

Fog smothers hope of fire control today

Morning blanket stops work for half a day, leads to spike in pollution level.

By Diana Marcum, The Fresno Bee, January 31, 2003

Dense white-gray fog smothered white-gray smoke, trapping soot, ash and specks of chemicals in a colorless soup Thursday morning over the Archie Crippen Excavation site fire.

Predictions that the smoke would be contained by today disappeared into the tule fog.

At a truck yard next door, Mike Kubar arrived at work on the 20th day of the fire and couldn't see his office building.

"I just made a calculated guess as to where to turn. This morning was the worst morning yet," said the manager of TKJ Trucking. "You smell it. You feel it in your lungs. I have a burning in both sides of my chest."

From a technical standpoint, the air was not as polluted as in the early days of the fire, but the fog did trap contaminants, causing levels to spike in the morning and remain unhealthy later in the day.

"It's complete pea soup. It holds everything," said Lisa Fasano, Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health advisory through 3 p.m. today, urging residents to avoid outdoor physical activity, stay inside as much as possible with doors and windows closed, and avoid smoking or being near smokers. The district urged schools to cancel or postpone outdoor athletic events or practices.

The wind determines the areas most affected. "If you can smell smoke, you are most likely in an area where the air quality is poor," said air district meteorologist Evan Shipp.

Crews operating heavy equipment lost half a day of work Thursday because of the reduced visibility. The same is expected today.

The fire smolders beneath mountains of debris, traveling in unseen veins. When the fog lifted and workers were able to resume turning over the piles, they made new discoveries of large caverns of fire.

Fasano said that if the fog lifts, workers should be able to control the smoke by the end of the weekend and put the fire out by the middle of next week.

Graham Davis has stopped paying attention to estimates of when the fire will be out. A controller for trucking company Commercial Transfer Inc., he works in the same yard as Kubar.

"They've been saying, 'Two weeks ... two weeks,' but it's been bad, and it's not getting any better," Davis said.

On Jan. 24, Davis found his white Monte Carlo painted gray with soot. He had to run the windshield wipers to see out of his car's front window.

"You look at something like that and how can you not think about what's going in your lungs?" he said.

Army Ranger Peter Fortier, home from Afghanistan for the funeral of his father, Commercial Transfer Inc. owner Terry Fortier, was more worried about Archie Crippen than the fire.

"He's a respectable guy, a lovable curmudgeon. I remember growing up with those huge woodpiles next door. We just never thought about them."

Fortier drove to the dividing line between the two properties, a corner called the truck graveyard, where his dad's antique trucks await restoration. The pile across the way looked like foothills, or even a mountain, with smoke mushrooming from behind. The smoke was hard to distinguish from the fog, but as the sun broke through, it darkened against the sky.

"It doesn't bother me in the least. I grew up with diesel exhaust, gas fumes. ... I just left a country in devastation," Fortier said.

Archie Crippen Excavation, the trucking companies and recycling centers are in a neighborhood of trailers and cinder-block houses with rusting swamp coolers.

"People living in this area are poor," Kubar said. "We're all wondering if that had something to do with how long it took to take this fire seriously."

He spoke through a face mask. When the phone rang, he took the call while still wearing the mask.

"Are you afraid to come out here?" he asked his insurance agent. "We have a mask you can use."

[Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee, January 31, 2003:](#)

City's responsible

By Sandra Polly, Fresno

Hats off to Jackie Winters (letter Jan. 25). I live close enough to the Crippen fire that I could see the flames from my front door. My home and clothes smell of smoke. My family's health has been affected.

However, I feel sorry for Archie Crippen, a Fresno businessman I have not met. Seems everyone wants to "hang him high."

I think the city of Fresno needs to accept responsibility for a bad situation.

Apparently the fire started on a Friday night. I understand the fire department responded and left when they thought the fire had been extinguished. Mr. Crippen and his employees were out all night trying to contain the rekindled flame.

On the following Sunday night I drove to the site and found an unattended burning heap. The next morning I called North Central Fire Department and was asked by their dispatcher exactly what was burning and where it was located, since they couldn't find the site.

I hung up and called the air pollution control district. The return call came either Thursday or Friday. The district's return caller said the fire department wouldn't respond to cell phone calls, and the people at Archie Crippen's should have known to go to a land phone. Am I the only one that finds this comment ridiculous?

Before the fire started, there were two previous spontaneous combustion fires at two separate green waste recyclers in the same neighborhood. These fires were allowed to burn themselves out. Why no fuss there?

I can already see the frivolous lawsuits on the horizon. Poor Mr. Crippen.

Stopped short

By Preston Jones, Ph.D., Fresno

I greatly enjoyed reading George Burman's comparison of hydrogen and gasoline fuels for automobiles [Valley Voices Jan. 25].

I would like to point out that Mr. Burman stops his efficiency calculation at the pump. Continuing this calculation to where the rubber meets the road requires the comparison of dirty and very inefficient combustion engines with clean and efficient electric motors.

This would make his conclusion about the relative efficiency of a hydrogen-based energy distribution system completely incorrect. Even accepting the 25% efficiency claim for combustion engines reported in the cited journal letter vs. 40% overall for hydrogen fuel cells and electric

motors, you still need only 57.5 billion gallons of today's 73.2 billion gallons annually, and not 92 billion.

Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, January 31, 2003:

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Editor: Mike Jensen made some good suggestions on how we could help win the war on terror by car pooling, lowering the speed limit and simply driving our gas-guzzling SUVs slower. However, I think Mr. Jensen is just scratching the surface of the SUV problem.

It is not just that the use of SUVs add considerably to our Middle Eastern oil dependency. SUVs also pollute more than smaller cars, do much greater damage when they collide with smaller cars and their sheer size creates visual and parking difficulties for the drivers of smaller cars. In my opinion, slowing down and car pooling are not the answers to these problems.

The government should hold SUVs to the same 27.5 miles per gallon standards as passenger cars, for that is what they really are: luxury car bodies sitting atop pickup frames. If they were held

to these standards, automakers would have to make adjustments as to their size and weight. However, this is not likely to happen. The automakers contribute large donations to the campaigns of our elected officials and money, not moral or practical considerations, is what determines social policy in America today.

The act of buying a SUV often demonstrates that a person has not taken the time to consider, or if he has considered simply does not care about, the effects his ownership will have on his fellow citizens, his country's oil dependence and the environment in which he lives. I'm sorry, Mr. Jensen, but people with these characteristics are not likely to slow down, carpool or obey a lower speed limit should it be posted.

We, as adults, attempt to teach our youth that with rights come responsibilities. Responsibilities to our nation, to our fellow citizens and to our environment. We try to teach them to care about the feelings and well-being of others rather than simply caring about satisfying their own desires. And yet, we buy SUVs that we know pollute much more than smaller cars, add to our oil dependency and are a hazard to others we share the road with. And we do these things because these vehicles offer us a little more personal convenience and a sense of worth and status. How sad.

Next up, the Hummer.

Byron Appel
Merced

[Letters to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian:](#)

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Get a bullet train

It would take a bus or car two hours to travel to Union Station in Los Angeles from Bakersfield after midnight.

I am a train buff, and during my vacations I travel by train for relaxation and sightseeing. I'm 62, work a day or two in Los Angeles each week and can't figure out how I could spend seven hours away from my home in the middle of the night to arrive in Los Angeles to work.

This is just the muddle-headed thinking that has kept the San Francisco to Los Angeles high-speed rail in the study mode for at least the last 25 years.

Forget the loop. Draw a straight line to Los Angeles and buy a bullet train or two to run back and forth like the car trains in the Channel between Britain and France.

It costs \$15 to \$20 for gas to drive to Los Angeles and back. I'd bet such a train could compete in time and cost. People, like myself, would ride frequently.

FRANCIS "RED" LeCAIN, Bakersfield

[January 30, 2003:](#)

Restrict Wal-Mart stores

Having read the recent letter concerning the bad press Wal-Mart earns, I wonder if the writer realized that McIntosh & Associates sent a letter to the City Council on behalf of Castle & Cooke requesting an appeal of conditions placed on the rezoning of these properties. These corporations are working for Wal-Mart, as is developer Lee Jameson.

If Wal-Mart gets its way, the conditions for restriction will be removed, as McIntosh is paying to file an appeal. Perhaps, we should ask Planning Commissioner Jeff Tkac why there is a restriction on The Marketplace that no "big box store," such as Wal-Mart, be allowed on that property? Listening to Tkac announce that he was a proponent for The Marketplace, I realize there is a double standard.

If these restrictions are lifted, neighborhoods will have no rights. Perhaps, a certain developer, who gave each councilman campaign contributions spent his money wisely.

I am far more concerned about decent pay with benefits, **clean air**, safety of neighborhoods, traffic and, more importantly, the effect this has on my town.

CYNDI LONGCRIER, Bakersfield