

Air quality will be bad both today and Saturday

Merced Sun-Star staff report, June 6, 2003

The air quality in Merced County is expected to be unhealthy today and Saturday for people particularly sensitive to air pollution.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had planned to kick off its yearly Spare the Air campaign today by asking Valley residents to limit their time in the car and to reduce practices that create air pollution.

But air quality is expected to be bad enough on both days that the air district is making both today and Saturday Spare the Air days.

Residents are asked to avoid driving, yard work involving gasoline machinery and use of motorboats and off-road vehicles.

Residents should also avoid using aerosol sprays and lighter fluid to start charcoal barbecues.

The air district issues a Spare the Air advisory when ground level ozone, the principal pollutant in what is commonly known as smog, is expected to be unhealthy.

Higher temperatures, an inversion layer and a lack of coastal breeze are all helping to create smog and keep it trapped in the Valley

"The first thing that causes the Spare the Air day is emissions," said air district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

Merced's Air Quality Index reached 142 Thursday and was expected to reach 145 today.

That figure is considered unhealthy for sensitive groups of people - like those with asthma - and they should limit their exposure outdoors until at least Sunday

Residents can help the air quality problem by avoiding unnecessary vehicle use.

Suggested driving tips include:

- accelerating gradually.
- using cruise control on the highway.
- obeying the speed limit.
- combining errands into one trip.
- Avoiding "topping off" at the gas pump.
- Taking the train for personal and business trips out of the area.

[Modesto Bee, Community Briefing, June 6, 2003:](#)

AIR QUALITY

Spare the Air day declared

Today is a Spare the Air day in the Northern San Joaquin Valley, based on smog forecasts compiled by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Officials urged people to limit their driving, if possible, and not to operate gas-powered engines. Also, people should limit outdoor activity. In Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties, the Air Quality Index is expected to reach 145. Readings between 101 and 150 are considered unhealthy for sensitive groups and anything above 150 is considered unhealthy for everyone. In Merced County, today's AQI is expected to reach 151. Today also is a no-burn day in the entire region.

Spare the Air begins today

Residents are asked to reduce pollution on smoggy days.

By Barbara Anderson

The Fresno Bee

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Unhealthy air arrived earlier than usual this year in the San Joaquin Valley, but today officially kicks off "Spare the Air" season.

Spare the Air is a voluntary clean-air program that runs through Sept. 30.

On days when ozone levels are unhealthy, businesses and residents are asked to reduce pollution-producing activities.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District notifies the public and business partners in advance when ozone levels are expected to reach 151 or higher on the air quality index.

The AQI is a system that rates air from healthy -- zero to 50 -- up to a hazardous level beginning at 301.

Smog is expected to reach an unhealthy 161 today in Fresno.

The smog in Tulare today should reach 159 on the AQI and air in Merced should be 145.

The air district is broken up into three regions:

Central (Fresno, Madera and Kings counties).

Southern (Tulare and Kern counties).

Northern (San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties).

All three regions met the criteria to be included in today's Spare the Air notification.

The northern region was involved because the air is unhealthy for sensitive groups, and neighboring regions have unhealthy air for everyone.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that irritates lungs and can cause asthma attacks.

The district's voluntary Spare the Air program differs from a smog health advisory. Health advisories are mandatory notices to the public when ozone reaches dangerous levels. Schools must cancel outdoor activities, and adults are warned to stop vigorous activities.

Last week, higher-than-typical smog levels for this time of year prompted the district to declare two health advisories.

Spare the Air began in 1996 as a way to help prevent ozone, the main ingredient in smog, from reaching levels that require health advisories.

Businesses that participate in the Spare the Air program agree to "educate, motivate and congratulate employees for emission-reduction activities," says district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

How they accomplish the goal is up to each business that participates in Spare the Air.

Some employers ask their employees to car pool and encourage them to reduce vehicle trips after work.

Others get creative, says district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello. An example is the city of Stockton, which started fresh-air concerts in conjunction with a downtown farmers' market.

Downtown employees are encouraged to bring lunch on concert days and enjoy the music instead of driving elsewhere to eat.

The air district asks people on Spare the Air days to take fewer trips in vehicles, postpone yard work that involves gas-powered equipment or use chimney briquette starters or propane instead of lighter fluid to start a barbecue

Air quality officials ask public to 'Spare the Air' for two days

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer

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Thursday June 05, 2003, 09:40:20 PM

Air quality officials have declared a "Spare the Air" advisory for today and Saturday in response to declining air quality in the region. They're urging all valley residents to change their behavior -- even just a little -- to fight smog.

The announcement marks the first Spare the Air advisory of the year. The annual summertime program encourages voluntary measures to reduce pollution on days when smog levels rise into the "unhealthy" range. Residents are urged to carpool, ride public transit, and avoid short vehicle trips and unnecessary idling.

Advanced forecasting technology now means that, for the first time this summer, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will issue Spare the Air warnings for specific counties rather than for the three larger regions of the valley.

Today was picked to launch the program regardless of the actual air quality reading, yet today's air quality index in the southern valley is projected to reach 159, considered unhealthy for everyone and surpassing the Spare the Air trigger of 150. Above this level, children, the elderly and people with breathing trouble should avoid all outdoor activity. Everyone else should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.

"Smog levels are on the rise and we need people to help," said Josette Merced Bello, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We notify the public and they, in turn, hopefully do the right thing to help clean up the air."

Bakersfield's air was recently ranked third-worst in the country by the American Lung Association, after Los Angeles and Fresno. Vehicle emissions are the largest source of air pollution in the valley, so measures to reduce driving can have the most benefit on air quality.

In addition, residents can also take the following actions to reduce smog:

- * Do not "top off" gas tanks.
- * Refuel before or after dark.
- * Obey speed limits, accelerate gradually and maintain a steady speed.
- * Don't barbecue.
- * Don't use lawn mowers, leaf blowers, weed whackers, off-road vehicles, boats or similar gas-burning equipment.
- * Save painting for another day, and use a brush if possible, not a sprayer.

Businesses can help clean the air by becoming a Spare the Air "Employer Partner." More than 700 businesses valleywide have already done so by offering their workers carpooling incentives, discounts on public transit and information about preventing pollution. The air district provides free promotional materials to participants.

For more information, call the air district at (559) 230-5800 or visit www.valleyair.org.

First 'spare the air' day is Friday, but with two changes

Merced Sun-Star, June 05, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will kick off its annual Spare the Air public education program Friday, and two changes in the plan will be at the season's forefront.

For the first time, the district will issue two-day forecasts for each of the eight counties within the air basin. The extended county forecasts will replace the single-day forecasts for the three large regions.

As in previous years, the district will continue to warn residents when ground-level ozone, the principal pollutant in what is commonly known as smog, is expected to be unhealthy in their areas.

Through the Spare the Air appeals, the agency will also ask residents in smoggy areas to take immediate action to reduce emissions.

"More localized information will help people evaluate air pollution levels in their area better," said Evan Shipp, the district's supervising meteorologist.

"The two-day forecasts will give everyone more planning time to implement Spare the Air carpools and other pollution-reduction activities so they can be a part of the solution," Shipp added.

To prepare for the kickoff, the district will contact more than 700 participating employers today with Spare the Air notifications. Employers will be asked to use Spare the Air posters and fliers, as well other communication methods, to encourage their employees to voluntarily take simple steps to reduce air pollution.

Suggestions to reduce air pollution include combining errands into a single vehicle trip, carpooling to work, school and social occasions, and postponing painting, solvent use and yard chores with gasoline-powered tools on Spare the Air days.

Mike Nelson, a Merced County supervisor and air district board member, said using alternative fuels and battery operated cars are alternatives the government should look into to reduce pollution.

"If we want to have clean air, we all have to work together. If that means carpooling ... ," Nelson said. "Bicycling is great, but it's hard to ask people to do that during the summer."

More ethanol in gas OK'd despite California protests

By David Whitney
Bee Washington Bureau
(Published Friday, June 6, 2003, 6:05 AM)

WASHINGTON -- The Senate approved legislation Thursday that will double the volume of corn-based ethanol added to gasoline after rejecting concerns in California that the mandate could add a dime to the per-gallon pump price.

The 67-29 vote came after a week of debate in which Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., fought unsuccessfully for a provision allowing states such as California to bar ethanol additives if they can meet federal clean air standards without it.

While Feinstein and the state's junior senator, Democrat Barbara Boxer, voted against the mandate, Boxer was able to work out a deal with Senate leaders that could give California farmers a role in ethanol production.

Ethanol now is produced from corn, and doubling its usage would be a boon to Midwest farmers. Under Boxer's provision, accepted without a vote, incentives were added for the use of other farm products such as waste from sugar beet, rice and apple processing.

The lopsided vote on the ethanol mandate reflects a compromise that melded an unusual alliance of environmentalists with the petroleum and agriculture industries. The provision means that 5 billion gallons of non-petroleum fuel will be added to the nation's gasoline supply by 2012, and the oil industry is relieved of a requirement that oxygenates to lower car emissions be added in cities with entrenched air pollution problems.

The most controversial oxygenate is MTBE, which would be banned under the legislation. While MTBE has helped lower pollution levels, it has leaked out of storage tanks in some areas and polluted ground water. Because of these problems, California had ordered a ban on MTBE effective next year. Refiners in the state have been steadily switching to ethanol, a kind of alcohol that is supposed to burn cleaner.

According to the California Energy Commission, nearly 70% of the gasoline sold in the state now contains ethanol. That number is expected to rise to 80% or so by midsummer.

The commission said that there have been no significant problems caused by the switch to ethanol, and it has not raised gasoline prices. According to the Oil Price Information Service, ethanol-laced gasoline is as much as 8 cents cheaper than a gallon with MTBE.

"We feel that California is a big winner," said Monte Shaw, spokesman for the Renewable Fuels Association that lobbies for the ethanol industry.

But Feinstein argued earlier this week that the mandate essentially creates a monopoly market for Archer Daniels Midland, the agribusiness conglomerate that produces nearly 50% of the ethanol supply.

"This is a huge transfer of wealth to the Midwest," Feinstein said. "For California, the mandate will force more ethanol into the fuel supply than it needs."

But Sen. George Voinovich, R-Ohio, said that by displacing petroleum in the nation's gasoline supply, reliance on imported oil will decline, the trade deficit will drop by some \$34 billion and corn growers suddenly will have a new market. "This will increase net farm income by \$6 billion a year."

Boxer, raising fears that ethanol could turn out to be as dangerous to the environment as MTBE, fought to remove a provision in the measure exempting producers and the oil industry from product liability lawsuits.

"I hope ethanol is totally safe, but no one is sure," Boxer argued, adding that the cleanup cost from MTBE spills has topped \$29 billion. Boxer's effort was rejected on a 57-38 vote.

The ethanol provision does not require state-by-state usage volumes but leaves it up to refiners to decide how to blend it into gasoline supplies.

Tracy Press, June 6th

Seminars to enhance home office work flow [Gretchen Macchiarella](#)

Telecommuting is not just for techies anymore. The idea of working in pajamas blossomed in the Bay Area as a convenience for workers, but the Great Valley Center is trying to promote the home office as a way to get people off the road one day per week. In the Central Valley, cutting out to the car is more than a perk, it is about health, said Great Valley Center's Richard Cummings. "While it may seem like a 1998 idea, the fact of the matter is air pollution is a 2003 issue," he said. The Great Valley Center and the Air Pollution Control District will host a three-seminar series starting Tuesday to help businesses set up programs to allow employees to work from home. It's not for every worker, and it's not for every day, said Richard Rasmussen, technical and outreach specialist with New Valley Connexions. There are obvious businesses where many employees can't work from home, he said, but all businesses have some component that can be done out of the physical office. "Even with manufacturing and light industry, there are accountants, office workers and service professionals that can work from home," he said. Foster Farms, for example, is a large Central Valley company that encourages telecommuting, Rasmussen said. That doesn't mean those people don't have an office, they just might work from home a few times per week, he said. Four years ago, Seth Fearey of Connected Communities in Menlo Park studied the availability of high-speed Internet access in the Central Valley for the Great Valley

Center. It showed large swaths where it was very difficult to be connected reasonably, but the circumstances have changed, he said. "One of the reasons for doing this telework program is that high-speed services are now much more available for people to work at home or other places," he said. The part-time telework schedule is fairly common nationally. About 28 million people in United States now work remotely with some regularity, Fearey said, and 16 million telework at least one day per week. A lot of that work is done in what Fearey calls a guerilla atmosphere. That is, the company doesn't have a formal program, but the connection is so readily available many people simply stay home sometimes. "The primary goal of the seminar is to encourage organizations to put together formal programs," Fearey said. When companies have a program, it is more likely to stick, and the business gets more out of it, he said. Either way, he said, it keeps cars off the road. PeopleSoft in Pleasanton is one of those companies without a formal policy, but a lot of telework anyway. Company representative Steve Swasey said all 3,500 employees in Pleasanton are issued a laptop when hired, allowing them to move around as much as reasonable. He said the flexibility helps employees, and the company doesn't lose any productivity. "Laptops have been a part of our culture for a long time, and it is really the way innovative and progressive companies have to manage," Swasey said. One of the technical advances that will be discussed at the third seminar is groupware. This kind of software allows a team of people in multiple locations to have a conference and all see the same items on their respective computer screens. Fearey said this can be a valuable tool for a company with dispersed employees. The seminars will use videoconferencing to connect the Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield offices of the Air Pollution Control District. Cummings said using the technology is a way to "walk the walk." Companies are also making a concerted effort to bring the jobs closer to where their employees live. Telework is a quick way to keep people out of their cars but in the high-paying jobs, Cummings said. "This is one small piece of a larger effort to come up with solutions to deal with the air quality and economic challenges,"

Cummings said. **The sessions are Tuesday, June 18 and 25 from 8 to 10 a.m. The cost is \$25 for all three sessions or \$10 for one. For information: www.greatvalley.org <<http://www.greatvalley.org>>. To reach reporter Gretchen Macchiarella, call 830-4269.**

Modesto Bee Opinions, June 6, 2003:

Izzy and Dizzy have tizzy about Modesto's growth

By C.V. Allen

Izzy and Dizzy are lolling in the noonday sun sharing a bottle of T-bird when Izzy says to Dizzy, "Ain't it great! Modesto now has more than 200,000 people and in 20 years we'll have 400,000?" Says Dizzy, "No way. There are 200,000 reasons why I cain't see the mountains anymore and cain't get anywhere without settin' and waitin' in traffic. Ain't like the old days where you knowed your neighbor and felt safe."

Izzy: "Aw, stop being such a fuddy-duddy. Think of all the good things happenin' -- more stores, a great big mall, a hotel you can see from Merced and pretty soon a brand new building for them arts people. And what about all them jobs it's bringing? Whata you want to do? Stop growing?"

Dizzy: "Yeah, lots of jobs. Forty years ago we had 10 percent unemployment, now it's one in 10. Big deal. And you forgot more hospitals for people who cain't breathe. Stoppin' and thinkin' about things for a bit ain't such a bad idea. See, if we could just put toll gates on every Modesto off-ramp, give everybody a 30-day pass, then make 'em leave, and send every family with four or more kids back to San Jose, we'd have a great little town."

Izzy: "Fat chance. See, the state gives us an al-o-CA-shun of homes we have to build for people who need a place to sleep -- that's a fancy word for 'ya gotta do it or else.' There's a lot of sweet talkin' and all -- like letting us make (gets down on his knees, folds his hands and rolls his eyes up) the plan, but they gotta like the plan or it's no go. And if they don't like the plan, they can stop paying us the gas money and even throw out our mayor and council."

Dizzy: "Lemme see if I got this straight. If we don't agree to build all the homes the state wants, they'll stop giving us our money back so we can't build roads and sewer lines for new homes, right? And throw out our council and mayor as a bonus? Sounds like a great idea. Why not just tell them our plan's just like Carmel's -- two outhouses and a granny flat every five years, and if they don't like it, they can stuff it. Any damn fool can see breathing and gettin' around's and havin' no farms left's going to be twice as bad with 400,000 people as it is with 200,000."

Izzy: "Dizzy, we ain't dealin' with any damn fool here. These is special damn fools -- government types. And we picked 'em. So get used to it."

Dizzy: "I think I know what's the problem with them state people. They's Eye-talins."

Izzy: "What'a ya mean, Eye-talins?"

Dizzy: "I got me a brother-in-law who's Eye-talian and he tells me in Italy they's got a name for all these doin's. They call it 'an offer you cain't refuse.'"

Allen, a semi-retired Modesto physician, has served as a visiting editor on The Bee's editorial board.

[Fresno Bee Letter to the Editor](#)

Valley's farmers, builders just want to do their part

by Leo Wilson

Fresno

Pat V. Ricchiuti

Clovis

(Published Friday, June 6, 2003, 5:35 AM)

Homebuilders and farmers believe in being good neighbors. But we also believe in staying in business.

Unfortunately, conducting business in California is becoming more difficult. We've seen taxes and fees skyrocket as state government seeks new revenue sources, and lawmakers are convinced we are not regulated enough.

The very environment the regulators claim to want to protect is the environment that keeps us in business, providing optimal growing conditions for the Valley's crops to thrive and beautiful scenery for residents to enjoy. Because we share concerns about our environment, we are committed to improving air quality in the Valley. We only ask that everyone work together to find solutions that won't result in the loss of precious jobs.

Agriculture has long been the backbone of California's economy, and the homebuilding industry is currently one of the state's only economic success stories.

Our industries represent hundreds of thousands of jobs and contribute billions of dollars to the state's economy annually. But increasing regulations make it even more difficult to sustain jobs in these times of economic challenge.

To further exacerbate our deplorable business climate, the workers compensation system is on the verge of collapse. Rates are expected to increase by more than 60% in the next year. Homebuilders and farmers are having a difficult time just finding proper insurance, at any price, so they can continue to do business.

The state is in disarray. But we are committed to doing our part. We are here for the long haul. We just ask lawmakers to work with us, so we can continue to do business in California.

If California's economy is to be rebuilt, businesses must do more than survive -- they must thrive.