

Court rules air officials need to prove public health benefit

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

Regional air officials must prove that public health will benefit from a rule to clean up pollution caused by the dairies and other animal operations, an appeals court ruled Wednesday.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's 2006 rule on such pollution did not contain studies on its effects, said the 5th District Court of Appeal in Fresno. The court said that without the studies it is impossible to know whether the rule helps the public.

District officials will consider an appeal, according to executive director Seyed Sadredin. But he said that including a public-health analysis would not be difficult, and the court upheld most of the district's rule.

Officials said the rule will annually remove more than 7,500 tons of ozone-making emissions called volatile organic compounds, associated with animal feed and waste.

The ruling Wednesday upheld the district's decision to limit the rule to ozone and particulate matter. Activists, who are considering a further appeal to the state Supreme Court, contend ammonia also should be included.

The Valley-based Association of Irrigated Residents had earlier sued the district over the rule and lost in Fresno County Superior Court.

Pollution is the Valley's silent killer

By MARTÍN E. MARTÍNEZ / Vida En El Valle
Vida En El Valle, Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2008

SACRAMENTO -- More than 800 people have died in the San Joaquín Valley in the last few years due to the high level of pollution here. In addition to the loss of life, pollution has cost the state more than \$6.3 billion dollars in medical expenses.

These figures were presented last week in a report titled 'The Economic Benefits of Achieving Standard Federal Air Quality in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley.'

"This is a very serious situation," said Jane V. Hall, one of the authors of the study. "More deaths are caused in San Joaquín County by poor air quality than by accidents on the roads."

The study's authors hope to raise awareness of the situation so that politicians will draft laws and policies to help improve air quality.

"The intention is that politicians, in particular, are made aware of these figures so they can act on them, using state and federal funds to keep fighting pollution," Hall said.

Víctor Brajer, another of the study's authors, said the figures presented in the new report are more critical than those announced two years ago in a previous report.

"Not only have we seen a significant increase in the number of people exposed to large amounts of chemicals, but also that these people are dying. It is urgent that measures be taken now, before the situation deteriorates further," Brajer said.

The report indicates that San Joaquín Valley residents are mostly exposed to elements in the microscopic spectra called PM-2.5, coming from a large number of pollutants such as diesel engines and chimneys.

"The worst thing is that in this valley 100 percent of the residents are exposed to this type of particles at any time throughout the year," said Hall.

According to the survey, last year Fresno had 75 days with a high percentage of PM-2.5, while Bakersfield had 68 and Visalia 64. In Modesto, there were 39 bad days but the city is considered one of the worst in the state regarding this type of pollution.

Although the situation is critical for everyone, Latinos are the most severely impacted because many work in the fields, the source of much of the pollution.

"The Latino community is the most affected because they have the least access to education about the environment. By not knowing the information, such as regulations or chemical contaminants, they are exposed directly to them," said José Antonio Ramírez, chair of the Fresno Council of Government.

He added that there are few regulations to combat this problem, so it is up to politicians to create proposals to help resolve the problem.

The results of this report came as no surprise to Rey León, director of Latino Environmental Advance and Policy (LEAP). León said his group has long known about the serious problem of pollution in the San Joaquín Valley and the little attention that authorities have paid.

"We have always known that we in the San Joaquín Valley have the highest rates of asthma and all sorts of diseases related to lungs, the important thing is to find solutions to the problem and they should come particularly from politicians," said León.

In fact, the report also indicates that the San Joaquín Valley has the highest rate in the number of cases of heart attack caused by poor air quality, this type of disease is mainly caused by particulates PM-2.5 .

Nidia Bautista, director of community relations for the Coalition for Clean Air, said that a high percentage of Latinos in the area do not have medical insurance which leading them to that end in emergency rooms, which makes the state and county to invest millions in amounts of resources to provide medical care.

"All this could be avoided if they create laws and regulations for the handling of chemicals, the problem is that whenever the government downplayed the situation. If we want economic progress but also the welfare of health, so we can all work together," Bautista said.

Among the regulations, León and Baptist are proposing to ban the entry of more polluting companies, use fewer diesel, especially in railways and reduce the transportation of trucks on Highway 99, which is one of the largest sources of pollution in areas as the city of Fresno.

LOCAL: Cleaner air, water their goal Grassroots movement continues in Valley

By JUAN ESPARZA LOERA / Vida En El Valle
Vida en el Valle Wed., Nov. 19, 2008

VISALIA -- Maricela Mares Alatorre remembers growing up in Kettleman City in the late 1980s and watching her parents get home from working in the fields and then attend meetings to fight a proposed toxic-waste incinerator they believed would be bad for the community's health.

Today, Mares Alatorre has returned to her hometown to continue that battle.

"It is important to stay in touch," said Mares Alatorre, one of about 200 people who attended last Saturday's 'Building Common Ground' conference at the College of the Sequoias.

The conference drew environmental rights advocates from throughout the San Joaquín Valley to share their experiences and develop common strategies to pressure government and industry to start protecting low-income and immigrant communities. The event was organized by the Central California Environmental Justice Network.

Mares Alatorre, whose parents helped defeat the incinerator from being built, is now on another mission. She and other Kettleman City residents are fighting efforts by Waste Management to expand its hazardous waste landfill by 11 acres.

"Everybody feels it is a health hazard," said Mares Alatorre.

It is grassroots community members like Mares Alatorre who are playing key roles in the environmental health movement, according to network president Debbie Reyes.

"If we don't become our own lobbyists, we won't win because the politicians are not representing the working class people who work in the fields," said Reyes, who is president of the California Prison Moratorium Project.

The network, she said, hopes to "build a common ground with Central Valley organizations to address the environmental injustices in our communities and address the quality of water and air."

Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, praised the work of the participants during her keynote speech.

"I don't have to tell you what the issues are, like access to clean drinking water," said Huerta. "These are things that are really affecting the health of our children."

Government and industry, said Huerta, think that locating hazardous waste landfills or incinerators near low-income communities is OK "because it is in farmworker communities."

Huerta called for action against the continued use of pesticides like methyl bromide which have already been banned in Europe.

"It is a very difficult thing to do, but we need to start organizing and put pressure on politicians," said Huerta.

Political empowerment, she said, will also help by getting minorities on water boards and other agencies that deal with the regulation of water and air quality.

"I know I'm preaching to the choir," said Huerta.

Conference participants attended workshops offered in English and Spanish that dealt with the impact of pollutants on health, what happens when communities are left out of the decision-making process, and, the effects of alternative fuels on families and the economy.

"Central Valley residents are plagued with a variety of serious pollution issues that have contaminated the air, water and land, and contributed to high rates of asthma and cancer," said network members Sarah Sharpe and Rosenda Mataka in a statement. "Valley residents are exposed to toxic and other pollution from toxic dumps, incinerators, toxic contamination sites, pesticides, diesel pollution, dirty power plants, sewage sludge dumping, dairies and other industrial activities that threaten public health."

Conference presenters said the annual health cost of air pollution in the Valley is \$1,600 per household, plus results in more than 1.2 million missed school days by children.

Actor touts the benefits of a green lifestyle

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

What does a Hollywood celebrity like Ed Begley, Jr. have in common with the folks of Kern County?

Ed Begley Jr. presents the keynote speech to local business owners and managers at the Kern Economic Development Corporation's second annual Renewable Energy Summit held at the Four Points at Sheraton hotel in Bakersfield on Wednesday afternoon.

A healthy dose of conservatism, according to the actor and environmentalist, who gave the keynote address at the Kern Economic Development Center's Second Annual Renewable Energy Summit on Wednesday.

"My father was a conservative who liked to conserve, whether it was string and tin foil or turning off the lights and conserving water," the 59-year-old said.

That sensibility, the actor said, is partly what inspired him to start composting, recycling and driving an electric car at age 20 in 1970.

"I was a broke, struggling actor then," Begley said. "It was good for my bottom line. I had a lot of extra money."

Begley's talk focused less on saving the planet and more on the co-benefits of his 38-year pursuit of a green lifestyle. Most recently, his zealous efforts to conserve energy at his Studio City home were chronicled in the reality television series "Living With Ed."

Even if you doubt man is contributing to climate change, an environmental friendly lifestyle helps “reduce our dependence on foreign oil, clean up the air in Bakersfield and save money,” he said.

“Is anyone here for that?” Begley asked, evoking applause and cheers from the audience.

While today he has rain barrels in the backyard, a windmill fastened to his home and rooftop solar panels, Begley said his environmentalist beginnings were small.

His first electric car was really a golf cart and he started composting while living in an apartment. He didn’t purchase solar panels for his home until 1990.

“The point is, you don’t run up Mt. Everest,” he said. “Not everyone can afford solar electric panels. But I know everyone in this room can afford a light bulb, weather stripping, home gardening and home composting.”

Even today, Begley says he continues to see economic benefits through relatively small changes. It wasn’t until he watched his neighbors paint and repair their wooden fence that he realized the maintenance costs saved by replacing his own aged fence with one made of recycled milk bottles.

“I can’t help but save money,” he said.

Officials issued Winter Spare the Air day

The Associated Press

In the SF Chronicle, OC Register, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO—Bay Area air quality officials will decide by noon if there should be another ban overnight on the burning of wood in fireplaces.

Because of a high level of air pollution, officials with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District issued a Winter Spare the Air day alert Wednesday.

The alert made it illegal to burn wood, pellets, or manufactured fire logs in any of the estimated 1.4 million fireplaces across the Bay Area.

Officials are hoping for voluntary compliance, but still sent out about 70 inspectors checking for smoke coming from chimneys.

Air quality officials say wood burning produces about one-third of the particulate pollution on a typical winter night.

Fireplace police on patrol; smoke can draw fine

Steve Rubenstein, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO -- The fireplace police descended on the Bay Area on Wednesday.

For the first time ever, residential fires are illegal under a new law, passed in July, that bans home burning on winter season Spare the Air days.

The first such ban took effect at noon. Seventy inspectors from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District planned to spend the day and evening patrolling residential neighborhoods, looking for telltale chimney wisps.

Violators will get warnings by mail. Repeat offenders face fines of as much as \$2,000.

The fireplace police say they are determined to keep law and order in the living room.

"We're serious," said district spokeswoman Kristine Roselius. "This is a major health threat. The weather conditions are such that smoke is trapped closer to the ground and anyone with respiratory problems will have a hard time breathing."

With 1.4 million fireplaces in the Bay Area, Roselius said the district is hoping for voluntary compliance. It notes that wood burning produces about one-third of the particulate pollution on a typical winter night.

The district predicts as many as 20 Spare the Air days during the winter season, which air quality officials define as Nov. 1 through Feb. 28. That means it could be illegal to fire up the fireplace as often as one day in every six.

Similar bans have been in place in the San Joaquin Valley and in the Pacific Northwest for several years

After the initial warning, repeat violators will face fines, some as high as four figures. In other no-burn districts, offenders have been permitted to do penance by attending "smoke school," similar to traffic school. But the Bay Area is a no-school zone.

The air quality district declared its Spare the Air Day because of what it called moderate levels of pollution all around the Bay Area. Moderate pollution is expected to remain today in the East Bay, the South Bay and the Santa Clara Valley regions, with good air quality in the North Bay and coastal regions. The district will decide by noon whether to extend the wood-burning ban.

The fireplace industry was seeing red about the prospect of more smoke-free days and nights.

"This is obviously something we're very concerned about," said Chris Caron, vice president of Duraflame, the Stockton-based purveyor of sawdust fireplace logs.

He said he hoped the new ban would not affect the fire log business and that Bay Area residents would burn even more logs on non-Spare the Air days.

"After (the district) gets through trying to scare everyone to death, we expect they will realize that people still want to burn in their fireplaces," Caron said.

He also said it was unfair to lump cleaner-burning sawdust-based logs with ordinary wood. And he said he was hoping for lots of cold, rainy, windy and miserable weather this winter.

"Bad weather is good for us," he said. "And good for air quality."

Rich Ventura, proprietor of Rich's Firewood of San Carlos, called the ban "a little excessive." Ventura sells oak fireplace wood for \$400 a cord, a quantity of stacked wood that measures 4 by 4 by 8 feet.

"They should try education first - that would be a better way to go," he said. "If you build a fire properly, and get it really hot in a wood stove, there's very little smoke."

Tim Regan of San Francisco said he had already gotten his education and wouldn't be spending Wednesday night burning any of the firewood he was buying at the Safeway on Market Street for \$18.

"The environment has to trump comfort," Regan said. "I'm sentimental about these things. A fireplace is so romantic, the curl of the smoke rising up - it's like Norman Rockwell. But I'm willing to make a concession to the planet's health and survival."

California leads fight against climate change on global level

Gov. Schwarzenegger signs a pact with heads of other states and provinces to cut greenhouse emissions. 'We have got to do something worldwide here,' he says.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

California formally moved to spread its can-do global warming gospel around the world, signing a declaration Wednesday with 11 other U.S. states and provinces or states in five other countries to help them slash their greenhouse gas emissions.

Fighting climate change shouldn't just go "nation by nation," Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger told a climate summit in Beverly Hills attended by more than 700 delegates from 19 countries. It must go "province by province. . . . We have got to do something worldwide here," he said.

California's unusual state-level diplomacy comes as President-elect Barack Obama has pledged to invigorate U.S. participation in negotiations for a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which took effect in 2005 -- and which the Bush administration declined to join.

Talks on a new climate treaty resume in Poland next month, and final agreement is expected to be signed in Copenhagen in December 2009. But success is far from assured as industrial nations, which have

caused much of the world's global warming, battle with fast-growing developing nations such as China to determine who should cut emissions.

Regional leaders signing Wednesday's declaration said they would develop strategies for high-polluting industries in an effort to influence the talks. The signers included 12 U.S. governors and state or provincial representatives from Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia and India.

California has developed more technical expertise in controlling planet-heating emissions than any U.S. state in the two years since it passed a law requiring its emissions to fall by about 15% in the next 12 years. And although the federal government has stalled in adopting any economy-wide climate legislation, the Golden State has forged ahead with renewable energy standards, automobile tailpipe regulations, efficiency incentives and forest carbon protocols.

"California is a little spot on the globe, but the influence we have on the rest of the world is enormous," Schwarzenegger told the conference, touting the "green jobs" that the state would produce from solar and other clean-technology energy.

The declaration sets in motion a process for the state's Air Resources Board, one of the world's oldest and most sophisticated pollution control agencies, to share engineering and policy expertise with regions such as Brazil's Amazon states and Indonesia's forested provinces on how to measure and control greenhouse gases.

China, India, Brazil and other fast-developing nations have resisted caps on their emissions.

"The industrial countries that have been spewing out the most greenhouse gases have a higher responsibility to act," said Gov. Ana Julia de Vasconcelos Carpa of the Brazilian state of Para.

About 20% of the world's annual carbon emissions come from burning forests in Brazil, Indonesia and other tropical nations. In an international carbon market, as envisioned in California's global warming law, U.S. industries could pay to preserve tropical forest as a cheaper way to meet their own global warming targets. It is a source of income that foreign leaders are eager to tap.

Gov. Jim Doyle of Wisconsin, one of the signers of the agreement, said that his heavily forested state also would share research with the tropical nations. "We have a joint interest in how the carbon market moves forward," he said. "We want to ensure that forest lands and their facility in capturing carbon receive appropriate credit. This will be a big political fight in this country and around the world."

Tropical deforestation, which was excluded from the emissions rules in the Kyoto Protocol, is expected to be incorporated in the new treaty. But how the developing nations are compensated by wealthy nations for not burning down their forests is far from resolved.

With California and other U.S. states facing severe fiscal restraints as the economy worsens, nonprofit organizations including the Climate Group, Conservation International and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation have pledged funds to support working groups and draft position papers for states and provinces that signed Wednesday's pact.

"Everyone wishes they could just say, 'I'm going to protect my forest, so give me money,'" said Peter Seligmann, chief executive of Conservation International. "But we have to verify that any commodity is real. Now these regions are linking with California, the eighth largest economy in the world, in an effort to create a verifiable source of carbon credits. That is huge."

Wal-Mart buys wind energy supply

The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald Thurs., Nov. 20, 2008

BENTONVILLE, Ark.—Wal-Mart Stores Inc. says it has invested in a wind energy farm in Texas that will generate enough power to light 15 percent of its Texas operations.

The world's largest retailer said Thursday the Duke Energy farm is being built in Notrees, Texas, and is to start production in April. The retailer will purchase electricity directly from Duke's Notrees Windpower Project, Duke Energy Corp. said.

The Bentonville, Ark.-based company has 360 stores and other facilities in Texas. Wal-Mart says it will pay traditional rates for the electricity, but doing so will decrease greenhouse gas emissions and will help the company reach its goal of using only renewable energy sources.

Obituaries

Carl Keith; Created Catalytic Converter

By Martin Weil, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post Monday, November 17, 2008

Carl D. Keith, 88, who as a principal inventor of the three-way catalytic converter made major contributions to automotive progress, clean air and human health, died Nov. 9 at a hospital in New Bern, N.C. He lived on Marco Island, Fla., and was in North Carolina to visit a daughter. She said he had congestive heart failure.

Based on chemistry, physics and engineering ingenuity, the three-way catalytic converter scrubbed three noxious gases from automobile exhaust. It curbed smog and eliminated some of the most damaging side effects of the internal combustion engine. An earlier converter got rid of two of the unwanted gases, but the three-way converter took its name from its ability to handle all three of the proscribed substances.

By keeping gasoline engines from spewing billions of tons of hazardous chemicals into the air, an Environmental Protection Agency report said several years ago, the converter helped save 100,000 lives and stave off hundreds of thousands of cases of throat and lung ailments.

Introduced at a time of rising concern about air pollution and environmental degradation, the catalytic converter was hailed as revolutionary and a sign that the hazards of modern technology could be kept in check.

As potentially dangerous exhaust gases whoosh toward the tailpipes of the world's automobile fleets, the cylindrically shaped converters stand in their paths, breaking down or building up their molecular structure and rendering them relatively benign. Within the converters, the gases flow through a honeycomb of tiny tubes. Lining the tubes are substances specially chosen for their ability to foster chemical reactions -- the substances known as catalysts that give the converters their name.

The first converters neutralized hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide. But they did not treat nitrogen oxides, which are also restricted under federal clean air standards.

The process needed to eliminate the first two is the opposite of that needed to curb the third. One adds oxygen; the other strips it away. In their breakthrough, Dr. Keith and co-inventor John J. Mooney created a catalyst that essentially could do both at the same time.

The three-way converter, based on this breakthrough, has been installed on more than 800 million gasoline-fueled automobiles and light-duty vehicles all over the world, Mooney wrote recently.

Dr. Keith was born in Stewart Creek in Ritchie County, W.Va. He studied at Salem College, Indiana University and DePaul University. He joined Sinclair Oil as a research chemist in 1943 and in 1957 went to work for Engelhard, retiring in 1985 as executive vice president.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 gave significant impetus to the development of the three-way converter. Dr. Keith also patented more than 200 other inventions.

On Nov. 6, 2003, he and Mooney received the National Medal of Technology from President Bush at the White House. His wife, Edith Keith, died in 2000. Survivors include two daughters; six grandchildren; and eight grandchildren.

[N.Y. Times commentary, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008:](#)

What's the Point of Daylight Time?

By MATTHEW J. KOTCHEN and LAURA E. GRANT

Santa Barbara, Calif. -- WHY do we — along with 75 other countries — alternate between standard time and daylight time? Although many people believe it has an agricultural provenance, daylight time has

always been a policy meant to save energy. As Benjamin Franklin argued, if people moved up their summer schedules by an hour, they could live by “sunshine rather than candles” in the evenings.

Energy conservation was the motivation for daylight time during World Wars I and II and the oil embargo of the 1970s, and it remains so today — even though there has been little scientific evidence to suggest daylight time actually helps us cut back on electricity use.

Recently, however, we were able to conduct a study in Indiana, where daylight time was instituted statewide only in 2006. Before that year, daylight time was in effect in just a handful of counties. This change of policy offered a unique, natural experiment to measure the overall effect on residential electricity consumption. We could compare the amount of energy used by households in the late-adopting counties during the two years before they switched to daylight time with the amounts they used during the year afterward — while using counties that always practiced daylight time as a control group.

We found that daylight time caused a 1 percent overall increase in residential electricity use, though the effect varied from month to month. The greatest increase occurred in late summer and early fall, when electricity use rose by 2 percent to 4 percent.

Daylight time costs Indiana households an average of \$3.29 a year in higher electricity bills, or about \$9 million for the whole state. We also calculated the health and other social costs of increased pollution emissions at \$1.7 million to \$5.5 million per year.

What explains this unexpected result? While daylight time reduces demand for household lighting, it increases demand for heating in the early spring and late fall (in the mornings) and, even more important, for cooling on summer evenings. Benjamin Franklin was right about candles, in other words, but he did not consider air-conditioners.

In regions of the United States where demand for air-conditioning is greater than in Indiana, this spike in cooling costs is likely to be even greater. Arizona, one of the hottest states, may have it right; it does not practice daylight time.

Eliminating daylight time would thus accord with President-elect Barack Obama’s stated goals of conserving resources, saving money, promoting energy security and reducing climate change. At the very least, we should abandon the notion that we are saving energy while enjoying the extra hour of sunlight on hot summer evenings.

Matthew J. Kotchen is a professor of economics and Laura E. Grant is a doctoral student in environmental science and management at the University of California, Santa Barbara.