

Cows emit more organic gas than cars, studies say

Dairy industry has argued for new research on the amount.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Saturday, May 7, 2005

Cows remain a bigger air pollution source than cars for one kind of smog-making gas in the San Joaquin Valley, according to two of three studies on new air quality research.

An advisory group Friday presented the three analyses as recommended guidelines to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which must decide by Aug. 1 how much pollution comes from the \$4 billion dairy industry.

Up to 700 dairies would have to obtain air-operating permits as major pollution sources if the district goes along with the highest recommendation of reactive organic gas emissions per cow. The recommendation is about three times larger than the current estimate.

The recommendations disappointed industry officials and encouraged environmentalists. But Dave Warner, the district's director of permit services, said the discussion is far from over.

"More work needs to be done," Warner said. "The district will go through an analysis of this same data, come out with a proposal and discuss it at a public meeting before publishing anything." Using the current estimate, state figures have shown for years that cows produce more smog-making reactive organic gas than cars. Industry officials have disputed the figures, saying they are based on 1938 research and are in need of updating.

Air officials last year intended to regulate large dairies in accordance with a 2003 law, determining each dairy's pollution by using the old estimate. But the industry sued to stop the effort until new research could be finished.

A settlement then created the current advisory group composed of academic, industry, health, air district and activist representatives. The group was supposed to review new research and recommend a new estimate to the local air district.

Instead of recommending a lower estimate, as industry had hoped, the group Friday delivered three estimates with a broad range. Only one was lower than the current estimate.

Dairy officials complained politics had entered the advisory process.

"Some members ignored the California science in favor of science in other countries that was done under different conditions for entirely different purposes," said Michael Boccadoro, executive director of the dairy advocacy group Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship.

Environmentalists said the 3.5 million people living in one of the country's most polluted air basins would benefit most if the air district uses one of the two higher recommended estimates.

"We've believed all along that livestock-related emissions are a major part of the Valley's problem," said lawyer Brent Newell, a longtime dairy critic who works for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. "There's a need to take regulatory action quickly."

Based on the old estimate, dairies produce more than 38 tons of reactive organic gases each day — almost a ton more per day than the second-highest source, light- and medium-duty trucks. The dairy contribution is currently almost 10% of all such gases emitted in the Valley.

The gases combine with oxides of nitrogen from cars and other sources and bake into ozone, the corrosive main ingredient in summertime smog.

The current dairy figure is based on an estimate of 12.8 pounds of gases from each cow annually. The advisory group's lowest recommended revise is 5.6 pounds, the number dairy representatives believe is correct. It would drop dairies to seventh on the list of the top 25 sources.

The middleground figure from the advisory group is 13.3 pounds, which is about a half pound more than the current estimate.

The highest figure, characterized as the "environmental recommendation," is 38.2 pounds. At that rate, dairies would account for nearly a quarter of these gases in the Valley — more than twice the pollution of light- and medium-duty trucks.

Report can't clear air on dairy pollution

SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, May 7, 2005

Dairies pollute the air. That much is certain. How much they pollute isn't as clear, according to a group advising the San Joaquin Valley air district on cow emissions.

Dairy cows could be the valley's seventh-largest polluter of smog-forming compounds, based on the group's report released Friday.

They could also be twice as bad for the air as all light-to-medium-duty cars and trucks that drive in the valley, according to the same report.

Unable to compromise, a committee of industry representatives, health experts, environmentalists and regulators issued a range of numbers, saying dairies produce as little as 5.6 pounds of smog-forming chemicals per cow per year, to as many as 38.2 pounds per cow per year.

Until now, regulators have held that one cow produces 12.8 pounds of pollution per year, based on studies done in 1938.

That's not too far from the group's compromise number: 13.3 pounds per cow per year.

Eleven members of the group unanimously approved the report, mostly because it offers something for everyone.

"I was hoping ... we could get to a single recommendation," said Dave Warner, the air district's director of permit services. "I absolutely think, based on the data we saw, that the low number is too low and the high number is too high."

It was a coup that the dairy industry acknowledged cows pollute at all, something it has never formally done, he said.

Much is still unknown about dairy cows and air pollution, and the committee disagreed on how to interpret the data.

"Unfortunately, this process allowed any view to be included in the report, whether or not it was supported by the research," said Michael Boccadoro, executive director of dairy-industry group Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, in a prepared statement.

"Estimating dairy emissions should not be about political compromise -- it must be based on sound science."

Environmentalists felt equally disenchanted.

"It really feels like whenever sound science is raised, it means whatever sounds good to industry," said Diane Bailey, an environmental engineer with the Natural Resources Defense Council, who sat on the committee.

"That's not scientific. There was really a feeling of bullying (in the group). It definitely has not been pleasant."

The San Joaquin Valley air district must come up with a final number for dairy cow emissions by Aug. 1, according to last year's lawsuit settlement between the dairy industry and the air district.

That number will determine which dairies need permits and the pollution-cutting measures they will have to take.

Dairy cows pass gas, but how much?

By TIM MORAN

Modesto Bee, also published in the Merced Sun-Star
Saturday, May 7, 2005

Dairy cows either: a) pollute the air a lot less than previously thought, b) a lot more than previously thought, or c) about the same as was thought.

The answer is all of the above, according to a committee charged with figuring out what the San Joaquin Valley's dairy cows contribute to smog.

Though members of the committee failed to reach a consensus in Friday's report, the ultimate decision has multimillion-dollar implications for the dairy industry - which produces the region's No. 1 agricultural commodity.

Milk generates \$1.24 billion in farm revenues in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties.

At issue are the volatile organic compounds - which are smog-inducing chemicals - created by dairies.

The committee, an advisory group to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, is called the Dairy Permitting Advisory Group. It is made up of dairy industry representatives, environmentalists, community groups and air district officials.

Friday's report is a preliminary step in setting up a permit process for dairies, which were previously exempt from air pollution permits. Once the new system is in place and the pollution level is determined, the air district can decide what mitigation measures dairies will have to take to minimize pollution.

Report lists three possibilities

The committee's report lists three possibilities and leaves the final determination to David Crow, the air district's air pollution control officer. He has until Aug. 1 to decide which option to endorse.

The decision could have big ramifications for the dairy industry, according to Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Modesto-based Western United Dairymen.

There are more than 2 million dairy cows in the valley. Particles in the waste they generate, in addition to the gas they expel, become part of the valley's air - among the worst in the nation.

Quantifying cows' effect on the air, by measuring the gas, is where the reports' authors disagree.

If the lowest of the three figures (5.6 pounds per year per cow) is endorsed by the air board, Marsh said, dairies might only have to change some management controls, such as cows' diet, the frequency of flushing waste material out of the buildings or further separation of solids in the waste.

But if the highest figure (38.2 pounds per cow per year) is chosen, dairies could be forced to spend millions of dollars on technology such as methane digesters, according to Marsh.

The middle figure (13.3 pounds) is close to the disputed number (12.8 pounds) that has been used since a 1938 study. Even the middle number makes dairies the No. 1 source of volatile organic compounds in the valley, ahead of trucks and cars.

"I think the three different perspectives are three equally valid ways of looking at the available data," said committee member Dave Warner, director of permits for the air district. "It's no surprise to me that a given set of data can be interpreted a number of ways."

The committee looked at four California studies, as well as other studies and factors that might contribute to dairy emissions:

The lowest number is based on the California studies and is favored by the dairy industry.

The middle number adds factors that the air district staff felt were missed in the California studies.

The highest number, favored by environmentalists, includes data that was acquired from studies outside the state.

Marsh said in a statement that he was "disappointed and concerned that politics appears to have entered into what was supposed to be a science-based process."

Public workshops are coming

Marsh said the highest number is "way out there, not related at all to scientific data." Data from studies done in other countries under different circumstances were used, he said.

But committee member Diane Bailey of the Natural Resources Defense Council said the California studies didn't cover some pollutants related to volatile organic compounds.

"It's not the fault of the researchers, but there are some huge blanks and we attempted to fill them up," she said.

That was accomplished by using data from studies done outside of California and translating the results to the situation here, Bailey said. "I feel it is based on the best available science."

Bailey added that there is a cost to choosing a number too low.

"The residents of the valley are subsidizing the (dairy) industry with their health," she said. "There is a health care dollar cost."

Warner said public workshops will be held before Crow makes his recommendation Aug. 1.

Asthma focus of Fresno summit

N.Y. expert calls the condition a growing national epidemic.

By Jim Steinberg / The Fresno Bee

Saturday, May 7, 2005

Dr. Benjamin Ortiz on Friday called for better coordination among families, medical providers and schools to combat what he called a growing national asthma epidemic.

Ortiz, assistant medical director of the Harlem Children's Zone Asthma Initiative in New York, spoke both as a pediatrician who treats children suffering from asthma and as the father of an asthmatic 5-year-old.

He said the medical threats of the condition overlap with living conditions, including dust, mold, indoor cigarette smoking and vermin, and that the conditions exist not only in Harlem, but also in affluent neighborhoods.

Ortiz delivered the keynote address during the Childhood Asthma Leadership Summit in Fresno at the LaRyan Event Center for the Central California Children's Institute of California State University, Fresno.

Detection and early treatment are key, said Ortiz, stressing an aggressive philosophy that the Harlem initiative pursues with families: "They don't come to us. We go to them. We follow them every three to four months, sooner if there is a crisis." He noted the fear he sees among parents. "The No. 1 question I'm asked is, 'Is my child going to die from asthma?'"

Fatal cases are rare, Ortiz said, but they do occur.

Among those listening was nursing professor Christine Ortiz of Fresno State. She said the degree of communication that Benjamin Ortiz called for does not exist in the San Joaquin Valley.

"We don't have that connection," said the community health nurse. "We are nowhere near that. And the other piece is money."

The link between asthma and childhood obesity was traced by Derek Shendell, of the California State Coordinating Office for the Community Action to Fight Asthma Initiative. He emphasized that a wealth of information is available to the public via the Internet and recommended the CAFA

Web site at www.calasthma.org <<http://www.calasthma.org>> as a good place for parents and health providers to begin.

Shendell repeated an unpleasant fact that is a basic fact of Valley life: "Valley air quality is among the worst in the country."

Parent Laura Whitehouse and her daughter Emilie added the personal touch to the conference.

Laura Whitehouse remembered one call from a school, telling her she had 10 minutes to get there before officials called an ambulance.

"All three of my children have asthma," Whitehouse said, "and they are all different."

Asthma is also expensive. Whitehouse said she and her husband spend between \$200 and \$600 per month "out of pocket" on asthma treatment, "and those are normal months."

"The hardest part is explaining to these kids that they are going to be on medications the rest of their lives," Whitehouse said. "And they're tired of it."

Refueling profits

Company turns used cooking oil into biodiesel at its plant

By ERIN WALDNER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, May 7, 2005

For one local company, used cooking oil might be fuel for higher profits.

American Biofuels LLC is using oils collected from 40 restaurants and other businesses to make biodiesel fuel at its Stockdale Highway plant.

The plant, built in 2003, is designed to process refined soybean oil and used cooking oils. The end product, biodiesel, is an alternative fuel that's gentle on the environment.

William ("Stretch") Fowler, director of American Biofuels, said the company decided to increase its use of waste cooking oils because soybean oil has become so expensive.

He said he pays \$2.60 per gallon of soybean oil, compared to 70 cents per gallon of cooking oil.

"This will bring our costs down substantially," Fowler said.

The middleman in this operation is Norm Ramspeck, president of Safe Environmental Alternatives in Bakersfield. A former truck driver, Ramspeck collects the used cooking oils and delivers the stuff to the biodiesel plant.

He parked his truck to the rear of Benji's French Basque Restaurant Thursday morning. Two barrels containing leftover cooking oils were waiting for him.

He proceeded to pump the oil into big containers in the back of his truck.

From Benji's, he moved on to Cactus Valley Mexican Restaurant just down the road, where two more barrels of cooking oil were waiting for him.

When pieces of food are mixed in with the oil Ramspeck retrieves, he has to scoop the food out so it doesn't clog his pump.

"That's where I really earn my money," he joked.

Ramspeck doesn't charge anything to pick up the oil. He also supplies the barrels free of charge. His paycheck comes from American Biofuels.

"I get paid 70 cents a gallon," he said.

He collects about 2,500 gallons of oil every two weeks.

Fowler said historically, used cooking oil collected from restaurants and food processors are rendered into a high-protein yellow grease that's added to animal feed.

Two big players in this industry are Baker Commodities Inc. in Los Angeles and Darling International Inc. in Irving, Texas. Darling has a processing plant in Fresno and serves businesses in Kern County, according to the company's Web site.

Dennis Luckey, executive vice president at Baker Commodities, said his company competes with Safe Environmental Alternative in the Bakersfield area for the collection of used restaurant grease. He said presently, Baker's grease goes into animal feeds but that the company is equipped to compete in biodiesel and is contemplating a venture in that arena.

Ramspeck said he hopes to expand his operation to Fresno within a month, at which point he said he will need to take on his first employee. Ultimately, he wants to collect cooking oils from businesses across the state.

He began working with American Biodiesel about four months ago.

He knew Joseph LaStella, president of Green Star Productions Inc., which has a 30 percent interest in American Biofuels. When LaStella asked Ramspeck if he was interested in collecting waste cooking oils that would be used to make biodiesel, "I thought about it for a long time and decided it's a dirty job but someone has to do it," Ramspeck said.

He received about \$15,000 in seed money from American Biofuels, according to LaStella.

LaStella initially thought maybe 20 percent of the businesses they contacted would be interested in participating. Turned out, it was more like 90 percent, he said.

San Joaquin Community Hospital was the first to get on board. Other businesses, particularly restaurants, followed suit.

"Now I have restaurants calling me," Ramspeck said.

Lisa Liu, owner and manager of Chalet Basque, said she got involved because she wanted to do something good for the environment and she believes in supporting local businesses.

Air District accepting grant applications

Last Updated: May 7, 2005, 09:50:34 AM PDT

MERCED

The Valley Air District is taking applications for grants for emission reducing activities, such as bike paths and commuter vanpools, under its REMOVE II incentive program.

The REMOVE II Program provides incentives for specific projects that will reduce vehicle emissions within the district, and will distribute more \$4 million in the coming months to people, organizations and businesses trying to improve the quality of Valley air.

Funds will be granted on a first-come, first served basis for activities.

People can get applications by calling (559) 230-5850; or at the Air District's Web site, www.valleyair.org. <<http://www.valleyair.org>>

The San Joaquin Valley air basin is classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as "serious non-attainment" for the national eight-hour ozone standard, and must reduce ozone pollution within the District's eight counties: Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern.

Air quality coalition to hold meeting

The Merced Sun-Star

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SACRAMENTO

On behalf of people struggling with asthma and other respiratory problems in the Central Valley, area residents will join health, environmental and other leaders -- members of the Central Valley

Air Quality coalition -- in Sacramento on Monday to meet with legislators and talk about solutions to the Valley's air issues.

Monday is the day the Senate Appropriations Committee votes on two bills affecting air quality: Senate Bill 999, which would reform the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District; and Senate Bill 497, designed to clean up diesel construction equipment.

People who want to participate will travel together on buses,

Those who want to attend can meet at 7:30 a.m. Monday at the Smart and Final parking lot on 15th Street. Buses will leave Sacramento to come back to Merced about 4 p.m.

CVAQ is a coalition of 100 people representing 44 community, medical, public health and environmental groups in the Central Valley, San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento.

For more information, call Carolina Simunovic at (559) 349-3632; Teresa Deanda at (661) 304-4080; Erin Rogers at (510) 697-1333; or Erica Lepping at (310) 594-6880.

Tracy: Slow is still the way to go

The Record

By Celeste Garamendi

Published Sunday, May 8, 2005

Some people think of Tracy as being flat, nondescript and sprawling.

Those who live in Tracy see more -- including beautiful mountain vistas to the west.

Some see Tracy as still being in the center of the growth dispute.

Tracy residents already have determined the city has value beyond the next subdivision. We want to protect the quality of our community as we grow.

The challenge for City Council members is to change public policy to catch up with residents.

In the late 1990s, residents began to see negative impacts from a 1993 general plan dominated by residential sprawl -- no jobs, gridlocked traffic, overcrowded schools, no open-space preservation, decreasing city services, degradation of downtown, increasing air pollution and no affordable housing. These problems got worse as city planners moved full-speed-ahead on the growth plan.

Pleas by residents to slow down growth and update the general plan were ignored.

In 2000, residents passed Measure A. The council, however, delayed implementation.

In November 2004, developers AKT/Tracy Hills and Surland Homes spent \$2 million to try and gut Measure A. Their Nov. 2 ballot initiatives were defeated soundly by voters.

Since 2003, city officials have been working to update the general plan with significant resident input. They haven't supported any substantive change from the current plan that calls for Tracy to grow to nearly 165,000 residents by 2015.

Seven years after Tracy's growth disputes started, the council old guard still is still resisting changes to the general plan that would help address its problems.

With the exception of Irene Sundberg, the council members haven't supported requirements for contiguous, concentric growth. They haven't supported establishing an open-space and separator program. They haven't supported mandatory affordable housing.

These are a few changes needed that have been successfully implemented in other cities.

Most council members stand firmly in yesterday and don't provide leadership for tomorrow.

The challenge is to accept a new vision and implement well-established smart-growth principles through the general plan.

Tracy residents now are sophisticated veterans of growth disputes. They won't be fooled by the usual developer hype.

Council members need to recognize this and change their policies to reflect the new reality in Tracy, or they'll be left behind as residents move forward.

With Measure A set to go into effect, and the general plan revision entering its final stages, members of the City Council have an opportunity to lead not only Tracy, but those in other San Joaquin County cities facing similar issues.

We hope they'll meet the challenge.

Garamendi, a slow-growth advocate, is a member of the Tracy Region Alliance for a Quality Community.

Study: Traffic bad, getting worse

By Leslie Miller

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published in the San Diego Union-Tribune

May 9, 2005

WASHINGTON - If getting stuck in traffic makes you want to roll down your car window and scream, look no further than another of those studies to find the bad news: Gridlock is getting worse.

Congestion delayed travelers 79 million more hours and wasted 69 million more gallons of fuel in 2003 than in 2002, the Texas Transportation Institute's 2005 Urban Mobility Report found.

Overall in 2003, there were 3.7 billion hours of travel delay and 2.3 billion gallons of wasted fuel for a total cost of more than \$63 billion.

"Urban areas are not adding enough capacity, improving operations or managing demand well enough to keep congestion from growing," the report concluded.

Still, seven of 13 major cities saw their annual delays per rush-hour traveler actually go down slightly: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, Miami, New York, Houston and Philadelphia.

In Los Angeles, yearly rush-hour delays for each motorist declined from 98 hours in 2002 to 93 hours a year later, but were still longer than any other city in the country. San Francisco had the nation's second-longest delays, declining from 75 hours in 2002 to 72 hours in 2003.

Honolulu, meanwhile, became the 51st city in which rush-hour traffic delayed the average motorist at least 20 hours a year. The Hawaiian capital joins such congested areas as Washington, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago - and Virginia Beach, Va., Omaha, Neb., and Colorado Springs, Colo.

The report was released Monday, the same day the Senate resumes debate on a bill that would spend \$284 billion on highways over the next six years.

But that's not enough money to solve traffic problems, according to highway and transit advocates.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials estimated it would take as much as \$400 billion in federal spending over the next six years to solve traffic problems, based on a 2002 study.

Roads aren't being built fast enough to carry all the people who now drive on them, according to the Transportation Development Foundation, a group that advocates transportation construction.

The number of vehicle miles traveled has increased 74 percent since 1982, but road lane mileage only increased 6 percent, the foundation said.

Tim Lomax, a co-author of the Urban Mobility Report, said the soft economy and slow job growth in 2003 meant that congestion got worse more slowly than it would have during better times.

"The upside of a slowdown in the economy is the congestion didn't get worse very quickly," Lomax said.

Lomax said that declines in rush-hour delays in some cities didn't mean congestion improved throughout each area. It probably just spread out to the suburbs.

"In most of those places, delay actually went up, it just didn't go up as fast as the number of people moving in went up," Lomax said.

Only job loss or major commitments to expand capacity will decrease congestion dramatically, he said.

Refusing to build more roads and transit systems won't discourage population growth, Lomax said.

Take fast-growing Austin, Texas, for example. In 1982, the average peak-hour traveler was delayed by 11 hours a year. That delay increased to 51 hours in 2003, the report said.

"Austin didn't add transportation capacity in the '80s or '90s," Lomax said. "The 'If you don't build it, they won't come' philosophy didn't work."

Congestion can also be reduced by managing traffic better. The report said such techniques as coordinating traffic signals, smoothing traffic flow on major roads and creating teams to respond quickly to accidents reduced delay by 336 million hours in 2003.

Robert Dunphy, senior resident fellow for transportation at the Urban Land Institute, said that half of all traffic delays are caused by car crashes.

"There are huge benefits to getting in there and clearing accidents quickly," Dunphy said.

Commuters also adapt, said Alan Pisarski, author of "Commuting in America" and a transportation consultant.

"People give up and go somewhere else," he said. "Or else they're leaving home at 6 a.m. or 9 a.m."

El Dorado Hills residents clamor for answers on asbestos risk

The Associated Press

in the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers

Saturday, May 7, 2005

EL DORADO HILLS, Calif. (AP) - Federal officials are drawing criticism from El Dorado Hills residents for not being able to answer questions about the health risks posed by naturally occurring asbestos in this Sierra foothills community.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported recently that everyday activities, such as biking along a nature trail or playing baseball, is enough to boost the risk from cancer-causing asbestos fibers found in the rocks and soil around El Dorado Hills.

At a public hearing Friday night, an overflow crowd of more than 1,000 of the town's 31,000 residents said they believed the study's authors had exaggerated the health threat.

"We need to take precautions ... but we also need to keep some perspective," said Vicki Barber, county school superintendent, noting that risks such as earthquakes and tornadoes pose similar threats in other highly populated places.

EPA officials warned, however, that only a limited exposure can be enough to trigger an inoperable, and usually fatal, cancer of the membranes lining the chest and other body cavities. Jon Morgan, El Dorado County's chief environmental enforcer, criticized the report as sloppy and alarmist, noting that not enough is known about the potential harm from the naturally occurring asbestos fibers.

Marcella McTaggart, the county's air pollution enforcement chief, said new rules are expected to be adopted soon that will impose controls on small construction jobs not already regulated - such as swimming pool installations. Also, waivers from the control measures will no longer be issued without proof from a registered geologist that the site soil is free of asbestos.

Information from: The Sacramento Bee, <http://www.sacbee.com>

Senator Says He Could End MTBE Shielding

By NORMA LOVE, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, May 6, 2005

Concord, N.H. (AP) -- Sen. Judd Gregg said Friday he has the votes to stop Congress from shielding makers of the gasoline additive MTBE from lawsuits filed by New Hampshire and other states.

"I think I'm in the position again to be fairly successful in that fight," Gregg told The Associated Press.

The Senate Budget Committee chairman said he has commitments from colleagues to block shielding the manufacturers from lawsuits. If necessary, Gregg said he would not hesitate to use a filibuster to kill the MTBE provision that was part of the energy bill passed by the House last month.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of Texas is a key backer of the MTBE lawsuit shield. He says the government essentially mandated MTBE use when it passed a 1990 law requiring gasoline to contain 2 percent oxygen, so Congress now should protect MTBE manufacturers against product liability lawsuits.

MTBE is added to gasoline to reduce air pollution. But it has been found to contaminate drinking water supplies, and about half the states face known or potential cleanup problems.

Nearly 200 public water supplies in New Hampshire, 16 percent of the total, have detectable levels of MTBE.

Two years ago, Gregg was one of six Republican senators who refused to cut off debate on that year's energy bill because of a similar MTBE provision.

[Column in The Record, Sunday, May 8, 2005](#)

The good, bad and ugly of rapid growth

By Eric Grunder, Columnist

New schools and portable classrooms are popping up around San Joaquin County like mustard in May. No wonder. If you randomly pick 10 county residents, chances are three of them will be young enough to own an iPod, read Harry Potter and actually watch "American Idol" (probably more like six in 10 if your sample is drawn at a shopping mall).

The county's under-18 population is nearly 4 percentage points higher than for the state as a whole. And it seems to be expanding faster than we can build skateboard parks.

Data out last week from the state Department of Finance show that San Joaquin County gained nearly 16,900 people last year "" roughly 46 new residents every day. That means, about 15 school age children a day are coming into the county (or being born here). Or, put another way, to serve this growth we need to add a new classroom about every two days (although that's not strictly true since each day some students leave the system by moving, graduating, dropping out or otherwise disappearing).

Still, our growing population does create a space race that is real. The bill to pay for all the schools, not to mention streets and police and public services on and on and falls directly on the taxpayers. And that bill may already be past due.

Between 1990 and 2000, San Joaquin County's population increased by 17.3 percent. Between 2000 and Jan. 1, 2005, we gained nearly 16 percent more residents, according to state estimates.

The county last year ranked among the state's top 10 fastest growing counties for both percentage growth -- 2.7 percent -- and for the number of new residents -- 16,867.

What should surprise no one who's tried to drive to the Bay Area on Interstate 205/580 or who's tried to buy a home in a market flooded with Bay Area expatriates flush with real estate money is that this part of the Central Valley is exploding. Tracy last year grew by 4.7 percent, more than three times the growth rate for the state.

The state, too, is growing. There are nearly 37 million Californians now. One of every eight American also is a Californian (crowded as California is, try cramming 127 million people onto the same land space, which is just about the situation for the Japanese).

Growth is good, in an economic sense. Our economy is based on growth as in, we grow or we whither. A growing economy means greater opportunity for a greater number.

But growth can be bad, too, in terms of what it means to our quality of life, increased pollution, infrastructure pressure, housing shortages and education challenges.

In this county, for example, we have to figure out how to get more of our young people not just in college, but through college. Then, we have to figure out how to provide the opportunities to keep their cerebral horsepower here.

We're not doing a very good job. Of the population older than 25, only

14.5 percent of our residents have at least a bachelor's degree.

For the state, the number is 26.6 percent. That 14.5 percent must come up if our local economy is to compete.

In his 1996 book, "Crazy Horse and Custer," the late historian Stephen Ambrose uses the parallel lives of the two warriors as a metaphor for the collision of the two great American archetypes of the mid-19th century.

Crazy Horse represented the state of being; Custer the state of becoming.

In some ways, the metaphor could be applied to San Joaquin County as we face the changes ahead and sort out the collision between what we've been -- a rural, agricultural-driven, slow-paced corner of California -- and what we likely are becoming -- a faster-paced, more urbanized, more economically diverse part of a new inland empire.

Grunder is editor of the Money section. Write him at P.O. Box 900, Stockton, CA 95201; by fax at (209) 943-8504; or by e-mail at egrunder@recordnet.com <<mailto:egrunder@recordnet.com>>.

Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, May 7, 2005:

Off the hook — for now

Valley's air district gets more time to implement new rule on fees.

Air quality activists gave a little breathing room to the Valley's air district Thursday by stepping back from a lawsuit over development fees that would be used to mitigate the added pollution from urban growth.

The district should not take this as a sign that it can relax and continue to delay adoption of clean air rules. This compromise with Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund only comes because the district has promised to adopt the fees, plus implement other rules covering commercial dryers, small boilers and some types of water heaters, by the end of the year.

George Torgun, an Earthjustice lawyer, is sufficiently reassured things are moving and the environmental activists he represents are interested in getting a strong rule in place for development fees. That rule is expected to be completed by early next year.

That's quite a grace period, considering the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control district was supposed to have adopted such a rule last year, under terms of a 2003 law. The rule will require fees for air pollution from traffic and other activities related to urban sprawl in the eight counties of

the air district, stretching from Stockton to Bakersfield. The activists' retreat from legal action takes some of the pressure off the air district, allowing it to focus on drafting an effective document.

The air officials blame the delays on the unexpected complexity of the task. Because this is the first rule of its kind in the country, they say, there is no template to follow and the district has been trying to get analytic models for prediction of polluting emissions in place. Skeptics have been suspicious, wondering if the reason for the delay was because of pressure applied to the district by the building industry. That's part of a larger suspicion in the minds of many observers that the governing board of the air district is less concerned about cleaning up the Valley's air than it is with protecting the status quo and the pocketbooks of entrenched special interests

For now, the air district has made its case to the activists, but should not get complacent. Clearly if the district doesn't get the new rules in place, and soon, the lawsuits will come back with vengeance, and the district stands a very good chance of losing if they do.

[Visalia Times-Delta editorial, Monday, May 9, 2005:](#)

Growth is a two-edged sword

Visalia is growing fast, and it is imperative that city leaders have a clear vision of how to handle the repercussions.

Data from the California Department of Finance confirmed what people in Visalia have known for some time: our city is growing faster than expected.

With an annual growth rate of 4 percent and an estimated 107,550 people as of Jan. 1 this year, Visalia's population is outpacing planning projections made 15 years ago and pushing the city toward population levels that weren't expected for another 15 years.

State analysts say Visalia's population has grown 17 percent in the past five years. At that rate, Visalia's population will exceed 125,000 by 2010. When Visalia planners and policy makers were developing the city's 30-year growth plan in the late 1980s, their rule of thumb was that Visalia would reach 125,000 about the year 2020. The city is way ahead of that rate.

Such rapid growth has its upside. Being a big city brings things to Visalia it wouldn't otherwise have - national stores and restaurant chains, larger businesses, job and investment opportunities, among other things. They will happen without much effort by the community.

It's the other edge of the sword - the curses - Visalia has to worry about, as well as Tulare County and its other cities.

Growth brings demands for services - public safety, sanitary facilities, economic opportunity - and puts pressure on resources - land, water, air, schools, parks. It can cause congestion and change the quality of life for people on existing streets. Our city leaders must guarantee such issues are factored in when the new homes and businesses arrive.

Visalia and Tulare County have had excellent planning principles and follow-through. The county is updating its growth plan now. Visalia is constantly examining its own.

The problem with rapid growth is that demands on the community increase exponentially: It's like when you add one inch to the radius of a circle: You are actually increasing the area of the circle by three square inches. That's how cities grow: the larger they get, the faster they grow.

Our communities will soon be faced with levels of growth on a scale they are not used to and that will challenge the philosophy of controlled and prudent growth that has governed the area. Principles that have been useful when Visalia was at 75,000 people might not serve when it is 125,000. The community needs to prepare now to keep from being overwhelmed.

Opportunity always accompanies change, as long as people change as well. Visalia's growth will only continue to be seen as a blessing if the city fortifies itself well against the curses.

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Sunday May 8, 2005:](#)

Padre needs quick settlement

Finish the interior work at the Padre Hotel -- puhleeeeeeze. After receiving a remarkably attractive exterior facelift, the project ground to a halt. The reason: The Kern County District Attorney's Office filed a lawsuit against Pacifica Enterprises, the San Diego company that purchased the landmark hotel and started the remodeling project.

The lawsuit -- filed a year ago this month -- claims that Pacifica knowingly removed asbestos from the Padre without proper safety precautions, using unskilled laborers.

The company halted interior remodeling until the suit is settled. Last week, a Kern County Superior Court judge set a trial date in October.

But the case could be resolved sooner -- like during a settlement hearing for the case on May 24.

David Cooper, local attorney for Pacifica, and Deputy District Attorney John Mitchell both said a settlement is definitely a possibility -- if not on May 24, then soon thereafter.

A quick settlement would be great news, as it would continue a progressive trend in downtown Bakersfield.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, May 8, 2005:](#)

'All get involved'

I was happy to read in The Bee recently that our schools are helping alert Valley families to unhealthy air conditions with the display of multicolored flags that represent the air quality each day.

With so many friends and family members suffering from asthma due to unhealthy air, it made me think, what else can I and other concerned Valley citizens do to improve our air?

I know legislative action locally and in Sacramento is needed so that we don't have unhealthy air flags flying over our schools. On a daily basis, there are news reports on state and local air quality legislation designed to curb the pollution produced by industry, farming and transportation.

Soon, our legislators in Fresno and Sacramento will be deciding which bills to pass to assist in cleaning up California's air. More than 45 health and environmental groups have organized a free legislative advocacy training in Fresno and Clean Air Action Day in Sacramento to educate our legislators on citizens' concerns for clean air.

Let's all get involved in cleaning our air by contacting the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition at (559) 485-1416 or www.calcleanair.org <<http://www.calcleanair.org>>.

Laura Fultz, Fresno

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Monday, May 9, 2005:](#)

The American Taliban

I'm tired of hearing conservatives whine about this so-called liberal media when they operate their own propaganda machine (Fox News) and basically control the media in all markets. (How many stations in this town does Clear Channel own?) Anytime public opinion doesn't go their way, the whining starts. It's a really pathetic display of partisanship that goes against our whole foundation of government.

Why do people like Tom DeLay hate our government so much? He wants to take power away from one of the branches of government and change the rules of Congress, just because they block his theocratic wishes.

Wake up people. We're a democracy. Our founding fathers could see into a future where corruption in politics could undermine our whole system. That's why they created checks and balances.

It's time we put a stop to the American Taliban branch of the Republican party.

I know most Republicans are honest people. So why do their leaders want to destroy this country in so many ways? War for profit, contractors making \$1,000 per day while soldiers are making peanuts. Polluters getting away with poisoning our air and water (MTBE). Restricting the free

practice of religion. Gambling with Social Security. Government intrusion into personal family decisions. And condoning the use of torture and the death penalty while hiding behind the curtain of this phony culture of life.

We all have to live in this country. Maybe in the next election, we can find people that feel the same way.

Dave Stevens, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Merced Sun-Star, May 9, 2005](#)

Valley still in air denial

Editor: Almost daily, we see reports on how bad our air pollution is in the Valley.

On the front page of the April 28 paper there was yet another article quoting a study conducted by the American Lung Association (people who really care about our health -- not just money).

If you missed it, consider the following:

"Children in the Valley have diminished lung capacity, increased susceptibility to asthma and many other chronic respiratory diseases, and the loss of months or even years from expected lifespans."

Of course we know that every living thing is affected, not just the children of our future, but each and every one of us TODAY. According to the report, Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties are among those having the most severely polluted air in the nation for smog and particle pollution.

This is not new information, but there are people who are still in denial about the extreme health effects of air pollution, and people who want to gloss over the problem. We cannot afford to have the proposed raceway come in and further negatively impact our air quality.

Sport and recreation are great, but not at the expense of our health.

Sonja Hunter, Atwater