

Pollution plan fails to nag ag, some say

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer -e-mail: mweiser@bakersfield.com

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A long-awaited plan to control particulate pollution in the San Joaquin Valley is prompting complaints among air-quality advocates, who say the plan continues to let agriculture off the hook for much of the problem.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has never had a particulate-control plan approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, despite several attempts over the last 10 years, and the district does not meet federal standards for particulate pollution. The valley could lose \$2 billion in federal highway funds and face other sanctions unless a new plan is approved by Aug. 28.

The air district Governing Board is scheduled to vote on the new plan at its regular meeting Thursday in Fresno. The goal of the phone-book-sized document is to meet federal health standards for particulates by 2010. But critics say it won't do that, nor will it significantly improve valley air quality, because it does little to regulate agriculture.

"There's so many things wrong with this plan that it's just mind-boggling," said Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment in Delano. "While they're doing this sort of favoritism for agriculture sources, people are dying from the high levels of particulate pollution."

Farms are the valley's biggest source of particulate pollution. Activities like plowing, discing and harvesting account for nearly one-fourth of all direct particulate emissions. Farm engines produce a major share of the exhaust gases that contribute to particulate formation.

Particulates include dust, soot and chemical compounds smaller than 10 microns in size, or one-sixth the diameter of a human hair. The largest of these particles are trapped in the nose, mouth and throat. But the smallest particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and even the bloodstream, causing breathing trouble for thousands of valley residents and aggravating asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and heart problems.

Particulates are also a big cause of the brown haze that limits visibility on smoggy days.

Particulate pollution occurs two ways in the atmosphere: direct release of dust and soot from roadsides, construction sites, fires, farming and engine exhaust; and chemical combinations in the air, usually involving nitrogen oxide and ammonia, called "precursors."

One component of the plan is a proposal to ban the use of fireplaces and wood stoves when winter weather traps smoke near the ground. This measure will be considered at a separate hearing July 17.

A key problem with the overall particulate plan, Newell said, is its method of accounting for pollution reductions. He maintains that the Clean Air Act requires the district to show reductions of 5 percent annually in either particulates or precursor pollutants. But the air

district claims it can reach 5 percent by adding reductions in both categories, so that a 3 percent particulate reduction and a 2 percent precursor reduction meets the standard.

EPA questioned this approach in its comments on the draft plan, but air district Planning Manager Dave Mitchell is confident it will pass muster.

"There's no guidance from the EPA on how to do this," he said.

Newell also criticizes the air district's proposed "conservation management plan," the centerpiece of its efforts to control farm-related particulate pollution.

Under this plan, farmers would choose from a menu of control measures, and compliance would be monitored by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Independent auditors would be responsible for verifying compliance, not air district officials.

"It basically allows the ag industry to decide which control measures are implemented," said Newell. "The majority of the new emission controls they're getting here is from a plan that's unenforceable."

The air district would get involved only if less than 80 percent of farms adopt the program. It could also take over the compliance checks if independent auditors find widespread neglect. The district retains field inspection powers at all times.

"We're going to put faith in the growers, to start with, that they're going to submit the plans," said Mitchell. "They get the chance to show they're going to do the measures to start with."

Loron Hodge, executive director of the Kern County Farm Bureau, said farmers are more likely to embrace the rules because they'll be working with agriculture officials who understand their business.

Newell said the air district could reduce nitrogen oxide emissions further by imposing stricter rules on the diesel engines that farmers use to pump water. But the air district maintains that its regulations are already among the strictest in the country.

The air district is also declining to regulate ammonia emissions, primarily from dairies, which contribute to particulate emissions in the atmosphere.

Mitchell said there isn't enough evidence yet that ammonia controls will reduce particulates. But the district is committing to study the issue and may consider ammonia controls in the future.

Down with water

By DAVIN McHENRY, Californian staff writer - e-mail: dmchenry@bakersfield.com

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Martha Galaviz, left, talks with her grandson, Pablo Appodaca Jr., Tuesday at Hart Park. The push for clean air could ruin the summer at Hart Park.

County park officials were forced to turn off the main water supply for the park roughly a month ago -- or face air pollution fines.

For years, the county has used a diesel-powered pump to refresh the two lakes at the park and water the grass and landscaping.

But last year the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District discovered that the county was violating the law by doing so. Over the past several months the county has been working to comply with the air pollution rules.

That came to a head roughly a month ago when the county replaced its 5,000-gallon-per-minute diesel pump to avoid daily fines.

Park officials installed a much smaller 800-gallon-per-minute pump and over the last few weeks, the water level has dropped in Hart Lake and Mirror Lake.

A new 2,500-gallon-per-minute electric pump was installed Monday and is planned to go on line this week.

Even so, the lakes are expected to remain lower, warmer and stagnant until late August, when the pump will be replaced with a permanent pipeline.

Until then there will be algae plumes, a smelly, exposed lake bed and maybe even some dead fish, said Robert Addison, the county parks director.

The rest of the 370-acre park won't be much better. Water for landscaping used to come from the round-the-clock diesel pump.

Now there won't be enough water for both the lakes and grass, Addison said. "We're going to have to cut way back on irrigation for the next two months," he said. "The grass should be OK. But I am worried about the trees."

The timing of the water problem is disheartening to some park regulars.

Looking over Hart Lake Tuesday, Bakersfield resident Caroline Marie bemoaned the timing of the water shut-off. Normally, the mother of two said she brings her boys to the park during the summer.

"Of all the times to do this," she said. "This is when you want to come out and relax at the park. To get your feet wet. And now its gonna be brown and ugly all summer."

If the county had not switched over to the new pumps, it could have faced fines ranging up to thousands of dollars per day, air district officials said.

Resting nearby, Oildale resident Tom Ferguson shrugged off the water problem, particularly after hearing the reasons behind it. Ferguson argued that cleaning the air was more important than the temporary water problem.

"I know it's just one pump, but you gotta start somewhere," he said. "I'm sick of the bad air around here."

The temporary fix won't be cheap. Addison said his department will spend \$10,000 to install the latest pump.

"We really don't have much of a choice," Addison said.

County officials said they have no plans to return to their old system of freshening the water in the lakes. Before the pumps, the county used to bulldoze upstream and force river water into the lakes.

"It would be too expensive and it was never very good for the environment," Addison said.

The county switched to a pump roughly a decade ago, Addison added.

Janis Parker, a spokeswoman for the air district, said the county was only supposed to use that pump for one year. But in 2002, a district inspector noticed that it was still in use.

The county replaced the pump two times over the next several months, but it was later determined that the latest pump wasn't OK either, Parker said. The county is limited to a 50-horsepower pump or less, if it is diesel-powered.

Addison said his workers tried to use such a pump but it was not able to keep up with the water demand. The new electric pump should improve conditions at the lakes slightly.

The lakes and landscaping won't return to their normal condition until late August, when the pipeline is in place.

The county had already planned to build the \$1 million pipeline, which will connect the lakes to a massive water treatment complex being built to serve land in northeast Bakersfield. Once on line, the pipeline will supply the lakes with a steady supply of water, even cleaner than before.

In exchange, the lakes could be used as an emergency supply of water in case the Kern River were to become contaminated.

"They figure they would have a three-day supply in the lakes and reservoirs," Addison said.

There was one bright side to the water problem, Addison said.

With the water levels low, a crew of workers was able to clean out litter and trash that had been deposited in the lakes over the years, he said.

Deal settles Sierra Club suit

By JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer - e-mail: jburger@bakersfield.com

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The Sierra Club and a pair of northeast developers have settled an environmental lawsuit over a tract of new homes planned on the Kern River bluffs.

The deal institutes a historic "air quality mitigation fee" that will charge each of the 316 homes in the project \$1,200 that will help pay for preventing air pollution.

City of Bakersfield Development Services Director Jack Hardisty said such a fee has never before been imposed in Bakersfield.

"It would be the first time that a set amount fee for air quality mitigation has been settled on," he said.

Sierra Club spokesman Gordon Nipp said money raised by the fee would be managed by a five-member committee and used to pay for projects that reduce air pollution -- such as the purchase of low-emissions vehicles.

Representatives from the Sierra Club, the developer, the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment, the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District and the city of Bakersfield would sit on the committee, he said.

Local developer Tom Carosella said he and partner Craig Carver agreed to the fee and several other concessions to Sierra Club concerns as part of the settlement of the lawsuit against their project.

The lawsuit claimed the city of Bakersfield and the developers did not prove that building the 316 homes wouldn't have a significant impact on air quality and traffic congestion. The settlement clears the way for construction of the homes on a ridgeline above Alfred Harrell Highway just north of Highway 178.

But Carosella said he may not be the one to do that building. A sale may take place.

"I'm not sure how far we're going to take it within this partnership," he said. "It very well may be a merchant builder who does this project."

Nipp said the settlement is a victory for his organization -- which filed a lawsuit against another nearby housing development on Monday.

The two lawsuits, and challenges to two other housing tracts on the bluffs, are part of Sierra Club's push to change the way local government controls land development.

Nipp said he hopes the mitigation fee will soon be routinely imposed on projects across the metropolitan area.

"We're pretty excited about all these things," Nipp said after listing concessions the club had gotten from Carosella and Carver.

"We're hoping the city and the county will follow suit and impose these things on developers."

In addition to the air quality mitigation fee the settlement requires the project builder to offer solar panels as an option for homebuyers.

"We got money to pay for a study to find suitable blunt nosed leopard lizard habitat," Nipp said.

And Carosella said he agreed to donate land for a 9,000-square-foot "park and ride" facility that will allow people to park and carpool from the development.

But, for the Sierra Club, the fight isn't over yet.

It has filed a similar lawsuit against a tract of 558 homes planned by Sage Community Group of Newport Beach on a big wedge of land just west of Rio Bravo Country Club.

And the club has appealed two other housing tracts to the Bakersfield City Council after the projects, located north along Alfred Harrell Highway, were approved by the Bakersfield Planning Commission.

Carosella said he is a little frustrated that the Sierra Club has begun attacking projects in northeast Bakersfield but hasn't raised the same challenges against the swiftly moving development that is paving over agricultural land in west Bakersfield.

But he believes that the scenic appeal of the Kern River bluffs will override the additional lawsuit costs on his land when he tries to market it to someone who builds homes.

"I don't think it will make it harder to sell," he said. "It really is a beautiful site."

Bakersfield California Letters to the Editor

Air 'better', not 'worse'

A *Californian* headline announcing a recent series of stories read: "Why our air isn't fit to breathe." This is despite the fact that since 1990:

Total NOX emissions are down 35 percent; total ROGs are down 43 percent; PM10s (a newly proclaimed and unproven problem with no known solution) are unchanged; vehicles and miles traveled are up 25 percent; and population is up 55 percent. It seems this is a success story of epic proportions.

Why do *The Californian*, state and federal agencies, and almost all news media continue to insist we have a terrible air problem that's getting worse?

Why the struggle to convince the populace that we must embrace Draconian measures to address a problem that the data shows is being successfully addressed by measures taken to date? How clean is clean?

The Californian made a good start with these articles, but more research must be presented before readers can form an intelligent position on air issues. Other facets to be examined:

Where's the pre-1990 air quality data? I suspect that if this was published it would show we have made significantly more progress on air quality than is shown by the post-1990 data thus weakening arguments for more restrictions on normal human activities.

Present graphical data showing how air quality standards have changed over the past 30 years. Show the hard science (if any) that justify those standards. Readers will be astonished about how stringent air standards have become and how little science is available to support those standards.

Compare health statistics between the San Joaquin Valley and "clean" air regions. Do they show a clear correlation between air quality and health problems, as we are led to believe, or are the health incidents associated with poor air quality simply "estimated" (made up to support a position) by some bureaucratic scientist?

Does the unbiased science support a need for additional air regulations? Who really benefits from stricter air and growth regulations? "All of us" is the easy, but wrong answer. There are huge financial and credibility issues at stake here; it behooves all of us to get it right.

A fully informed readership can make good judgments on air and growth issues. It would be refreshing not to have the debate driven by bureaucrats and hysterical "anti-" elements for a change.

BARRY HANSON, Bakersfield

Leaders: 'Damn the facts'

As I awoke this morning and flung open my doors to the wonderful aroma of our valley's newest industry creating cow manure I reflected on your weekend articles about air pollution and growth. I was at first appalled, then became angry, as I read them. Who are these spineless elected officials who claim to have no control over the growth and accompanying problems that face us? Who else can control these matters but them?

"Damn the facts, full speed ahead!" could easily be their motto. Now I know why they had to place the other motto, "In God We Trust," at City Hall. We sure can't trust them to act in our best interests!

It is easy to become intoxicated with the wonderful notion of growth while ignoring the consequences. It happens all the time as communities struggle to find fresh sources of public money. (Could that be it? The new taxes that have these folks dazzled? Nah.)

True leadership balances the need for growth with a quality of life.

A tiny start, an indication that pollution concerns them, would be for them to order the city's traffic lights coordinated for smooth flow. Every day on my way to work and home, I see the main street filled with vehicles stopped to allow a single car to enter at a minor side street. How absurd!

Sure these are tough issues. Here's another motto to consider: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Maybe going out of office is the answer.

GREGG K. KNOWLES, Bakersfield

Bakersfield California Opinions

'NIMBYs' are the problem

Great articles on the "Air we can't breathe." It would seem one of the major pollution problems is again the dreaded N.I.M.B.Y. If one of the best solutions is "Smart Growth," translated build homes close to work/shopping/schools etc., the not-in-my-backyard group would appear to be a root cause of every major air pollution.

Try putting homes and businesses anywhere close to where they live and they will drive their SUVs to their attorney's office and then caravan their SUVs down to the planning department. Hopefully they can all afford lung transplants.

JAY McCARTHY, Bakersfield

Elect officials who listen

The Californian's series on pollution in our locale makes it clear that the problem continues to become more and more serious. It is exacerbated by the fact that we have people in positions of power who do not listen to or learn from experts in the fields of air pollution and smart growth.

Councilwoman Jacquie Sullivan is quoted as saying, "It's a shame when people say we are growing too fast. Growth brings jobs." Jobs won't come if we can't attract new

business. Growth brings cars and pollution and people buying homes relatively inexpensively and commuting to the Los Angeles area (not staying here for new jobs).

Councilwoman Sue Benham says we need to demand accountability. So do it, Sue!

The executive vice president of the Building Industry Association says there is no problem! Go figure!

City and county leaders claim there is "no feasible mitigation" to reduce the pollution problems. Fresno is doing it!

Public input from the carefully crafted Vision 2020 project made no dent whatsoever in the direction policy makers intend to go. We need to elect people who are open to listening and learning and who care about the well-being of their constituents and their community.

Ultimately, the only way to express an opinion that ever really makes a difference is to "speak" at the voting booth. Otherwise we are going to have the same "good old boys and girls" running Bakersfield and Kern County --right smack into the honor of being the most polluted area in the United States.

CAROLINE REID, Bakersfield

Do people have to die?

To our elected representatives: I understand that there are a certain number of people who have to die before you approve a traffic signal at a certain intersection.

My question is: How many people have to die before you do something about air pollution?

RICHARD St. CLAIRE, Bakersfield

Voters, air is important

Our elected officials are doing nothing about abysmal air quality because this issue is not something our citizens are basing their votes on.

Everyone gripes, but like our summer heat and our winter fog, bad air has not become an issue that determines anyone's political fate.

To the contrary, politicians perceive that doing anything about our air and sprawl will cost them the support of the development community and its money. Talking, but doing nothing is the safe thing.

Until voters in this county make clean air the big Kern County political issue and make and break political fortunes on real clean air action, we'll just keep wheezing along.

ANDREW HONIG, Bakersfield

Valley headed for crisis

I sincerely appreciate the fine work of *The Californian* staff in producing the series on regional growth and air pollution. Clearly, if more people, businesses and traffic are added to the valley, and air pollution, housing and commercial development strategies remain the same, we are headed for a crisis.

Comments by some of our city and county political leadership quoted in these articles and their collective track records, illustrate that, except for the exemplary efforts of Sen. Dean Florez, the people of Kern County and the city of Bakersfield have some intellectually shallow or socially irresponsible people in key decision making positions.

Air pollution is a valley problem. Kern County not only suffers from problems of its own making, but our air pollution is exacerbated by being downstream from growth and vehicle traffic throughout the valley. We, the public, are part of the problem, and we must take better responsibility for insisting on the development and implementation of solutions.

There are reasonable ways to accommodate population growth while minimizing "sprawl" and pollution from vehicles. Appropriate approaches can yield an enhanced quality of life and more attractive and desirable communities.

As a first priority, the public must elect representatives in key decision making positions who will give their concerns and interests primary consideration and who can provide vision and leadership in addressing air pollution and growth problems here at home, as well as at the state level. The public must make this a priority at every election; we must not accept elected officials who do not provide good vision and leadership in this regard.

The Californian is to be commended for highlighting this critical problem.

FRED DORER, Bakersfield

Modesto Bee Opinion

Mixed messages

Modesto Bee - Published: June 18, 2003, 06:45:14 AM PDT

Who are the people who come up with nonsense like Spare the Air day, pollen counts, etc.? Millions of us are working outside from sunrise to sunset, poor air or bad pollen.

You ran two articles side-by-side on Page B-1 on June 6: one asking to limit outdoor activities ("Spare the Air day declared") and the other to fire up Harley Davidsons for charity ("Hop on a Harley for a good cause").

One article asked not to use gasoline engines; the other one expected more bikes on the road -- and here they came, 2,500-plus, a beautiful sight to behold.

Now the media is all hyped up over the new casino that opened in Lincoln, causing traffic jams out of this world. Since all those people seem to have too much money and are ready to waste it, why not set up a toll booth by the casino and collect \$5 a car so they help pay for traffic control, because they are causing the problem? Why should the rest of us pay the extra bills?

HENDRICK J. BOMER

Oakdale

Air quality worse in hot weather

Published: June 18, 2003, 06:52:04 AM PDT

Modesto Bee

HOT TIPS TO BEAT THE HEAT

In case of extreme heat:

Stay inside as much as possible, preferably in an air-conditioned room. If you don't have air conditioning, try to spend a few hours a day somewhere that does, such as a theater or library. When at home, stay on the lowest floor, out of the sun.

Prepare your home. Cover windows with drapes or shades, and consider installing outdoor awnings or louvers that can reduce heat entering the home by as much as 80 percent. Remember that electric fans will not cool your home, only blow around hot air.

Eat well-balanced, light meals.

Drink more fluids than usual and avoid those that contain alcohol, caffeine and lots of sugar, which can cause you to lose body fluid. People who have epilepsy or heart, liver or kidney disease; are on fluid restrictive diets; or have problems retaining fluid should consult a doctor before increasing fluid intake.

Dress in light-colored, loose-fitting clothing and wear fabrics that "breathe," such as cotton.

Wear plenty of sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher), sunglasses and a hat.

Do not take salt tablets, unless instructed to do so by a physician.

Avoid strenuous physical activity. If you must exercise, try and do it at the coolest part of the day, usually between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m.

Never leave anyone, person or pet, in a closed, parked car.

Be aware of who is at higher risk in the heat. High-risk individuals include: infants and young children, adults over 65, people with mental illness, people suffering from high blood pressure or heart disease, obese people, homeless people, people using drugs or alcohol in the sun.

Learn the symptoms of heat disorders, and what you can do to treat yourself and others.

Some common heat disorders: What to look for and what to do:

SUNBURN -- Symptoms: Painful redness of the skin, possible blisters, swelling, headache and fever.

First aid: Take aspirin to reduce pain and swelling, and take a shower, using soap to rinse oils from the body that may block pores and affect the body's ability to cool naturally. If blisters occur, apply dry, sterile dressings and seek medical attention.

HEAT CRAMPS -- Symptoms: Painful spasms in legs or abdominal muscles; heavy sweating.

First aid: Apply firm pressure to cramping muscles, or gently massage area to relieve spasms. Sip water. If nausea occurs, discontinue water and seek medical attention.

HEAT EXHAUSTION -- Symptoms: Heavy sweating; weakness. Skin is cold, pale and clammy. Pulse might be weak. Victim's temperature might be normal. Fainting or vomiting might occur.

First aid: Get victim to lie down in a cool place. Give sips of water. If nausea occurs, discontinue water. If vomiting occurs, seek immediate medical attention.

HEAT STROKE (SUN STROKE) -- Symptoms: High body temperature (106-plus). Hot, dry skin. Pulse may be strong and rapid. Possible unconsciousness. Victim most likely will not sweat.

First aid: Heat stroke is a severe medical emergency, and can be fatal. Seek medical attention immediately by calling 911 or taking victim to the hospital. While waiting for emergency medical systems to respond, move victim to a cooler place. Remove clothing and try a cool bath or sponging to bring down body temperature. Use extreme caution. Under no circumstances should you give the victim fluids.

On the Net:

www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremeheat/

www.redcross.org/services/hss/tips/heat.html

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, Federal Emergency Management Administration

Heat isn't just kid stuff

By SARAH T. HALL - MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER

Published: June 18, 2003, 06:52:04 AM PDT

Northern San Joaquin Valley temperatures reached the mid-90s Tuesday, and it's only going to get hotter as summer progresses.

The high temperatures can lead to a variety of health problems, such as heat stroke and breathing ailments.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 1979 to 1999, 8,015 people died in the United States from excessive heat exposure -- more than were killed by earthquakes, flood, tornadoes, hurricanes and lightning combined.

Jeet Gill, a nurse educator at Emanuel Medical Center in Turlock, said people should use common sense to prevent problems in the summer months: avoid prolonged exposure to the sun, use sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher and drink plenty of water.

"Heat stroke, once it hits, leads to total failure of the thermal regulatory mechanism," Gill said, citing symptoms such as diarrhea, confusion and hot, dry skin.

He stressed that heat stroke is a medical emergency and should be treated only by professionals.

Gill suggests that people heading to the beach or on a camping trip bring along a simple saline solution -- four teaspoons of salt dissolved in a gallon of water.

"The sodium you need for the body cells to function," he said, which is why saline is more effective than plain water in rehydrating a victim of heat exhaustion.

On top of the medical risks that come with overheating, dangers associated with violent weather also increase in high temperatures. The National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm warning Tuesday for Tuolumne and Calaveras counties, where rain, strong wind and hail were possible. No major storms were reported, however.

Poor air quality is another side effect of scorching days.

Unhealthy air led to the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District declaring today a "Spare the Air" day. People are encouraged to carpool or use public transportation whenever possible to cut down on the number of vehicles driven. For more suggestions on how to cut down on air pollution, visit www.sparetheair.com.

The heat and pollution advice should be heeded all summer. It will get hotter in the coming months, but with luck it'll be nothing like the summer of 1984, when temperatures soared above 100 degrees on 32 days from May to September.

"It was the summer from hell," said Maree Hawkins of Modesto Irrigation District.

Bee staff writer Sarah T. Hall can be reached at shall@modbee.com.

Spare the Air warning continues

By Sentinel Staff

June 18, 2003

FRESNO - The third Spare The Air Day of the season is forecast for Wednesday in Kings County.

The Central region, including Kings County, has a Spare The Air Day forecast for today.

The designation was made by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District as air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

Valley residents can help reduce and control air pollution levels in the following ways:

€ Avoid unnecessary vehicle use, including personal automobiles, watercraft and off-road vehicles;

€ Drive smart if you must drive, and reduce emissions by obeying the speed limit, accelerating gradually, using cruise control on the highway and avoiding "topping off" at the gas pump; and

€ Take the train for personal and business trips out of the area.

Heat brings poor air quality

Today is Valley's fourth Spare the Air Day; temperature may hit 101.

By Matt Leedy
The Fresno Bee

June 18, 2003

The air will be hot and unhealthy again today, but that won't keep men like Ramon Avila and his crew indoors. There's just no money in it.

Avila and three employees started Tuesday morning, grooming lawns in neighborhoods surrounding Woodward Park. By the early evening, they were in the Fig Garden area, wearing earplugs and white masks.

The gardeners' gear protected them from dust and noise produced from their leaf blowers, but air experts said the machines only add to the Valley's pollution problems.

"We have to do it. We have to do it if we're going to make any money," Avila said of his decision to use leaf blowers and work outside on a triple-digit day predicted to reach unhealthy levels of pollution.

Air quality in parts of Fresno County, including Parlier, reached an unhealthy level Tuesday, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Pollution in Fresno and Clovis made it unhealthy for sensitive groups, including the elderly, children and people who work outside.

Today won't bring any relief, as Air District officials call for the Valley's fourth Spare the Air Day of this month. The district announces Spare the Air Days during a four-month season between June and September.

High Valley temperatures, expected to range from 91 to 101 degrees, combined with lingering ozone, prompted the Air District to call a Spare the Air Day for Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties.

Residents are encouraged to reduce outdoor activities between 2 and 7 p.m. when ozone is the worst. People also are asked to curtail driving and using machines such as lawn mowers and leaf blowers that create ozone-producing emissions.

Exposure to ozone -- even at relatively low levels -- can reduce lung function, and cause chest pain and coughing.

Repeated exposure can make people -- especially children, the elderly and those with respiratory diseases such as asthma -- more susceptible to breathing problems.

Ozone is formed through a chemical reaction of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds, which come from cars, trucks, buses and farm equipment. Other sources are power plants, refineries, solvents and consumer products.

Despite the 103-degree heat Tuesday in Fresno and pollution that made it unhealthy for many, Chad Hannickel and a dozen of his teenage friends still played a modified game of baseball at Hamilton School.

To compensate for the heat, the players moved their pickup game to the long shadows of tall pine trees and used a plastic ball. They had no choice but to practice for their championship game today, players said.

"Too hot to practice? Never," said Hannickel, 15. "What are you going to do inside, just sit there and play Nintendo all day?"

Temperatures in the Valley are expected to fall Thursday to the high 80s and low 90s. Officials said the cooling-off should also improve the area's air quality.

Opinion

Bad air shows the level of Valley problem

Visalia Times-Delta

June 18, 2003

It's not the heat that causes such misery in the Valley in summertime.

It's not even the humidity.

It's the air quality. These days it can only be described as miserable.

Those with allergies and respiratory problems are suffering mightily this week from the thick, foul air that is hanging in the Valley while the days' 14 hours of unrelenting sun cook the air and boost the ozone level. Anyone who is outdoors for any length of time is in danger from the ozone, which sears the lungs and stings the eyes.

If it were only a matter of using sunblock or staying in the shade, people could deal with it. But it's hard to go without breathing.

These harsh air days are a reminder to Valley residents on two fronts. First, take the air quality seriously this week. Avoid unnecessary exercise outdoors and limit activity and exposure to both the sun and the ozone-laden air. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has already issued a couple of Spare the Air Day warnings for the Valley this week, and it will likely invoke it again today.

The Spare the Air Day notice is not just a warning to avoid activity in unhealthy air. It's also an appeal to use polluting-causing machinery sparingly, if at all. Limit driving. If you have to drive, do it efficiently and go as easy as possible on the environment.

Taking our bad air seriously also means that residents need to continue to put pressure on policy makers to do something about it. California needs to increase its anti-pollution efforts with more effective strategies. The state is not being serious enough about cleaning its air, and it only takes a look outside in weeks like this to know that.

It's not the heat, it's the air quality in the San Joaquin in summer. As long as our resolve to change that remains at its current level, our air quality will remain at this level: miserable.