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Editorial and two side articles, San Francisco Chronicle, August 11, 2002

## **A Blight on the Garden of Eden Who will sacrifice to clean valley's air?**

Thick haze blots out snowy mountains just 20 miles away. Schools cancel outdoor recess when the soot and ozone in the smoggy air reach dangerous levels. Asthma doctors are stunned at the record number of youngsters gasping for breath. This isn't a Rust Belt steel-town or car-clogged Los Angeles. It's the verdant San Joaquin Valley, a 240-mile-long stretch of farmland from Stockton to Bakersfield, with some of the nation's worst air. While California's skies have cleaned up in recent years, the valley's skies haven't. The American Lung Association put three San Joaquin counties -- Kern, Fresno and Tulare -- in the top-six most-polluted counties in the nation. For a decade, regulators and politicians have dawdled while the heavy air settled into a near-permanent lid over the region. Finally, the first steps toward cleaning the skies are being taken, though it will take up to a decade to test the results. It's a shameful record that punishes the state's poorest residents. Set against the prosperous image of California, the eight counties making up the valley are impoverished stepchildren. The valley's jobless rate is more than double the state average. Its residents have less schooling, income and life expectancy than those in other parts of California. The valley leads the rest of the state in one dismal social barometer: It hosts the highest number of prisoners, thanks to a construction boom of state prisons welcomed by job-hungry towns. Neglect and timidity postponed smog solutions until now. But harsh publicity over asthma rates and lawsuits brought by environmental and civil rights groups are prompting change. The results bear close monitoring to make sure the air improves. The valley runs on a puzzling paradox: Vistas of green cotton fields and neatly-fenced dairies matched against filthy, yellow air. How did prime farmland become so polluted and who is responsible? Local smog officials claim the issue is complex. Highway 99 and Interstate 5 rumble with truck traffic powered by federally regulated diesel engines. Cars and pickups using state emission rules commute to work from sprawling subdivisions stretching from Tracy to Bakersfield. As a result, the valley's smog board has no say on tailpipe emissions responsible for up to 60 percent of the region's bad air. Adding to the atmospheric brew is the Bay Area, a source of smog that blows through gaps in the Diablo range and into the valley, totaling up to 27 percent of the smog at the north end. A pending state bill would require

higher smog-check standards for Bay Area drivers to alleviate this problem. This is a sensible improvement that removes a favorite valley gripe, blaming outsiders. But cleaner Bay Area vehicles won't solve the inland area's homegrown smog problems. The valley is also a victim of topography. Mountains rim it on three sides, holding in pollution. Its famously warm weather works to bake a mix of pollutants into ozone that clogs the skies and stays put. High pressure zones and inversion also act to trap dirty air. Currently, the biggest wild-card in boosting air quality is farming. Agricultural activities - ranging from diesel water pumps to road dust kicked up by tractors -- have few controls. Since the federal Clean Air Act was passed in 1970, farmers have enjoyed an exemption from emission rules faced by power plants, auto body shops or factories. Oil extraction, centered in Bakersfield and Coalinga, also holds an exemption. Pushed by environmental groups and health groups, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency earlier this year won a court ruling ending the farming exemption and obliging big agriculture operations to line up for clean-air permits. But setting such standards will be a political and technical challenge. Valley farming is a \$16.5 billion industry that produces a tenth of the country's fruits and vegetables, exported across the country and overseas. But it also pours out a fifth of the valley's smog-causing pollutants. Along with engine emissions, farming churns up particulates, speck-sized dust one seventh the width of a human hair. These tiny strands can add to smog and lodge in breathing passages, causing respiratory problems such as asthma. But the diversity of agriculture with some 200 crops makes for a regulatory challenge. Farm combines costing \$250,000 apiece can't easily be retrofitted with cleaner engines. Harvesting techniques in one corner of the valley may be benign compared to the same activity near homes. Changes in agricultural practices pose special problems. Huge "manure lagoons" created by a new wave of mega-dairies with 5,000 milk cows may need to be covered to prevent ammonia from escaping into the air. But a recent study by the National Academy of Science said not enough was known about the side-effects of big dairy operations and more research was needed. Farming groups also complain that global competition has never been tougher for commodities ranging from garlic and almonds to asparagus, once valley money-makers. Lay on new pollution-control costs, and many farmers may give up and sell to real estate developers. But barring court appeals, change is on the way for valley farming. Its practices clearly need review by regulatory agencies to see if emissions and lung-harming dust can be moderated. The

problem of dirty valley air is too huge to allow one major player to escape scrutiny. For the past 10 years, as the valley's air soured, little was done. Beginning last year, a battery of lawsuits brought by environmentalists and civil rights groups prodded the slumbering federal EPA to oversee local policymakers. Real choices, with the potential to clean the skies, are now on the table. What's needed is a realistic timetable on reducing smog. Currently, the valley is holding to a plan to reduce pollution by 30 percent by 2005. But local regulators claim that the figure can't be achieved without drastic steps such as industrial shutdowns or no-drive days. These are steps that would harm the region financially and enrage residents. Local leaders have fashioned an alternative: stretch out the air-cleaning steps over the next 10 years. To do this, the valley smog authorities need to declare that air quality has worsened from severe to extreme. It's a humiliating designation that admits the region has sunk to the bottom bracket of public health. This downward step, in effect, says that conditions are so bad that they need extra time to cure them. The lower rating will mean special review by federal authorities, who aren't popular in the valley. It may chase away new industry, but the chief advantage is that it buys the valley time for cleaner engine technology, lower-emission fuels and changes in farming practices. More public transit, land-use planning to curb sprawl and effective regional government must also be in the mix. Like any promise to reform, this pledge to clean the air demands scrutiny. Residents, who have made pollution a top concern in polls this year, must pressure elected leaders for results. Watchdog groups, including environmentalists and health advocates, should keep the heat on local and federal authorities for measurable improvements. Farm groups, vital players in any solution, need to accommodate change, not fight it. With so many contending groups, cleansing the valley's air will be a battle. But the problem can no longer be ignored or pushed off indefinitely as it has in the past.

### **'FRESNO EDDY' SWIRLS VALLEY SMOG**

California's 240-mile-long San Joaquin Valley has some of the smoggiest air in the nation. Strong winds and sharply ascending mountains to the east trap air pollution in the valley. Mountains limit air flows into and out of the valley. Most air entering the valley travels through the Bay Area, where it picks up pollutants. Cool winds from the mountains cause air to move in a circular pattern, or eddy, preventing pollutants from dissipating outward. Layers of warmer air above the cool air also hinder pollutants that would otherwise disperse upward. During the summer, winds flow in a south-southeasterly direction, allowing some air to escape

### **Asthma invades Fresno**

It's not hard to find an asthma sufferer in smoggy Fresno. One in 6 schoolchildren has symptoms.

Sam Armentrout, president of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, has two grandchildren with the respiratory disease. Dr. David Pepper, a physician and leading clean-air activist, has a son with asthma. Hot, smog-clouded and buttressed by mountains, Fresno has the highest incidence of asthma in the state. Some 16 percent of children suffer from shortness of breath, wheezing and nonstop coughing. Only New York and Chicago have higher rates. It wasn't until recent years that the disease was studied in depth. Before then, asthma was treated as an allergy problem or bronchitis because of similar symptoms. The bad news is that asthma is a life-long ailment that can kill as victims grow older and weaker. But it can be held at bay through medicine, usually steroid drugs delivered through L-shaped pocket inhalers, and by avoiding smoggy weather, pet hair, dust, stress and other sources that can trigger an attack. A number of studies, including a University of California project focusing on Fresno, are in progress to examine the link between filthy air and surging asthma. Genetics, race, income and home life are all under scrutiny. Other asthma hot spots besides Fresno include Solano and Marin counties, both with asthma rates almost double the state average. Though the disease can be managed, it can be isolating and costly, according to Kevin Hamilton, a respiratory specialist who runs a 2,000-patient program at the Community Medical Centers, a major Central Valley health-care system. Asthmatic youngsters need to stay indoors during the late afternoons, when temperatures and emissions produce the worst air. These kids miss out on sports and outdoor activities -- and the friendships and bond they forge -- that other children take for granted. Also, medicine can cost more than \$150 per month, a major burden in California's poorest region. "We've seen a big increase in our school system over the past 10 years as the air's gotten worse," said Carol Padilla, head of nursing for the Clovis public schools, the second-largest district in the Fresno area. Out of 33,000 children, 5,000 have asthma, she said. On days with pollution alerts, Clovis teachers forbid children from running, postpone 4 p.m. football games until early evening, and cancel outdoor recesses.

## **Report backs air breakup Valley pollution-control district facing sanctions**

By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer, August 15, 2002

Local officials should consider divorcing the regional air pollution control district to avoid a freeze in transportation funds and increasing costs of doing business in San Joaquin County, according to a report released Wednesday.

Such a move could help shore up millions of transportation dollars that may be frozen if the Valley air district doesn't meet one of several looming clean-air deadlines.

It also could help businesses avoid an almost unavoidable increase in business costs as air regulators increase requirements on industries that pollute the air.

But environmentalists Wednesday attacked the idea as an improbable political scheme that would only delay anti-pollution efforts at the expense of San Joaquin County children, the elderly and residents with breathing problems.

Still, the idea has support in the business community, where representatives point out that San Joaquin County has relatively clear air when compared with its southern neighbors, such as Fresno and Bakersfield.

Yet, the county suffers the same air sanctions as the rest of the Valley even though smog levels here haven't exceeded federal limits, according to air-district data.

The new report, commissioned by the San Joaquin Council of Governments, suggests that the best way to break from the Valley air district is for San Joaquin County, Stanislaus County and Merced County to form a separate district. Other options include joining the Sacramento or Bay Area air districts or even forming a district with mountain counties, according to the report.

COG plans to hold a public meeting on the issue from 8 a.m. to noon Wednesday at the Wine & Roses Country Inn & Restaurant, 2505 W. Turner Road, Lodi.

"There is hypocrisy at work here," said Kevin Hall, an air-quality specialist with the Sierra Club.

Hall said that while San Joaquin County complains about Bay Area smog blowing into the county, this county's smog is blowing into the southern Valley.

"That's putting politics and special interests above public health. The local politicians are just trying to dodge a bullet and not willing to take responsibility for their share of the problem," he said.

Even though San Joaquin County by itself doesn't exceed smog limits, that doesn't mean the air is clean here. The American Lung Association gave the county an "F" grade in its annual report of air conditions. And soon, the EPA will enforce a new smog standard that air officials say the county won't be able to meet.

Still, business officials say it's unfair to lump San Joaquin County into the same air district as Fresno and Bakersfield. For example, in the past 10 years, San Joaquin County saw 10 days where federal smog limits were exceeded; Kern County had 245 such days, according to air-district data.

Stockton Chamber of Commerce CEO Douglass Wilhoit said he favors joining the Bay Area air district in hopes of getting that area to address pollution that blows over the Altamont Pass. He said environmentalists shouldn't ignore the economics of the air debate.

"Even environmentalists have to eat, have to have jobs, have to be clothed. You can only hug a tree so much, but that tree won't feed you," he said.

Mike Locke with the San Joaquin Partnership said the looming air sanctions have hurt efforts to bring businesses to the county. The partnership is a nonprofit economic-development corporation.

"We've dealt with many projects where air quality was a deciding factor not to locate a business here because of the more stringent requirements," he said.

Julia Greene, executive director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments, denied that a divorce from the air district would delay clean-air goals and argued such a move could help the air.

For example, the new Tracy power plant had to buy air credits to start operating, but those air credits came from a business in Bakersfield that voluntarily imposed certain pollution controls. With a separate air district, those air credits would have to come from local sources, she said.

Stockton resident Gloria Faires was skeptical. Faires says the air quality in Stockton often is so bad she can't breathe and runs from her car to her front door with her hand over her nose and mouth to keep from breathing in the pollution.

"It sounds like they're putting businesses over human needs. Can't they see that when you come down from Highway 88 and go down hill, it looks like you're going under a big brown blanket? It's shocking," said Faires, a retired nurse and antiques dealer.

Stanislaus County's COG director Gary Dickson said he was interested in more discussion about forming a separate air district with San Joaquin and Merced counties.

"It would be foolish not to talk about it, given the stakes involved," he said.

The head of the Valley air district, David Crow, declined to comment specifically on the report because the air district's governing board had not discussed the issue.

Even if the idea of forming a new air district has support in San Joaquin County, that doesn't mean it's possible.

EPA and state air officials rarely split air districts and point out that San Joaquin County would have to prove that it was in a different air basin than the rest of the district. Because the county is separated by two mountain ranges and experiences Delta winds from other counties, that might be nearly impossible, officials say.

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## **Smog heads for the hills**

### **Bad air smothers ideas of a mountain escape as park gets more ozone than Fresno County.**

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee, August 15, 2002

While the San Joaquin Valley cooks in the season's most dangerous siege of smog, Sequoia National Park, amid the ponderosa pines, incense cedars and giant sequoias, may seem to escape the mess. It doesn't.

"We're definitely the worst national park in the western United States for ozone," said Annie Esperanza, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks air resources specialist. "We're head and shoulders above the rest."

That means daily smog updates in the visitor center at Grant Grove and warnings from rangers about limiting activity if you are asthmatic.

It means that if you visited Sequoia, you breathed smog.

Folks in the Valley and the mountains may breathe a little easier today and even more so through the weekend as triple-digit heat begins to back down, smog forecasters said.

But the bad-air onslaught continued Wednesday. A state-mandated health advisory was called for the Fresno area, including Selma, Reedley, Fowler, Parlier and Centerville, as well as the Arvin-Edison area in Kern County. Schools in those areas had to discontinue outdoor activities between 3 and 7 p.m.

The advisories have been triggered for five of the past six days. The Valley hasn't had a run of bad ozone days like this since summer 1998, when advisories were called six days in a row.

Ozone, which forms most readily on hot, sunny days, is a colorless, corrosive gas that can cause asthma attacks and contribute to lung problems. The Valley is one of the worst places in the country for ozone pollution, rivaling Los Angeles.

But you won't find a lot of relief at Sequoia.

The smog at 9 a.m. Wednesday was worse in parts of Sequoia's sleepy pine belt than in Fresno, Clovis or Parlier. No place in Fresno County had more smog than Sequoia before 9 a.m. Wednesday.

The ozone rode Valley breezes during the previous day to Sequoia National Park, which is almost perfectly located downwind of Valley metropolitan areas.

Unlike metropolitan Valley areas, the dirty air doesn't go away overnight at elevations between 2,000 and 4,000 feet, say officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"You need to know that you may be subject to higher eight-hour averages of ozone in those areas than in a metropolitan area," said district supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp.

Strangely, the bad air hangs in the foothill and midelevation areas a lot longer than in the Valley because there isn't much nighttime traffic. Vehicle emissions -- which provide the ingredients for smog during the day -- apparently cause a reaction that reduces ozone once the sun goes down. "The oxides of nitrogen scavenge the ozone, and levels come down quite low during the night in and around cities," Shipp said. "But you don't normally have traffic up in the mountains."

The trend shows up in long-term or eight-hour monitoring. Sequoia has had more than 40 violations of the eight-hour federal health rule this summer at the Ash Mountain monitoring site, said the National Park Service.

The eight-hour health standard is pegged at 84 parts per billion, and the Ash Mountain monitor has been above 100 several times in the past week. For perspective, one part per billion amounts to about a pinch of salt in 10 tons of potato chips.

Around Sequoia, smog remained all night above 60 parts per billion, which is harmful to plant life, air resources specialist Esperanza said.

Jeffrey and ponderosa pine trees show smog effects with yellow mottling in the needles. Giant sequoia seedlings also can be damaged.

Science does not yet fully understand how much damage the mountain ecosystem has suffered from smog, Esperanza said. But many questions are raised. "If we start killing trees with ozone, how is that going to change the forest?" she asked. "Will different trees begin growing in places where they affect the water table? We're upsetting the balance of nature, and that could affect all of us eventually."

## **Valley air pollution levels climb**

*By Denis Bohannon  
Hanford Sentinel Managing Editor*

HANFORD - With air pollution levels climbing to dangerous heights, today has been declared a Spare The Air Day throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

It is the sixth day in a row that the voluntary pollution reduction measure has been put into effect.

As a heat wave has hit the Valley, Air Quality Index levels for ozone have been in the 170s and 180s this week.

Levels above 150 are considered unhealthy even for robust adults. It is deemed very unhealthy when it reaches 201.

Ozone is considered particularly unhealthy for asthmatics, very young children and the elderly. Ground-level ozone is an odorless, colorless gas produced when oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds are exposed to sunlight and heat. It irritates the lungs and can cause or aggravate heart or respiratory problems. Ozone can also cause headaches, nausea, coughing, chest pains and irritate throats.

Air pollution in general contributes to lung disease, which is the third-leading cause of death in the United States, according to the American Lung Association.

A health advisory was in effect Tuesday afternoon for the Fresno/Clovis metropolitan area, the Arvin and Edison areas as well as the surrounding Kern County foothill communities.

Residents were warned to use caution when participating in outdoor activities.

When schools are in session, they are urged to keep students indoors while advisories are in effect. The American Lung Association identifies children and seniors among those most at risk from the harmful effects of air pollution.

Air quality officials have also kept one eye on the potential for pollution from particulate matter, known as PM-10, brought in from the fires in the Sierra. So far, the fires have done little to add to the air pollution misery on the Valley floor. The soot in the upper atmosphere, however, has made for some spectacular sunsets as it bends the light and gives the sun a deep red color.

## Smog, smoke blanket valley

By JEFF JARDINE, MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER,, August 15, 2002

It is a double whammy that Wednesday created the worst air quality conditions of the year in the Northern San Joaquin Valley and foothills, authorities said.

There are five levels in the air quality index, which measures air for breathability. Modesto's air quality reached the third level -- unhealthy air for sensitive groups -- at 3 p.m. Wednesday, three hours earlier than it did Tuesday.

The smog and haze made it impossible to see the Diablo Range or the Sierra Nevada from Modesto most of Wednesday, giving the valley a Los Angeles-like look.

And the bad air is likely to continue today, which has been declared a Spare the Air day.

A break could come later this week when offshore breezes are expected to bring some relief to the valley and foothills, said Bill Sandman of the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District.

"Conditions should start getting better beginning Friday," he said. "The winds will come in and last for a few days."

So what caused the bad air?

"We've had lots of hot summer days," said Josette Merced Bello of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We've had stagnant winds, and the wildfire situation has brought in the particulate matter."

On top of that, a pressure system has kept the bad air in place all week, and it has gotten worse each day, Bello said.

"(The pressure system) acts like a lid," she said. "It started early in the week. When you start the week out bad, it only gets worse. It's the smoggiest conditions we've had all year."

Even so, the Northern San Joaquin Valley thus far has avoided the health advisories that have plagued the southern part of the valley. When such an advisory is issued, authorities can limit outdoor activities for children or people with respiratory problems.

"We've had health advisories in the Fresno area the past four days," Bello said.

In 1999, the entire valley air district -- which stretches from San Joaquin County's northern border all the way south to the Grapevine -- issued no health advisories. There were three in 2000 and one in 2001. This year, five already have been issued -- all of them in the south, Bello said.

Still, the air quality in the northern valley was bad enough to send a few people to Memorial Medical Center's emergency room for treatment Wednesday, said Anita Talkington, spokeswoman for the Modesto hospital.

Doctors Medical Center in Modesto treated a few more respiratory patients Tuesday, but Wednesday -- the smoggier of the two days -- was closer to normal, spokeswoman Carin von Latta said.

Much of the smog and smoke has settled in against the Sierra foothills, said Sandman, deputy air pollution control officer in Tuolumne County.

"We're getting lots of calls about it up here," he said. "We have maybe five to 10 miles of visibility, and we're getting (bad air) from the valley, the Biscuit fire in Oregon in the upper-level winds, and from the McNally fire (near Sequoia National Park) from the lower-level winds."

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## Bad air plagues county

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, August 15, 2002

By [Mike Jensen](#)

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District predicts that Merced County will have the worst air quality of the year today and possibly tomorrow, so district officials are urging all residents to stay indoors as much as possible.

The county's air quality index is expected to reach 156 today. That level is considered unhealthy for the general population.

Charlie Goldberg, a spokesman with the Valley air district, said, "Everyone should limit their exposure."

Wednesday's air quality index was 155, also considered unhealthy for the general public.

The air pollution, which was evident to the naked eye throughout the Valley Wednesday, was the result of high temperatures, which help produce smog, said Goldberg.

Smoke from the 130,876-acre McNally fire burning in Sequoia National Forest, southeast of Fresno, is also adding to the problem, Goldberg said.

An air inversion held the pollution in the Valley.

The pollution control district has declared today and Friday "Spare the Air" days.

Residents are asked to avoid unnecessary driving and postpone any painting projects, especially those involving spray or oil products.

Farther south in the Valley, the air was so bad that the air district asked school districts in Clovis, Fresno and Bakersfield to keep schoolchildren indoors.

"It was pretty obvious things were not getting better," district supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp said.

A heat wave that began last Friday has pushed temperatures into the triple digits repeatedly. Ozone is the main ingredient of smog and is most apparent on hot days when the sun heats chemicals in the air.

The smog has also affected forest areas. An ozone monitoring station at Sequoia National Park had a higher smog reading than downtown Los Angeles on Monday.

The National Weather Service said a slight cooling trend should begin by Thursday and Friday.

The San Joaquin Valley air basin is currently considered in "severe" noncompliance with federal Clean Air Act standards. Valley air district officials are expected to soon ask that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reclassify the Valley in "extreme" noncompliance.

The California Energy Commission has approved licensing of nine new power plants in the Central Valley. Applications for nine other plants are currently pending before the commission.

Air district officials believe there will be no new impact to the Valley's air because the power plant developers will purchase air credits from other businesses that have taken steps to reduce their pollution.

A company can obtain air credits by turning off a polluting piece of equipment or by voluntarily finding a way to lessen its pollution. Those credits may then be sold to new businesses, including power plants.

Before the new Valley power plants are built, developers must obtain a certain amount of credits.

Air district officials maintain the air credit system provides a way to reward business to take voluntary efforts.

Some environmentalists have questioned if the crediting system actually removes pollution from the Valley air.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

## Mega dairy wins planning OK

### **Application now goes to the Board of Supervisors**

By Amee M. Thompson, Visalia Times-Delta, August 15, 2002

Armed with an "exhaustive" environmental report and the approval of the Tulare County Planning Commission, Rob Hilarides will now take his request to build a new dairy to the county Board of Supervisors.

On Wednesday the Planning Commission made their approval of Hilarides' dairy and cheesemaking operation final.

Hilarides wants to build and operate a 9,100-cow dairy at the intersection of Road 188 and Avenue 242, just west of Lindsay. Hilarides will also build a farmstead cheesemaking facility on 1,428 acres where the Lindsay Olive Co. used to have its brine ponds.

"This is probably the most exhaustive environmental impact report done on a dairy in Tulare County," said Michael Spata, an attorney with the county counsel's office. "[The report] is based on information from some of the most highly qualified experts. What is before you is a comprehensive treatment of the issues."

Commissioner Shirley Kirkpatrick said she is supportive of the project and the thoroughness of the environmental documents, but she sees a point when Tulare County will have enough cows. "At some point we will reach the carrying capacity for dairies in this county, and the industry has to realize that," Kirkpatrick said. "Hopefully, we will have enough information at that time to know we have reached that."

In the end, it came down to money and benefits over any possible negative effects. "The economic and social impacts way outweigh any negative impacts this project may have," Commissioner Mark Fernandes said.

Wendy Bettencourt, who lives about a quarter-mile east of the proposed dairy site, was disappointed with Wednesday's final decision. She said the opponents of the dairy will appeal to the supervisors.

"There are people trying to get that area cleaned up," Bettencourt said. "Putting a dairy on top of that is not going to solve problems."

Bettencourt and her husband, Alan, have been speaking out about how the dairy will affect the air quality and groundwater for those surrounding it.

The seven-member commission voted 5-0 in favor of approval. Commissioner Ed Dias did not participate because of a conflict of interest. Dias is a sales consultant in the farm and land department of Pearson Realty, a contributor to the Dairy Industries Alliance, a group supporting the permit. Commissioner Chris Kapheim was absent.

Dairy permits in Tulare County have been on hold for more than three years as the county has been sued, first by state Attorney General Bill Lockyer and then by the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. Both took issue with the rules for reporting the environmental effects that could be caused by dairies. The board could see the Hilarides permit on its calendar as early as 1:30 p.m. Sept. 17.

### **Tallow plant smell lingers every so often**

By ALEJANDRA NAVARRO, MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, August 14, 2002

A thermal oxidizer at Modesto Tallow Co. has reduced the bad smell coming from the plant and cut down on complaints -- but only when the new equipment is running.

The thermal oxidizer has not been running consistently since it was installed July 22, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District reported to the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

The district received complaints during short spells when the unit had to be turned off.

Supervisors Nick Blom, Tom Mayfield and Ray Simon voted to accept the report. Supervisor Paul Caruso abstained because he owns property near the plant. Supervisor Pat Paul voted to reject the report.

"If I lived in that neighborhood, that would be unacceptable to me," said Paul, whose district is centered in Oakdale. "I think things are going way too slow."

The tallow company has turned livestock carcasses into ink, glue and other products at a plant in south Modesto for 85 years. During that time, houses, businesses and an elementary school -- Shackelford -- have grown up around the plant.

Paul noted that the plant has grown, too.

"If the company were near Del Rio Country Club would this be happening?" Paul said, adding that she doubted that the situation would be the same.

Other supervisors credited the company.

"I think we should work with the company, since they have been willing to work with us," Blom said.

Simon said people in the area have said they are pleased with the effect that the new device has had on reducing the smell.

"I personally think you've made a tremendous investment," he said to company officials. "I think you're going in the right direction."

The air district received some complaints in the days following the installation. These likely were due to working out some of the start-up problems, Modesto Tallow Co. President Jeff Podesto said.

"We knew we were going to run into some issues," he said. The company installed the oxidizer in 4 1/2 weeks, instead of the expected 16.

The plant had a stretch of 10 almost stench-free days, with the air district receiving only two complaints from July 27 to Aug. 5.

Last Wednesday, the oxidizer went offline for two days because of problems on the tallow production line, which is linked to the oxidizer. Complaints came in to the air district throughout last weekend.

When the unit is off, the plant goes back to its scrubber, which uses chlorine to reduce odors. That does not work as well as the oxidizer.

Podesto said there is no way to predict how often the production line would force the oxidizer's shutdown.

Air district officials said they are cautiously optimistic about the device's success.

The air district is going to watch for a pattern of complaint-free days while the unit is on.

"It's definitely looking like it is a pattern, but we need to continue to monitor it," said Jami Aggers, air quality compliance manager for the district.

If complaints continue while the unit is working or if the plant breaks down often, keeping the device offline, Aggers said the district will work toward securing an order that would force the tallow plant to take corrective action.

## Spare the Air warning extended through Thursday

Bakersfield Californian, August 14, 2002

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Wednesday announced it has extended its Spare the Air Day warning through Thursday for most of the San Joaquin Valley, including Kern County.

The district is forecasting air quality to be unhealthy during those days, citing continuing high temperatures, calm winds and high pollution levels.

As a result, the district is urging caution for people involved in strenuous outdoor activities.

Residents can help reduce air pollution levels by:

- \* Avoiding unnecessary vehicle use, including personal automobiles, watercrafts and off-road vehicles.
- \* Driving economically by accelerating gradually, using cruise control on highways and obeying the speed limit. Combine your errands into one trip. Keep your car tuned so it operates efficiently.
- \* Using public transit whenever possible.
- \* Postponing any paint projects, especially those with spray or oil-based products.
- \* Taking the train for personal and business trips out of the area.

## News in brief from the San Joaquin Valley

**By The Associated Press**

Bakersfield Californian, August 14, 2002

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) - San Joaquin Valley air quality officials asked residents to stay indoors this week after high temperatures pushed ozone to dangerous levels.

The air was so bad that the valley Air Pollution Control District asked school districts in Clovis, Fresno and Bakersfield to keep schoolchildren indoors.

"It was pretty obvious things were not getting better," district supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp said.

Since Friday, a heat wave has pushed temperatures into the triple digits. Ozone is the main ingredient of smog and is most apparent on hot days when the sun heats up chemicals from cars. The smog has also affected forest areas. An ozone monitoring station at Sequoia National Park had a higher smog reading than downtown Los Angeles on Monday.

As a thick haze hung over the valley Wednesday, the National Weather Service said a slight cooling trend should begin by Thursday and Friday.

[Bakersfield Californian Editorial, August 14, 2002](#)

## City-County meetings help

**The Bakersfield Californian**

Wednesday August 14, 2002, 06:10:05 PM

The planning commissions of Kern County and the City of Bakersfield made history this week. They held a joint meeting to hear environmental concerns regarding future development in metropolitan Bakersfield.

For one brief moment, these two advisory commissions were "on the same page" listening to concerns about air pollution, traffic, agriculture, population growth, etc.

Environmental concerns don't stop at a city's borders. Polluted air flows over both the county's and city's jurisdictions. Cars and trucks travel on roads that snake across the city-county lines. The joint meeting was held to gather information as city and county officials update the metropolitan Bakersfield general plan. Commendably the county and city are working together on this update. But sadly, ongoing development plans and project approvals by elected and appointed city and county officials often lack this same spirit of cooperation.

As metropolitan Bakersfield grows as more and more people, and more and more businesses move into the area city and county cooperation must grow as well.

Ron Sprague, chairman of the Bakersfield Planning Commission, observed at this week's meeting that similar city-county commission meetings should be scheduled annually or semi-annually.

We agree. These meetings will encourage both advisory groups to focus on the shared opportunities and challenges that overlap city and county borders.

In recent years, the Board of Supervisors and City Council have held regular joint meetings, which have fostered greater cooperation and understanding between sometimes-warring governing bodies. We hope joint meetings can foster this same cooperation and understanding among city and county officials who help plan metropolitan Bakersfield's future.

## **Some houseplants help clean the air**

By Elinor Teague

*Fresno Bee, August 10, 2002*

Indoor air pollution can cause health problems. Did you know houseplants are among the best indoor air filters?

Many modern homes and office buildings, especially ones built after the energy crisis in the '70s, are energy efficient. However, the man-made materials used in their construction and some kinds of furniture emit harmful chemical vapors (called VOCs, volatile organic compounds), such as formaldehyde, acetone, benzene and ammonia. Modern closed ventilation systems often are ineffective in removing the VOCs.

Research done by senior NASA scientist B.C. Wolverton in the 1980s showed that many houseplants effectively can filter chemical vapors.

They humidify the air and produce oxygen while removing carbon dioxide and pollutants.

Wolverton tested and categorized 21 families of plants for their ability to remove VOCs. In general, large-leafed plants that tolerate low light were most efficient. Philodendrons head his list, followed by spider plants, golden pothos, Chinese evergreens, peace lilies and sansevieria (mother-in-law's tongue). Ivy, chrysanthemums, Boston ferns, Gerbera daisies and many palms also work well.

A good article about this subject is provided by the EPA on the Web at [www.emagazine.com/july-august\\_1998/0798gl\\_ecohome.html](http://www.emagazine.com/july-august_1998/0798gl_ecohome.html).

