

Yosemite burn plan

[Tuesday, Sept. 21, Modesto Bee](#)

As conditions get wetter and cooler, fire managers at Yosemite National Park plan to burn about 2,000 acres in the next few months. The prescribed burns are part of the park's effort to reduce fuel and maintain the health of its meadows. Planned burns include:

90 acres in the Mariposa Grove of the Giant Sequoias.

69 acres in the western end of Yosemite Valley.

354 acres of Big Creek in Wawona.

1,557 acres near Gin Flat.

Next month, fire managers may reignite an area that was burned in a lightning-ignited fire this summer.

Senator says changing air district dangerous

but folding board into one group backed by many at Fresno meet

By MARK GROSSI - THE FRESNO BEE

[Tuesday, Sept. 21, in the Modesto Bee](#)

State Sen. Dean Florez told state commissioners that he doesn't want guardians of California's air to disappear in Gov. Schwarzenegger's bureaucracy-busting campaign.

The Shafter Democrat testified Friday at a state hearing in Fresno that a proposal to fold the California Air Resources Board into a larger agency would be dangerous.

He said the possible loss of an agency filled with world-class expertise might weaken regulations, allowing more pollution and jeopardizing the public in Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley, the nation's dirtiest air basins.

"The small children and the elderly whose lungs are damaged by air pollution are, in my opinion, the customers of our state," Florez said.

He spoke before members of the California Performance Review Commission, which heard from industry advocates and environmentalists.

The 21-member commission is considering Gov. Schwarzenegger's sweeping proposal to slim down state government. Commission members will make recommendations in the coming months.

The Fresno hearing was the sixth of seven statewide on the proposal, which officials say will save \$32 billion over the next five years and make the state bureaucracy easier for residents to understand.

The Air Resources Board — supported by farming, public health and air activist groups — is among dozens of agencies protecting the state's air, land and water. The board would be lumped into a jumbo agency with many other boards and commissions.

Last public hearing on Monday

Environmentalists complain-ed this is happening too quickly. Public comment on the 2,500-page proposed overhaul ends Sept. 30, and the last public hearing is scheduled Monday in Davis.

The document, compiled this year by 275 seasoned state workers, cuts a wide swath through the government from education to public safety to environmental protection. It recommends eliminating 120 state boards and commissions. Critics are coming from many directions, but none as loud as environmentalists.

"We don't need to fix what ain't broken," said lobbyist Ann Notthoff of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

But if the Fresno hearing was any indication, the streamlining effort has its share of support from lobbies and industries. And most everyone, including environmentalists, backs the idea of making state government simpler and cheaper to run.

"We support this," said David Guy, executive director of the Northern California Water Association, representing many water users. "The temptation is to be very protective."

Farmer Gary Robinson, who grows pistachios near Coalinga, told commissioners it is time for change in the "one size fits all" approach to regulating water in the state.

He said the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board holds firmly to a single set of rules for a wide variety of agriculture. With more than 25,000 farms and hundreds of different crops, Valley agriculture needs more flexibility, he said.

"Under the rules, all farms pose an assumed threat to the water, despite the fact that most farms don't," he said.

Lawyer James McKelvey, a former city attorney for Fresno, spoke for the home-building industry. He talked about spending years winding through lines of environmental regulations and fees only to see projects land in court.

"Home builders support the California Performance Review," he said.

But environmentalists saw problems with the approach to water regulation. Linda Sheehan, regional director of The Ocean Conservancy, said the proposal would move state's enforcement toward a federal model, which does not allow as much public comment.

In California, major water decisions go through board hearings that often take many months, or even years. Federal officials see far more lawsuits because their process is not as laborious, environmentalists said.

"There is far less transparency and trust," she said. "It's far less accessible to the public."

Study: Smoky bars a bigger risk

Air pollution inside shown to be much greater than on city street at rush hour

By LINDA A. JOHNSON of The Associated Press

[Tuesday, Sept. 21, Orange County Register & Monday, Sept. 20, in San Francisco Chronicle](#)

TRENTON, N.J. – Which is more harmful to your health - a smoky bar or a city street filled with diesel truck fumes? Well, you might want to skip your next happy hour.

Smoky bars and casinos have up to 50 times more cancer-causing particles in the air than highways and city streets clogged with diesel trucks at rush hour, according to a study that also shows indoor air pollution virtually disappears once smoking is banned.

Conducted by the researcher who first showed secondhand smoke causes thousands of U.S. lung cancer deaths each year, the study found casino and bar workers are exposed to particulate pollution at far greater levels than the government allows outdoors.

"This paper will help localities pass smoking bans," predicted the author, James Repace, a biophysicist who works as a secondhand-smoke consultant after spending 30 years as a federal researcher.

Repace tested air in a casino, a pool hall and six taverns in Delaware in November 2002 and in January 2003, two months after the state's strict indoor smoking ban.

His detectors measured two substances blamed for tobacco-related cancers: a group of chemicals called particulate polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PPAHs, and respirable particles - airborne soot small enough to penetrate the lungs.

"They are the most dangerous" substances in secondhand smoke, said Repace, a visiting assistant clinical professor at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston.

Repace said his research also showed that ventilation systems - sometimes touted by tavern, restaurant and casino groups as an alternative to smoking bans - cannot exchange air fast enough to keep up with the smoke.

The study, published in the September issue of the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, was partly funded by the nation's largest philanthropic organization devoted to health care, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation of Plainsboro, N.J.

Repace found an average level of respirable particles of 231 micrograms, or millionths of a gram, per cubic meter of air in the eight nightspots in Delaware.

That is 15 times the 15-microgram Environmental Protection Agency limit for outdoor air and 49 times the rush-hour average on Interstate 95 in Wilmington. It even tops the 199-microgram rush-hour level at Baltimore Harbor Tunnel tollbooths.

Fresno is 11th worst for asthma

Southern California areas rated worst by environmental group.

By Mark Grossi

[The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2004](#)

Environmentalists will release today a national who's-who of dirty-air cities, leaving Fresno out of the top 10.

The city of 456,000 is the major urban center in the San Joaquin Valley, which ranks alongside Los Angeles and Houston as the country's worst places in terms of smog violations. Fresno usually ranks in the top five on bad-air lists, which pleases health advocates who call attention to the region's air problems.

But among communities where asthmatic children are exposed to unhealthy air, New York City, Philadelphia and others ranked worse than Valley cities in a report called "Dangerous Days of Summer" by Environmental Defense, a national nonprofit group.

Smog or ozone can trigger asthma attacks. The corrosive gas is known to cause tiny scarring in the lungs. The new report shows millions of children nationally breathe air tainted with unhealthy levels of smog, despite a decade of progress in pollution cleanup.

Los Angeles and Riverside-San Bernardino in Southern California are the two worst places, the report said. The rankings give a high priority to populous cities as well as childhood asthma cases. Fresno was 11th. "We know Fresno County has a 16% rate of childhood asthma," said Dr. John Balbus, one of the authors. "We used a national average of 8.3% to estimate the number of asthmatic children in each city. We probably underestimated Fresno by half, but we used the national average for all cities."

Cities were ranked by multiplying the number of asthmatic children and number of bad-air days, said Balbus. The estimates show large cities have many more asthmatic children, so they ranked worse than Fresno.

That's not a full portrayal of the Valley, said Josette Merced Bello, president of the American Lung Association of Central California. She said she commends Environmental Defense for the report, but the Valley's air problem must not be understated.

"Being ranked better than other metro areas for air quality exposure could mislead elected officials and the public here into believing that our situation is not critical," she said. "Not only is that incorrect, but it's the kind of thinking that could slow the momentum we are building in cleaning up our region's air."

Balbus explained the point of the report was to make a national statement that the job on air cleanup is far from finished.

The report suggests policy-makers and industry leaders reduce pollution by 80%. Authors call for a faster cleanup of diesel engines and a national transportation policy to limit traffic congestion, increase travel options and encourage cleaner vehicles.

"People are getting sick and dying," said Balbus. "We should focus immediately on feasible and cost-effective solutions."

WORST PLACES FOR ASTHMATIC CHILDREN

1. Los Angeles
2. Riverside-San Bernardino
3. New York City
4. Philadelphia
5. Houston
6. Washington, D.C.
7. Chicago
8. Baltimore
9. Atlanta
10. Detroit
11. Fresno

Source: *"Dangerous Days of Summer," Environmental Defense*

Dairy may face fines in dumping

Inspectors find pipe channeling wastewater from farm into sensitive ecological preserve

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer
[Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2004](#)

Wastewater illegally dumped on the Buttonwillow Ecological Reserve last month appears to have been routed there intentionally from a nearby dairy, according to state regulators.

"It is believed to come from the Goyenette Dairy," said Lonnie Wass of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, one of the agencies investigating the case.

Albert Goyenette, who operates two dairies in Kern County, was previously fined by federal regulators for a dairy wastewater violation in Chino, where the dairy industry has a heavy presence.

Goyenette could not be reached for comment Monday.

In early August, a state Fish and Game Department inspector discovered about 16 acres of the Buttonwillow preserve under 3 to 4 feet of water. The inspector, John Battistoni, said he found an unauthorized drainpipe joined to a Caltrans culvert nearby.

The pipe allowed excess water on crop land south of 7th Standard Road to run under 7th Standard, via the Caltrans drain, onto the preserve.

The 21/2-square-mile nature preserve is home to threatened and endangered plants and animals.

Samples of the water are being tested for excess salts and nutrients, which can "burn" plants.

Battistoni found no dead animals at the preserve as a result of the flooding, which has now dried up. Some plants may have died, but he won't know for certain until spring blooms come due.

The water board is investigating the case in cooperation with the Fish and Game service. A violation notice is currently being prepared, said Wass, who would not comment on what penalties are being considered.

"Certainly there has been a violation," he said.

Goyenette runs a dairy south of the nature preserve, near the northwest intersection of Sullivan and Brandt roads. The Brandt operation has some 5,500 cows, according to county planners.

The dairyman has a second facility west of McFarland.

Dairymen are allowed to apply liquid dairy waste, thinned with fresh water, to the crops they grow for their cows' food.

That wastewater, however, is regulated. Farmers can only apply what plants can use. The wastewater contains nitrates, salts and other substances. Operators can be cited when they don't apply the liquid waste according to the rules.

Goyenette's Brandt Road dairy received a previous violation from the regional water board in September 2001, according to county planners, for applying too much water to crops.

In May 2000, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fined Goyenette \$9,000. In the Chino incident, federal regulators said Goyenette used a man-made ditch to route dairy waste to a flood control basin.

Schools will get clean-fuel buses

By Cheri Carlson

[Tuesday, Sept. 21, Merced Sun-Star](#)

They're growing old, breaking down and filling the air with nasty fumes.

But not for long.

School districts around town are planning to retire their aging fleet of polluters with new, more environmentally friendly buses.

The purchases would be made possible with grant money, which would cover the majority of the costs, from the California Energy Commission.

About \$4.6 million -- enough for about 36 buses -- is available for California schools to buy buses this year. And local educators are hoping hundreds of thousands of dollars will come their way.

The money comes from Proposition 40 funds, which voters supported to help conserve natural resources and improve state and local parks.

For districts like the Merced Union High School District, which is still using buses made before 1977, the district would be responsible for 10 percent, or \$10,000, toward the new vehicles.

Districts like the Merced City School District, which has buses made between 1977 and 1986, would be required to pay 25 percent of the cost, or \$25,000.

In the Merced Union High School District, three buses are set to be replaced with ones that use cleanerburning fuels. The buses, which cost nearly \$115,000 apiece, use low-sulfur diesel fuel. The district would be required to pay about \$30,000 for the new vehicles, and the state would contribute about \$315,000.

"We have several pre-1977 buses," said Assistant Superintendent Terry Silva. "They are unreliable ... and great polluters."

Administrators have been on the lookout for grant money that would help them replace the fleet, and hope to qualify for the Proposition 40 funding.

The Merced City School District has not specified the number of buses it's seeking to replace.

But, administrators said, the district hopes to use the grant money to buy the lower-emission buses as it replaces some of its older models.

In Merced and the rest of the Central Valley, finding ways to reduce pollutants is a must, said District Superintendent Alan Rasmussen.

The deadline for the grant applications is Sept. 30, and award announcements are expected by early October.

Both the local school districts are asking board members to adopt resolutions in favor of seeking grants at meetings this week.

State's First Major Ethanol Plant Under Construction In Goshen

Tuesday, Sept. 21, Valley Voice

Goshen - The state's first major ethanol fuel production plant is underway in Goshen - a town that may carry a biblical name, but is better known locally for its grinding poverty. In the Bible it may be remembered as the land of milk and honey. It may well be what Goshen, California aspires to be as the \$10 million renewable fuel refinery has begun construction in recent days.

"We're finally moving dirt," says co-owner of the plant, Kevin Kruse who owns the big Western Milling plant astride Highway 99. The foundation for four large fermentation tanks are being laid this week, only days after final approval for the project was received by the company from the Tulare County Planning Commission.

The project, Phoenix Bioindustries, is the first of likely three ethanol fuel plants to be built in Tulare County. The co-owner is Rick Eastman.

The plant is expected to be in operation next spring making 25 million gallons annually of fuel that will be blended in gasoline for motor fuel.

It will be the first major in-state supply for fuel that is blended in all gasoline in California at 6% with gasoline. The new plant will add 18 jobs at Western Milling in Goshen that already employs about 140, says Kruse.

Western Milling is in the feed business and the new ethanol plant will produce 300,000 tons of wet distillers grain - highly prized in the dairy feed business.

The interest in producing ethanol in the central valley comes in part not just because the state needs so much of the fuel but also a byproduct of the process makes a grain for cattle feed. Tulare and Kings counties alone have over 1 million head of cattle as potential customers for the feed. "It amounts to a wonderful symmetry between ethanol and the dairy industry here," says Rick Eastman.

To help fund the plant, the County of Tulare supported an industrial revenue bond application for the company that offers a lower interest rate than conventional financing. The bonds were issued by the California Statewide Communities Development Authority.

To get their final approval for the project, Kruse and Eastman had to work out emission issues with the air board, other environmental issues with the Center For Race, Poverty and the Environment, building issues with various trade unions and water and noise issues with neighbors.

The plant sits on about 4 and ½ acres just north of the big Western Milling silos along 99 and the Union Pacific railroad. The site is typical in layout of ethanol plants who require a large off loading capability for rail cars since the fuel is made from corn brought in by train.

While 25 million gallons sounds like a lot, the state's motorists need closer to 900 million gallons a year to blend with gasoline to provide enough fuel for a year. Ethanol is made from renewable sources - some of which may be grown in California so they won't have to be imported from the Midwest in the future.

For Goshen the new industry will mean economic development. The plant is next door to Western Meat Packing who still hopes to build a state-of-the-art slaughter house adding another 200 jobs. The project is tied up in court but the developer, says he is "ready to go."

Helping to handle the expected truck traffic from those projects is the new Betty Drive connection to the Visalia industrial park that county redevelopment and the City of Visalia have built.

A second Tulare County ethanol project is the 42 million gallon a year CalGren project near Pixley that is now fully permitted to move ahead as well. "We're in preliminary negotiations for our financing and expect we will be able to break ground before the end of the year," says CalGren principal Matt Schmidt. Construction time on the plant will be 12 to 15 months, he says.

Study: Smog in seven California areas among worst for children

[S.F. Chronicle, Monday, September 20, 2004](#)

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- Seven California metropolitan areas rank among the worst in the nation where air pollution affects children, according to a study by a national nonprofit environmental group.

The report, which will be released Tuesday, shows that children who live in those areas are more susceptible to air pollutants that trigger asthma than other kids.

"We've known for a while that California's summer air quality is among the worst in the country," said Kathryn Phillips, California asthma and air quality project manager for Environmental Defense. "Now we know that cleaning up the air is a matter of life and death for a lot of kids in this state."

Los Angeles was ranked first in the report, followed by the Riverside-San Bernardino region. Other California cities listed were: Fresno (11), Sacramento (12), Bakersfield (13), Ventura (40) and San Diego (50).

Entitled "Dangerous Days of Summer," the study looks at the number of days with high air quality index values and the number of children affected. Estimates were made for the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day between 2001 and 2003.

The study found that children were risking their health if they played outside during the smoggiest days of the summer.

For children with asthma, which accounts for more than 16 percent of the kids in Fresno County, and 13 percent of the kids in San Bernardino County, significant portions of the summer can be dangerous for breathing and playing outdoors, the report showed.

The national average for children with asthma is about 8 percent.

In Los Angeles, half the days are dangerous for children with asthma during a typical summer; in Riverside-San Bernardino, 70 percent are dangerous.

The report follows the release of another study by the University of Southern California that shows teens who grow up in heavy air pollution have reduced lung capacity, putting them at risk for illness and premature death as adults.

Environmental Defense said the asthma risk for children can be reduced if emission standards for heavy-duty diesel engines are enforced and funding is put toward programs that provide incentives to retrofit vehicles with emission control devices.

"Here in California we've put a lot of effort in cleaning up the air but there is more that needs to be done," Phillips said.

Ban drive-throughs to help clean Fresno's polluted air

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2004:](#)

I hope to see a change in the number of drive-throughs in Fresno. I suffer from asthma, as do a lot of people living in Fresno, and with the air quality getting worse every day it has had a huge impact on our health.

Everywhere you look there is some sort of drive-through, from fast-food chains to coffee shops, and now dry cleaning. I understand that in this overwhelmingly busy world and extreme temperatures, drive-throughs make it easy to pick up a quick bite or other necessities, but is it all worth reducing the quality of the air we breathe?

Just imagine how unhealthy it is to sit behind a convoy of running motors breathing in the huge amounts of pollutants. Not only is your health at risk, but your family is breathing in these toxic fumes as well.

We have enough health problems from the many fast-food chains opening everywhere in Fresno causing an abundance of overweight people. We don't need to be battle breathe clean air.

I lived in San Luis Obispo for seven years, where a law banning drive-throughs other than banks was adopted. The air is clean and it is a beautiful place to live. I know we can't eliminate all drive-throughs, but I believe we can make some changes. Is the amount of time it takes to get out of the car really that much of a problem compared with the number of adults and children suffering from asthma and other breathing problems? Something needs to change.

Sarah Martinez

Fresno

Put dairies in hills

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2004](#)

Southern California county supervisors are thanking Kern for taking their unpopular dairies away from them. In cities like Chino, 3,000 houses can be built on 500 acres of dairy land generating \$18 million in property taxes.

However, there is a simple solution for Kern County! For thousands of years, cows have grazed in the mountains of Europe for many good reasons. Therefore, locate our dairies in the Kern mountains high above Highway 14, close to the windfarms already there.

When the wind is not blowing, millions of dollars of power transformers sit idle, so digesters will convert the manure into electricity at that time. Additionally, because wind power costs only 5 cents per kilowatt, dairies can make their milk, cheese and ice cream at a super low cost.

Excess manure will be used for fertilizer to grow trees and crops for cattle feed. Low cost energy, pumps clean, unpolluted well water and powers thermal cold storage warehouses.

Kern County reduces taxes by leasing county land to the dairy farmers just like the Bureau of Land Management leases to the windfarmers. L.A. County has leased the Marina Del Rey for 99 years to developers who have now invested a billion dollars on taxpayer-owned land. Eons ago smart supervisors created the Los Angeles DWP. Angelenos were thereby not held hostage when Texas power cartels overcharged us by \$13 billion.

While the Tehachapi wind farms have led the world producing billions of kWh in power, our supervisors have snoozed and consequently not one Kern business has benefitted from this low cost resource.

I will be glad to present the supervisors with an expanded "agripark" plan to solve the dairy location crisis.

-- MICHAEL G. MacKENZIE, Tehachapi