

Pollution control plan introduced

By Mike Jensen - Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, March 27, 2003

The local air district unveiled a new air pollution plan this week that will, in part, affect the way farmers do business in the San Joaquin Valley.

The Draft 2003 PM10 Plan has been in the works for several months and is expected to cut down on air pollution throughout the Valley.

The plan deals specifically with "PM10" pollution. That's pollution consisting of tiny dust and soot particles that are 10 or fewer microns in diameter.

Ten microns is one sixth the diameter of a human hair.

The pollution is produced from wood burning, dust and diesel engines and is known to lodge in the respiratory system, causing health problems, such as aggravating asthma.

The new air plan relies heavily on regulations already adopted or under consideration by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, such as the proposed ban on residential wood burning on some winter nights when air quality is extremely poor.

However, new measures for farmers are also expected to be required under the plan.

"It's a fairly substantial piece" of improving air quality, said Dave Mitchell, an air quality supervisor with the Valley air district.

Measures might include driving slower on unpaved roads or in parking areas, spraying water or sealant on unpaved roads, and shredding agriculture waste rather than burning it.

Farmers may also be asked to take such measures as using Global Positioning Satellite equipment in tractors and other on-field machinery, according to Mitchell. The GPS equipment might help farmers become more accurate in traversing fields so less dust is stirred up.

As proposed in the draft plan, later this fall the air district would distribute handbooks to farmers and growers explaining the new practices.

Farmers would then have to report what practices they're doing beginning sometime around January 2005.

According to the draft air plan, the new farming practices could decrease the current 189 tons per day of ag-produced pollution by 34 tons per day. That's a 17 percent reduction.

A comment from the California Farm Bureau Federation was unavailable late Wednesday.

Other pollution measures under the plan include the new ban on residential wood burning that's expected to take effect this fall.

Fresno area residents will be asked not to have wood fires on the worst nights for air pollution, probably about 20 days per season. Residents in Merced are expected to have fewer no-burn nights under the regulation.

Kevin Hall, with the Sierra Club, said he had not yet seen the draft version of the plan.

His group has become a watchdog of the Valley air district and filed lawsuits over air pollution issues over the past couple of years.

Noting that the district has failed to meet several previous deadlines for cleaning air pollution, Hall said, "Based on past performance, you can't help but be skeptical."

Mitchell, with the air district, said the cleanup plan is expected to bring the Valley air basin into compliance with federal health standards by 2010, with 5 percent reductions in air pollution each year until then.

The Valley air district will hold several workshops next month to discuss the plan.

- Fresno - 1 to 4 p.m. April 7, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. The meeting will also be held again at 6:30 that night.
- Modesto - 9:30 a.m. to noon April 10, 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130. That meeting will also be held again at 1:30 p.m.
- Bakersfield - 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. April 9, 2700 M St., Suite 275.

Each meeting will be broadcast to the two other locations. That means Merced County residents could go to Modesto or Fresno to attend the meetings by video link during any of the three presentations.

Farmers learn about air pollution permits

Valley growers get help figuring out pollution outputs at workshop.

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee, *(Published Thursday, March 27, 2003, 4:57 AM)*

KERMAN -- In an evening filled with questions on unprecedented air pollution permits for San Joaquin Valley farms, Nick Kusalo had one that might have been on everyone's mind.

"Is this a penalty just for the Valley?" the grower asked farm officials who were trying to explain the process.

Like many issues discussed Wednesday, the response could not be simple.

"The answer is yes and no," said Roger Isom, vice president of the California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association.

No, the program is not just pointed at the Valley -- it's for the whole country. But yes, since the Valley's air is among the country's worst, more farms and businesses are recognized as "large sources" and must get a permit so officials can track pollution more closely.

Dozens of farmers learned about the permit at the workshop at the Kerman Community Center. It was sponsored by the Fresno County and Madera County farm bureaus, Nisei Farmers League and the cotton ginners and growers group.

The farm groups also are planning sessions in Fresno, Tulare, Hanford, Madera, Bakersfield, Merced, Modesto and Five Points over the next several weeks.

Officials are helping Valley farmers decide in the next six weeks whether they produce enough pollution to apply for a federal air permit. Farmers have until May 14 to apply if their diesel-

powered well pumps are creating more than 25 tons of pollution annually. Most farms do not generate enough pollution to be included.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is requiring the permit for farms for the first time because of a lawsuit settlement last year. Since the 1970s, state law has not required farms to get the permit, which generally is required of large power plants, glass factories and other big industry.

In addition to tracking pollution, the permit requires fees. Those who must get a permit must pay a fee of \$37.86 per ton of pollution. A farmer who has several pumps putting out a total of 30 tons of pollution per year would have a fee of \$1,135.80.

But the fee won't be required this year, Isom said. The federal government expects to hand off the permit program to the local air district, which would collect the fee. That probably won't happen until at least next year.

Also, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is expected to drop into the country's worst category for smog, and that means the threshold for the permit program will probably drop from 25 to 10 tons late next year.

"How do you figure out a ton of pollution?" one farmer called from the audience.

Isom said his organization would have a calculator online by noon today.

The reporter can be reached at mgrossi@fresnobee.com or 441-6316.

Opinion piece, Modesto Bee, March 24, 2003:

Air district is moving in right direction

By NICK BLOM

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District has been criticized recently on its efforts to cleanse the valley's air. It has been thought to be "slow" and "staggering" in the fight for a suitable atmosphere. I would argue differently.

I have served on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District's Board for more than 14 years. I have seen it grow to make a substantial impact on our valley's air pollution problem. In a tradition of continuous improvement and prudent decision-making, the air district has made significant progress toward a healthy environment both directly and indirectly.

Critics suggest the air district should place heavier regulations on our farmers and our local agricultural industry. They believe imposing more rules on how farmers produce their vital products will solve our challenge. A clear example is pushing farmers even further in controlling the dust they generate.

Currently, farmers are making strong efforts in partnership with the air district to reduce dust by using new technology in their farming processes. Placing heavier regulations, such as a requirement to eliminate certain crops, is not the answer as they include significant side effects.

I ask that these critics consider not only what may happen directly but also indirectly, more specifically, the economic impacts involved with stricter regulations.

The agricultural industry of our valley is the main source of our economy. Each year it generates millions of dollars in revenue, from the farming of almonds to the production in our wineries, and remains a major source of employment for our residents.

Forcing the industry to adhere to strict air regulations will cause an economic backlash to all counties within the air district's boundaries. Both farming and production will be slowed and profits and employment shall swiftly fall. Cutting crop production may improve air quality but will only hurt the valley economically in the long term. Forcing stricter regulations on the agricultural industry will have negative effects on other aspects involved with maintaining a healthy community.

We face a tremendous challenge in making the air healthy for its residents but must also be conscious of all factors involved in creating new regulations.

The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District makes careful decisions rather than taking hasty actions. It fully considers the impacts involved with new rules. Perhaps if critics adequately investigated both sides of regulating the air and understood the complex issues involved, they would replace the words "slow" and "staggering" in their criticism against the air district with the words "thorough" and "thoughtful."

Blom is a former Stanislaus County supervisor.

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, March 27, 2003:](#)

'Take better care'

By Ashley Davis

McKinley Elementary

I want to talk about the air in Fresno. The quality of the air is bad, especially since the fire that happened in January. The air quality was so bad then that I had asthma and had to go to the doctor.

I had to miss school for four days. We didn't get recess for a long time, because it was so smoky outside, and we had to stay inside for our recess. You could smell the fire from our school.

That is why I want you to read this letter. People need to be more responsible and take better care of our world.

[Letters to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian, March 27, 2003:](#)

We really need new jobs?

I keep reading over the years about how we need more jobs. Yet when more jobs come into the area, the unemployment stays about the same. In addition, we have increased pollution, more traffic and a strain on our infrastructure.

I also wonder why people would want to move here with the prevalence of valley fever and poor air quality. Is that being withheld from potential "settlers?"

WILLIAM RIEKEN, Bakersfield

[Community Voices, Bakersfield Californian, March 26, 2003:](#)

Walter E. Stewart: Don't tout our good life too loudly

Attention all who revel in slamming Bakersfield. There are infinite things wrong with Bakersfield just as there are things wrong with every city. I will not make excuses for Bakersfield's shortcomings. On the other hand, I will give praise where praise is due.

Unemployment in Bakersfield is comparable to the national average. Crime is comparable to any metropolitan area. Air quality is bad. A few schools are performing above state average. An alarming plurality of local schools are embarrassingly functioning below state average.

Bakersfield is scandalized by the alleged misfeasances of a few government officials and prominent citizens in high positions. The extensively publicized "Lords of Bakersfield" is the

alleged break of trust and conduct to which I refer. Having said that, consider the following axioms.

I howled with laughter when Johnny Carson poked fun at Bakersfield. Disillusioned malcontents make me laugh when I hear derogatory remarks like: "Bakersfield is that dusty little truck stop north of Los Angeles."

Bakersfield is the 12th largest metropolis out of 964 cities and towns in California. Heads of state and world dignitaries attend the Bakersfield Business Conference every year at Cal State Bakersfield. Visitors are impressed with the amicability of Bakersfield residents.

Lodging, shopping, sports, theaters, entertainment and culture are myriad and diverse. Different ethnic groups, religious sects and political persuasions live together without adversity.

Bakersfield's impressive civic auditorium and monumental state-of-the-art multiple-use indoor arena are busy edifices for world-class sports and entertainment.

There is no shortage of gourmet restaurants.

Complainers who fail to take advantage of what is available in Bakersfield can blame only themselves.

The cost of living in Bakersfield is lower than many California cities. Modest homes up to and including stately residences are more affordable than in many parts of California. Bakersfield is home to six hospitals which are backed by laboratories, clinics and other health facilities.

Bakersfield is geographically unique. It is less than a two-hour drive to the second largest city in the U.S. It is also less than a two-hour drive to the ocean, mountains and desert.

Bakersfield's temperature seldom dips to or hovers at freezing. Compare that to a substantial part of our country where people freeze to death every year. People bellyache about Bakersfield summers. Dry 90- to 100-degrees Fahrenheit does not kill. People in other parts of our country die from sweltering humidity and catastrophic floods.

It is extremely rare for Bakersfield to experience an earthquake that causes fatalities or property damage. The central states are buffeted every year with frequent tornadoes that kill innumerable people and cause millions of dollars in property damage.

Oh my gosh! I could go on and on, but I'd better shut up. The good outweighs the bad. I don't want to be responsible for the whole country moving to (you guessed it) Bakersfield.

Walter E. Stewart is retired from the Kern County Public Works Department. Community Voices is an expanded commentary that may contain up to 500 words. The Californian reserves the right to republish contributed commentaries in all formats, including on its Web page.