

Five questions with valley air district executive director David Crow

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Nov. 12, 2005

David Crow, longtime executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and one of its first paid employees in the early 1990s, is retiring in February. Crow was around when the valley's eight counties battled air pollution on their own, and he helped build the valley air district into a clean-air juggernaut that cut stationary sources of air pollution in half during his tenure.

Reflecting on his time at the air district, Crow spoke by phone to *Californian* staff writer Sarah Ruby on Wednesday. Here's an excerpt of the interview:

1 What do you think has been your biggest accomplishment on air quality?

"(There's much to be proud of in the way of emission reductions, but one) thing that has emerged over the years is the degree to which the public has become aware of the severe air pollution problems. ... The valley has responded in a very positive way with a lot of common sense to address a problem that escapes none of us."

2 What do you wish you'd accomplished, but haven't?

"This district does not get enough credit or respect for what we have done. ... (We've) struggled with state and federal agencies and others getting the credit and the support and the recognition we needed. I'll take some responsibility for that. We were so singularly focused on the valley we did not perhaps do enough outreach early on to legislators in Sacramento and Washington. ... I came to that realization a year or so ago, and we are definitely upping our efforts there."

3 How have attitudes about air quality changed since you took the job?

"I think the valley is responding with well-deserved pride about how we as a valley are going to tackle these issues and solve them and how we can be an example for other communities around the country."

4 Is Bakersfield different -- does it have a different attitude, outlook, strategy -- when it comes to cleaning up the air?

"I'm going to say yes, the South Valley is different. The South Valley knew and understood an air pollution problem, frankly, long before some parts of the valley did. It's because you are at the south end of the valley and it all moved that direction."

5 What is the biggest misconception about air quality?

"At this point, the biggest misconception is it's gotten worse. ... We're on the brink of being in attainment for (fine-dust particles that aggravate asthma). That's a pretty monumental accomplishment given the San Joaquin Valley -- its size, we are No. 1 in agriculture, No. 1 in dairy. ... Having said that, we do have the new standards, (which) represent a monumental challenge."

Here are a few things you can do to improve air quality:

- Educate yourself about air pollution and what you can do to help clean the air.
- Make your voice heard! Write letters and make phone calls encouraging political and business leaders to make air-conscious decisions.
- This winter, check before you burn: call 1-800-SMOG-INFO (1-800-766-4463) to see if you're allowed to burn wood in a fireplace, stove or heater.
- Walk to the store, bike to work or find some other way to cut down on car trips each week.
- Keep your car tuned up, and when you buy your next one, make sure it's a low-emissions vehicle.
- Use electric lawn equipment and leaf blowers.
- When filling up your tank, don't top off. It not only wastes gas and money, it harms the air.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Brothers' venture cleans air

SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Nov. 12, 2005

The Porter brothers clean the air for a living. They make Viscon, a diesel additive approved by Texas air regulators to cut a smog-forming pollutant from diesel engines. They're also in line for an air-quality verification in California.

Graduates of Garces Memorial High School, Michael Porter, 52, and his brother, Patrick Porter, 51, didn't set out to become environmentalists. Pat worked in computers for years, and Michael went into the oil business. Michael worked his way up at a local oil dehydration refinery, and he bought the company in 1994.

The market for removing water from oil began to wane in the 1980s. Large oil companies installed their own oil dehydration equipment, cutting out middlemen like Michael Porter. His refinery still operates, but he needed to diversify and still make use of the tangled maze of pipes near Buck Owens Boulevard.

"When we first started this we knew nothing about emissions," Michael said. "I was looking for something to do with our existing infrastructure."

He hit on biodiesel, figuring the market for it could only increase, as it has in Europe. But when he did some research he found that when it comes to one smog-forming pollutant, burning renewable fuel made from vegetable oil or animal fat is worse for the air than fossil fuels.

"The stumbling block was the increase in (smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions)," Michael said.

Burning biodiesel cuts down on almost every other pollutant and toxin when compared with regular diesel, but pure biodiesel produces 9 percent more nitrogen oxide emissions than conventional diesel, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Porters seem to have found a solution in Viscon, which is made from rubbery white pellets of polyisobutylene. An ingredient in chewing gum, polyisobutylene was traditionally used by oil companies to clean out deposits in refinery equipment.

Viscon got its name from the word viscous, which describes a sticky liquid that doesn't flow easily. Viscon, a red mix of polyisobutylene and diesel fuel, can be stretched with the fingers into webby wisps, much like honey. In an engine, Viscon stretches fuel molecules into chains instead of bundles, making them burn more efficiently and at cooler temperatures, Michael Porter said.

When added to diesel fuel and burned in stationary engines, Viscon cuts nitrogen oxide emissions by 25 percent, dust particles by 48 percent and carbon monoxide by 38 percent, according to the Porters. California air regulators couldn't comment on the claims because they're still reviewing them, said Dimitri Stanich, spokesman for the state air resources board.

The brothers have spent five years and \$2 million to test their product in engines for its effect on fine dust particles, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide emissions and other air and water scourges, the Porters say. In September, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality approved Viscon as a diesel additive that can help refiners meet a mandated goal of reducing smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions by 5 percent to 10 percent.

The Porters' company, GTAT California LLC, was one of the first to go through the Texas regulatory process.

"These companies have been very forthright as far as meeting our state regulations," said Morris Brown, a team leader at the Texas agency.

Air-friendlier diesel must be on sale in most Texas counties by Jan. 31, and the Porters are hoping to secure multi-million dollar contracts with refiners willing to use Viscon to meet the regulation.

It's less clear how California's air quality endorsement would help the Porters' business. The brothers envision fleets, commercial engines and ports using Viscon to cut down on fine particle and smog pollution, but state regulators haven't worked out specific programs.

"It's kind of an awkward thing that is still being worked out right now," said Stanich. "How can we assure that the right amount is being used widely and regularly? (For now) it's more of a marketing tool for businesses."

A solution could be to regulate refiners, Stanich said. That could create a market similar to the one in Texas.

Biodiesel is what got the Porters into the additive business, and they hope to end up in the renewable fuels market, perhaps converting the oil dehydration refinery to a biodiesel-plus-Viscon plant.

"Everyone, politically, accepts biodiesel as a good thing for the future of the country," Michael Porter said. "It reduces our dependency on foreign crude, it's a method of supporting our own farming and it reduces emissions throughout the state."

L.A.'s the Capital of Dirty Air Again

Despite having fewer smoggy days this year than last, the region ranks as the worst in the nation for unhealthful haze, the EPA says.

By Miguel Bustillo, Los Angeles Times, Monday, Nov. 14, 2005

Los Angeles is America's smog capital once again.

The megalopolis actually has had fewer smoggy days this year than last, continuing a relatively steady three-decade trend toward cleaner air. However, Houston and California's San Joaquin Valley, which in recent years rivaled and even surpassed L.A. as the smoggiest areas in the country, experienced exceptionally clean air this year.

As a result, the Greater Los Angeles region is again home to the worst smog in the nation, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency's latest barometer for measuring the unhealthful haze - a dubious distinction the region has held for most of the last half-century.

Air quality in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties has exceeded the federal health standard for more than 2 1/2 months this year.

"It's a tough job cleaning up the ozone at this point because there are not a lot of easy emissions to target," said Joe Cassmassi, planning and rules manager for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the region's chief smog-fighting agency. "The low-hanging fruit, as a lot of people like to say, has been taken."

Ground-level ozone, the primary ingredient in smog, is formed when two types of air pollution react chemically while being cooked by the sun's rays. Both of the pollutants, volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides, are emitted during the burning of fossil fuels in cars, factories and power plants.

Scientists have linked breathing smoggy air to an array of health effects, including wheezing and coughing because of irritated lungs, increased asthma attacks, reduced lung power and even premature death.

The South Coast Air Basin, which includes all of Orange County and most of the urbanized parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, exceeded the EPA's smog standard on 84 days this year.

Last year, the region exceeded the standard on 90 days, and in 2003, it surpassed it on 120 days. The standard limits airborne concentrations of smog, or ground-level ozone, to .08 parts per million over an eight-hour period.

By comparison, the San Joaquin Valley, which in recent years had been the nation's biggest violator of the eight-hour standard, exceeded it on just 72 days this year -- the fewest ever since regulators began recording smoggy days. The region surpassed the mark on 109 days last year and 134 days in 2003.

"We'd like to believe that public awareness of this issue has become so high in the valley that people are changing their behavior," said Kelly Hogan Malay, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air

Pollution Control District. She said the weather in the San Joaquin Valley was unusually hot for parts of this year, which should have created more smog.

Because the smog season tends to peak in summer and tail off after October, the totals for this time of year have traditionally been the final numbers.

The EPA requires areas that exceed the smog standard to develop plans to reduce ozone-forming pollution. Regions have different deadlines to meet the standard, based on the severity of their smog problems. If Los Angeles still exceeds the standard by 2021, it risks losing federal transportation funding.

Before adopting the eight-hour smog standard this summer, the EPA's dirty air barometer was a measure that limited concentrations of ozone over a one-hour period.

Though the eight-hour baseline is generally seen as a more accurate measure of smog levels, critics condemned the agency for pushing back the compliance deadline, which had been 2010 for Los Angeles, when it switched standards, arguing that it removed pressure on local officials to clean the air or lose federal money.

EPA officials said last week that the criticism was unjustified, arguing that their new rules still called for areas with smog problems to continue trying to meet the old one-hour standard, even if the actual regulatory deadlines had changed.

If the one-hour standard were still used, Houston would have topped Los Angeles as the nation's smog capital. Houston violated the one-hour standard on 33 days this year, compared with 30 days in the L.A. region.

Texas officials said they took no comfort in ceding first place in the annual smog derby to Los Angeles. They said they are tightening restrictions on air pollution in the Houston area, which largely stems from the cluster of oil refineries and chemical plants near the city.

"It's easy to say that we don't want to be No. 1 when it comes to smog. But we don't want to have the first-, the second- or the third-highest number of 'exceedences,'" said John Steib, deputy director in charge of enforcement and compliance for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Although the Los Angeles region once again finds itself leading the nation in smoggy air, state and local regulators have made dramatic strides in reducing the haze.

In 1976, the Los Angeles region surpassed both smog benchmarks for more than half of the year. It exceeded the one-hour standard on 194 days and the eight-hour standard on 206 days. As a result, regulators issued Stage 1 alerts informing the public that the air was unhealthy to breathe on 102 days that year.

With a handful of exceptions, notably a spike in dirty air in 2003 that regulators blamed on a siege of ideal smog-forming weather, those numbers have dropped steadily ever since. Last year, the Los Angeles region violated the one-hour standard on just 28 days. Regulators have had to issue a Stage 1 health warning only once in the last seven years.

Despite the improvements, air quality officials and environmentalists are quick to note that the seemingly mundane act of breathing continues to pose a serious health hazard in many parts of Southern California.

Though regulators have begun to get a handle on smog-forming pollution, research increasingly indicates that airborne particle pollution, especially soot from burning diesel fuel, may pose a greater risk. A study by the South Coast air district concluded that diesel soot accounted for 70% of the cancer risk from air pollution in the region.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, and the rail yards that help move goods from the ports, are the largest source of diesel soot in the region. Reducing port pollution has become a major focus for state and local activists and lawmakers.

LA is once again the nation's smog capital

The Associated Press

in the Fresno Bee, Bakersfield Californian and Orange County Register, Monday, Nov. 14, 2005

LOS ANGELES (AP) - We're No. 1.

The greater Los Angeles region shoved aside Houston and the San Joaquin Valley as the national smog capital in 2005, despite having cleaner air this year than last, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Air quality in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties exceeded the EPA's smog standard on 84 days this year. The EPA considers the totals to be final numbers for 2005 because the smog season runs from May through September.

"It's a tough job cleaning up the ozone at this point because there are not a lot of easy emissions to target," said Joe Cassmassi, planning and rules manager for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the region's main smog-fighting agency. "The low-hanging fruit, as a lot of people like to say, has been taken."

Houston and the San Joaquin Valley, which in recent years rivaled or surpassed Los Angeles as the country's smoggiest areas, enjoyed exceptionally clean air this year.

But Los Angeles' rank comes with an asterisk.

The EPA this year switched from measuring smog over a one-hour period to measuring it over an eight-hour span.

Under the old system, Houston would have edged out Los Angeles for the top spot by violating the standard on 33 days compared to 30 days.

Although it led the nation in smoggy days, the Los Angeles region's air is considerably cleaner than it used to be.

The air violated federal standards on 90 days in 2004 and 120 days in 2003. And in 1976, it exceeded federal standards for more than half the year.

Los Angeles could lose federal transportation funding if the area continues to violate the smog standard by 2021.

Workshops aim to encourage walking

By Shannon Darling, Staff writer

Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Nov. 12, 2005

A series of eight different workshops will begin next week, all with one goal — to get people walking.

Scott Cochran, a regional planner with the Tulare County Association of Governments, said the workshops will discuss ways community and city planners can make their cities more friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists.

He said he will deliver the following message at each meeting:

"If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you will get cars and traffic. If you plan cities for people and places, you will get people and places."

The workshops are called "Walkable Communities" and will focus on the importance of planning for people and places, not vehicles.

So at each community, the public is invited to give their opinions on how to improve.

Cochran said the key is to connect subdivisions and developments for the pedestrian.

\$20,000 grant

The workshops are being paid for by a \$20,000 grant from the National Center for Biking and Walking. Cochran said having a walkable community is healthful because it can cut down on [air pollution](#).

Each community will go on a short walking tour, pointing out what works and what doesn't. Robert Rutherford, with the building department with Farmersville, said his city is working on making the city's downtown more attractive, so people will want to walk there.

"We have a lot of people here who can't drive," he said.

Free rides jump start service for bus

By Chris Collins

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Nov. 14, 2005

When Merced County's transit system offered free rides on "The Bus" for three months this fall, officials knew a few more people would hop on.

Analysts for The Bus predicted a 25 percent increase.

To their delight, their expectations were wrong.

Ridership on the no-charge routes went up 84 percent from the same three months -- August, September and October -- last year. That translated into nearly 350,000 rides for county residents.

"It's just like, 'Wow,' " said Larnold Jones, an assistant transportation manger. "We didn't expect anything like that."

A three-year, \$622,000 grant from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District nixed the \$1 to \$3 fares and will help fund free rides during the same three-month period over the next two years.

Those months are harvesting season in the Valley and the extra dust and smog makes it the worst air-quality days of the year.

The air district is funded mostly by fees from Valley residents.

Janet Appling-Kasper, an analyst for The Bus, said the bonanza for commuters attracted some transit converts.

She said unofficial numbers show a 10 percent increase in ridership even after the free fare period ended.

The three-month trial gave mass transportation skeptics a chance to try it out risk-free -- something The Bus couldn't have afforded to do by itself.

"In the past, we had one day free," Appling-Kasper said. "That doesn't really do it. Ninety days did it."

Raceway impact report out for review

By David Chircop

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Nov. 10, 2005, 11:10:37 AM PST

After months of review by county planners, an exhaustive 3,000-page environmental study on a proposed raceway northeast of Atwater is ready for public viewing.

The study details Riverside Motorsports Park's potential adverse impacts on water, traffic, noise and air pollution, as well as the conversion of agricultural land.

The public has until Dec. 23 to review the document and to make comments for inclusion in a final environmental impact report.

The study took 2 1/2 years to complete, costing more than \$1 million, said John Condren, Riverside's president and chief executive officer.

While the project still has a ways to go before final approval, Condren said the public release of the draft report clears a "tremendous hurdle."

County planners began reviewing the study in early July. It was made public for the first time on Monday.

This isn't the first time Riverside had an EIR reviewed by county planners. Last year, county officials rejected the project's first impact report, which was compiled by Sacramento-based EIP Associates. Rather than stay with EIP, Riverside found a new consultant -- Sacramento-based EDAW, Inc.

Because the public hearings call for amendments to the county's General Plan, the study has to go before the county Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

Hearings are expected to begin in February or March.

How long that process stretches depends on the amount of public testimony and the level of review commissioners and supervisors seek.

"I've given up on crystal ball gazing," said Condren when asked when he will know if the project gets the green light.

Merced County Planner James Holland said public comments collected by the county will go back to the consultants for inclusion in the final EIR.

People can review copies at Merced County library branches, at the Planning Department and on the department's Web site.

Expecting an environmental legal challenge, Condren said he has assembled a "sizable defense team" of corporate and environmental attorneys.

"Now that the facts are out, I am extremely hopeful that it will dispel all of the unfounded rumors that have been spread throughout the area," he said. "If people take the time to read the environmental impact report they will see that this project has many benefits for the county."

See the report

Where to review the documents:

- County Planning Department: 2222 M Street
- All County Library branches
- Online at: web.co.merced.ca.us/planning/ceqareports.html

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, Nov. 13, 2005:](#)

Become an editorial board member

By Dianne Hardisty, Californian Editorial Page Editor

The Californian for more than a decade has invited members of the community to participate in its editorial board deliberations. These are discussions that yield The Californian's positions regarding community issues and challenges. The newspaper's recommendations regarding candidates for various elected offices also are based on these deliberations. To provide diversity of thought and experiences, The Californian invites members of the community to serve six-month terms on the editorial board. Generally this has involved Publisher and Californian owner Ginger Moorhouse appointing one man and one woman to serve as the editorial board's community members.

The Californian and the community it serves has benefited greatly from these appointments. The newspaper's leadership on community policy development has been enriched by including the insights of people who are not employees or officers of The Californian and who come from a variety of backgrounds.

It is now time to expand the reach of this community member program. Beginning in January, The Californian will be expanding the number of community members (editorial board advisers) from two to six, and extending their terms from six months to a year.

By adjusting the program's format, we hope that community service on the editorial board will fit more easily into an individual's personal schedule, be more satisfying to the community members and provide greater opportunities for community members to contribute.

We invite people who are interested in serving as a community member of the editorial board during 2006 to submit a letter of interest and a resume or description of their experience to Editorial Page Editor Dianne Hardisty by e-mail at dhardisty@bakersfield.com or by mail to Opinion Section, The Bakersfield Californian, P.O. Bin 440, Bakersfield 93302.

Please e-mail or mail your photograph with your letter of interest. Photographs will accompany the story announcing the community member appointments to the editorial board. They also will accompany occasional commentaries written by community members and published in the Opinion section.

This will be an exciting year, as the newspaper will be formulating its recommendations concerning many state and local elected offices. In addition, The Californian will be following many local issues, such as how the community is growing, [the quality of its air](#) and the operation of its government.

The six people selected to serve as community members will be sent (by e-mail) agendas for the weekly editorial board meetings. In addition, community members will be invited to: attend the weekly meetings, which are scheduled on Tuesdays at 2 p.m.; attend quarterly lunch/brainstorming editorial board sessions; attend newsroom orientation sessions; e-mail suggestions and feedback about editorial positions; and occasionally contribute written commentaries that will be published in the Opinion section.

While only six people will be serve on the editorial board, others who have expressed an interest in serving will be named to a "Sounding Board" a group that will be asked to contribute opinions from time to time on community issues and be invited to participate in special events.

Community members of the editorial board and members of the Sounding Board will be connected by e-mail. To participate, you must be online.

Dec. 15 is the deadline for applying to serve as a community member of The Californian's editorial board. All applications must be accompanied by the applicant's name, address, telephone number and e-mail address.

The editorial board, which is headed by Californian Publisher and owner Ginger Moorhouse, includes President and Chief Executive Officer Richard Beene, Executive Editor Mike Jenner, Editorial Page Editor Dianne Hardisty, Deputy Editorial Page Editor Chris Bagdikian, and Associate Editors Tracey Cowenhoven and Ed King.

Additional newspaper executives serve rotating terms on the editorial board and high school students also are assigned to attend the weekly meetings.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Short Takes, Saturday, Nov. 12, 2005:](#)

Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, wants to allow Americans to get free firewood out of national forests this year to alleviate high heating bills. The idea has some merit, especially for people who face very cold weather and hence very high heating costs. The drawback is that it might encourage more fireplace use in the San Joaquin Valley. We're encouraging all valley residents to abide by the air alerts issued by the air pollution control agency (www.valleyair.org).

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Nov. 14, 2005:](#)

Move cows to East Kern

Recently *The Californian* printed a lengthy article regarding the means by which some land development firms sell numerous parcels of Antelope Valley acreage to unsophisticated buyers. Evidence indicated that many were sold for some ten times assessed value. Buyers were apparently soothed by seller suggestions that, due to enormous California population growth, their equity would be assured at some future date.

At the same time, various newspaper articles described efforts by the dairy industry to place some 40,000 cows in Kern County.

In my early real estate days, I bought and sold many properties in the California City/Cantil area -- several to the Arciero alfalfa ranch. This ranch farmed several thousand acres and used plenty of water to do so. Thus it would appear that water should pose no problem for that area and its future.

Understandably, most Bakersfield citizens are upset by the forthcoming flood of dairies headed our way -- dairies guaranteed to produce flies, dust, odors and even more dangerous methane gas.

Any rational thinking person (not to be confused with politicians) might see a perfect opportunity to rid the San Joaquin Valley of an unwanted detriment and, at the same time, provide Eastern Kern with the boost needed to jumpstart their economy. I still own land over there and would be delighted to see cows grazing on it.

-- KEN ALLEN, Bakersfield

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Nov. 14, 2005:](#)

Padre owners, pay up!

I hope those families whose fathers were exposed to unsafe conditions not only go after the owners of the Padre but make sure they sue everyone connected to those asbestos companies.

My grandfather died in 1976 because of mesothelioma or asbestos cancer. Thirty years ago, they didn't know enough about the dust that many people breathed in as they worked for John Mansville (Dow Corning now owns that company and its trademarks).

Additional dust was on his clothes and shoes. When my grandfather came home he would take off his clothes, and this would, in turn spread the dust across the house.

So if it affected him, what did it do to his family? In 1998, I lost my oldest uncle to mesothelioma. In 2000, I lost my father to mesothelioma. I lost my second uncle in 2004 to mesothelioma. None of them worked in the industry.

My grandmother, who will be 94 in 2006, has survived mesothelioma cancer three times only because she made sure that she was checked for the cancerous tumors.

The Padre Hotel may have sentenced those men to death with the sloppy cost-saving procedures that they decided to take for the sake of their pocketbook.

I hope they have to pay big time to those men who now are at a huge risk for one of the most intelligent cancers out there! Intelligent you ask? Well, my father's tumor grew at an increased rate after his first round of chemotherapy. He died about five months after being diagnosed with a tumor the size of a half dollar!

-- JEFF GEORGE, Bakersfield