

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Valley air director plans retirement

Crow leaves track record of innovation

(Fresno, CA) – After 14 years of leading the largest air district in the nation, Air Pollution Control Officer and Executive Director David L. Crow has announced his impending retirement.

Crow, 57, plans to leave his position at the head of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in February. The District expects to begin the recruitment process for his successor in January.

“The most rewarding thing about the past 14 years here has been the positive way in which Valley residents, business and industry have interacted with the District’s governing board in addressing air-quality issues,” Crow said. “The public has supported not only the District’s role in improving air quality, but I think we’ve been a catalyst for a good discussion of quality-of-life issues such as land use and transportation.

“All of that is a tribute to the Governing Board’s common-sense, open, democratic approach to listening to all interests in the Valley.”

Since Crow assumed leadership of the District, which covers the nation’s largest air basin of 25,000 square miles and eight counties, he has overseen the passage of more than 500 rules or rule amendments that have cut stationary source emissions by half and have led the nation in pioneering control standards on previously unregulated emission sources.

For example, the District crafted the landmark Check Before You Burn winter residential wood-burning restriction program, which entered its third season this week and is being eyed by other air districts in the state. Other innovative programs include a system to manage smoke emissions from agricultural burning, Conservation Management Practices for farms and alternate compliance methods for rules that otherwise would be cost-prohibitive.

During Crow’s tenure, the District has become active in regional air-quality consortiums, including Valley Clean Air Now and Operation Clean Air.

“No one has articulated the challenge of, and the solution to, our Valley’s air-pollution problems better than Dave Crow,” said Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, an Operation Clean Air representative.

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"Dave understands the unique nature of the Valley and its issues, and has executed the board's directives in the spirit we intended," said Kern County Supervisor Barbara Patrick, who also is a member of the governing bodies of the Valley Air District and the California Air Resources Board. "He embodies the spirit of cooperation that the Air District board has worked to communicate to the District's constituents."

"Dave's done a good job and I'm sorry to see him go," said Merced County Supervisor Mike Nelson, also a District Governing Board member.

Crow came to the District as a seasoned public servant, after serving as acting city manager for Foster City in the Bay Area; budget director and director of policy development for Fresno County; and working for the Council of Governments in Sacramento. He earned a B.S. in Public Administration at California State University, Fullerton, where he pursued graduate studies.

He accepted the mission to lead the District when the challenge of improving the Valley's air was indeed daunting. Regularly ranked among the worst nationwide in summertime smog and wintertime particulate pollution, the Valley air basin is now poised on the brink of achieving attainment for the federal health standard for particulate pollution of 10 microns and smaller (PM10), a feat that required the regulation of residential wood burning. The air basin has also shown progress in reducing ozone exceedances.

"The District has fulfilled every stationary-source obligation over the years," Crow said. "That's no small task, given the scale and complexity of the Valley and sources." He noted that the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Air Resources Board have both given the District high marks for its progress.

"The San Joaquin Valley District has matured into a fully professional, effective and responsive air pollution control district under Dave Crow's tenure. His leadership has been tremendous and we're going to miss him a great deal," said Catherine Witherspoon, executive officer of the state Air Resources Board.

But also on the District's radar is the continuing development of criteria for regulating emissions from the Valley's multibillion-dollar agriculture industry, as required by landmark state legislation, and addressing emissions as a consequence of robust Valley growth – both high-profile arenas rich with potential controversy.

However, representatives of regulated industries unanimously laud Crow's ability to derive consensus from seemingly irreconcilable interests.

"He certainly promoted an environment for his staff to work both toward improving air quality and also recognizing the needs of the regulated community," said Ed Yates, president and CEO of the California League of Food Processors, whose membership accounts for 95 percent of the state's fruit and vegetable processing industry and 60 percent of total Valley industry. "We clashed but we've always had a good environment to air our concerns. The esprit de corps of the District has always been at a high level."

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"Dave brought agriculture to the table because he allowed us to present our side of the discussion. Rather than saying, 'This is what you'll do,' it was 'What can ag do?'" said Manuel Cunha, a Valley farmer and president of the influential Nisei Farmers League. "I'm very hopeful that we're going to be in PM10 attainment this year, largely because of what Dave Crow was able to accomplish: 6,400 farmers and 3.4 million acres of the most productive farmland in the world developing air-quality conservation management plans in just six months. No other air district in the country could do that."

"We've had our arguments but he always acknowledged our point of view. And he respected us," Cunha added

"Despite all the different groups Dave's dealt with, he's remained steadfast in his thought process, which is to clean up the air. And the air is getting cleaner, so I'd say he's been successful at that," said Les Clark, a member of the Valley's Citizens Advisory Group of Industries and the District's Citizens Advisory Committee.

"He has demonstrated his commitment to issues like smart growth and regional planning, and has personally taught me a lot about air pollution policy in the Valley," said Carolina Simunovic, environmental health director for Fresno Metro Ministry. Simunovic is also on the District's Citizens Advisory Committee. "He's made significant gains, including a dramatic increase in community awareness."

Seyed Sadredin, the District's Deputy Air Pollution Control Officer, also noted Crow's ability to cultivate a culture of facilitating cooperation, both within and outside the District.

"Over the years, Dave has demonstrated an exceptional ability in bring out the best in everyone and in marshaling people of diverse interests to work together toward the common good," he said. "His tremendous legacy leaves the District well-positioned to take on the unprecedented challenges that lay ahead with great vigor and efficiency."

As for Crow, leaving the District in no way means he's retiring from the ongoing dialogue about how to improve the experience of Valley living.

"I will definitely have a continuing interest in the lives and livelihood of the people in the Valley," he said. "And I absolutely plan to slow down and spend more time with my wife, Vicki, and my sons, Ryan and Matthew."

"Air-quality champions never retire – they just take a little time to take a breath," Autry observed.

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