

News & Notes

Take precautions over blowing dust

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, May 13, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control District issued a health caution Monday because gusty winds were kicking up dust. It was especially heavy in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties. Exposure to particle pollution can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections. The cautionary advisory was through Monday evening but could be released again today if the wind persists, the air board said. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call the district office in Modesto, 557-6400.

Officials warn of blowing dust

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, May 12, 2008, 3:16 PM

Local air pollution officials are warning that gusty winds in the San Joaquin Valley may blow dust around and exacerbate health problems.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District advisory runs through this evening in the valley portion of Kern County. The high concentrations of what's called PM 10, or small particulate matter, can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis plus increase risk of respiratory infections.

It also says: "In people with heart disease, short-term exposure to particle pollution has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmias.

"People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion. Everyone else should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion."

Blown-dust danger: Seniors, children urged to avoid strenuous activity

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, May 12, 2008

Gusty winds pose a health risk in western Tulare County and other portions of the Valley, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials warn.

The winds may produce dust and unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter, according to a district news release. Potential health problems include aggravation of lung disease, asthma attacks, acute bronchitis and increased risk of respiratory infection.

Valley residents are urged to use caution until midnight tonight. Those with heart and lung disease should follow their doctor's advice for dealing with unhealthy air quality, and older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, officials said.

Information: www.valleyair.org or (559) 230-6000.

100-acre grass fire fought at 99, 120

More than 40 firefighters attack interchange blaze; gray cloud stops traffic

By Michelle Hatfield

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, May 13, 2008

MANTECA -- A 100-acre brush fire and its accompanying thick, gray smoke caused Highway 99 traffic to come to a standstill and led to three collisions Monday morning as dozens of firefighters battled the blaze at the Highway 99 and Highway 120 interchange.

Fire officials were investigating the cause of the fire Monday afternoon while snuffing scattered flare-ups that slowed the evening commute to and from the Bay Area.

The fire burned more than 100 acres east and west along Highway 99 between westbound Highway 120 and east of Austin Road.

Chris Haas, Manteca's interim fire chief, was on his way out of the office Monday morning when he noticed smoke billowing. He drove toward it, then called in the emergency at 10:30 a.m., he said.

"The smoke was incredibly dense. It was gray," Haas said.

As smoke blocked drivers' visibility, the highway became a parking lot, said Adrian Quintero, spokesman with the California Highway Patrol's Stockton office. Traffic was stopped for at least 45 minutes.

When traffic was allowed to move, CHP officers guided drivers along the highways and detoured them onto northbound 99 to eastbound Yosemite Avenue to Jack Tone Road, Quintero said.

Vehicles on eastbound Highway 120 west of Highway 99 were making U-turns in the median to backtrack and find other routes. CHP officers were discouraging the move because driving over the dry grass in the median could have sparked another fire.

The fire was contained by 11:30 a.m., Haas said. Responders included about 42 firefighters from the Manteca, Ripon, Lathrop and Waterloo-Morada departments and about 10 CHP officers.

The fire started in the island between southbound Highway 99 and the offramp for westbound Highway 120, Haas said.

The high winds and dry brush helped the fire spread rapidly to the east side of Highway 99.

"This was definitely a wind- fueled fire. Winds were north-northwest," Haas said.

The fire damaged highway posts and guardrails, Quintero said. It threatened structures, including Kamps Propane station west of Highway 99.

Firefighters were guarding Kamps, but employees didn't think the fire would reach the propane tanks, said Vice President Terry Ayres.

Haas said he was thankful for the work by Manteca firefighters and surrounding agencies and that there were no injuries.

Three accidents occurred on Highway 99 as a result of the fire and traffic backup. Two collisions involved minor injuries and the third, which involved the rear-ending of a CHP car, logged only property damage, Quintero said.

Manteca's grass fire was one of 25 fires burning in Stanislaus, Merced and Madera counties Monday, said Anthony Presto, spokesman with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The Manteca fire's smoke could be seen and smelled in Modesto, he said.

Temps could soar into 100s by the end of the week

By Felix Doligosa, Jr., Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, May 13, 2008

Temperatures are expected to heat up this weekend -- some areas could hit 100 degrees.

Bakersfield is expected to have highs of 97 degrees on Friday and Saturday, according to Tim Roche, meteorologist with Weather Underground.

Certain spots in the San Joaquin Valley could have temperatures hovering around 100 degrees, Roche said.

"It's just a matter where the heat concentrates," he said. "There will probably also be some bad [air quality](#)."

The hot weather is caused by warm air from the tropics moving north into Kern County and pushing away the cool air blowing from the ocean, Roche said.

He said "it's unusual" to have weather so hot at this time, but "it's not unheard of."

The typical temperature in Bakersfield in May is about 85 degrees, according to Roche.

Cooling centers are not scheduled to be open this weekend, said Kern County Parks and Recreation Director Bob Lerude.

But, "Things can change. It's only Monday," Lerude said.

The cooling centers open for extreme weather temperatures, he said.

Cooling centers typically open when temperatures either reach 105 degrees in the valley, 95 degrees in the mountains or 108 degrees in the desert, Lerude said.

The United Farmworkers Union monitors the weather every day, but has not yet made any plans for the weekend, said Vicki Adame with the UFW.

"We constantly remind workers of their rights when weather heats up," she said. "You are entitled to regular breaks, fresh water and a heat shelter."

The high for Bakersfield on Sunday is expected to be about 92 degrees and temperatures are expected to cool next week, Roche said.

Tips for the heat

Never leave children or pets in a vehicle, even for short periods of time.

Wear a wide brim hat and loose fitting, light-colored clothes.

Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluid.

Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun, especially during the midday and afternoon. When possible, stay in the shade or an air-conditioned room.

Periodically check on children and the elderly.

Make sure that pets and farm animals have plenty of shade and water.

Watch news sources for updates.

Source: National Weather Service

County group presents 'blueprint'

By Corey Pride, Los Banos Enterprise

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, May 13, 2008

[javascript:mi_story_tool.closeTool\(\)](#)The Merced County Association of Governments provided an outline of the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint to the public at last week's City Council meeting.

Candice Steelman, MCAG's public affairs manager, said the blueprint is a plan designed to get Central Valley communities to agree on a vision for the region for the next 30 to 50 years.

"Life goes on in the Valley. In fact an average of 1,400 babies are born in the San Joaquin Valley every week," Steelman said, narrating through a power-point presentation. "In what kind of valley will they live, work and raise their families? That depends on the choices we make today."

About two years ago counties in the Valley began to form the blueprint to deal with population growth and its impacts. Steelman said the region is expected to triple in population by 2050.

"It was only expected to double about a year ago. Now it's expected to triple," she said. "We must decide, do we want to repeat the mistakes of L.A. or San Jose? Or do we want to do something different."

When it is completed, the blueprint will lay out specific approaches to protecting agriculture, dealing with added traffic, achieving cleaner air quality, job creation and making infrastructural improvements.

Councilman Joe Sousa said he just wants to make sure the blueprint benefits everyone.

"My only concern with the blueprint is that it adheres to the principles it says it's going to," he said. "If it's good for Merced County we should all support it. If it's good for Stanislaus County we should support that also."

Using the term "smart growth," Sousa said he also believes the blueprint needs to be based on sound principles. Those principles include areas in the Valley where population growth is

encouraged and where it is discouraged. Currently Los Baños is one of a handful of areas designated as a population growth center in the blueprint plan. Every council member except Sousa attended a meeting about the blueprint held in Fresno last month. After the meeting Mayor Tommy Jones said it will be important to get average citizens involved in forming the plan. Last week Steelman said more than 10,000 people have participated in the blueprint process. "We've held hundreds of public meetings (and) we'll hold more," she said.

Forum to tout green growth

Panelists say unemployment can go down without harming environment.

By Leslie Albrecht

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, May 13, 2008

Merced needs more jobs -- that's the rallying cry of politicians and residents alike.

Now a new note is joining that chorus: Merced needs "green" jobs.

A group of local activists is hosting a public forum Thursday night in a bid to start a conversation about how Merced can attract jobs in eco-friendly industries such as solar and wind power.

Three panelists will discuss how Merced could win government grants to promote green jobs, how the city could attract so-called "green industries" and how other California cities have made promoting green business a priority.

Event organizer Kenny Mostern says he wants to reframe the debate about Merced's economic future. Arguments about controversial developments such as the Riverside Motorsports Park and proposed Wal-Mart distribution center have been missing an important idea -- that Merced doesn't have to sacrifice the environment to win jobs, said Mostern.

He points to the fast-growing clean energy industry as a sector that could provide jobs while helping the environment.

"The most distressing thing about the way issues are posed in Merced is that somehow we have a dilemma about whether to bring more jobs or whether to have clean air," said Mostern. "That's ridiculous. What we need to do is bring in jobs that give us clean air." Mostern is a vice president at True Ballot, a business that administers elections for labor unions.

Merced Mayor Pro Tem John Carlisle will deliver opening remarks at the forum, scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday at Merced Theatre at 301 W. Main St. Carlisle, elected to the City Council last November, said he's looking to make good on a campaign promise to bring more jobs to Merced, where the unemployment rate hovers over 13 percent.

"Just because the campaign's over, the issue's not over," said Carlisle. "I'd like to see us actually do something about it. I think the first step is planting the seed in people's mind that there are possibilities out there and it doesn't have to be just any old jobs for job's sake. It can be a job that's constructive for the community."

Carlisle said he'd like to see Merced follow the lead of cities like Richmond, which recently partnered with three other Bay Area cities, UC Berkeley and Lawrence Berkeley National Lab to form the East Bay Green Corridor Partnership. The coalition aims to promote green business as a way to improve the area's economic prospects, especially for low-income, low-skill workers.

Thursday's forum is being promoted by the Sierra Club, the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition and the Stop Wal-Mart Action Team, a group opposed to Wal-Mart's plan to build a distribution center in southeast Merced.

But Carlisle said the forum isn't about Wal-Mart. "It would be an issue even if the Wal-Mart idea didn't exist, because of our high unemployment rate and our poor air quality," said Carlisle.

Gabbing green

WHAT: Public forum to discuss how Merced could attract environmentally friendly "green" jobs

WHEN: 7 p.m. Thursday

WHERE: Merced Theatre, 301 W. Main St.

WHO: Panelists are Mark Stout, director of renewable technology planning, Cleantech America; Nwamaka Agbo, Ella Baker Center for Civil Rights, Green Collar Jobs Campaign Team; and Cheryl Brown, UC Berkeley Labor Center.

Patterson looks to sue Stanislaus County over West Park

City: Environmental study needed before board's OK

By Tim Moran

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, May 13, 2008

The city of Patterson wants to take Stanislaus County to court over a chicken and egg question: Should the county have approved a memorandum of understanding with West Park LLC developer Gerry Kamilos before doing an environmental impact report?

Patterson officials think the environmental report comes first; the county disagrees.

The county approved the agreement with Kamilos on April 22. It concerns the proposed 4,800-acre West Park business and industrial park southeast of Patterson, a project vigorously opposed by Patterson officials.

The West Park plan includes a short-haul rail link between the Port of Oakland and the Crows Landing Air Facility that forms the core of the development. Patterson city officials say the additional trains will disrupt traffic, including emergency vehicles, in the city, and increase air pollution.

The agreement spells out the terms and conditions West Park will have to meet in working out a more formal and detailed agreement with the county and its redevelopment agency. West Park submitted several engineering reports before the April 22 agreement, covering such topics as traffic, water and sewer, drainage, and the economic viability of the short-haul rail proposal.

But the environmental impact report is a requirement of the California Environmental Quality Act, and is a far more detailed analysis of the project, what environmental problems it might pose and how those problems might be alleviated. The West Park impact report is expected to take up to two years.

The Patterson lawsuit, which City Attorney George Logan said would be filed this week, contends that the report should have been done before the memorandum of understanding was approved. At issue is whether the memorandum is a binding decision to proceed with the development.

"The document they signed puts the county on a clear and straight path to a 5,000-acre development," Logan said.

Stanislaus County Counsel John Doering disagreed. "The MOU is a nonbinding agreement and does not lead to anything binding until an EIR is completed and certified," Doering said.

The Patterson City Council decided to proceed with the lawsuit in a closed session Friday. But a meeting with Kamilos and county officials Monday seems to have softened some city officials' stance.

At Monday's meeting, Kamilos presented a new proposal to alleviate traffic problems posed by the short-haul trains. Instead of building a rail overpass at Las Palmas Avenue near downtown Patterson, Kamilos suggested a trenched underpass for Las Palmas Avenue.

"The concept looks good; it's probably workable," Patterson Mayor Becky Campo said Monday. But she said the rest of the council needs to analyze the concept and consider it at the May 20 council meeting.

The lawsuit, she said, is a way of getting the attention of the Board of Supervisors.

"We really felt we were being ignored on this issue, and this was the only way to get the board's attention," Campo said. "We hope during the process we can still come to an agreement."

Councilwoman Annette Smith also said the underpass concept was a positive step.

"Gerry has put some effort in presenting a possible solution for one of the forefront issues for Patterson," Smith said. "I think Gerry has responded to our concern."

The concept had no technical data, however, Smith said, just drawings and a photograph of a similar underpass in Pleasanton.

And the council wants assurances from the Board of Supervisors that environmental issues raised by the development will be addressed, Smith said.

The lawsuit can be pulled back if an agreement is reached, Campo said. The decision to file the lawsuit was not an easy one, she said. "We want to maintain good relations with the county. This doesn't affect any other projects we have with the county."

Kamilos said Monday the city doesn't have to file the lawsuit until May 22, which would give the council time to consider his underpass proposal at the May 20 meeting.

"We will continue our dialogue, and hopefully we can keep everyone at the table," Kamilos said. "I'm very encouraged by our meeting this morning. All parties seemed to be trying to achieve a very cooperative atmosphere."

State fines Costco \$40K

A Press staff report

Tracy Press, Monday, May 12, 2008

State air regulators fined Costco \$40,200 for failing to report air pollution from diesel-fueled refrigerators at warehouses in Tracy and Mira Loma, the California Air Resources Board announced last week.

The Washington-based wholesale company filed late, incomplete reports about the refrigerators, which are mounted on shipping containers, rail cars and trucks.

Facilities with 20 or more refrigerated loading docks are required to record activities that cause pollution, the air board said.

Peralta Community College District in Alameda County will get one-quarter of the fine to pay for diesel education courses. The California Air Pollution Control Fund, which pays for air quality education and offers grants to promote cleaner technology, will get the remaining \$30,150.

The wholesalers also volunteered information to the agency about operating schedules at each distribution center.

The air board has been cracking down on diesel particulate matter pollution recently, a decade after it was declared toxic to humans.

"Significant numbers of these engines congregate at distribution centers, truck stops and other facilities," said air board spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe. "The potential health risks from toxic diesel exhaust is a concern for those that live and work nearby."

This is the third time the state has fined a company for this violation since last year.

Costco fined over diesel reports

By The Record

Stockton Record, Saturday, May 10, 2008

TRACY - Air regulators fined Costco \$40,200 for failing to file reports about air pollution from diesel-powered refrigerators mounted on trucks, trailers, shipping containers and rail cars, officials said Friday.

The fines were levied for late and incomplete reports at distribution facilities in Mira Loma and Tracy.

The California Air Resources Board said that facilities with 20 or more cold storage loading docks must keep records of activities that create air pollution, including refrigerator units used to keep perishables fresh.

One-quarter of the fine will go to the Peralta Community College District to fund diesel education courses. Costco also voluntarily provided information about operating schedules and loading times at both distribution centers, the air board said.

Report: Wind energy could grow 19% by 2030

USA Today Tues., May 13, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two decades from now Americans could get as much electricity from windmills as from nuclear power plants, according to a government report that lays out a possible plan for wind energy growth.

The report, a collaboration between the Energy Department research labs and industry, concludes wind energy could generate 20% of the nation's electricity by 2030, about the same share now produced by nuclear reactors.

Such growth would pose a number of major challenges, but is achievable without the need of major new technological breakthroughs, said the report released Monday.

"The report indicates that we can do this nationally for less than half a cent per kilowatt hour if we have the vision," said Andrew Karsner, the Energy Department's assistant secretary for efficiency and renewable energy.

If achieved, it would be an astounding leap.

Wind energy today accounts for only about 1% of the nation's electricity, although the industry has been on a growth binge with a 45% jump in production last year.

To reach the 20% production level, wind turbines would have to produce 300,000 megawatts of power, compared to about 16,000 megawatts generated today. Such growth would envision more than 75,000 new wind turbines, many of them larger than those operating today. About 54,000 megawatts would be produced by turbines in offshore waters.

And it would require a major expansion of the electricity grid system to move power from high-wind areas to other parts of the country, the report said.

"The United States possesses abundant wind resources," said the report spearheaded by DOE's National Renewable Technology Laboratory in Golden, Colo., and a 20% share of electricity production "while ambitious, could be feasible."

But the report cautioned that its findings were not meant to predict that such growth would, in fact, be achieved, but only that it is technically possible. And it acknowledged "there are significant costs, challenges and impacts" associated with such rapid growth.

It would require improved turbine technology, "significant changes" and expansion of power line systems and a major expansion of markets for wind energy to accommodate an annual growth rate of 16,000 megawatts of electricity a year beginning in 2018, more than five times today's annual growth.

Randall Swisher, executive director of the American Wind Energy Association, said the report confirms that wind energy "is no longer a niche" in the power industry.

Dan Arvizu, director of the department's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, said that the 18-month study provides a "vision" of the kind of wind energy growth technically possible.

"First of all, it's doable, second of all it's desirable," said Arvizu at a news conference.

"It's time for America to change the way we think about wind power," said Bob Lukefahr of BP Alternative Energy North America. The oil company is a leading wind developer, said Lukefahr.

If wind energy's share of power production grows to 20%, natural gas consumption is expected to decline by 11% and coal consumption by 18% in 2030, said the report. As a result carbon dioxide emissions linked to global warming would be reduced by 825 million metric tons a year.

"This is the equivalent of taking 140 million cars off the road," said Swisher.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, May 13, 2008:](#)

'Environmental refugees'

According to statistics, there are an estimated 25 million environmental refugees around the world, a number far greater than those displaced by war or religious persecution.

This number is growing because of the extravagant lifestyles of the people in the west who prefer gas guzzlers, Styrofoam cups and Ziploc bags. The greenhouse gas emissions created by the west ultimately hurt poor nations such as Tuvalu, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Uzbekistan.

The most surprising fact is that the United Nation's classification of a refugee does not include those displaced by environmental catastrophes, and these refugees have no protection regularly given to refugees. Plus, most western nations prefer to ignore this problem they have created. Reducing carbon emissions is the most important and necessary solution to the problem; however, this appears to be another mirage in a desert. Another solution is for the United Nations to recognize this category of refugees.

In the meantime, where do these people go? Will they ever feel at home when replanted in an alien country? Will they know how to acculturate and make a living, or would these refugee shelters become similar to Fresno's El Dorado Park?

Pamuditha Mahadiulwewa, Fresno

[Letters to the S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, May 13, 2008:](#)

Don't stall in closing toxic power plant

Editor - The Chronicle's May 12 editorial ("A blight on 'the green city' ") has done a great disservice to those of us who suffer daily from the toxic impacts of the polluting Potrero power plant.

The members of the neighborhood-based Power Plant Task Force - all residents of the Potrero Hill, Dogpatch and Bayview communities - have worked tirelessly for more than seven years to close the plant.

For more than seven years, we have lobbied California regulators to allow the plant to close without requiring the operation of "peaking" plants as a replacement power source. Unfortunately, every single one of the so-called "alternatives" cited by opponents of the plan to close the plant has been dismissed.

We certainly appreciate the concern of those who recently decided they care about the health of our neighborhood children and families. But those of us who have worked to close this aging power plant for years understand that the only viable plan is to build and operate the much cleaner combustion turbines. They will run less than half the time and emit far less pollution.

We strongly support more solar, wind, new transmission, "reconductoring" and energy efficiency. But none of those - alone or together - will close the Potrero power plant. Responsible leaders who say they care about our community's health should support the combustion turbine project now.

*Philip de Andrade, Chair Power Plant Task Force
San Francisco*

Editor - Various city departments and citizens advisory committees labored for more than five years on a balanced approach to closing the Mirant Potrero power plant with city built and operated "peaker" plants. Then, as so typical in San Francisco, a new group has waded in at the last minute, challenged the project and demanded that the city start over again. Supervisor Sophie Maxwell charges that the new group is a front for the Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

The Chronicle should be well aware that to re-permit an electric power project in California takes years. If the city were to start over, the existing antiquated Mirant plant would continue to operate indefinitely, polluting the air and the bay water.

Furthermore, San Francisco's electric demand keeps growing, partially caused by such environmentally beneficial projects as electrifying Caltrain, Muni bus lines and cruise ships. Conservation and solar projects will not do the job.

The mayor and majority of the Board of Supervisors are on the right track with the peaker projects and should stand up against the PG&E orchestrated protest.

James W. Haas, San Francisco

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, May 13, 2008:](#)

Who's fighting to clean air?

I'm grateful that air district board members Raji Brar, Henry Perea and the newest appointee to the board, Dr. Tellis, voted against the inadequate State Implementation Plan, which asked for an extension of time to clean up particulate matter 2.5. But sadly, they were out voted 8 to 3.

The residents who live within the air district can't afford to wait any longer. PM 2.5 is so small it can't be seen by the human eye, but it can end up in our bodies and cause illnesses and premature death. The plan the air district board recently approved is very dependent on the California Air Resources Board (CARB) coming up with regulatory laws. The air district should have just faced up to its own responsibility to take action to clean the air.

I was very disappointed that my own representative on the air board, County Supervisor Ray Watson, voted to approve this plan. This is not the first time I have been disappointed by my supervisor on air quality issues.

It's harder than ever to see the mountains because of air pollution and more people are suffering from respiratory illnesses, but the air district has given itself an A-plus for cleaning the air. Just because they say it's so, doesn't make it true. Someone needs to say it: the emperor has no clothes!

This inadequate PM 2.5 plan is coming in front of CARB for final approval very soon. Lives are at stake. Please let them know we need a better plan.

Linda MacKay, Lebec