

Air quality topic of discussion at library

By Alex K.W. Schultz

The Porterville Recorder, Wed., July 15, 2009

Locals concerned with the area's poor air quality attended a lecture presented by San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials Tuesday at the Porterville Public Library.

Scott Nester, the agency's director of planning, highlighted problems and solutions during his two-hour talk inside the library's community room.

"Everybody knows we have a pretty serious air pollution problem here," he said. "We're trying to talk to people about air quality and get input on pollution these days."

Ozone and particulate matter are the two major contributors to the Valley's poor air quality, Nester said.

Ozone is produced through the interaction of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight.

There are two types of particulate matter: PM 10 and PM 2.5.

PM 10, which is more prevalent in the fall, encompasses dust and large particles. PM 2.5, a winter problem, includes smaller particles and is more dangerous than PM 10.

In 2007, there were 812 premature deaths, 364 new cases of chronic bronchitis, 3,600 cases of acute bronchitis in children, 119 hospital admissions, 584 nonfatal heart attacks and 69 lost work days in the Valley — all due to unhealthy emissions — according to a study done by the University of California, Fullerton.

There is, however, some good news: Stationary-source pollution has been reduced by 80 percent since 1980, Nester said.

"Air quality is improving," he said, "but we have a long way to go."

The Valley, according to Nester, produces over 600 tons of pollution per day with the main contributor being heavy-duty trucks. The goal, Nester said, is 160 tons per day.

"It's going to take a lot of work by a lot of people to get us there," he said.

Nester said "virtually everybody" needs to reduce the amount of miles they travel. He also said cleaner fuels need to be used and emissions put forth by equipment should be minimized.

Boyd Leavitt, who attended the lecture with his wife, Mary Leavitt, said he believes farmers should be more regulated.

"Any time we approach air," he said, "we are expected to comply but they are not."

Mary Leavitt said she sees the area's air quality improving.

"I think the Valley can do better," she said. "We're all in this together."

Air quality officials seek residents' feedback

Session: Free chat planned in library Tuesday

By Jenna Chandler

The Porterville Recorder Friday, July 10, 2009

The Valley's air pollution control district wants ideas and feedback from residents about how to make the air cleaner.

An informal and informational chat will take place at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday in the Porterville Public Library in the Community Room, 41 W. Thurman Ave.

Air pollution, which affects people and vegetation, has gotten better, but representatives from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District have more work to do. Through conversations with

residents, they want to enhance their databases with fresh information and educate people on new ways to reduce bad emissions.

"We know that people are interested and concerned," spokeswoman Janelle Schneider said.

Since 1990, emissions in the San Joaquin Valley have been reduced by nearly 60 percent, according to 2008 report on Valley air.

"Air quality has been pretty good this summer," Schneider said.

Ozone and particulate matter are the two pollutants responsible for a majority of the Valley's air quality problem, affecting human health and vegetation. Heavy duty diesel trucks, pesticides and fertilizers, food and agricultural processing are examples of ozone-damaging culprits.

Bad air quality can cause asthma attacks and respiratory conditions. It also weakens plants, making them susceptible to diseases, and affects pets, cold and drought, Lucinda Roth, supervisor with the air district, said.

"It's a two hour presentation, but it's not a direct presentation," Roth said. "We really want feedback from residents."

Admission to the chat is free. There will be refreshments, an iPod give-away, and Spanish-language interpretation.

Asthma study finds seasonal surprises

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, July 14, 2009

A new study confirms that lung problems get worse for Fresno asthmatics in winter when soot pollution increases. But, strangely, the same is not true during the worst summertime smog.

Surprised researchers say they think asthmatics simply stay indoors on hot, smoggy days. But on pleasant winter days when soot pollution sometimes spikes, people spend more time outside.

People with lung problems seem more aware of summertime pollution, said lead researcher Tim Tyner of the University of California at San Francisco-Fresno Medical Education Program.

"I think it means we should educate people more about particulate matter so they will know when it's wise to stay inside," said Tyner, associate director of clinical studies.

Over the last 18 months, Tyner and pulmonologist Jose Joseph, associate professor of medicine at UCSF-Fresno, intensely studied the effects of pollution on nine Fresno residents who have asthma.

Chemist Alam Hasson and biologist Mamta Rawat, both from California State University, Fresno, also participated in the study. The research included a battery of physical tests to identify changes in lung functions and chemicals found in the asthmatics after air-pollution exposure.

The \$250,000 study, underwritten by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, sheds light on a chronic lung problem in one of the nation's worst air basins.

Fresno County is California's asthma capital: Nearly one in three children -- or about 75,000 -- have it, according to one statewide health survey.

Researchers monitored the nine Fresno asthmatics during fall, winter and summer. In warm weather, asthmatics carried portable ozone monitors, so researchers would know how much pollution individuals experienced.

The portable monitors showed personal exposure was much lower than the ozone readings shown by the official air monitors in Fresno, largely because people were indoors much of the time.

But in winter, urine samples showed chemicals related to tiny specks of pollution, called PM-2.5, which are linked to reduced lung function. The chemicals triggered lung inflammation, Tyner said.

The chemicals come from vehicles, wood burning and meat cooking, according to the air district.

"The district is already moving in the direction of better controls of these chemicals," said David Lighthall, district health science adviser.

The district has enforced more wood-burning restrictions on polluted winter days, and new charbroiling rules for restaurants are under consideration. The district also is working on improving a program to retire high-polluting vehicles.

Tyner said researchers were unsuccessful in recruiting men for the study. But he said it was more important to find asthmatics who did not suffer allergies from pets, pollen, mold and dust, which are additional triggers for the ailment. Allergies would have created too much complexity in the study.

The research also included nine other women who did not have asthma. Tyner said the healthy women had fewer problems with PM-2.5 pollution, but they still suffered some narrowing of small airways in their lungs.

To confirm and expand on the findings, the researchers are planning a larger follow-up study involving 80 people -- 40 with asthma, and 40 otherwise healthy individuals.

Chevron project tied to increased dependence on foreign oil

By Mike Taugher

Contra Costa Times, Wed., July 15, 2009

To understand why Chevron wants to retool its Richmond refinery, one can start by looking at two numbers: 5 million and 69 million.

The first is the number of barrels of crude oil brought into the refinery from foreign sources in 1986, nearly all from Indonesia. The second is how many barrels of oil the refinery imported last year, almost all from Saudi Arabia and Iraq, according to statistics kept by the U.S. Department of Energy.

As oil production in Alaska declined, Chevron and other California refiners that were heavily dependent on Alaska oil have had to buy more foreign oil to make up for the loss.

Finding crude overseas that has the same, easy-to-refine characteristics as the Alaskan oil for which the refinery is designed is getting more difficult and expensive, analysts said.

"As the Alaska supply goes down, they're looking for opportunities to increase their flexibility," said Joanne Shore, a senior analyst with the Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration.

Generally speaking, there are two characteristics of crude oil at issue: the amount of sulfur in it and its density.

Chevron insists it is seeking to refine only higher sulfur crudes. Because the project also includes installation of new sulfur removal equipment and better pollution controls, sulfur emissions are expected to decline significantly as a result.

Environmentalists, however, contend the company also intends to refine heavier crude oil and that this will increase emissions of toxins and other pollutants.

A consultant hired by state Attorney General Jerry Brown's office backed that claim, saying in a report last year that available crude oil is getting heavier all the time and the retooling project will allow the refinery to process it.

Chevron disputes that, but language in its massive, three-volume environmental study of the project was vague enough that Contra Costa Superior Court Judge Barbara Zuniga found it left wiggle room for the company to process the heavier crude.

But does it matter?

In theory, heavier crude can contain more toxic contaminants and, because it is thicker, it takes more heat to break down and refine. That can translate into more emissions of toxins and other pollutants, such as oxides of nitrogen, or NOx, that are produced by burning.

"The new furnaces are going to be firing harder, but they are going to be held to a much, much higher standard," said Greg Solomon, a senior air quality engineer at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "It's hard to see an increase in NOx (a pollutant associated with combustion) there."

Other pollutants will be controlled with permit conditions and monitored with new, state-of-the-art equipment to determine if those limits are exceeded.

A leading state energy analyst agreed.

"For a different kind of crude oil coming into the plant and all of a sudden there's going to be more emissions, they won't do that," said Gordon Schremp, a senior fuels specialist with the California Energy Commission.

Overall, the project is expected to reduce emissions of some kinds of pollutants and increase other kinds. Nitrogen oxide, an ingredient in smog, sulfur dioxide and particulates are expected to decrease, while carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds, another smog ingredient, are expected to increase.

There's another pollutant of concern, too.

The refinery's emissions of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming, would increase by more than 50 percent.

"There is international scientific consensus that human-caused increases in greenhouse gases have and will continue to contribute to global warming," Chevron acknowledges in its environmental impact report, "although there is much uncertainty concerning the magnitude and rate of the warming."

But the judge found that the plan to offset greenhouse gas emissions was not specific enough.

Brown, who forced Chevron to address greenhouse gas emissions, said the company's plan to offset those emissions is adequate.

"We felt they had a good plan to mitigate," Brown said in an interview. "We think this is an important project. The efficiency of the plant is a good thing."

The project involves replacing old equipment, and under "new source review" regulations, the refinery is required to replace that equipment with the cleanest and most efficient pollution controls and monitoring equipment available.

"When you're taking out an old piece of equipment, there's definitely a plus for that," said Solomon, the air district engineer, adding, "Some pollutants are going to be an increase."

So, is the overall project a net plus or a net minus for air quality?

"That's a difficult questions to answer," Solomon said.

Calif. board postpones decision on pollution tax

The Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wed., July 15, 2009

SACRAMENTO—California regulators are again delaying a decision on the nation's first statewide carbon fee on utilities, oil refineries and other polluting industries.

The California Air Resources Board has canceled a vote on the issue for a second time.

The board is considering charging a carbon fee to raise money to pay for California's landmark global warming law. It was expected to vote during a July 23 meeting in San Diego.

Board spokesman Stanley Young says regulators need more time to address concerns raised by electricity providers.

They're worried that California could inadvertently impose a fee on energy that is moved through the state but not used here. That would violate federal energy laws.

Company to pay \$2.5 million for false air reports

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wed., July 15, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO—A company that operates a tank farm in Contra Costa County will pay \$2.5 million for filing false air quality reports.

Federal prosecutors say Shore Terminals LLC pleaded guilty Tuesday to four counts of submitting false annual reports to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Prosecutors say as part of a plea arrangement, a judge fined the company \$1.75 million. Shore Terminals was also ordered it to pay another \$750,000 to help fund air quality projects in Contra Costa and Alameda counties.

Prosecutors say Shore Terminals filed false air reports during equipment malfunctions between 2003 and 2006 at its fuel terminal in Selby, an unincorporated area of Contra Costa County.

Tank farm operator hit with \$2.5 million punishment

By Josh Richman, Oakland Tribune

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wed., July 15, 2009

A company that runs a fuel terminal on Contra Costa County's northwestern tip has been ordered to pay \$2.5 million in fines and penalties — including \$750,000 to local clean-air community service projects — for violations that contributed to Bay Area smog.

Shore Terminals LLC pleaded guilty Tuesday to four felony counts of submitting false annual reports to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Neither the company's attorney nor a spokesperson could immediately be reached for comment later Tuesday.

The company's plea agreement says Shore Terminals received and distributed petroleum such as gasoline, diesel fuel and jet fuel as well as ethanol at its NuStar marine terminal and tank farm in unincorporated Selby, near Crockett. There, the company filled fuel trucks using a truck loading rack, which requires a vapor recovery unit to capture volatile organic compounds — gasses which when hit by sunlight create ground-level ozone, a big part of smog.

From 2003 through the end of 2006, the plea agreement says, Shore Terminals had mechanical problems that caused the vapor recovery unit to malfunction and shut down, yet workers kept loading even when the unit wasn't working. To do so, the company repeatedly used a bypass switch previously installed in the operations control room. Yet in March 2005, May 2005 and March 2006, Shore Terminals falsely certified to the BAAQMD and the EPA that their facility was in compliance with the Clean Air Act and all permit requirements.

U.S. District Judge Susan Illston on Tuesday ordered Shore Terminals to pay a \$1.75 million fine, but also to pay \$500,000 to the National Fish & Wildlife Association and \$250,000 to the Bay Area Clean Air Foundation to be used for projects that improve Bay Area air quality, particularly in Contra Costa and Alameda counties; the company must pay the nonprofits within a week, and can't use these community service payments for tax breaks. And the company must follow an environmental compliance plan to ensure future compliance with the Clean Air Act and other environmental regulations.

Seal Beach makes it easier for residents to go solar City Council opts to waive hundreds in fees for solar customers

By Jaimee Lynn Fletcher
The Orange County Register, Wed., July 15, 2009

SEAL BEACH— It will now be a little easier for residents to go solar.

City Council members on Monday unanimously voted to waive the fees associated with installing solar panels on single-family homes, a move city officials say sends a message that Seal Beach is environmentally savvy.

The city used to charge about \$550 in fees, on average, for residents who installed panels on their homes, which included a plan check and inspections.

The council Monday considered lowering the fee to \$325 but after appeals by a handful of residents, members quickly decided to absorb the costs.

"It may not change the world, but it will make a statement," resident Robert Goldberg said.

Seal Beach will now be one of eight Orange County cities to offer free solar, including Huntington Beach, Costa Mesa and Santa Ana, according to a report from the Sierra Club.

The waived fees apply only to single-family homes with a roof area of about 320 square feet, said Lee Whittenberg, the city's director of development services.

City officials estimate the city will lose about \$3,000 in revenue a year, which Councilman Michael Levitt said is a small price to pay.

"We're getting very cheap publicity as being a city that cares about the environment," he said.

In 2008 the city had nine applications for solar installations, and resident Mike Buhbe said dropping the fees could encourage more residents to be energy efficient.

"It will obviously reduce the cost and \$500 might be the amount of money that just tips somebody over the edge," he said.

Buhbe paid about \$20,000 in April to install a large system on his one-story Old Town home. He said he expects his system to pay for itself in about 16 years, maybe sooner if energy costs continue to rise.

"I just wanted to be a responsible citizen and reduce my Co2 output," he said. "I'm doing what I can to reduce air pollution."

Buhbe said his electricity bill is at zero since he installed his system, and the initial cost of going green will be well worth it in the future.

"You don't have to go with a large system to zero out your bill," he said. "If you can afford a low-priced car, you can afford to put solar on your roof."

Larger residences, such as apartment complexes, and businesses still have to pay fees based on project size and undergo rigorous inspections by the Orange County Fire Authority, Whittenberg said.

The city has seen two commercial applications in three years for solar panels, including a 4,000-square-foot system installed at Kohl's at 12000 Seal Beach Blvd.

The average fee for installing solar in Orange County is \$426 for each resident. Los Alamitos, Placentia and Dana Point have the highest permit fees, charging more than \$900, according to the Sierra Club's report.

Orange County has the lowest fees for residents in unincorporated areas looking to go solar, charging \$16 for each resident.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Wed., July 15, 2009:](#)

Clunker of a clunker bill

By Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang

Is the new "cash for clunkers" law really a vehicle for replacing gas-guzzling cars and trucks with the next generation of clean, green machines - or is it just a disguise for moving slightly less thirsty guzzlers from dealers' lots onto America's driveways?

If the federal agency with the mission of overseeing the law does its job well, we'll find out quickly - and well before the automakers show up again on Capitol Hill, tin cup in hand, asking Congress that so-2009 question: "Please, sirs, may we have some more billions?"

It is weighted heavily in favor of carmakers looking to unload unsold gas gulpers on a skittish market. But Americans have an opportunity in coming months to turn it greener.

The limited effects the controversial new law would have on greenhouse gas emissions combined with its cost have quickly ignited one of those rare American political moments when environmentalists and conservatives find common ground.

Conservatives say that it is a \$1 billion boondoggle written to channel taxpayer dollars to the automakers and dealers; environmentalists agree, and add that its standards are so lax that it will do little to persuade Americans to give up their gas guzzlers and start driving cleaner wheels.

Working against a July 24 deadline, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is preparing the regulations' fine print now.

The agency needs to write the rules so that the public learns which cars and trucks are being scrapped and which new ones are being purchased with a taxpayer subsidy under the "clunker" provisions.

Congress can then base its decision on whether to extend the program - and there is little question that the auto companies will want it extended beyond its expiration on Nov. 1, or sooner if the money runs out - on data that tell us whether tax money is going for new hybrids or new gas guzzlers.

And as the government prepares the details, car buyers need to think about the choice the law offers them.

When introduced, the program had an environmental rationale: Pay people to scrap their gas-guzzling clunkers and replace them with new cars that get 25 percent better mileage, pollute less and cut our oil addiction.

But it got hijacked.

By the time President Obama signed the legislation into law, auto industry lobbyists and their congressional friends diluted it so that in some cases, buying a car or light truck offering an improvement of a mere 1 mile per gallon over your junked wheels will get you a \$3,500 voucher.

So you can take the money and use it to buy pickups, vans and SUVs. Now that doesn't even sound green, does it?

But Americans have a choice. We can take the program back from Detroit: Let's use the money to buy cars that will save us dollars at the pump and cut global warming pollution. If you've been thinking about buying a hybrid or some other truly green wheels, here comes Uncle Sam with the cash to help you make it happen.

That's not where the auto companies drove the program. But it is the original green idea. Get clunkers off the road and replace them with something better.

Dan Becker directs the Safe Climate Campaign. James Gerstenzang is the campaign's editorial director.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register Editorial, Tuesday, July 14, 2009:](#)

Join forces for real power

History has shown that any effort for progress in the Central Valley has a much greater chance of success when different agencies collaborate.

Combining the resources of different San Joaquin Valley counties has been effective in several kinds of public action. In law enforcement, multicounty agencies have proved to be effective in both drug enforcement and in preventing rural crime. The San Joaquin Valley Partnership has created opportunities for addressing health and social issues. [The regional air pollution control district has created a vehicle for addressing the region's most difficult issues.](#)

These examples have obviously not been lost on College of the Sequoias President Bill Scroggins. Last week, he proposed that two-year colleges in the Valley — there are 14 of them — collaborate on efforts to get access to federal stimulus funding. Colleges are eligible for and gaining access to this money, but Scroggins said just one college would find it difficult to obtain funding by itself.

Scroggins also reasons that the issues facing community colleges in the Valley are similar and that they arise from regional issues an agriculture-based economy, relatively low level of technology, high rates of unemployment, non-English speakers, and a relatively low level of individuals with education beyond high school.

"We need to show the federal government that our region needs help," Scroggins said. "These are big problems we face and we need big money to handle them."

We applaud Scroggins' approach and agree that many have a better chance of success than one. Unfortunately, getting a number of entities to collaborate has been a challenge in our Valley. We have seen several other appeals for collaboration to address common issues falter for lack of multiagency commitment.

We are used to being overlooked in the Valley, especially sitting as we are between two very high-profile areas, the Bay Area and Southern California. Any of the individual counties in the Valley seem small and insignificant compared with Los Angeles, Orange, Santa Clara, etc., But when the counties in the Valley put their resources together, they have clout.

Lawmakers in Congress have learned this with a couple of campaigns. They all must be a little ideological and more willing to compromise to pursue their common interests, but they have done it.

At present, the various Central Valley counties are all being afflicted by the effects of the state budget crunch. The consequences are the same for the counties and their constituents up and down the Valley they will be forced to lay off personnel in public safety and in social services. In almost every case, the result is forecast to be the same.

Counties already have lobbyists to advocate for them and organizations that look out for their interests. But joining forces on solving some of the issues that the state budget crisis is creating would be a powerful and creative way to make a statement about the state budgeting mechanism.

Scroggins wants to take the idea of collaboration a step further. He proposed that not only junior colleges, but also local Workforce Investment boards, join in the message to the federal government. That would make a unique but logical alliance: Local Workforce Investment boards seek and distribute grant funding for economic development, job creation and employee training.

They share the same mission as community colleges to create an educated and well-trained work force.

That goal is worth pursuing as a priority above all others. After all, if our region had a high employment rate for well-trained workers working at high-paying jobs, most of the Valley's problems would be history. That would certainly be worth sacrificing some autonomy to become an effective collaborator.