

Stronger burning rules are sought

By Mike Jensen - Merced Sun-Star, April 15, 2003

Valley air pollution officials want to strengthen a regulation curtailing wood burning in fireplaces and stoves on nights when air quality is especially bad.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had originally planned to restrict wood burning on about 25 nights per winter for standard fireplaces and stoves.

At the same time, new cleaner-burning fireplaces and stoves specially certified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency were to be affected on five or fewer nights per winter.

However, the air district now says that the EPA-certified devices will also be banned on the same nights as regular fireplaces and stoves.

"The change is because it was determined (the original regulation) was just too difficult to enforce and it would decrease the effectiveness of the program," said Anthony Presto, a spokesman with the Valley air district.

Presto said that enforcing the original regulation would have been difficult because "we're not going to be looking inside people's homes" to check out the type of fireplace being used.

Also under the air district's proposed regulation, there would be restrictions on installing wood-burning fireplaces in new homes.

On parcels with more than two homes per acre, one home could have a wood-burning fireplace. On parcels with more than two homes per acre, no wood-burning devices would be allowed.

The new regulation will also affect the purchasing and selling of older homes.

Before a home with a wood-burning fireplace or stove can be sold, the owner must dismantle it or convert it to one certified for use by the EPA.

Valley air officials are worried about what's known as "particulate matter" pollution created from ash, smoke and soot.

Unlike visible dust that gets caught in the upper respiratory system, the microscopic pollution reaches the lungs, causing increased asthma attacks, bronchitis aggravation and reduced lung function.

Residential fireplaces and stoves contribute about 30 percent of the Valley's winter air pollution, according to air district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

The new regulation is expected to take effect next fall.

The Building Industry Association of the Central Valley is not opposing the regulation.

Ed Taczanowsky, association vice president, said Monday that his organization has surveyed its members in Merced, Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties, and that about 95 percent of them have already stopped installing traditional wood-burning stoves and fireplaces in new homes.

"It wouldn't affect us, is what I'm saying," he said.

It's not clear when the Valley air board directors will vote on the proposal. However, it's expected to take effect next fall.

In the meantime, the air district is planning a host of public workshops on the issue next month.

- Fresno - 6:30 p.m. May 5, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. The meeting will also be held again at 6:30 that night.

- Bakersfield - 1:30 p.m. May 6, 2700 M St., Suite 275.

- Modesto - 2 p.m. May 7, 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130. That meeting will also be held again at 1:30 p.m.

S.J. Valley farmers hazy about air-quality rules

By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer, April 15, 2003

MODESTO -- More than 50 confused farmers, farm managers and agriculture advocates sought help from federal air officials Monday at a meeting about complicated new rules for heavily polluting farms.

Next month, San Joaquin Valley farms with several polluting diesel irrigation pumps will have to get permits to operate their pumps from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

It's the first time farms have been regulated under the Clean Air Act rules, which originally were written for big businesses such as power plants and oil refineries.

A lawsuit from environmentalists persuaded the EPA last year to add big, heavily polluting farms to the mix.

But the often-changing air rules from federal, state and Valley regulators have done little to clear the haze of confusion that surrounds the new regulatory program for farmers.

"We get faxes and read articles in the newspapers and from the Farm Bureau that are trying to get the word out about this. But until today, I had no idea what the details were or whether I had to worry about it," said John Miller, who farms near Modesto.

Miller was among the few dozen farmers who left the Modesto workshop Monday after learning that their farms don't produce enough pollution to fall under the permit requirements.

The new rules cover only farms that have stationary equipment that produce more than 25 tons a year of smog-forming emissions. That means a farm with just six average-size diesel irrigation pumps could be regulated.

Later this year, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is expected to ask the EPA to consider the Valley's air pollution "extreme." Among other things, that would mean farms producing 10 tons of pollution a year would have to get permits starting around 2005.

The farmers at the workshop had plenty of questions. What if I add engines after the permit deadline? What if I buy electric pumps? What if I don't follow the new rules? What if I have many separate ranches? Do I have to pay for this?

The answers: If a farm exceed the 25 tons, you need a permit; electric is favored, because it doesn't release emissions; farmers should use their judgment about whether separate farms are part of one overall operation; and farmers will have to pay about \$37 for each ton of pollution, but that may increase.

What if a farmer moves a diesel engine from well to well? In that case, the engine would be considered a "mobile source" similar to a car or tractor. It wouldn't be regulated.

"If you sit here and try to make this make sense, it's not going to happen," said Kerry Drake, the EPA's assistant air-division director for the regional office that covers the Valley.

"There's nothing we can do about it. It's the law," he said.

Only a few hundred farms are expected to need permits under the new rules. But environmental groups say those farms long have been afforded an illegal pass to pollute.

The San Joaquin Valley has one of the worst air problems in the state. That pollution is linked to cancer, premature deaths, asthma and other breathing problems. Pollution also can decrease crop productivity.

Still, many farmers at the workshop thought it was unfair.

"Go down Highway 99, and those trucks are much more of a problem than what I have. And yet we have to get a permit. It seems to me they're trying to do a good job, but why spend all this effort on the farmers when the problem is in the urban areas?" Mark Hutson asked.

Many air officials, politicians and residents have lamented the pollution from cars and trucks, the Valley's largest source of smog. Congress can strengthen those rules, but that is unlikely because of opposition from around the country.

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To learn more

For more information on the farm regulations, go to www.valleyair.org.

Bakersfield Californian Community Voices / Paul Gipe:

Clean air is everyone's duty

Monday April 14, 2003, 05:45:11 PM

Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has made a bold attempt to confront the valley's abysmal air quality. Notably, he has proposed removing the agricultural exemption. It takes courage to introduce bills that will affect the senator's longtime political supporters. It will take even more courage to see these bills pass into law. As good as they are, the senator's bills are just the beginning of what is needed.

We all must do our part to clear the air. No one can be exempt -- neither Florez, nor commuters, nor agri-business, nor the valley's burgeoning building industry. Ag is right. They should not have to bear more than their share. It is high time to address urban sprawl and how it is literally choking this valley to death.

We all know someone here with asthma. That asthma either was caused by the valley's notorious pollution or has been aggravated by it. These are real people who have a right to breathe without relying on an inhaler.

How people breathe and what they breathe affects each and every one of us. It affects our way of life. Take my neighborhood in east Bakersfield. It is a good neighborhood. Yet in the past five years, two of our longtime neighbors have left. They have left not only the neighborhood, they have left the valley. Why? Because of Bakersfield's dirty air.

Chris and Michelle, our next-door neighbors, were the first to go. They were young and active. They formed our Neighborhood Watch program. They were part of the community. They also had two young children. One day they told us they didn't want their kids growing up in such polluted air and were moving to Washington state. It was a blow to everyone on the street.

Then there was Charlie. He and his wife kept a well-tended yard with beautiful flowers that brightened up the neighborhood. They always gave a cheerful greeting. Suddenly one day Charlie announced that his wife had moved to Northern California and he would soon follow her. She has asthma, Charlie said, and she just couldn't live in Bakersfield any longer.

We miss Chris and Michelle. We miss Charlie and his wife.

That is the toll of the valley's air pollution. It is driving good people away. It is destroying our quality of life.

Addressing the valley's air pollution is long overdue. It is too late for Chris and Michelle; it is too late for Charlie and his wife. But if we act forcefully and without further delay, we can clear the air and ensure that we don't lose more good neighbors.

Pass these bills, Sen. Florez. Your constituents expect it. Now if we can just get the good senator to park his Denali (12 mpg) and drive a Prius (50 mpg), he will set an example not just for other politicians in Sacramento, but for all of us here in the valley.

Paul Gipe is a local author and chair of the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club. 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.

Drivers urged to park, ride for clean air Pedal and foot power can also reduce pollution

By Amee M. Thompson, Visalia Times-Delta, April 15, 2003

It's time to ride a bus, take a walk or pedal a bicycle to work.

That is the message the Tulare County Association of Governments is trying to get out to residents through its Make a Difference in Air Quality program.

"Certainly industry and agriculture contribute significantly to our air quality problem, but we are all part of the problem," said Bob Stocker, assistant executive secretary for TCAG. "We could all be a part of the solution if we would be willing to change our habits."

According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's status report released last year, 67 percent of the Valley's nitrogen oxide emissions -- the precursor gases that can lead to ground-level ozone pollution -- comes from mobile sources such as trucks, passenger vehicles, recreational boating, motor homes and off-road vehicles.

So if everyone curtails driving just a little bit, it can add up, TCAG spokeswoman Nancy Lockwood said.

That's why on Earth Day, April 22, the Visalia City Coach will be offering free bus rides all day.

The bus will run its usual weekday schedule from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. over 10 different routes, including the downtown trolley.

Transit opportunities

"We are always looking for opportunities for people to ride the bus," said Monty Cox, transit manager for the city of Visalia. "Earth Day seemed like a natural opportunity to do that."

Visalia City Coach has had free days in the past, Cox said, and it always has received a positive response, increasing ridership for a bit. He said that with more routes added last August, people who haven't ridden the bus in a while should be pleased with the improvements.

"Especially now with the environmental issues being so strong for us here in the Valley, [riding the bus] is an important thing that everybody can do at least once or twice a week," Cox said.

But the Make a Difference in Air Quality program doesn't just stop with the free bus day April 22.

There are videos and brochures available for businesses to share with employees on alternative ways to get to work, Lockwood said.

"We're all in the habit of jumping in our car and going somewhere," Lockwood said. "Even if we were just to link our errands together, we could help cut down on air pollution."

And TCAG isn't just targeting those who can drive. A curriculum is being used in after-school programs to inform a younger generation about carpooling, walking and riding bicycles, Lockwood said.

Information

Ride Free Day on Visalia City Coach: 713-4950

Make a Difference in Air Quality program: www.tularecog.org

Moisture may add to heat in Valley

Study tracks rise of daily lows over 70 years

By Heidi Rowley, Visalia Times-Delta, April 15, 2003

Valley temperatures are rising, and the cause might be an increase of irrigation water.

A University of Alabama professor, and former Fresno resident, has been approved for a \$200,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to study the odd climate change in the Central Valley.

John Christy, professor of atmospheric science at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, observed a 4-degrees increase in the minimum temperature over the past 70 years in Kings, Tulare, Fresno, Madera, Merced and Mariposa counties. But during the same time, he said, minimum temperatures in the foothills and the mountains have not changed.

4-degree rise

Four degrees may not seem like much to the casual resident, Christy said, but "that's a large change in temperature."

Especially, he said, if it is limited to a specific area.

Normally, large-scale climate changes will affect both mountain and valley regions, and minimum and maximum temperatures. Minimum temperatures are recorded at sunrise; maximum temperatures are taken in the late afternoon.

A desert by nature

"The Central Valley is a desert," he said. "Normally, if the air is bone dry, the temperature will drop dramatically at night. If you dump a lot of water into the Valley for agriculture, a lot of it evaporates, adding water vapor -- a powerful greenhouse gas -- into the air near the ground so it can't cool off as much at night."

Mark Burger, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service stationed in Hanford, agreed with Christy, saying irrigation water could affect nighttime temperatures, but said it should be increasing the daytime temperatures as well.

"That seems a little extreme on a meteorologist's perspective," he said of the four-degree increase. "Irrigation certainly can contribute to temperature change. I tend to think other aspects would change the temperature, such as pollution or haze."

Summer highs dip

In addition to the increase in minimum temperatures, Christy said he also noticed that daytime temperatures in the summer have dropped slightly, something that he also attributes to the increase in water in the area.

Christy received the grant based on a preliminary study he did over a few months in 2002 where he placed temperature recorders in eight mountain stations, 15 foothill stations and 17 Valley stations. He compared those recordings to past historical data.

For example, Christy said he has a record by James W. Blake, a military officer, for January 1870 in Visalia. Blake recorded 20 to 25 different sets of environmental data, including the fact that it only rained .14 inches in January during that year.

Records to 1851

The study also includes climate data from as far back as 1851 from Fort Miller, the site of which is now underneath Millerton Lake.

From a farming perspective, the scientific study is irrelevant, one local water authority said, because irrigation has made the Central Valley habitable.

"If it weren't for irrigation, nobody would care if it were hotter or cooler; they wouldn't live here," said Randy McFarland, public information consultant for Friant Water Users Authority. "Whether it has impacts is irrelevant. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for the water."

McFarland said he believes the fact that the area is now more populated and urbanized may also be contributing to the temperature change.

For his upcoming three-year study, Christy has more than doubled the number of temperature recorders in the six-county area. The study will be done by Christy, one of his colleagues at the university and possibly a graduate student.

Results questioned

Dave Kranz, a California Farm Bureau spokesman, questioned Christy's data.

"Is it irrigation that's adding to warming temperatures or is it sunlight reflecting off all the paved roads that come with urbanization?" Kranz said.

He said Christy's theories seem somewhat flawed.

"The crops that are grown on irrigated land actually help clean the air," Kranz said. "For example, it's estimated that each acre of rice in California scrubs about 23,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere."

Kranz said the state has actually lost agricultural land in recent years to urbanization and wildlife protection.

Bernadette Del Chiaro, a spokes-woman for Environment California, worries that studies such as Christy's could divert attention from the need to reduce fossil fuel consumption.

"There may be multiple factors causing climate change," Del Chiaro said. "But regardless, there is still the larger problem, which is our dependence on fossil fuels."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, April 15, 2003:](#)

Pollution tech could be valley's economic savior

Turning agricultural waste, including manure from dairies, into clean electricity sounds visionary. It is, perhaps, but it may be closer at hand than we think.

The Great Valley Center in Modesto has issued a report suggesting that such things may be in our future, along with other advances that could make the valley a center for cultivating technologies to support alternative and renewable energy, including biomass, solar, wind, hydrogen and geothermal.

And why not? The San Joaquin Valley is one of the filthiest air basins in the country, and ag waste, especially dairy manure, is a large source of air pollution here. Why shouldn't the valley be a leader in devising ways to cleanse the air that degrades the health of so many people?

Some of the technologies are ready to use now. Biomass energy plants that burn farm waste as fuel to produce power are already in place around the valley, an alternative to the open-field burning that contributes to air pollution. The technology is not competitive with traditional power sources such as oil, coal, hydropower and natural gas -- not yet, anyway. Thus the plants require subsidies, which are threatened by the state's budget crisis.

In Modesto, forward-thinking officials are exploring ways to recycle the 400,000 tons of agricultural waste produced annually in Stanislaus County. Ideas include not only generating energy from cow manure, but extracting ethanol from fruit skins and other farm refuse.

To help support these technologies, there are institutional resources in place, such as the Center for Irrigation Technology at California State University, Fresno, and the Great Valley Center itself. More are needed. Environmental studies -- particularly cleanup and conservation techniques -- should be a centerpiece of the curriculum at the University of California at Merced, when it opens.

There are private sector opportunities as well. As we have noted, there's a generation's worth of jobs in the effort to clean our air, and considerable economic reward awaiting those who solve the problems. Why shouldn't that happen here? Why should we let that development -- both technological and economic -- take place at distant research universities and in faraway factories?

The answer, of course, is that we should not. But we had better start hustling if we want these things to happen here. We are losing a great deal of time to the state's budget mess. We should be planning for this vision now -- with concrete plans, not wish lists. Valley residents' lives, and the lives of their children, depend on it.