

In the News - 2/17/04

[Tuesday, February 17, 2004, The Merced Sun-Star](#)

Clouds, light rain remain likely for rest of this week

By Alexandria Rocha

John Baxter relaxed under the awning at Main Street Cafe Monday afternoon, smoking a cigar and sipping a cup of hot coffee.

"I like this weather for a break, not a steady diet of it," said Baxter, of Atwater. "My wife loves it, she hates the hot weather."

Baxter's wife may be in for a treat - officials at the Hanford office of the National Weather Service are predicting that Merced will see another six days of light showers and gray clouds.

The forecast, however, peaks mid-week with a thunderstorm predicted for Wednesday evening.

So unlike Baxter, Merced native Moses Castellano is looking forward to the stretch of drizzling weather.

"I enjoy the rain, [it cleans the earth and the air](#)," said Castellano, who works at a sawmill in Modesto. "It's not too cold, it's not too hot. I would take this kind of a day over others."

Monday's weather, which remained around 60 degrees for most of the day, put Castellano in the mood to visit his favorite bookstore - downtown Merced's Second Time Around.

"I like the rainy weather, and today I wanted something to read," he said.

Jean Barnett, who has co-owned the bookstore with her husband Jim for seven years, said the wet weather seems to lure customers inside the store.

"When it's raining we do get busy," Barnett said. "Someday we'd like to have cookies and coffee. We've been thinking about that."

Though Merced stayed fairly dry after Monday's morning drizzle, folks up in the higher elevations saw a potent storm, bringing snow, rain and blustery winds to the Sierra.

A snow advisory that had been issued early in the day for the Lake Tahoe region was canceled by mid-afternoon, but not before some area ski resorts picked up 2-7 inches of new snow.

The National Weather Service also said snow levels would remain high, at around 8,000 feet, where another 2-4 inches of snow was expected Monday night.

Gusts of 80 mph were forecast over the Sierra ridge tops.

[Tuesday, February 17, 2004, The Bakersfield Californian](#)

Students hope to cut through the haze with Spare the Air ads

By JASON GUTIERREZ, Special to The Californian

Section: Local; Page: b4

For Kern County residents, unhealthy air, hazy skies, and not being able to see the mountains bordering the San Joaquin Valley is nothing new, but to a group of curious fifth-grade students it was something worth investigating. They're doing Spare the Air TV commercials for class.

Jeanne Hamilton's fifth-grade class at Buena Vista Elementary School first became intrigued with Kern County's air problem after they saw a presentation on the weather.

Around the same time, all of the fifth-grade teachers in California received a contest package from Jiminy Cricket's Environmental Challenge. This contest is sponsored by Disney to encourage fifth-grade students in California to be more aware of their environment. Through a

hands-on project, the students study science. The winning presentation earns children a trip to Disneyland.

"I decided that since my students were very excited about the presentation, then this would further enforce their interest to learn about science," Hamilton said.

This comprehensive project is based on scientific research, group work, and an overall submission of a class presentation.

"The students are separated into small groups of three to five," Hamilton said. "Then through research, they put together a presentation on how to spare the air."

These students wanted to really make an impact so they decided that they would write and star in their own Spare the Air commercials.

"They wanted to show that they could make a difference and thought, what better way to do it than through a commercial," Hamilton said.

The student commercials will be individually shot and then compiled to form one large classroom submission. The commercials will also be broadcast to other schools within in the Panama-Buena Vista Union School District so that they can see the accomplishments of the students and learn how to Spare the Air.

"Whether the kids wrote about carpooling, not burning in their fireplace, or the reasons why so many children in the valley have asthma, they all teamed up together to use science to answer their questions and find a solution to their problems," Hamilton said. "Not only are they learning the importance of preserving their environment but they are also learning the power of the media."

Hamilton says that what started as a simple question on why we can't always see the mountains has turned into one of the best learning experiences she has been able to get her students involved in.

This project has also served another very important purpose for the future education of the students. This year the State Testing and Reporting test will include a new science portion for fifth-grade students.

"We are just thrilled to death to have the students be able to participate in a program like this," said Joy Rose, Buena Vista Elementary principal. "Not only will it prepare them for the STAR-9 testing, but it brings an abstract idea to life for the students so they can understand theses concepts through their involvement."

Eleven-year-old Kevin Giannelli said that he has learned a lot about the air he breathes and saving his environment.

"We can help change our environment to help keep people healthy," Giannelli said. "I am doing whatever I can to help out and making sure we help cure asthma."

Carpooling is just one of the methods that the students have decided to promote in their commercials, as this line in their production says:

"If two to four people carpool regularly, then four million gallons of gas will be saved and our air will not be polluted, so be cool and car pool," Garvin Prichett, 11, said.

[Saturday, February 14, 2004, Los Angeles Times](#)

EPA Relaxes Estimations of Park Pollution

By Elizabeth Shogren

WASHINGTON - In a decision that raises the possibility of increased pollution in national parks around the country, the Bush administration will allow North Dakota to change the way it estimates air pollution over Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

The change, announced Friday in Bismarck, N.D., means that a consortium of power companies will be able to go ahead with a coal-fired power plant in North Dakota, and other power plants could open in the future, state officials said.

Compliance with the Clean Air Act's requirements on national parks is determined by a system for estimating pollution levels. The new system, which is expected to produce lower estimates, could allow new coal-fired plants to be built near the North Dakota park without violating the law.

"That sets the stage for new investments in our energy industry and real progress in our rural communities," Gov. John Hoeven said in announcing the agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency.

David Glatt, chief of the environmental health section of North Dakota's Health Department, said the changes should make the state's estimates better match the actual air quality over the park. As a result, the state will be able to allow more projects that create air pollution, like power plants, to be built.

"What we've done is we've got a model that does a better job of predicting what the real world sulfur dioxide emissions will be," Glatt said.

Sulfur dioxide emissions contribute to the haze visible in skylines and are a major source of acid rain, which damages trees, waterways and other components of the park system, such as national monuments

Several environmental groups challenged the state's description of what the new system will do.

"Our deep concern is that this is a damaging case of politics trumping sound science and the long-standing judgment of EPA's professional staff that could have far-reaching impacts and allow harmful air pollution degradation at national parks across the country," said Vickie Patton of Denver, a lawyer for Environmental Defense, a national environmental group.

"New coal-fired power plants are being proposed across the inter-Western United States that are predicted to have harmful impacts on national parks."

The EPA and the state had been at loggerheads since 1999 over whether the air over the park and the Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge violated federal standards meant to prevent degradation of air quality in public lands.

As recently as last summer, the EPA had argued that because the park's air violated pollution standards, additional energy development should not be allowed.

But in a draft memorandum of understanding with the state, the EPA agreed to allow the state to use a new technique for estimating the pollution that state officials said would show that the air was not as dirty as previously thought.

Environmental groups accused the EPA of violating the spirit of the 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act, which was designed to protect national parks and other public lands from becoming polluted by industrial development.

"Under the Clean Air Act you are supposed to keep pristine areas like natural parks relatively pristine," said Frank O'Donnell, executive director of the Clean Air Trust, an advocacy group.

"This looks to be a terrible precedent for national parks across the country."

The environmentalists said this was another in a string of efforts by the Bush administration to ease pollution rules to benefit the energy industry.

"What they did to work on the problem was to cook the books," said Mary Mitchell Bismark, organizer of Dakota Resource Council, a regional environmental group. "What the EPA has agreed to significantly changes the rules of the game."

Bill Wehrum, counsel for the EPA's assistant administrator for air, disagreed, saying the change was a result of a long negotiation between the state and the EPA "about developing a method that will produce results we can rely on."

Environmentalists said the EPA would now be pressured to make similar deals with other states that wanted to build power plants upwind from national parks. For instance, efforts to build coal-fired power plants in Utah have been hindered in part by concerns that pollution from them could sully the air in Capital Reef National Monument, opponents said.

Glatt, the North Dakota environmental health official, said several states, including Utah and Nevada, had shown interest in the new technique for modeling pollution over parks.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota's top tourist destination, preserves the rugged Badlands and sweeping prairies that beguiled its namesake as a young man. Known as one of the presidents with the strongest commitment to conservation, Roosevelt established five national parks, 18 national monuments, 51 wildlife refuges and 150 national forests.

Valerie Naylor, the park's superintendent, said she had not analyzed the announcement. But, she said, "we are concerned about anything that could degrade the air. Scenic views are extremely important in the Badlands."

Floyd Robb, vice president of communications for Basin Electric Power Cooperative, one of the companies in the consortium considering North Dakota as the site of a power plant, called the agreement "good news," but added that the group of power companies had yet to decide where to build the plant.

[Sunday, February 15, in the Modesto Bee](#)

Fireplace burn ban works out

By MARK GROSSI, Fresno Bee

The first season of bans on fireplace burning is ending soon with hardly a fuss in the San Joaquin Valley. Why?

Let's go right to the surprising numbers:

? Authorities have ordered wood-burning bans on two days since Nov. 1, not 20 to 25 days as they had expected.

? The air was dirty enough on nine other days to ban burning, but meteorologists could not predict them with any certainty.

? Air officials have not written violation notices to people for illegally burning wood at home.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency required the rule, following the settlement of an environmental lawsuit pointed at the valley. The season will run each year from Nov. 1 to the end of February.

The 25,000-square-mile valley is among eight areas in the country considered seriously out of compliance with federal standards for tiny specks of pollution called particulate matter.

Subtle weather changes, and possibly a reduction in wood burning, have helped this season, authorities said.

"There's been great cooperation from the public," said Bob Kard, director of compliance for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We're looking for people to comply this well next year."

The weather is another matter.

On the plus side, the valley has not had its usual extended episodes of stagnant winter weather this season, which create ripe conditions to trap soot and ash emitted by fireplaces, wood-burning stoves and other devices, such as inserts and outdoor chimneys.

But without those patterns, predicting weather and air pollution has been tricky.

District meteorologists predict the next day's air quality using an index from a clean zero to a lung-searing 300 or above.

A no-burn day is triggered when the forecast indicates the index will reach 151 or higher the next day.

The district discourages people from burning wood when the index is predicted to be between 101 and 150. Burning has been discouraged so far this season on 57 days in various parts of the district.

On Nov. 18 and Jan. 23, the only two days when wood burning was banned, the air didn't get dirty enough to qualify for a no-burn day. Yet nine other days registered high enough pollution to trigger a no-burn day.

Modesto had the worst day

The worst pollution problems were expected in Fresno, the valley's largest city. But the worst air-quality day so far was in Modesto, on Nov. 7.

Forecasters predicted air quality would be in the moderate range in Modesto then, but it turned out the air was much more polluted that day.

Air district spokeswoman Janelle Schneider said it's possible someone living near the Modesto monitoring station was burning lots of wood that day, which could elevate a reading. She said, however, that final readings depend largely on the weather.

"What these are are forecasts," she said. "It's our best estimate about what the air quality's going to be for that day."

In fact, Modesto had three days with air quality poor enough to qualify as no-burn days. Stanislaus County, one of eight counties in the valley air district, has not had a burn ban called this season.

"Some days, the data has been right on the cusp, and it can go either way," said Evan Shipp, supervising meteorologist. "We'll learn from this year and probably do it differently next year."

In the summer, pollution tends to get worse as the air blows south in the valley, but the trend in the winter, Schneider said, is for the dirtiest air to hang around the most populated areas.

"Particulate matter doesn't travel," she said of soot and smoke that spew from people's chimneys. "Ozone travels. So, that's why you have higher readings in urban areas. More people have fireplaces and more people are burning."

But San Joaquin County, home of Stockton, has about 50,000 more people than Modesto and yet tends to log some of lowest readings for the toxic particles associated with wood burning in fireplaces. Schneider said that's because delta breezes help clean the air there year-round.

Overall, there were fewer bad air days this winter than air quality officials had predicted.

Authorities said residents listened and refrained from burning wood, preventing a lot of pollution. Even in January, when fog and clouds hung around for weeks like a wet blanket, only one burning ban was called.

"We still have a few weeks left in February," Shipp said. "We could still get another one."

On the two no-burn days this season, the air district received more than 60 calls from the public to report potential illegal burning. More than two-thirds of the calls came in Fresno County.

Compliance director Kard said about half of the complaints were unconfirmed, and there were no repeat offenders. Kard said there has been no reason yet to write violation notices, which could carry a fine ranging from \$50 to \$1,000.

"We've written letters of inquiry to check on all complaints," Kard said. "We've found good compliance."

Modesto Bee staff writer Melanie Turner contributed to this report.

[Saturday, February 14, Stockton Record](#)
EPA air proposal may help Valley
By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer

SAN FRANCISCO -- The head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday that his agency is seriously considering new emissions rules for trains, a move that could help ease San Joaquin Valley's air pollution.

Mike Leavitt, who took over the EPA in November, also refuted concerns that the Bush administration would back off proposed rules for diesel engines. Valley air regulators are depending on those new limits to help the region meet federal health-based pollution limits.

Also Friday, the EPA announced it intended to reclassify the Valley as an "extreme" smog zone. Such a move would give the Valley until 2010 to clear the air, instead of the 2005 deadline. A final determination on the classification could come in late March.

Leavitt made his remarks at a meeting of reporters at the EPA's San Francisco district headquarters. It was the first time the former Utah governor had visited the region since he was sworn in as EPA administrator.

The new regulations that could affect diesel engines in trucks, construction equipment, boats and trains are expected to be finalized in April.

"This will be a profound change. The impact will be that the black puff of smoke you occasionally see from trucks or other equipment will be a thing of the past," Leavitt said.

He also predicted that the next 10 years will see the most significant progress in clean-air policies in the nation's history.

If trains are included in the new diesel-engine regulations, it could mean big changes in Valley rail yards.

Don Hunsaker with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said that trains put out 14 tons a day in smog-related emissions.

"That's enough so that we were looking at ways to deal with those emissions," Hunsaker said.

The Valley air district is not legally allowed to directly regulate so-called mobile sources of pollution. That includes any moving pollution source, such as cars and trains. Mobile sources are responsible for more than half of emissions that cause smog in the Valley.

However, the Valley air district could decide to pass rules that would limit train idling or ask that railroads use clean-burning fuels to power train cars that only work in rail yards, Hunsaker said.

The EPA also has been criticized by some California clean-air groups that argue the administration is attempting to gut the federal New Source Review program.

That program requires improvements be made to factories, power plants and other large polluters when operations are expanded.

The environmental groups say proposed changes to the program could allow major polluters to delay or escape new pollution controls.

Wayne Nastri, the regional EPA administrator, said concerns about easing pollution-cutting requirements are unfounded.

The EPA will work with California agencies to make sure there is no decrease in the program, he said.

[Saturday, February 14, in the Modesto Bee and the Fresno Bee](#)

Valley closing in on extreme polluter status

By MARK GROSSI, THE FRESNO

The federal government Friday announced plans to drop the San Joaquin Valley into the country's worst-polluter status and provide more time to clean the air.

But the deal isn't done yet.

An activist lawsuit next month still could stop the much-debated move, which the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District requested last year.

The district wants the so-called extreme polluter status because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would push back the smog cleanup deadline from 2005 to 2010.

It would avert sanctions, including withholding \$2 billion in federal road-building money.

But the Association of Irrigated Residents, a valley activist group, plans to ask a judge on March 11 to block the move.

The group contends that the air district did not examine the health benefits of missing the 2005 deadline, triggering millions in business penalties and then using the money to create new pollution reductions.

The district's move to extreme must go through a 30-day public comment period after a Federal Register notice, expected next week.

The move probably will not become final until after the activists' court hearing.

"The court is going to hear our issue before the move is final," said lawyer Brent Newell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, representing the activists. "Judges can and do rule from the bench on issues like this."

Volunteering for extreme status

The valley is the only place in the country ever to volunteer for the extreme status, which has applied only to perennial smog king Los Angeles since 1990.

If the move takes place, the EPA has set Oct. 1 as the deadline for the valley's new ozone cleanup plan, a road map to achieving the federal standard.

Don Hunsaker, plan development supervisor, said the deadline should not be a problem.

"We've been working on it for more than a year, and we've had several public workshops," he said. "We will probably have another in April."

The district governing board will have the chance to approve the plan in summer, Hunsaker said.

The extreme status would force about 150 businesses into a special federal permit program, requiring them to file annual reports and pay extra fees on each ton of pollution.

The program's threshold for pollution emissions would be lowered under the extreme status.

Taking aim at major sources

About 270 businesses -- glass factories, large power plants and large petroleum operations -- already are involved in the program, which is aimed at major pollution sources.

The 150 additional businesses would include some large food processors, printing operations and small- to medium-sized petroleum firms.

Hunsaker said the businesses would not have to become involved in the program until 2006 or possibly later. The businesses are scattered throughout the 25,000-square-mile district, ranging from Stockton to Bakersfield.

The valley never has attained the federal standard for smog.

Last year, the district exceeded the one-hour, or peak ozone, standard 37 times, second worst in the country. Los Angeles was the worst with 68, and Houston finished behind the valley with 35.

Ozone, the main ingredient of smog, is a corrosive gas that triggers asthma attacks and other lung problems. Ozone levels in the valley generally have improved over the past two decades, EPA officials said, but not as quickly as required by federal law.

"The proposed schedules put the district on an aggressive track to develop and adopt the plans that will bring clean air to valley residents," said Deborah Jordan, director of the EPA's air division in the Pacific Southwest region.

The Bakersfield Californian published articles on the following subjects over the long weekend, but due to fees for archived materials, we are unable to access the complete articles:

Rubio airs ideas on pollution fight

Author: CHRISTINE BEDELL, Californian staff writere-mail: cbedell@bakersfield.com

Date: February 14, 2004

Publication: Bakersfield Californian, The (CA)

Section: Local

Words: 474

Page: b6

Michael Rubio on Friday shared anti-air pollution ideas he'd take to the Kern County Board of Supervisors if elected March 2.

They include:

- * Asking the state to audit the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to ensure it spends air cleanup funds efficiently.

The district develops and implements anti-pollution plans; the Board of Supervisors is a voting member.

- * Letting school and city officials veto dairy projects up to three miles away if they can show the...

Click here for complete article <<http://nl.newsbank.com/nojavascript.html>>

Valley air so bad it's 'extreme'

Author: MATT WEISER, Californian staff writere-mail: mweiser@bakersfield.com

Date: February 14, 2004

Publication: Bakersfield Californian, The (CA)

Section: A Section

Words: 824

Page: a

Federal officials announced Friday they will approve the valley's request to downgrade the region's air quality to "extreme," the worst category under the law.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will publish the announcement in the Federal Register in about a week. It would become final 30 days later.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District voted Dec. 18 to opt for the "extreme" category under the federal Clean Air Act. The same law...
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Letters

Monday, February 16, Modesto Bee

Decomposition releases its emissions gradually

By JAMES SWEET

John Paoluccio (Opinions, Jan. 30) asserts that allowing agricultural waste to decompose naturally produces more smog-forming emissions than burning and would lead to higher smog levels in the San Joaquin Valley.

The opposite is true. Burning agricultural waste creates more harmful emissions than allowing it to naturally decompose.

Decomposition releases carbon dioxide and methane gases slowly and gradually. Wood burning, by contrast, completely destroys the material, which not only releases more carbon dioxide than natural decomposition and significant amounts of methane, but also produces non-stable gases and particles that contribute to the valley's poor air quality. These pollutants include carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, nitrogen oxides, particulates and toxic gases listed as hazardous air pollutants.

Whether from decomposition or burning, the release of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide contributes to global warming. However, these stable gases do not contribute significantly to the formation of ozone, the primary ingredient of smog. Ozone forms primarily as the result of a photochemical reaction between nitrogen oxides and nonmethane hydrocarbons, which are released by burning woody materials but are not released by decomposition. Burning agricultural debris also releases large amounts of airborne particulates, a pollutant of serious concern during fall and winter months.

Paoluccio is correct in pointing out that ag burning is a smaller source of harmful emissions than many other sources in the valley. Other activities release considerably more total emissions during the course of a year. But an agricultural burn releases all of its emissions in a very short period, and can create a nuisance and health concern for downwind areas.

Therefore, the local air district is obligated to consider ways to reduce such emissions. In addition, the district continues to consider and adopt controls for larger sources as well as other similar and even smaller contributing sources.

Sweet is an air quality project planner for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Feb. 17, 2004, Editorial, Visalia Times-Delta

Lesson can be learned from wood burning

Arrival of bees and blossoms in this part of the San Joaquin Valley also means the end of the fog season.

Winter might have another shot for us, but it should be mostly downhill from here, with rising temperatures and more sunshine.

It also signals the end of the first season in which there were voluntary controls on fireplace burning. And did anyone notice?

As the first season of controls on fireplace burning, this one turned out pretty well. There were only two days since Nov. 1 in which the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District ordered a ban on burning wood in fireplaces and neither was for Tulare County.

Air quality this season was also relatively good, with only nine other days in the winter in which air officials said the air quality was hazardous.

There are a number of factors that contributed to this.

We're sure that one factor is that Valley residents get it: Their voluntary compliance in limiting wood-burning reduced the need for calling for a ban and helped an overall improvement in the air quality.

We find this significant because it means that behavior can change and that people can accept the premise that they can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

It's a step toward recognizing that public awareness coupled with public participation can make a difference in problems such as air quality that were formerly seen as intractable.

This is only a very small first step, to be sure, and this winter's relatively clean air quality is not all attributable to public cooperation.

The weather helped a lot.

There were fewer days of inversion layers that trap air particles close to the ground than in an average winter.

Besides a couple of cold stretches in January, the Valley was also spared severe cold for long periods.

It is likely that fewer people were burning wood because there wasn't as much need.

Even so, as the first installment of an effort by residents to correct a public health problem, this has to be considered a success that people can build on.

Valley residents this winter began to see what the result can be when we do adjust behavior in an effort to obtain better air quality.

There were fewer smoky nights and more clear days when the mountains could shine through the haze.

Valley residents next must accept that kind of effort as second nature: We live in a sensitive environment easily affected by even small changes.

While much of our air pollution problem is still created by mobile sources, including some from outside our area, the solution to the problem will not be found unless every element is addressed, including those as small as burning less wood in fireplaces.

Then people need to convert that lesson to other behaviors, including their use of appliances and small engines and their dependence on single-passenger vehicles.

This is a public education process.

Admittedly, this area is still in first grade, but at least this year on the subject of burning wood, it received good grades on its report card.

Sunday, February 15, 2004

Fresno Bee Editorial

Mute the cheering

We now have more time to clean up the Valley's air. Will it matter?

We asked for it. We got it. Now what are we going to do with it?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Friday that it will -- at the request of Valley air officials -- reclassify the San Joaquin Valley as an "extreme non-attainment" area under the federal one-hour ozone standard. Thus we join the Los Angeles basin in the country's worst-offender status for smog pollution.

The move means the Valley has more time -- until 2010 instead of 2005 -- to meet the federal air-quality standards. The move also means that, for the time being, the Valley will finesse heavy sanctions, including large penalties against businesses and the possible loss of \$2 billion in federal highway funds.

Stifle the urge to applaud. Some new sanctions will accompany this change, as many more businesses will now have to pursue federal permits for the pollution they generate. And in any case, this change represents failure, not success.

We had a deadline. We couldn't meet it. In some respects, we didn't even try to meet it. That's why we asked for more time. But getting more time to clean up the Valley's air is no guarantee that we will actually do the job. Already some are muttering confidently in private that when the 2010 deadline nears, we'll just go back and get another pass, find a way to win ourselves another delay. Anything to keep the status quo, anything to avoid the unpleasantness of taking aggressive action.

Maybe, maybe not. If the administration in Washington, D.C., should change, the EPA could become less complaisant toward the polluters -- which is all of us -- than it is under the laissez faire economic policies of the Bush team.

New vehicle standards expected in 2007 may help, but we all have to find more energy for this task. This is no game.

The EPA move means that a new plan for meeting the one-hour standard will be submitted by Oct. 1. New permit requirements would be submitted within a year of the change in classification. And the clock keeps ticking closer to 2010.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

We got our collective wish -- the federal EPA will drop the Valley into the "extreme" category for smog pollution. Now what?