

## Smoky air still risk to health

Particulate matter from Fresno debris fire can trigger problems.

By Barbara Anderson, The Fresno Bee, January 21, 2003

Federal environmental health officials said Monday that clouds of acrid smoke from a debris fire in southwest Fresno continue to pose health risks and they plan to fight the blaze with a fire-smothering foam today.

"We definitely are concerned about the particulate matter in the air -- the smoke and the emissions from it," said Michelle Rogow, an on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Be aware that this fire is ongoing ... there is an increased amount of particulates; and to be cautious," Rogow said.

A decision Monday to begin fighting the fire with foam was based on an assessment of the fire-suppression effort, EPA spokesman Mark Merchant said.

Members of the unified command (with a city fire, county environmental health and EPA representative) expect foam will cut down on particulates in the air and should help with extinguishing the fire, Merchant said.

So far, firefighters have used water and bulldozing equipment to attack the fire. Officials estimate it could continue burning for an additional 10 days to two weeks.

Local environmental activists and health officials took issue Monday with what they called "misleading" comments made over the weekend by Fresno City Manager Dan Hobbs, who said he was relieved to hear "there is no danger off the site."

"It was irresponsible for city officials to downplay the risks," representatives of the Medical Advocates for Healthy Air and the Sierra Club-Tehipite Chapter said in a news release Monday.

"I was outraged," said Sierra Club member Kevin Hall after a 3 p.m. news conference at Fresno Park on Kearney Boulevard and South Fruit Avenue. "He was misinforming the public."

Hall said he doesn't want to create a panic, but "we're trying to create awareness."

Hobbs said Monday he was speaking about levels of carcinogenic chemicals as reported by the EPA, which were shown to not be at hazardous levels.

"The data is there's no danger to the community from toxins or carcinogens. That's what I think was really on everybody's mind. The risk posed by smoke -- we know that. I don't appreciate anybody putting me in the position of saying I'm minimizing that."

Said Mayor Alan Autry: "I'm sorry it didn't turn into the Chernobyl [Kevin Hall] wanted it to -- thank God."

Confusion about the health risks from the fire occurred Sunday when the EPA released preliminary results from air samples taken at the site of the fire, at the Archie Crippen Excavation near Nielsen and Marks avenues. The samples showed the air contained the toxic chemicals benzene and chloromethane, but not at levels high enough to cause undue health concerns.

Fresno City Council Member Cynthia Sterling also was criticized for remarks she made at the fire scene.

Sterling said Monday the public release of information was according to "research at the time" and was done to "assure the public that everything was being done to protect them."

The public is invited to a meeting about the fire at 5:30 p.m. Thursday in City Hall chambers, she said.

Sterling represents the southwest Fresno area most affected by the fire. Sterling and Deputy Mayor Roger Montero will lead a task force to investigate how a football-sized field of wood, metal, plastics, asphalt, concrete and mattresses spontaneously combusted at the excavation business.

Monday, Rogow of the EPA said hazardous-chemical findings from air samples are preliminary and do not mean residents should ignore the smoke.

"Smoke is an irritant. We know that's a problem," she said.

Fine particles from burning wood are tiny enough to bypass the nose and throat to pierce lung tissue. The particles are known to trigger asthma attacks, bouts of bronchitis and sinus infections, among other respiratory conditions. They also are linked to an increase in heart attacks in people with cardiac problems.

"Our position has been and always will be that breathing smoke is unhealthy," said Josette Merced Bello, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

"The fact that we didn't find carcinogens and toxics at high levels in the smoke is somewhat good news," Bello said. "But that doesn't mitigate the health risks of particulates in the smoke."

The district issued health advisories about the level of particulates in the air that caused the Fresno Unified School District to cancel outdoor activities for four days last week. School officials will look at air-quality forecasts today before deciding whether children can play outdoors and participate in sports, said district spokeswoman Jill Marmolejo.

Smoke from the fire meant busy doctor offices and clinics in Fresno last week.

At the Elm Street clinic operated by Sequoia Community Health Foundation, health workers estimate a 25% increase in overall upper respiratory complaints can be traced to smoke from the fire. And employees of the clinic have been affected as well.

"A lot of headaches, eye irritation -- that kind of thing," said Susan Harrington-Howard, a nurse practitioner.

Floyd D. Harris Jr., who lives about three miles east of the fire, said he didn't equate his dizziness and nausea to the fire until his wife said her lungs were tight and she was using an asthma inhaler for the first time in years.

"You really just can't breathe over in that area right now," Harris said. "It's like it goes up and comes down like the fog."

## **Advisory: Don't use fireplaces this weekend**

The Bakersfield Californian, January 20, 2003,

Valley air quality officials are asking residents not to use their fireplaces through 4 p.m. Monday to protect public health.

The voluntary "Please Don't Light Tonight" advisory was issued by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in response to stagnant weather expected through the weekend. Conditions may trap wood smoke near the ground, raising the risk of breathing difficulty for many residents.

The voluntary advisory is expected to become mandatory next year. For more information, call 1-800-SMOG-INFO or visit [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## Keeping eye on polluters

By MATT WEISER, Bakersfield Californian staff writer, January 18, 2003,

Diesel trucks, fireplaces and agricultural burning have something in common: They all pump tons of tiny toxic particles into the valley's air every day. Now the public has a new way to keep an eye on these type of polluters.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District this month flipped the switch on a new valley-wide system of electronic monitors that measure the smallest particulate pollution on an hourly basis. The valley is one the first regions in the nation to introduce such a system, in part because air quality officials already know the region won't meet upcoming new federal rules on particulate pollution.

The new monitors measure particulate matter that is smaller than 2.5 microns in size, usually referred to as pm2.5. It's a pollution category that will face new regulatory scrutiny by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency later this year. Until now, the valley's air quality monitors primarily measured only pm10, larger particles that range from 10 to 2.5 microns in size, and on a much less frequent basis. Ten microns is about one-sixth the diameter of a human hair.

Researchers now know that the smaller particles are much more dangerous to public health, because they can be inhaled deep into the lungs and then passed directly into the bloodstream, adding heart attacks to the list of breathing problems associated with air pollution.

Updated readings from the new "real-time" sensors will eventually be posted hourly on the air district's Web site ([www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org)) to help people with breathing problems avoid the worst conditions.

"It's important for people with respiratory and cardiac diseases to know the conditions before they plan their activities," said air district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello. "It's also important for the district to distinguish the particle size because they come from different sources."

The riskier small particles come mainly from combustion: wood burning, vehicle exhaust, agricultural burning and the like. Larger particles are mainly produced by plowing, construction and dust raised from dirt roads. These particles are too big to penetrate the lungs and generally become trapped in the nose, mouth and throat.

The air district has been monitoring particulate pollution for years, but its sensors generally could not distinguish between small and large particles, and pollution levels could only be determined by physically removing a paper filter from the sensor.

"Obviously that's not real conducive to forecasting if you have to go around and pull them and analyze them," said Bello. "Real-time monitors were not available until very recently. The technology wasn't there."

The 11 new sensors, three of them in Bakersfield, cost about \$100,000 each and measure particles electronically instead of collecting them on a filter. As a result, the monitoring results can be retrieved electronically as well, allowing the air district to collect and analyze the results remotely.

Such monitoring is not yet required by law, but it soon will be as a result of impending federal regulations on pm2.5 pollution. The EPA in 1997 established a new health standard of 65 micrograms per cubic meter (24-hour average), but the rule was quickly challenged in court by industry groups. EPA won that case last year, opening the door to a new enforcement program expected this year.

In the meantime, the air district pushed ahead with its monitoring program, and got its first real test last week when a major fire at a yardwaste recycling facility in Fresno sent huge clouds of smoke into the air. The new sensors detected pm2.5 concentrations four times above the federal health standard, so the district issued a health advisory in Fresno urging children and people with breathing trouble to stay indoors.

The new technology may be helpful to the district in developing new air pollution rules. During the recent introduction of proposed rules to restrict the use of fireplaces, for example, the air district was attacked by some critics for presenting inadequate data on pm2.5 pollution.

"The data they presented from a scientific perspective was very limited to extrapolate from and make public policy," said one of those critics, David Lightsey of Bakersfield, who represents the National Council Against Health Fraud. "They certainly would need better data."

Others hope the additional data provided by the sensors will help quiet the critics and bring about a long-awaited move toward better air quality.

"Everybody knows the air quality is pretty awful," said Gordon Nipp of Bakersfield, a member of the executive committee of the Sierra Club's Kern-Kaweah Chapter. "I don't know how much more data we need, but of course the more we have the better. I would hope that it would be an effective tool."

## Industrial Explosion

Stargazers worry over light at night

Critics accuse planners of cutting discussion short

By DAVIN McHENRY, Bakersfield Californian staff writer, January 17, 2003,

Trailors are parked along the IKEA warehouse near I-5 at the bottom of the Grapevine as they are loaded. Trucks pick up the trailors once they are loaded.

Coming north over the Grapevine, travelers for decades have been greeted with views of farmland and open space as far as the smog permitted.

Now the view is changing.

At the southern edge of the valley a cluster of huge distribution centers have begun sprouting up along Interstate 5, near the Highway 99 interchange. As drivers choose between the two highways, they speed past a looming IKEA warehouse, centerpiece of the Tejon Industrial Complex.

Currently there are about 1.5 million square feet of industrial space at the complex, a pair of gas stations and some fast food restaurants. Owner Tejon Ranch Co. has permission to build another 3.5 million square feet of industrial space, says Joe Drew, vice president of commercial and industrial development for the company.

But Tejon wants more.

The company has plans to add another 15 million square feet of industrial space and 93 acres of commercial development to the complex. The expansion would consume roughly 1,100 acres east of the interstate.

That would cover an area equal to about 1 1/2 downtown Bakersfields. Downtown, from 24th Street to California Avenue and Oak Street east to L Street, covers about 737 acres.

The county Planning Commission approved the expansion in December.

County supervisors are expected to vote on the project Tuesday.

If approved, the complex could swell to a total of 20 million square feet of industrial space over the next decade.

In comparison, the rest of southern Kern County currently has about 24 million square feet of industrial space.

Once fully built out, the Tejon complex would be equivalent to more than 90 large big-box stores, such as Super Wal-Marts.

The Tejon complex's largest buildings would top out at 1.8 million square feet, large enough to hold nearly all of the Valley Plaza and Marketplace shopping centers combined.

"The scale is almost unbelievable," said attorney Kassie Siegel, who represents the Center for Biological Diversity, a Santa Monica group critical of the project. "It's mind-boggling the impacts this project is going to have."

Critics worry about the effects the project would have on air quality as well as habitat and animals throughout the southern valley. They also complain that the ranch is getting off cheap when it comes to paying for infrastructure.

But most of all, they worry that the Tejon expansion is just the first of many projects.

"This kind of project is 100 percent growth-inducing," Siegel said.

Wide open warehouse spaces

The largest privately held parcel of land in the state, Tejon Ranch has been used for decades for farming and ranching. Other portions have remained largely untouched, located high in the mountains.

In all, the parcel is 270,000 acres and is spread out over Kern and Los Angeles counties.

In the mid-1990s, the ranch announced a shift in its long-term plans. Tejon officials began to put together plans to develop portions of the property, particularly the corridor along Interstate 5.

The first major project was phase one of the Tejon Industrial Complex, located on the west side of the interstate. The project was designed to capitalize on Kern County's location at the heart of the state, within four hours drive time of most of Southern and Northern California.

"You can reach some parts of Southern California faster from Kern County than from Riverside," said Jesse Mach, a business developer with Kern Economic Development Corp. who specializes in luring distribution centers to Kern County.

In recent years the county has seen several large companies locate massive distribution centers locally, including Sears, Target and IKEA. The flow is expected to continue as companies look to downsize warehouses in Southern and Northern California into a single distribution center.

"That's the trend right now," Mach said.

Kern County's high unemployment, undereducated work force and available land are all well-suited for distribution centers, experts say.

Furniture maker IKEA became the first industrial tenant at the Tejon complex, buying the land and building the first half of a 1.7 million-square-foot distribution center. It has begun construction of the second half of that building.

Office supply distributor Daisytek International later moved into a 326,000-square-foot building also at the complex.

The proposed expansion coming before supervisors Tuesday would largely be more of the same. It would quadruple the industrial space and add 275,000 square feet of commercial space.

While the project could theoretically include everything from automobile manufacturing to fruit packing, thanks to fairly broad industrial zoning, Drew said the focus is going to be on distribution centers.

"That's where the appetite is," he said. "I don't expect to have auto manufacturing out there."

Looking for the big picture

The industrial complex is not the only massive project proposed by Tejon. Last year the company also began the development process for a new project further south on Interstate 5.

The company submitted its first plans for a 23,000-home project just east of Frazier Park, on 11,700 acres in Los Angeles County. Called Centennial, the project would essentially create a new city on the border, complete with commercial land and open space for parks.

The scope of the two massive projects have drawn interest from environmental and smart growth groups across the state.

"Tejon has registered on the statewide radar screen," said David Myerson, director of urban program at Santa Monica-based Environment Now. "The effects go beyond Kern County."

Myerson has spoken out against both projects. Like many critics, he said he wants Tejon to reveal its grand plans for the entire ranch before moving forward with any projects.

"What we are seeing is an effort by Tejon Ranch to piecemeal small projects through without doing a full analysis of all of their plans over 20 to 30 years," Myerson said. "They may not know all the details yet, but they certainly have some idea what they want to do with the property."

Several groups, including the local chapter of the Sierra Club, Kern Audubon, and Center for Biological Diversity, have called for a master plan.

"If they would at least draw out some of their plans so that the county could get together and plan the infrastructure," said Carolyn St. Claire, a political activist and member of the local League of Women Voters.

But Drew argues that a master plan wouldn't be very useful.

The ranch has no idea exactly what it wants to do with all 270,000 acres of land, an area roughly the size of the city of Los Angeles, he says.

"If you were building out Los Angeles you wouldn't hold up all development until you knew how the whole city was going to be built, would you?" Drew said. "That's unrealistic."

Paying its freight?

Over the years, Drew said plans for developments have come and gone at the ranch. A master plan developed today could become defunct in a short time, he said.

Drew also noted other property owners aren't required to provide master plans for all of their land when developing only a part of it.

"If you had a farmer who wanted to build homes on some of his land you wouldn't ask him to master plan all of his land," Drew said.

County planners say they have no power to force the company to spell out its master plans. In fact, county Planning Director Ted James said he was pleased the current expansion was brought to the county in one piece, rather than broken down.

"Of course, if they have plans for something larger, I would rather see them come with the larger project," he said. "But I would rather see them come in with what they have, than come in with 100 acres at a time."

By bringing forward the larger project, James said it gives his staff a chance to craft comprehensive mitigations.

So far, the Tejon project has some large infrastructure requirements, providing land for a fire station, sheriff's substation and day-care center. The company will also have to build a new sewage treatment plant capable of handling up to 100,000 gallons per day.

The company also agreed to build a new fire station (with helipad) and a substation on the land provided. The company has offered to spend up to \$1.2 million on the buildings.

Tejon officials also have agreed to buy a new fire engine worth up to \$350,000 and pay for one firefighter at the station, around the clock, roughly \$240,000 annually.

Still, some say the ranch isn't paying it's fair share.

Critics noted the county would have to pick up the cost of at least one other firefighter for the station and for any staff at the substation.

"We wouldn't need a fire station or a firefighter out there if they weren't building there in the first place," St. Claire said. "We never make the developer pay the ticket for the ride."

St. Claire also noted the cost of the Tejon-funded firefighter would actually be taken out of the property taxes the project pays the county, making it a wash for the ranch eventually.

Critics have also bashed Tejon's recent lobbying for cash to help rebuild the Laval Road freeway interchange. The company agreed to pay for the worn two-lane overpass to be rebuilt, but then learned of state plans to eventually widen the freeway.

That would require more work on the overpass.

Now Tejon officials are seeking local, state and federal money to pay for all but \$1.5 million of the \$10 million project.

"That's money (taxpayers) are going to pay to help Tejon make money," Myerson said.

Critters vs. jobs

Tejon officials argue the project is going to be a boon for the county, particularly the unemployed.

In all, the complex would generate about 6,000 jobs, according to estimates from Tejon. Most of the jobs --4,500 -- would be in the industrial sector with another 1,500 jobs from fast food restaurants, gas stations and other highway-related businesses.

So far, however, most of the jobs created at the complex have been in the latter, lower-paid category.

As of September, the complex had generated 583 jobs, mostly minimum- wage positions at fast food and gas stations. About 220 of those jobs were in the two distribution warehouses, with wages of \$8 per hour to \$11 per hour, according to county officials.

Kern Economic Development Corp. President Patrick Collins admitted the complex and even the distribution centers are not a cure-all for Kern's economy.

"We don't want just (distribution center) jobs," he said. "We want higher-paying jobs too. But we need to have a diverse job base. And we can't wait until (the local education level is higher) so we can get the high-tech jobs."

According to Collins, a Kern County resident needs to make around \$10 to \$11 per hour to be self-sufficient.

Even so, the Tejon jobs should help alleviate Kern's high unemployment, which is particularly high near the complex, said John Nilon, head of Employers' Training Resource.

In Arvin and Lamont, just down the road from the Tejon complex, unemployment regularly tops 20 percent.

"This project could have a dramatic effect on unemployment in those communities," Nilon said.

But critics worry the project could also have dramatic effects on wildlife in the southern San Joaquin Valley.

The Tejon property is the last open corridor for wildlife to move across the valley unhindered. Animals often use the ranch to move between the coastal mountains and the Sierras, said Siegel.

A wide variety of animals live in the area, including the kit fox, antelope squirrel and burrowing owls.

"There are a half dozen ecosystems coming together in this area," Siegel said. "And they are going to lay down 1,500 acres of solid pavement that (animals) can't get around. They have refused to acknowledge the importance of this land."

Indeed, Drew downplays the quality of the land, noting much of it is either farmed or former oil fields.

"This is not pristine habitat," Drew said.

As for the east-west migration complaints, Tejon officials argued there already is a large barrier running the length of the valley -- Interstate 5.

The only place animals can cross the road freely is at the California Aqueduct, which will remain open, Drew said.

"We've actually set aside land around (the aqueduct) for that."

## Dirty air unavoidable

By MATT WEISER, Bakersfield Californian staff writer, January 17, 2003

Warehouses may not seem like a major source of air pollution. After all, they're mostly just space.

But the 15 million square feet of new warehouses proposed by the Tejon Ranch Co. at the foot of the Grapevine -- and the massive amount of traffic they would generate -- would be a major new source of air pollution in Kern County.

In fact, the Tejon warehouse expansion would pump triple the smog-forming organic gases into the valley's air than the 1,100-megawatt La Paloma power plant under construction near McKittrick: 177 tons per year of reactive organic gases, compared to 50 tons per year for the power plant. Such emissions are a leading cause of pollution and a big reason why the valley now ranks No. 2 on America's list of smoggiest places, government officials said.

As approved by the Kern County Planning Commission on Dec. 12, the Tejon project got a virtual free pass on these emissions. But under pressure from critics and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, county planners decided this week to impose additional restrictions to reduce the project's contribution to valley smog.

"Those things which have been recommended by the air district, that are possible, should be done even if they are more costly to the company," said Laura Dennison, who has studied the Tejon expansion as a member of the League of Women Voters. "If they don't do them and the county doesn't require it, it's like thumbing their noses at us, the people who live in the pollution."

The increase in truck and car traffic that would be drawn to Tejon's proposed expansion, east of the present IKEA warehouse at Wheeler Ridge Road on Interstate 5, is immense. It's estimated the project would generate nearly 8,688 vehicle trips in the peak afternoon traffic hour alone, causing a significant pollution problem that cannot be eliminated by development restrictions.

Diesel trucks moving to and from the warehouses would account for an outsized share of that smog: The California Air Resources Board estimates diesel trucks produce 40 percent of the nitrogen oxide pollution released by vehicles in the state, and 60 percent of the particulate pollution.

The air district has no legal authority over mobile pollution sources, like the cars and trucks at the heart of the Tejon project's pollution. Even so, it urged the county to adopt six measures to directly address this problem.

The county may regulate business activity in ways that limit pollution, yet it initially imposed only one air district recommendation: requiring warehouses to provide electrical hookups so truckers don't idle their engines if they spend the night. The county also imposed conservation measures on buildings at the site. Together the rules reduce the project's air pollution by, at most, 8 percent.

But this week, after further consultations with the air district and the developer, the county decided to impose three measures to make a bigger dent: an idling limit of 15 minutes for trucks visiting the warehouses; requiring propane or electric forklifts and other material-moving equipment; and requiring fleet vehicles owned by any site operator be fueled by clean-burning compressed natural gas or propane.

"It's still a challenge for enforcement, but we felt after our discussions with the air district that it was something that could be implemented, and it would be a positive thing to do," said Kern County Planning Director Ted James.

The smog-reducing effect of these measures is difficult to quantify, said Heather Ellison, a planner with the air district, because it depends on the extent of their adoption and compliance success. But she praised the county's decision to do more.

"It's wonderful news. Anything's going to help," said Ellison. "I've gotten more mitigations on this project than I've ever gotten. It's a huge project and they don't want our air quality to be any worse than the rest of us do."

The one area that would make the biggest dent is reducing employee trips, she said.

But neither Tejon nor county planning staff have proposed any measures to reduce them.

Of the 8,688 anticipated vehicle trips the project will generate, just 409 are trucks and 5,900 are passenger vehicles commuting to the site. Most of them will make a 40-mile round-trip commute from Bakersfield.

Critics call it a classic case of leapfrog development: allowing construction far from existing services and population centers.

"The concern of it is obvious. One of the things they would not be able to completely mitigate is the effect on air quality, and it's already (among) the worst in the nation right now," said Mary Ann Lockhart of Pine Mountain Club, a member of the Sierra Club's Kern-Kaweah chapter. "Everyone needs to know and consider how it might impact their lives."

State law forbids local government, including the air district, from imposing carpooling requirements. Nevertheless, the air district recommends that the developer provide natural-gas fueled vanpool service for workers commuting to the site. James conceded the county could persuade the developer to do this in return for some perk from the county. But it hasn't done so.

"I don't see that our offering that as a leverage point is really a beneficial thing from a land-use standpoint at this stage," said James. "If an applicant wants to voluntarily do these things, they can."

Improved bus routes to the area could help reduce the amount of smog generated by commuters. But nothing has been proposed to improve public transit serving the Tejon site, despite a warning, back in November 2001, in a letter from Adel Klein, Kern County's director of policy analysis: "The proposed project will increase the demand on Kern County for bus transportation. Additional routes will need to be added and the frequency of the service will need to increase."

The environmental study also does not address the cumulative impact of additional warehouse construction in the air basin.

This issue arose in the recent case of the Borba dairy proposal. A judge ordered the Borbas to study how their dual dairies would affect air quality in the context of all existing and proposed dairies in the San Joaquin Valley air district. That ruling wasn't binding on new projects proposed in the county or the air district, though it did make a persuasive case that an industry's cumulative impacts deserve further scrutiny in the future.

Ken Koch, senior project manager for Tejon's environmental consultant, Impact Sciences of Agoura Hills, said the project has been studied sufficiently.

"The impacts are fully addressed, and the conclusion is there would be a significant unavoidable impact to air quality," said Koch. "But it's important to keep these impacts in context. There's going to be a huge increase in the amount of heavy truck miles traveled in Kern County."

The Kern Council of Governments predicts that heavy truck traffic in the county will increase from 803 million miles traveled in 1990 to 3.5 billion miles by 2014. Diesel trucks already account for 24 percent of the vehicle miles traveled in the county, compared to 10 percent statewide.

Critics wonder if the county should even entertain projects that encourage greater truck traffic, and truck traffic that lingers.

The county and Impact Sciences initially rejected a 15-minute idling limit by saying it would cause excessive wear on diesel truck engines.

But the American Trucking Association, a major lobbying group that represents trucking firms and diesel engine builders, actually urges members to idle their trucks no longer than 5 minutes at a time because it saves so much money. A study by the group found that one hour of idling daily for a year is equal to 64,000 miles of engine wear and wastes 500 gallons of fuel.

And in December, the California Air Resources Board adopted a new law requiring school bus drivers to shut off their engines within 30 seconds of arriving at a school to minimize diesel exhaust fumes. There was hardly a peep of opposition, because many school districts already do this voluntarily.

The county and Impact Sciences also initially rejected the proposal to require clean-fuel fleet vehicles, saying a similar trial program by United Parcel Service proved to be too expensive.

But a closer look at the UPS program shows this claim to be misleading. The program was initially more expensive because the first natural gas vehicles deployed by UPS were conversions of existing trucks. A later phase used purpose-built compressed natural gas trucks, which actually proved cheaper to operate than traditional gasoline-fueled trucks.

"It's important for businesses to recognize they have a responsibility to common things, public things, such as air pollution," said Dennison. "This is a matter of decency on their part to comply with those things that are possible."

## **Blaze not a danger, EPA says**

Chemicals in Fresno woodpile smoke not at harmful levels.

By Jennifer Fitzenberger, The Fresno Bee, January 20, 2003

Chemical levels in a thick plume wafting from a woodpile fire in southwest Fresno won't harm the public, officials said Sunday.

Air samples taken Wednesday at Archie Crippen Excavation near Marks and Nielsen avenues contain hazardous chemicals, but not enough to cause concern.

"The issue is concentration -- whether it's a risk," said Michelle Rogow, an on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "At this time, we don't believe they are." City officials expressed relief at the news. "I'm glad to hear ... there is no danger off the site," City Manager Dan Hobbs said.

"The worst is over. It's just going to get better at this point."

Sunday marked the ninth day of the blaze, sizzling through 100,000 cubic yards of asphalt, concrete, mattresses, wood, metal, plastics and auto parts. Firefighters are working day and night to put out the fire, which they hope to extinguish by 5 p.m. Friday.

Rogow said chemicals found in air at the pile are consistent with those found at similar fires: Benzene and chloromethane. Benzene is found in gasoline and other fuels; chloromethane often is generated from trash and other waste products.

"If found in higher concentrations, they could possibly cause a risk to the population," Rogow said. "But not at this point."

Also, air quality has improved since last Monday, said Evan Shipp, supervising meteorologist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "That's evidence of it being able to disperse," Shipp said.

The smoke, though, is an irritant, and the public should stay away from it. "If you smell smoke, take necessary health precautions," Shipp said.

Fliers about the dangers of breathing smoke were distributed Sunday to church congregations in west Fresno.

Keith Kelley, executive director of Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development, distributed the fliers in hopes of raising public awareness of fire-related health issues.

About 2,000 fliers printed in English and Spanish were passed out. Another 500 in Hmong were distributed.

At Trinity Church of God in Christ, Kelley handed a stack of fliers to head usher Sharon Williams. "We want to make sure people know about it in the community," Kelley told Williams. "Please tell some neighbors also."

Williams, who has grandchildren with severe asthma, nodded with understanding: "Thank you for this information. We need it." Trinity Church is about a mile from the fire.

Pastor Daniel Lopez smiled when Williams gave him a stack of fliers at El Taberna Culo Assembly of God. "I'll keep this, and I'll tell the people," Lopez said.

Lopez knows first-hand what it's like to suffer in the smoke. It made him cough and wheeze Saturday while pulling weeds in his west Fresno back yard.

Lopez's wife, Ruth, said children mistake the smoke for clouds. She tells them, "That's not clouds. That's smoke," she said.

Kelley wants businesses like Crippen's to move farther away from the city. "It happened. Now we just have to make sure it gets cleaned up," Kelley said.

Mayor Alan Autry pledged Sunday to form a task force to investigate "events associated with" the fire, which ignited by spontaneous combustion.

Fresno City Council Member Cynthia Sterling and Deputy Mayor Roger Montero will lead the task force, which will examine the city's conditional-use permit process and the impact of waste and recycling centers in west Fresno.

"We will do everything we can to make sure incidents like this don't happen again," Sterling said. For now, officials want to stop the fire. A second excavating machine was brought in Sunday to help gut the football field-sized mound.

The excavator scoops out the rubbish, which then is bulldozed into a pond of water. When flames are extinguished, the soot is moved to the side.

Two ladder pipes are spewing up to 2,000 gallons of water per minute on the pile to tame flames and suppress floating particulates.

"We have a good game plan going," Fresno interim Fire Chief Joel Aranaz said. "We'll continue with these operations until we get this fire put out."

## Firefighters tearing into woodpile

Health issues nag city for eighth day; analysis of soot imminent.

By Felicia Cousart Matlosz, The Fresno Bee, January 19, 2003, 7:07 AM)

As Fresno's notorious woodpile blaze burned for an eighth day, city firefighters Saturday began attacking the broad two-story expanse of waste, aided by bulldozers and backhoes in a careful effort to kill a fire that has triggered health problems across the city.

Before firefighters set to work, Mayor Alan Autry held a news conference in front of the football field-sized mound to assure people that the city was doing what it could to stop the fire. Concerns about what exactly is in the smoke's soot have increased as more people complain about the smell and health troubles.

"Rest assured, we're going to take every measure to protect the people, not only in southwest Fresno but around this community," said Autry, accompanied by officials from other agencies involved in halting a blaze that's sizzling through 100,000 cubic yards of debris. It's unclear how long it will take to end the fire, which may require a \$500,000 price tag to fight.

What's imminent is an answer from the Environmental Protection Agency about what's in the fire's soot particles. Michelle Rogow, an on-scene coordinator for the EPA, said they have gotten some results back and that they may be able "in a day or so" to talk about whether there are toxics coming off the pile at Archie Crippen Excavation near Marks and Nielsen avenues in southwest Fresno.

The yard is supposed to take in only road debris, asphalt and concrete. But after the fire broke out Jan. 11, officials discovered other material buried in the tall mounds, such as mattresses, wood, metal, plastics and auto parts.

Officials believe the fire ignited by spontaneous combustion, which happens when decomposing material in a damp environment creates heat and combines with oxygen.

As of Saturday, more than 1 million gallons of water had been poured on the fire.

City fire crews were briefed Saturday morning and trained on how to safely pull apart the immense pile and stop the blaze. Until then, they didn't have the expertise or equipment to do so.

The firefighters, each outfitted with breathing apparatuses and devices that monitor for high levels of carbon monoxide, will battle the fire in sections. A backhoe carves out a chunk of debris and sets it aside. A bulldozer then pushes the material away, and firefighters douse it with water.

Eric Lamoureux, spokesman for the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, said they have no estimate when the job can be done: "We're just beginning the operation to start breaking the pile apart. ... It's too early to tell right now."

In addition to Lamoureux's office and the EPA, agencies such as the California Integrated Waste Management Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are involved. As the different agencies work together, questions have been raised about how so much prohibited material accumulated at the site.

City officials said they will examine that question. They have said they have received no complaints about the site since March 2001.

Officials investigated that complaint and found no code or zoning violations. But at least two residents said they have dogged the city for years about the Crippen yard.

"We're going to find out what went wrong," Autry said. "We're going to take the appropriate steps. We have to always get better. This is a big hit in the face that says you have to get better."

City Manager Dan Hobbs said administrators have been looking since October at how conditional-use permits are processed and will have a report in about 30 days.

Meanwhile, others who are worried about how the fire is triggering health problems in the area say the city didn't do enough to immediately alert and inform people, especially those in neighborhoods around the site.

Kevin Hall, air quality chairman for the local chapter of the Sierra Club, said his organization urged the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue fliers advising people how to protect themselves and that the district responded immediately. Saturday, the district had 2,000 fliers in English and Spanish and another 500 in Hmong ready to go.

But Hall said the city needs to do more. For example, "there was no medical person at that press conference today," he said. "No one there to talk about public health, and that's what people need to hear."

The city plans to deliver a letter from Hobbs on behalf of Autry to area residents explaining what has happened and what the city is trying to do.

Saturday, Autry and City Council Member Cynthia Sterling, whose district includes the site, handed out the letter to some residents near the yard.

Sterling also plans to conduct a town hall meeting, tentatively scheduled for Thursday evening at City Hall.

Gina Odeneal, who was thrilled to see Autry because she's a fan of his days as a television actor, said she and her two young daughters have asthma and are staying inside as much as possible.

"They've been real sick since it started," Odeneal said. "If it's foggy outside, then it's really, really bad. It's so bad that one day my husband was actually wiping ashes off of us inside the house."

Rebecka Cooksey, who lives with her family near Fruit and Olive avenues, hasn't gotten a letter yet.

"Last night [Friday], the sky was just orange and red. We could see it, and the smoke was just terrible," she said. "We can't run our heater because of the toxics coming through the vents, and we can't use our fireplace because that's also unhealthy. It's cold in our house, and everybody has sore throats, and our noses are hurting and our ears."

She doesn't understand what happened: "I think they should have been prepared for something like this."

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, also wants to know what happened. He attended a meeting Friday in Fresno about the fire. He's also chairman of the state Senate Select Committee on Air Quality in the Central Valley.

Florez said he will send a letter to the state Department of Finance requesting money be set aside to cover costs involved in fighting the fire.

He said he doesn't want the city or Fresno County faced with reimbursing costs as they deal with tight budgets because of the state's pending fiscal crisis.

Florez also said he wants to conduct a hearing about the Fresno case and how it occurred because it could happen elsewhere.

"I think this is a wake-up call for both counties and cities to proactively identify these things and get these cleaned up," the senator said.

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## Fee boosts target farms, businesses

Companies reject 'polluter' label, fear for bottom line.

By Lesli A. Maxwell, Fresno Bee Capitol Bureau, January 19, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- While Gov. Davis looks to taxpayers and poor people to shoulder much of the burden in closing a multibillion-dollar budget shortfall, the Democrat also wants farms and other

businesses to pony up more money for using pesticides, releasing runoff into waterways and spewing air emissions.

Davis is pushing for these so-called "polluter pays" fee increases to help fund three regulatory agencies -- the Department of Pesticide Regulation, the Air Resources Board and the State Water Quality Control Board. The proposal worries businesses and pleases environmentalists.

In asking for higher fees, Davis wants to keep money in the state treasury and alleviate the agencies' dependence on the more volatile, taxpayer-fed general fund.

The governor's proposal embraces a policy reform from environmentalists who believe pollution-producing industries should bear the government's costs for regulating them.

But businesses and some lawmakers take exception to being labeled polluters and have questions about how their weak bottom lines might be further eroded.

"The concept of those who pollute the environment paying for costs to regulate them makes sense," said Sen. Chuck Poochigian, R-Fresno. "Where that concept breaks down is in the definition of 'polluter.' Is a farmer who sprays an insecticide on his tree crop a polluter? I don't think so."

Tucked inside Davis' \$96.4 billion budget proposal is an increase in a small tax on pesticides -- called a mill assessment -- a broad range of chemicals used on food crops and other agricultural products, as well as some products used by consumers, such as chlorine for swimming pools.

If approved, it would be the first time in several years that the tax has increased.

The tax, currently 1.75 cents for every \$1 in wholesale sales, would increase to 2.5 cents per \$1, raising \$7 million in annual revenue.

Coupled with other fees paid by commercial pesticide users, the Department of Pesticide Regulation would function without any reliance on general fund dollars.

"We needed to have a balanced system for the long term, and we think this proposal will do that," said agency spokesman Glenn Brank.

The agency, which oversees chemical use in farm fields and other industries, had been forced to cut deeply into its current budget and scale back its monitoring of air, ground water and surface water.

DPR officials say the proposed increase is a modest one and shouldn't hit farmers' pocketbooks too hard.

"This proposal just gets us back to where we had been," said Brank, noting that the department's proposed \$53.3 million budget would support 359 staff members.

But dealers in agricultural chemicals aren't so sure farmers won't notice an increase.

"A fee like that will automatically be added to the cost of the product and passed directly to the consumer," said Geary Austin, owner of Leffingwell Ag Sales, a chemical company based in Lindsay whose primary customers are citrus growers.

"It's not huge, but it's another straw for farmers to add to the list of rising costs and increased foreign competition."

Environmentalists, while supportive of steeper fees for pesticide users, suggest Davis' proposal doesn't go far enough.

"It still wouldn't provide enough money to DPR to fully protect workers and communities from the harmful effects of pesticides," said Bill Magavern, a Sierra Club lobbyist. "We would recommend a tiered system so that the most hazardous chemicals would be assessed at a higher rate. [That] would be an incentive to use less harmful chemicals."

They also say Davis' support of raising fees is driven by budget woes, not environmental concerns.

"Before these proposals, his record on 'polluter pays' has been mixed at best," Magavern said.

"The magnitude of the fiscal crisis has forced him to take another look."

Davis' proposal also calls for raising more than \$10 million in fees for industries regulated by state air officials and \$13.6 million in fees for those overseen by state water regulators.

Officials for those agencies said they did not know which industries would be targeted for fee increases or how much costs would rise.

## Burning pile contaminated

Two nearby residents have made numerous complaints to the city.

By Mark Grossi, Pablo Lopez, The Fresno Bee, January 18, 2003

Amid a burning, two-story-tall mound of wood, authorities have found twisted metal, plastic, soiled carpet and various automobile parts -- adding contaminants to a potent plume.

Questions about the pile and the Fresno government's knowledge of the hazards are stirring even as authorities prepare a 10- to 15-day assault on the fire at a cost of up to \$500,000.

Lee Crippen, whose father, Archie, owns the burning pile, on Friday lamented the fire.

"It ruined our business," he said. "We're good at what we do, and we had a good reputation around town for house demolitions. It's one big mess."

Fresno County and the city of Fresno on Friday night declared a local emergency. The action includes a request to the governor to declare a state of emergency, which could free up more state money to fight the fire.

State and federal authorities Friday said earth-moving equipment this morning will begin the labor-intensive job of tearing apart the 100,000 cubic yards of burning wood and rubble at the southwest Fresno site.

Firefighters will shower the week-old blaze with foam to hold down dangerous microscopic particles floating into the air. As sections of the massive pile are removed, they will be doused and hauled away.

Air quality officials are warning a metropolitan area of 500,000 people to keep their children in their homes this weekend if they smell smoke. The soot particles can trigger asthma and other breathing difficulties.

"If they smell smoke, it means they're breathing these particles," said spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Meanwhile, city officials said they had not received recent complaints about the Archie Crippen Excavation site at Nielsen and Marks avenues, so they would not have known about the hazard.

City spokeswoman Patti Miller said the city has no funding or staffing to monitor conditional-use permits, such as the one for Crippen's site. Investigations are based on formal complaints.

However, Harlan Kelly Sr., a southwest Fresno resident, said he has been fighting Crippen's operation and other recycling demolitions for years. He took his complaints to City Hall four times, city clerk's records show.

Another area resident, George Finley, said he also has complained for years about the Crippen site.

"The city knows the piles were high and smelled," said Finley, who is a member of the city's Edison-Southwest Fresno Citizens Planning Advisory Committee.

The city in March 2001 investigated Kelly's complaint and found Crippen's operation had "no zoning or code violation at the time," Miller said.

Kelly complained to the City Council again three months later. But he did not file a formal complaint at that time, Miller said. "He just said, 'You guys aren't doing enough,' " Miller said.

The pile -- the size of a football field filled 20 to 25 feet tall -- caught fire Jan. 11. Calm, foggy conditions have allowed particles to accumulate and virtually smoke out portions of Fresno, forcing schools to cancel athletic activities.

Ordinarily, damp, foggy conditions would help hold down a woodland fire. But this fire is buried in a pile, well-protected from the elements. Even a stream of water cannot penetrate well enough to extinguish it.

Though small flames shoot up in different areas of the pile, the intense part of the fire remains deep within.

"The fire is seeking oxygen, like tentacles," said Frank Simpson, spokesman for the California Integrated Waste Management Board, which is taking a lead role in fighting the blaze.

Officials believe the fire started through spontaneous combustion, which occurs when decomposing material in a damp environment creates heat and combines with oxygen to ignite.

Fresno firefighters did not have the expertise or equipment to safely pull the pile apart and stop the fire, city officials said.

The Integrated Waste Management Board, which oversees management of the state's solid waste, was called Tuesday, and federal authorities joined the effort Wednesday.

The state committed up to \$300,000 for the work, but officials now believe the fire could cost up to \$500,000 to extinguish and clean up.

In most of these situations, the state will attempt to recoup the money. The management board will make that decision.

Site owner Crippen faces possible penalties of \$50,000 or more per day from the Valley air district for improperly handling the material in the pile and creating a public nuisance.

Crippen has not received previous notices of violation from the air district for this kind of problem. But in 1992, a Fresno inspector said Crippen violated city code because excessive dust and rodents on the property were detrimental to public health and safety.

The inspector also noted tires, vehicles and other items on Crippen's property -- debris not allowed under his work permit.

Fresno officials said the 1992 matter probably was resolved because there is no indication in city records that Crippen was penalized.

When Crippen's property was annexed to the city in the mid-1980s, Fresno officials honored his Fresno County permit to run a recycling operation. Crippen crushed asphalt and concrete and sold it to developers to build streets and parking lots.

Records also show Crippen had a financial relationship with the city. Since at least December 1982, the city has been paying him to demolish homes. In addition, the city paid him \$113,000 to demolish an air tanker base in 1992.

Crippen's contracts were obtained through a competitive bid process, with language in the contracts requiring compliance with all laws, Miller said.

At Crippen's site, Simpson of the Integrated Waste Management Board said the owner was allowed to take 40 tons of material to his site and haul away 40 tons per day.

"Unfortunately, more was coming in than going out," Simpson said. "Everyone knew it was here, but I don't think anyone was paying attention."

Southwest Fresno resident Finley said he and others complained to city officials but were unsuccessful.

Kelly, the other southwest Fresno resident, showed a video of Crippen's tall mounds to the City Council in June 2000. The video also documents tall piles at other recycling and demolition plants in southwest Fresno.

When his efforts didn't produce results, Kelly said he and others filed a complaint with the Fresno County civilian grand jury in November 2000.

"The neighborhood affected is presently suffering from the possible life-threatening effects of fumes, dust and odor," a portion of the complaint said.

# Bad air quality suspends games

By Bryant-Jon Anteola, The Fresno Bee, January 17, 2003

Gyms were dark. Practices were short and limited to strategy sessions.

It was an identical scene at all six Fresno Unified high schools Thursday.

Air quality concerns -- caused by wind shift and smoke of a 6-day-old woodpile fire in southwest Fresno -- prompted Fresno Unified officials to postpone all indoor and outdoor activities held in the Fresno and Clovis areas until Tuesday.

Six varsity basketball games were called off -- two girls games Thursday and four boys games today. All would have been league openers.

Instead, players and coaches sat in limbo, unsure how to prepare for their next game when they can't practice.

"I thought I had seen it all -- why a basketball game couldn't be played -- until now," said Sunnyside High boys basketball coach Mark Beebe, whose Wildcats were to play Edison today to begin North Yosemite League action.

"We purposely didn't schedule a game earlier in the week so we could really focus on our league opener and Edison. ... What can you do, though? You don't want to jeopardize anyone's health."

Some schools located a few miles from the fire scene, such as Central, Washington and Memorial, have limited outside activity throughout the week.

Only Fresno Unified decided to call off games and halt physical activities.

"Unless someone tells me otherwise before tipoff, we're still going to play Yosemite [tonight] at home," Memorial boys basketball coach Wil Hooker said.

All other games in the Central Section that didn't include a Fresno Unified school (Bullard, Edison, Fresno, Hoover, McLane and Roosevelt) playing in the Fresno/Clovis area went or will go on as scheduled.

The Fresno girls basketball team played at Lemoore on Thursday. The Roosevelt boys basketball team still is set to play at Reedley today in the only NYL opener still scheduled.

Some of the canceled games already have been relocated or rescheduled.

The Bullard girls basketball team was to play at No. 3 Clovis West. That game now is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday. In boys basketball, No. 6 Clovis West hosts Bullard on Wednesday because tonight's game was canceled.

Other arrangements are pending.

"They'll just have to get creative," Fresno Unified athletic director John Mauer said. "It's not something coaches probably want to do, but we're not going to risk playing with this air."

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## Police alert car dealers to threat

**Fresno State plans conference on tactics of environmental activists.**

By Jim Steinberg

The Fresno Bee

*(Published Friday, January 17, 2003, 7:46 AM)*

A scheduled conference on revolutionary environmentalism next month at Fresno State has prompted Clovis police to advise concerned car dealers to consider hiring extra security.

California State University, Fresno, emphasizes that the Feb. 13-14 conference is designed to consider the phenomenon of environmentalists' increasingly militant tactics, not to advocate those tactics.

The university describes the conference as an examination of "a growing movement toward 'direct action' tactics, such as arson and property destruction, by environmental and animal-rights activists."

The fact of those tactics "prompts a need for debate, discussion and an academic analysis of these trends," the university says.

Environmentalists have protested such things as sport utility vehicles, saying they use too much fuel and pollute the air. In a couple of cases, environmental groups took responsibility for setting fire to car dealerships.

An announcement from the university says faculty members will hold "an academic seminar on 'Revolutionary Environmentalism: A Dialogue Between Activists and Academics.' "

The university's Political Science Department organized the gathering, "and invited selected academic and activist representatives ... for dialogue within the university community."

At least some in the nearby Fresno and Clovis auto community fear that the gathering could spawn property damage along Shaw Avenue or elsewhere.

University officials say some of the environmentalists who will be visiting have been arrested during protests.

Clovis police Sgt. Tom Tucker said police cannot be on all car lots 24 hours a day.

"If I'm a car dealer, I recognize that police can't be everywhere at once. So I hire a set of eyes for \$7 an hour to call police if there is a problem," he said.

Bill Hedrick of Hedrick's Hallowell Chevrolet, near the university on Shaw Avenue, said Clovis police told his dealership "we should add security."

The general manager of another Shaw Avenue dealership declined use of her name, but said Clovis police had called all dealers. The police told this dealership "we are beefing up patrols and recommend that you hire guard service," the general manager said.

"I'm so angry," she said. "Why are they doing this? They said for educational services. Are they educating college students to be terrorists?"

Michael Dunlap, interim Fresno State police chief, said his department has shared information about the conference with the Fresno and Clovis police departments and the Fresno County Sheriff's Department.

"We are keeping them aware of what we are visiting upon them," he said.

"Folks are coming here who have an agenda."

Still, Dunlap said he understands the university is motivated by scholarly examination.

Ellen Gruenbaum, dean of Fresno State's College of Social Sciences, said conference organizers decided to close the event to the public: "They don't want to promote controversial ideas."

She said the conference will attract a wide range of environmentalists, including, but not limited to, those who employ extreme tactics.

Gruenbaum said such tactics can include sabotage and have become "a dangerous trend ... We think that as social scientists, we should be discussing what is happening."

The conference will feature discussion and debate among academics and activists, she said, identifying Mark Somma, who teaches political science at Fresno State, as a key organizer. Somma could not be reached to comment Thursday.

Guests scheduled to attend include Rik Scarce, author of "Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement," and Rod Coronado, a speaker on animal rights and direct-action environmentalism and a former spokesman for the Animal Liberation Front. Others expected to attend: Kim Marks of EarthFirst!; James Leslie Pickering, former spokesman of Earth Liberation Front; Capt. Paul Watson, author of "Seal Wars: Twenty-five Years on the Front Lines with the Harp Seals" (with Martin Sheen); and Gary Yourofsky of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

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[Fresno Bee Editorial, January 21, 2003](#)

## **We must do better**

Wood pile fire in Fresno hasn't been handled very well by agencies.

Not all of the fallout from the scrap pile fire in southwest Fresno is lodging in the lungs of Valley residents. Some of it is landing on the heads of the local, state and federal agencies whose job it is to protect us from such dangers.

Where to start? How about the Fresno Fire Department, which poured thousands of gallons of water on the fire the first day, only to discover that such action might have made the task harder, not easier. Considerable time was spent as various agencies, local and state, scratched their heads and tried to figure out what to do. Finally, heavy equipment began breaking the big pile into smaller, more manageable piles, which could be extinguished by crushing them into the mud created by all that water.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency issued what sounded to many like a confident and soothing proclamation -- based on samples taken several days after the fire started -- that there was little to fear from chemicals released into the atmosphere by the fire. Later the agency complained that it had been misunderstood, and that it said no such thing. But it's clear that was the message people heard. The announcement caused Fresno's city manager to say, "The worst is over. It's just going to get better at this point."

The mayor has announced the formation of a task force to study the problem. We'll see. The city inspected the fire site less than two years ago and found no problems. Are we to believe that the offending pile was assembled at the site entirely in the interim between "inspection" and fire? Will people give much credibility to a city task force investigating city departments?

**The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District was little better than the other agencies involved in this mess. The district issued warnings, to be sure, but didn't get around to talking directly with the people living closest to the site until Saturday -- a full week after the fire began -- when it handed out some 2,500 fliers in English, Spanish and Hmong.**

In the midst of all this, people were crowding into doctors' offices, clinics and hospital emergency rooms complaining of respiratory difficulties. And how reassuring is all this to thousands of parents whose children's schools were not permitting strenuous outdoor activity?

There are plenty of reasons for these poor performances, but few excuses. It is true that similar fires in the past might not have raised as many eyebrows -- and created so much anxiety -- but things are different now. The public has a better understanding than it once did of the depth and seriousness of our air pollution problem here in the Valley. And people expect better. State Sen. Dean Florez is forming a select committee to investigate the Valley's filthy air. This episode would make an excellent place to start.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

Burning scrap pile in southwest Fresno isn't just polluting the air, it marks a leadership failure at all levels.

#### [Modesto Bee Editorial, January 20, 2003](#)

Other city councils in the San Joaquin Valley ought to consider following the lead of the Fresno City Council and consider ordinances banning wood-burning fireplaces in new houses.

Such a ban would make a significant contribution to air quality. About 30 percent of the soot and ash that blankets valley cities in the winter comes from burning wood in residential fireplaces.

Some argue that cities should wait to see what the valley air district does regarding fireplaces and then enact stricter regulations if need be. But that criticism ignores an important point: There is no guarantee the regional district will come up with the sort of rule the Fresno council contemplates.

Older homes with wood-burning fireplaces -- some of which have no alternative for winter heating -- would not be affected by the proposed ordinance, but they are a problem that will have to be addressed eventually, perhaps by providing new heating systems.

Admittedly, that could be costly, but many of the steps we must now take to clean up the valley's filthy air will be costly. Eliminating wood-burning fireplaces in new houses -- natural gas fireplaces can be provided instead -- would not require much money. But it would cut against the grain of long habit -- such as burning wood in fireplaces solely for the aesthetic joy it brings.

The alternative, however, is simply unacceptable. We can take these steps, and make these sacrifices, or we can continue to live in an atmospheric cesspool. Air pollution is increasingly deadly to crops on the valley floor, trees in the Sierra Nevada and the children so close to our hearts.

With those stakes on the table, we can't afford to stand pat.

#### [Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee](#)

[January 21, 2003:](#)

### **The same air**

By Derek Soderholm  
Fresno

In response to The Bee's special report, "Last Gasp," published Dec. 15, I noticed that the city of Fresno was mentioned maybe one or two times. I have difficulty understanding why one article was comparing the moderately sized city of Clovis' dirty air with the Los Angeles air basin.

It must be really amazing how the air just gets really dirty when you cross Willow Avenue into Clovis. When The Bee mentions Clovis as the "hot spot" for bad air, you do not back the statement up with statistical differences between Fresno and Clovis' air, if indeed there are any.

I think it would be more accurate to use terms such as "Fresno metropolitan area" or "Fresno-Clovis" when you are talking about a problem that affects both cities.

Polluted air is a problem that affects all of us here in Fresno and Clovis, and I don't think labeling Clovis' air dirtier than Fresno's is the way to go about addressing an issue when the two cities are basically one area. It would be different if Fresno and Clovis were separated by several miles, but in fact they aren't. They are separated by about 80 feet of asphalt.

[January 19, 2003:](#)

## What about trains?

By Michael Mathews  
Fresno

In all of the finger-pointing at the causes of our air problem, from ag burning and fireplaces to the bus situation, we have missed one big contributor to the bad air: the railroads. Some of these big dinosaurs run 24 hours a day, seven days a week and consume ungodly amounts of diesel while spewing out tons of black smoke filled with particulates. Yet I don't hear anyone calling for any pollution regulations on these things.

Could it be because the powerful rail unions would have a cow? Heaven forbid if the rail industry actually had to be accountable for all the aggravation that it causes -- air and sound pollution, not to mention the safety issues.

I have a better idea than consolidation: Just limit the number of trains that pass through the Valley on any given day. Any loss of freight shipping could be picked up and moved by smaller, safer, less-polluting trucks.

I realize that these are "fightin' words" to some people who believe that the railroads should have free rein with little accountability. But if the Valley air board is really serious about our air problem, it will have to focus some attention on the railroads eventually.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, January 19, 2003](#)

### Affection for the absurd

No wonder California has the largest state budget deficit in the United States -- it has a sick and twisted affection for the absurd. The state seems determined to punish the law-abiding taxpayer and revenue-generating businesses by increasing taxes and excessive regulation. This has driven large companies and "working" families from our borders, but we have only seen the beginning of the exodus.

I know the liberals are anxious to create yet another useless governmental agency to "study the problem." This is the insane mindset that has created the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The key word being control.

They want to control our freedoms. They will tell us when we can and cannot burn our own fireplaces. The fireplace Gestapo will be hard at work searching for us "fireplace criminals."

I will not passively be loaded onto the boxcar. But alas, without this tax-wasting agency, its employees might be forced to seek honest employment or perhaps jump on to California's notorious welfare program. Ah, for the good old days, when the good guys won for a change and weren't taxed for winning.

RAY McDANIEL

Modesto

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, January 18, 2003](#)

### District has indeed improved air

Editor: You rightly note that creating a state senate committee on air pollution in the Valley brings new allies to air quality efforts ("Air pollution fight gains another ally," Jan. 9). The Valley needs the help of elected leaders at every level because they, as well as Valley residents, have an important role to play in cleaning our air.

However, your assertion that the "ineptitude" of the local air district led to the present situation misrepresents the breadth of the Valley's air problem. The Air District's mandate is to regulate

stationary, industrial sources of pollution. These sources comprise 40 percent of smog-causing emissions.

The majority of emissions come from sources (e.g. on- and off-road vehicles) beyond the control of the Air District. Thus, the cooperation of leaders and agencies outside the Valley is crucial.

Your editorial also disregards the success of Valley Air District regulations and the improvements made by the 7,000-plus businesses regulated by the district valley-wide. In the past 10 years, the district's board has adopted more than 60 emission control rules. These rules are among the strictest in the country and include technology-forcing controls for gas turbines, flat glass furnaces, coating applications and solvent cleaning operations. Business owners can attest to the stringency of emission controls in the Valley.

These rules have successfully reduced industrial emissions. By 2005, district regulations will have helped reduce smog-forming emissions by 190 tons per day compared to 1990 levels — a 50 percent reduction. If no new rules had been implemented between 1975 and 1995, emission levels would have increased 76 percent over that period.

Clearly, we have far to go in ensuring healthy air. The involvement of state senators is welcomed. But as we move forward we should not forget what has worked in the past and where future efforts are needed.

David L. Crow  
Merced

[Letters on point, Bakersfield Californian, January 20, 2003](#)

## Tejon proposal considered

Rush to decide a threat to Kern

The Tejon Ranch expansion sounds like a good project that will bring needed jobs to Kern County. However, I am outraged that the County Planning Department and Planning Commission railroaded the project through the review process.

As a result, taxpayers may again foot the bill because, to date, our Kern County Supervisors have not had the intestinal fortitude to make developers pay their fair share of the expenses.

Tejon Ranch already owns the land, so they have a leg-up on their investment. Yet, planning commissioners feel it is acceptable to let us taxpayers foot the bill for GET to expand its service to transport folks to the Tejon development. Another loophole that the County Planning Department and Planning Commission are covering up is that Tejon will pay little, if any, of the high cost to protect our already-dirty air from the effects of construction and trucking that will result from their project. This is in addition to millions in freebies Tejon will get for developing their land, and ultimately making millions upon millions in profits.

If the Tejon expansion had proceeded through the normal review process and had a fair hearing, county officials and taxpayers could have mitigated some of the heavy costs this project will place on our shoulders. We need jobs, but at what cost: a huge net loss?

Here's hoping the supervisors delay final approval long enough to require Tejon Ranch to pay their fair share of the costs associated with this otherwise excellent project.

MARY HELEN BARRO, Bakersfield

## Supervisors bow to developers

The Californian did Kern County a tremendous service publishes the recent articles about the effect on our air quality the proposed warehouse development at Tejon Ranch will have. Now, how will the responsible officials respond?

It seems obvious that above all else, jobs are the motivating factor behind this as well as recent decisions made about mega-dairy development in the county. Despite a rapidly growing concern over air pollution by residents, the prospect of a reduced quality of living because of noise and dirtier air takes a back seat to the concept of bringing more jobs.

It's a vicious circle -- more jobs, more pollution of all kinds. I'm sure the commissioners are relying on the prevailing winds to push the new pollution southeast against the mountains. But that will only serve to back up the pollution coming from farther north, leaving Bakersfield gasping.

I don't understand how the Kern County Planning Commission could ignore member Kay Pitts' request for more time to study this huge project. Two hours of discussion? Give me a break. That positively tells me that the actions of the board are only that of a rubber stamp for developers, and you know what kind of brains a rubber stamp has.

Just like with the woodburning fireplace issue, officials are ignoring the opinions of residents of the county in favor of industry, at almost any cost. It's way past the time for the people who make decisions for the rest of us to listen to what we have to say.

GREGG K. KNOWLES, Bakersfield