SJV Air Pollution Control District seeks funding for projects; has $1.4M available

Sun-Star Staff
Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, July 7, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is requesting proposals for projects that demonstrate bold, innovative and creative, new emission-reduction technologies as part of the district's Technology Advancement Program. The district is seeking technology demonstrations in the areas of renewable energy, waste solutions and mobile sources that will continue to improve the Valley's air quality.

The district released the Request for Proposals for new projects July 5. About $1.4 million is available and is expected to fund five to eight projects that will demonstrate the feasibility of new emission-reduction technologies that are necessary to meet state and federal air-quality standards, the district said in a news release.

"The response to our first solicitation under this program was very encouraging. There's no shortage of the kinds of ideas in the Valley that will help us reach clean air," Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer, said in the release.

A portion of available funding is a result of collaboration between the district and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the Clean Air Technology Initiative. The Clean Air Technology Initiative is a partnership of local, state and federal agencies working with the private sector, non-profits and academia to demonstrate and bring to market new clean air and energy technologies to reduce criteria pollutants, greenhouse gases and air toxics to meet air-quality goals, according to the release.

"We will not achieve our goal of clean, breathable air unless we accelerate the development and deployment of new technologies," Jared Blumenfeld, regional administrator for EPA's Pacific Southwest Region, said in the release. "This grant funding will help bring near-zero emitting technologies to market while creating green jobs in the San Joaquin Valley."

The district's Technology Advancement Program was launched in 2010. Current projects include solar energy storage, next-generation off-road diesel retrofit, advancement of hybrid vehicle technology, and low-emission uses of biogas. These projects will demonstrate and accelerate deployment of technologies to reduce directly emitted particulate matter and/or nitrogen oxides.

Complete proposals must be received by Friday, Aug. 19 at 5 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. Complete information is available at the District's Technology Advancement Program website: http://www.valleyair.org/Grant_Programs/TAP/tap_idx.htm.

On July 21 at 9:30 a.m., the district will hold an in-person workshop for interested technology proponents. The workshop will be held at the District's Fresno office via video teleconference from the Modesto and Bakersfield offices, and potentially EPA's San Francisco and Los Angeles offices. (Additional information about this workshop is available at the District's TAP website above.)

For more information about the Valley Air District, visit www.valleyair.org or call a regional office: in Fresno, 559-230-6000; in Bakersfield, 661-392-5500; and in Modesto, 209-557-6400.

Valley Air District seeks new technology proposals

Has $1.4 million for them

Central Valley Business News, Wed., July 6, 2011

Got a clever idea on how to reduce the air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley? You might be able to get funding to put the idea into use.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wants proposals for projects that demonstrate "bold, innovative and creative, new emission-reduction technologies" as part of its Technology Advancement Program.

Approximately $1.4 million is available and is expected to fund five to eight projects that would demonstrate the feasibility of new emission-reduction technologies that are necessary for the Valley to meet state and federal air-quality standards.

“The response to our first solicitation under this program was very encouraging. There’s no shortage of the kinds of ideas in the Valley that will help us reach clean air,” says Seyed Sadredin, the District’s executive director and air pollution control officer.

The District’s Technology Advancement Program was launched in 2010. Current projects include solar energy storage, next-generation off-road diesel retrofit, advancement of hybrid vehicle technology, and low-emission uses of biogas.

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Free vehicle emissions tests Saturday at fairgrounds

Sun-Star Staff
Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, July 6, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and Valley CAN, a nonprofit, will provide Merced-area drivers who have owned their car for at least six months a free vehicle emissions test.

The event will be held Saturday, July 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Merced County Fairgrounds, 900 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, 11th Street parking lot.

If the vehicle doesn't pass the test but can be repaired, the driver will receive a voucher for up to $500 in emission related repairs at a local Gold Shield-certified smog check station.

A maximum of 525 vehicles will be tested on a first-come, first-served basis. There will be free food and drinks while supplies last. The event will be held Saturday, July 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Merced County Fairgrounds, 900 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, 11th Street parking lot.

The sponsors said more than 2,000 cars have been repaired to state smog standards by Valley Clean Air Now's Tune In & Tune Up program since 2003. In partnership with the Foundation for California Community Colleges and its VRRRM program, the Valley Air District has been able to expand the program with funding from the Reformulated Gasoline Settlement Fund. Fifteen of the events will be held throughout the Valley over the next 18 months.

For program information visit www.vrrrm.org

For event information email MercedEvent@valley-can.org or call 1-800-806-2004.

The Vehicle Repair, Retirement and Replacement for Motorists (VRRRM) program is made possible by a grant from the Reformulated Gasoline Settlement Fund. Created as a result of an antitrust class action, the purpose of the fund is to achieve a clean air or fuel efficiency benefit for California consumers, according to a news release from the district.

Toll lanes in LA to cost 25 cents to $1.40 a mile

Associated Press
In the Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, July 7, 2011

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Wednesday for the first Los Angeles toll roads _ rejiggered carpool lanes that officials hope will ease downtown congestion and perhaps expand into a regional system of pay-as-you go pavement.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa joined other local, state and federal officials with hardhats and shovels to ceremonially open construction in a parking lot next to the Interstate 110 carpool lane in suburban Gardena.

A $210 million federal grant provided money for a pilot program that will convert about 25 miles of I-110 and Interstate 10 carpool lanes under the ExpressLanes project.

About 11 miles of I-110 toll lane between downtown and Gardena are expected to open next year. Another 14 miles of I-10 lane from near downtown east to around El Monte will open in early 2013.

Motorists traveling alone will pay for the option of using the so-called High Occupancy Toll, or HOT, lanes. The toll, ranging from 25 cents to $1.40 per mile, will utilize "congestion pricing" that changes depending on demand.

Carpools with two or more people can use the I-110 lane for free but only those with three or more will have the same perk on the I-10 segment.

While many large cities utilize toll roads, Los Angeles County residents have long been used to freeways, although a similar toll lane is in place on California State Route 91 in Orange County.

Villaraigosa said using the toll road could save rush-hour commuters about 10 minutes daily, "reducing the pollution that comes from idling cars and clearing the congestion that clogs our streets and highways."

The pilot program will be reevaluated after a year of operation but if successful there are hopes of expanding it, said Marc Littman, spokesman for the regional Metropolitan Transportation Authority that is overseeing the project along with the California Department of Transportation.

"It's very difficult to build new freeways in the Los Angeles area _ we're just built out _ so the idea is to better manage the freeways that we have, to squeeze more capacity out of them," Littman said.

"The freeways aren't free," he added. "Right now, the average motorist in Los Angeles County spends, like, 70 hours a year stuck in traffic. That costs you."

Officials did not provide an estimate of the number of motorists who might use the lanes, but the pilot program could raise about $20 million in tolls, MTA spokesman Rick Jager told City News Service.

The toll lanes are one part of an effort to deal with jammed traffic. The tolls could encourage people to carpool or use public transit, and some of the federal money will be used to purchase buses that also will use the toll lanes, Littman said.

Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Wed., July 6, 2011:

Fireworks did cause some big pollution spikes in Valley

By Mark Grossi

Just to finish a thought I started last week: There were a few monster readings on July 4th that look like the result of fireworks.

Turlock in Stanislaus County spiked big numbers for particle pollution between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. To a lesser extent, so did Clovis, Visalia, Bakersfield and even tiny Huron.

The biggest spike was in Turlock with 176 micrograms per cubic meter of air between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. The daylong standard is 35 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

The spikes around the San Joaquin Valley were not enough to cause a violation for the daylong standard, which averages hourly readings around the clock.

But those were dangerous numbers during the fireworks celebrations. Those tiny bits of soot, metals and chemicals can easily get into the lungs and cause problems even for people who are otherwise healthy.

Contra Costa Times commentary, Tuesday, July 5, 2011:

Opinion: Support for clean diesel -- it's not an oxymoron -- must continue

By David Pettit and Allen Schaeffer
Special to the Mercury News

Fifteen years ago, there was no such thing as a clean diesel. Today, new diesel buses, trucks and other engines are more than 90 percent cleaner. These diesel engines operate smoke-free, have created thousands of new jobs in the hard-hit engine manufacturing sector and elsewhere, and are helping to save escalating fuel costs by operating more efficiently. Unfortunately, the federal program funding these innovations in California may be coming to an end this week.

In 2005, Congress approved the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act, a five-year effort to accelerate the cleanup of millions of dirty diesel engines still in use across the United States. The act sought to improve air quality by modernizing diesel engines and equipment through replacements and retrofits.

California is heavily reliant on diesel and also suffering from the worst air pollution in the nation. The diesel emissions act is helping to address this. From 2008 through 2010, California received more than $55 million from it, more than any other state, to retrofit engines in school buses, construction vehicles, public transit buses, rail and truck transportation, and agricultural equipment, including tractors and generators.

In the past two years, California's Air Resources Board received $9 million to re-power switchyard locomotives operating in the South Coast. Caltrans received $1.6 million to install diesel particulate filters on construction equipment and replace older dump/trash trucks with 2007 or newer models. And nearly $4 million went to the San Joaquin Valley -- one of the worst air pollution areas in the country -- to replace heavy-duty trucks and re-power off-road agricultural vehicles. These diesel engine retrofits will reduce air pollution for all Californians.

Just a few months ago, this program was overwhelmingly reauthorized for another five years. But in February, the president's budget included no money for it. Congress has a chance to change that Wednesday.

Congress should continue to fund the diesel program, and here's why:

Every dollar invested in diesel retrofits and replacements yields at least $13 in health benefits -- fewer asthma emergencies, fewer lost work days and healthier communities. In addition, the program has provided federal funds in a competitive process that encourages state, local or private funding matches. By doing so, it has leveraged roughly $3 in state, local, or private funding for every federal dollar. It's hard to find a better investment in public health.

The program provides the seed funding for thousands of fleet owners, farmers and other diesel users to afford the new engines, retrofits and technologies. In turn, this is unlocking the potential of America's engine makers and equipment innovators. U.S. engine companies are producing the most durable, most efficient and cleanest diesel engines in the world, and other clean diesel manufacturers are making the catalysts and filters that can make older diesel engines cleaner during the years of service that they have left.

Tough choices have to be made in the upcoming budget. But clean air shouldn't be a partisan issue, and the diesel cleanup has never been one. When the program was reauthorized in December, Democrats and Republicans recognized that it was one of the most cost-effective programs in government and that there was no such thing as Democrat air or Republican air.

If ever a program made sense and had the support of environmental, labor, public health and industry groups, this is the one. With 11 million dirty diesel engines still on our roads, construction sites and farms, Congress needs to continue funding the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act.

David Pettit is a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council in Santa Monica and

Allen Schaeffer is executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum. They wrote this for this newspaper.

Stockton Record editorial, Thursday, July 7, 2011:

Power to the people

Sierra snowpack assures ample, clean power supply for our hot Valley summer

There's more good news about all the snow sitting in the Sierra, slowly melting in the summer sun.

In addition to more water flowing through our rivers, streams and the Delta, and more water for our thirsty crops, the heavy winter snow pack means more readily available hydro-electric power.

Pacific Gas and Electric estimates that this year's electrical power yield from its dams will be 21 percent higher than average owing to the abundant water Mother Nature locked in the winter snows.

With water stacked up in mountain and Mother Lode reservoirs, when electric power demand surges, PG&E officials can literally turn a valve letting water pour through a turbine at one of its hydroelectric dams. The power is there instantly.

Absent the snowpack to fill those reservoirs, the utility would have to fire up generators fueled by coal or natural gas. Not only does that take more time, those fuels are more expensive and create more air pollution.

PG&E calculates the extra mountain water this year translates into a reduction of more than 886,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions.

That's equivalent to the electricity used by 107,600 homes for an entire year.

Of course, having various ways to generate electricity remains the prudent way to do business. Although last winter's rains broke our three year drought, there is no reason to believe there won't be more dry years ahead. California has seen wet-dry cycles time and again.

That's why it makes sense not only to have many types of electrical generating facilities available but to conserve as many kilowatts of electricity as we can.

Conservation and added efficiency not only saves electricity but also money.

And that's something every consumer can do, and likely will be prompted to do when the power bill arrives showing just what it costs to stay cool during our hot Valley days.