young. "It is probably safe to say children are at greater risk from pollutants ... but this study doesn't do anything to help us measure what our risk is," he said. In that case, we need a study -- or two or three -- that does measure that risk. Then we need to get busy reducing that risk.

In fact, we needn't wait for a full accounting of the damage that air pollution does to the very young, the elderly, those afflicted with debilitating diseases, to plants and animals that sustain our agricultural base, to economic development efforts -- how many owners of businesses will wish to relocate to this area after they discover that the children of their employees will be at greater risk merely because they live here? We can get started right now on many of the different initiatives that will be needed to clean up the air.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the advisory early Friday based on its forecast. It called for schools in Fresno, Clovis and southeast Fresno County, including Selma, Reedley, Sanger and Parlier, to halt outdoor activity from 3 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The decision wasn't universally popular. "Who really cares about the air?" one young football player asked. That's understandable. Young athletes are usually rarin' to go. But it's also a reminder of why adults make these decisions, and a measure of how much education remains to be done on the crucial issue of air quality.

In this case, the air district did exactly the right thing, even though the air quality didn't turn out to be as bad as forecast.

We're past the time when concerns about the air quality here can be dismissed as the ravings of crackpots or the suspicious agendas of radical environmentalists. Nor is this an issue of left vs. right in the political sphere. It will take political action to clean up the problem, but this is a bipartisan issue if ever there was one. And it's no longer possible to ignore the problem. Only the most blithely ignorant Pollyanna could deny that this great basin in which we live is filled from brim to brim with filthy air.

The solutions will come from a combinations of sources, just like the pollution itself. We all contribute to the problem; we must all be part of solving it. We have not been nearly aggressive enough in addressing this problem. We are paying for that indifference and neglect now, and will do so into the foreseeable future. It will be costly to make the changes we must make, both in the amount of money it will take and the disruptions it is sure to cause in our comfortable and convenient lives. But the cost of doing nothing, or of waiting even longer, would be frightful.