

In it for the long haul

Students' air quality project will serve a number of useful purposes.

[Fresno Bee editorial April 17, 2003](#)

Fresno and Clovis students at the Center for Advanced Research Technology will soon embark on their own studies of the Valley's filthy air. That's welcome news from several angles.

The school has received a \$100,000 grant from Clean Air Now, a nonprofit group sponsored by the oil industry. The money will be used to purchase equipment -- specifically a mass spectrometer and a gas chromatograph -- to be used in the students' air studies. The work will begin in the fall, with the goal of staging a forum for students in the spring, at which the results of the studies will be shared.

It's a terrific opportunity for the students to practice the process of scientific experimentation and the scientific method. It raises the visibility of the issue for the students and their peers when they become involved in the problems of the day.

But the best thing about this news is the fact that it involves students -- our children. The struggle to improve the Valley's air quality is essentially a fight for the future, whether there will be one that is healthy and full of opportunity, or whether the Valley is condemned to a bleaker future of economic blight, illness and death. And our children have much more of a future at risk than most of the rest of us.

Their involvement in this effort serves two basic purposes: Their own awareness of the world they live in, as well as the world they hope one day to inhabit, will be raised. And their efforts will be a constant reminder for parents and other grown-ups of just precisely what's at stake.

The fact that the funding for this program comes from a group set up and sponsored by Chevron-Texaco may cause some teeth to grate in the environmental community; similar groups have in fact become obstacles to clean-air efforts in other places. But the upside to this project is good; we can certainly afford to see how it turns out.

Clean-air efforts lauded

By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer, April 17, 2003

A new business-oriented clean-air group has honored a Stockton business and the city government for efforts to clear the air.

Health Plan of San Joaquin and the city of Stockton are among 19 businesses, organizations and agencies around the San Joaquin Valley to be recognized by Valley Clean Air Now.

Both the city and the health organization promote programs to encourage carpooling and a reduction in the number of vehicle trips. Cars and trucks are the leading cause of air pollution in the Valley.

Valley CAN plans to recognize the Valley businesses and agencies with a publicity campaign, including newspaper advertisements that herald the clean-air efforts.

"We also want to encourage other businesses to think about ways they can clean the air," said Brad Sherwood, a Valley CAN spokesman.

The 19 companies and organizations honored by the group did things like encouraging carpools and buying low-emission equipment.

Health Plan of San Joaquin, a health-maintenance organization, participates in the Valley's Spare the Air Program, which encourages people to carpool and avoid pollution-causing activities on days with exceptionally bad air quality.

The HMO has offered preferred parking to employees who carpool, notifies employees via e-mail of Spare the Air alerts and owns a company van to shuttle employees to meetings.

"It's not just environmental good will," spokesman David Hurst said. "We really feel as a health-care organization, with the level of acute asthma in the Valley and the number of children we serve with asthma, this is a step forward in having some effect on asthma issues."

Stockton's city government since 1996 has promoted a voluntary trip-reduction program. City officials estimate that the program has meant the elimination of at least 1,200 vehicle trips per year.

Valley CAN was launched in November with the help of money from ChevronTexaco. Its board of directors, which include farmers and businesspeople, want to encourage voluntary actions to improve air quality.

The advocacy group plans to honor more Valley businesses in the future. For more information, go to www.valley-can.org.

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TUSD school buses to get cleaner-burning fuel systems

By Andy Samuelson, Tracy Bureau Chief, The Record, April 12, 2003

The choking, black smoke that trails school buses could be a thing of the past in Tracy.

Most Tracy Unified School District yellow school buses lumbering through neighborhoods next fall will be equipped with cleaner-burning fuel systems that will substantially reduce nitrous oxide, particulate matter and carbon-monoxide emissions, said Casey Goodall, the district's assistant superintendent for business services.

The school board last week accepted a \$250,000 grant from the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District to retrofit 27 of the district's 32 buses so they can burn cleaner diesel.

Goodall said he hopes most of the 27 buses will be converted by September but added that a timetable has not been made yet.

"Diesel engines are thought to be the largest contributor to pollution in the San Joaquin Valley," Goodall said.

Community activist Susan Sarvey helped research the grant as part of her monitoring of power companies trying to build generation plants near Tracy.

Sarvey extracted a concession from GWF to reduce diesel emissions and, while researching ways to stretch the company's contribution, found the air-pollution district grant that requires the district to pay only \$100 per bus a year to clean new parts.

GWF plans to build the Tracy Peaker Power Project, a 169-megawatt plant on South Schulte Road.

The district can use the GWF funds and find a matching state grant to pay for a natural-gas fueling station, which could cost as much as \$500,000, Goodall said.

Tracy Unified applied for a grant to purchase a natural-gas-burning bus.

The fuel station could be used by neighboring school districts, which worried school board member Bill Swenson.

"The extra traffic coming through the service yard would a great concern of mine," Swenson said.

But the district has to bring its vehicles in compliance with state law that requires cleaner-burning school buses on the road by 2006.

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Check out this story from the Times-Delta. I don't know where the heck they got the idea the rule is from the EPA.... I'm confused. I'll touch bases with them today...

EPA details fireplace restrictions

By Ameer M. Thompson, Visalia Times-Delta, April 17, 2003

Homeowners may be hit the hardest by proposed wood-burning fireplace restrictions.

The Environmental Protection Agency announced the proposed rules Monday for the San Joaquin Valley. Under the new rules, most wood-burning fireplaces and stoves would be banned in new homes. Non-EPA certified fireplaces would have to be disabled, converted to natural gas or upgraded to soot-containing models before homes could be sold.

"It will increase the cost of selling the home for the seller by about \$3,000 to \$5,000 at the point of sale," said Steve McFadden, president of the Tulare County Association of Realtors. "There is a financial impact on the sellers, which consequently means the buyer will have to pay more for the house."

The new rule is aimed at helping to reduce the amount of PM10 emissions in the San Joaquin Valley, which increase during the winter when people use their fireplaces. PM10 refers to tiny particles of soot, dust, ash and other solids and liquids less than 10 micrometers in diameter.

The Central Valley does not meet federal or state PM10 standards.

PM10 can get into lungs, tonsils, nasal passages or other mucous membranes. It can carry toxic chemicals causing serious health problems, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

McFadden said he is all for clean air, but he hates to see additional costs being passed on to homeowners.

Bob Haun, owner of Buck Stove, Fan and Spa, at 1830 W. Caldwell Ave. in Visalia, said he isn't sure what kind of effect the new rule will have on his business.

"Our sales are pretty heavy on the gas stove side already," Haun said. "Some people are putting wood stoves in because they can't afford the other kind."

The proposed rule would exempt homes that rely solely on wood for heat, houses above 3,000 feet and buildings where no natural gas or propane service is available.

Bob Keenan, executive director of the Building Industry Association, said builders in the area had stopped putting wood-burning fireplaces in new homes years ago.

"It's not going to have an effect on us," Keenan said. He added that the Building Industry Association supports the proposed rule.

Another component of the rule makes the voluntary "Don't Light Tonight" program mandatory. Haun said people will learn to change with the rules.

"People will still have a romance with the hearth," he said. "It's just now seeing my business going from 100 percent wood, to 50 percent wood, to less than that."

Burning wood

Houses that have existing wood stoves should remember a few tips from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Firewood should always be dry or seasoned.

Denser wood, such as oak or wood from fruit trees, takes longer to ignite but burn slower.

Softwood used for kindling produces more particulates than denser wood.

What's next

The air district will present to the public the latest proposed changes at a series of meetings beginning May 5. Information: www.valleyair.org

Businesses receive awards for efforts to cut air pollution

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday April 16, 2003, 11:41:56 PM

Three Bakersfield businesses recently received awards for their efforts to reduce air pollution.

The awards were presented by Valley Clean Air Now, a new San Joaquin Valley nonprofit group that aims to reduce smog by encouraging voluntary efforts. The 19 awards announced this week are the first to be presented under the group's Business Recognition Program.

ChevronTexaco received an award for committing to reduce nitrogen oxide pollution from its operations by 45 percent, compared to current emissions, by the year 2008. The San Joaquin Valley is out of compliance with federal standards for nitrogen oxide pollution, a key smog-forming gas.

Today Cleaners of Bakersfield also won an award for voluntarily switching to a new dry-cleaning solution. The new silicone-based solution is not a volatile organic compound, so it does not contribute to the valley's smog, unlike perchloroethylene. Today Cleaners has switched four of its stores to the new solution and plans to convert the remaining seven by the end of the year.

Braun Electric Co. of Bakersfield received a Business Recognition Award for starting a van pool service for employees. The electrical engineering contractor provides four shuttle vans, available to its 200 employees, between Bakersfield and Taft, Bakersfield and Belridge, and Taft and Belridge.

Award winners receive window stickers for their businesses, recognition in media ads placed by Clean Air Now, and a resolution from the group's board of directors honoring their efforts.

Clean Air Now was launched in November with a \$2 million grant from ChevronTexaco. Its board consists of representatives from major businesses in the valley. For the complete list of award winners, visit the Clean Air Now Web site at www.valley-can.org or call 800-806-2004.

-- Information from Valley Clean Air Now, compiled by *The Californian*

LOCAL DIGEST

The Bakersfield Californian
Wednesday April 16, 2003

Clean air coalition's valley tour will start in Bakersfield today

Operation Clean Air, a new coalition of San Joaquin Valley leaders seeking to promote voluntary pollution controls, will conduct a tour of the valley today to introduce its message to the public.

The 15 members of the group's steering committee will appear in Bakersfield at 9 a.m. at Centennial Plaza in front of Centennial Garden and Convention Center, 1001 Truxtun Ave. Then it will travel by natural-gas powered bus to Fresno for an appearance at 12:30 p.m., followed by Stockton at 3:30 p.m.

Operation Clean Air is a collaboration among business, government and community leaders working to identify voluntary strategies to clean up the valley's polluted skies. Its members include mayors from Fresno, Bakersfield and Stockton; the Building Industry Association of San Joaquin Valley; Fresno County Farm Bureau; and the American Lung Association.

The group's goal is to create a five-year plan to reduce pollution and increase economic prosperity. With that goal in mind, the group will hold a conference from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday at the Fresno Convention Center, 848 M St. in Fresno, to draft the plan. The tour is designed to encourage public attendance at the conference, which costs \$45.

For information, call (209) 550-0716 or visit www.operationcleanair.org.