

## **Some residents feel a little burned by restrictions on fireplaces**

By STEPHANIE TAVARES, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2004

When the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District introduced no-burn days, critics said it would divide the community, pitting neighbors against one another. Now, a little more than a year after the first warnings were handed out, that division is beginning to show.

For the thousands of people around Kern County with respiratory ailments, smoke from fireplaces is a major source of pain and anger. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District doles out tickets on days predicted to have the worst air quality and asks people to voluntarily keep their fireplaces dark on days when air quality is bad. But many people just don't believe that fireplaces are to blame for the pollution, and burn anyway.

Rosedale resident Bud Beurmann said he regularly burns a fire in his fireplace on no-burn days. He believes heavy semitruck traffic on I-5, along with industry and agricultural burning, are more to blame for the pollution levels than his fire.

"I'm not trying to pollute the air, I want the valley to be cleaned up, but you don't go about cleaning our air by picking on a few people who are burning their fireplaces when you're bringing in all these industries and dairies," Beurmann said.

According to the air district, about 30 percent of particulate pollution in the winter comes from fireplaces. The restrictions and recommendations against burning help improve air quality on the worst days. They base their claims on about 15 years of scientific studies done in the valley.

While few people have been turned in for violating the two burn bans this season -- Beurmann hasn't been cited -- tension is mounting between the region's most vulnerable population and those who refuse to follow a rule they feel won't do anything to improve air quality.

Central Bakersfield resident Jay McCarthy, who suffers from a lung ailment requiring him to use oxygen throughout much of his day, said watching smoke come out of his neighbors' chimneys on a no-burn or discouraged burn day while he coughs and wheezes inside his house is frustrating. He said he hasn't turned in any of his neighbors yet, but he's tempted, especially when they don't seem to care about how it affects him.

"I'm more than happy on days when it's permitted to leave things be, but when I look on the news and I see that it says 'no burn' or 'discouraged burn' I really feel discouraged that some people don't care enough to pay attention," McCarthy said. "They don't realize that probably half their neighbors have a health problem and burning affects them."

It's not just about those who already have lung ailments, though. Air pollution can lead to premature death, chronic bronchitis and asthma, Ross Porter, a communications director with the American Lung Association, said.

Particulate pollution, including smoke particles, are small enough to seep into homes, even when the windows and doors are closed, and pollution levels inside can be up to 70 percent as bad as the air outside, according to the air district.

That means there is no escape for the more than 76,000 Kern County residents estimated to suffer from lung ailments such as asthma and emphysema. For McCarthy, the issue isn't who's to blame for the pollution, it's about caring about and respecting your neighbors.

"I'd like to share the world with them and I wish they'd do that for me," he said. "It's not a perfect system but it's all we've got."

## **Dumping of biosolids in Kern spurs Senate panel hearing**

By CHRISTINA SOSA, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2004

Treated bio-sludge being shipped from Los Angeles to Kern County doesn't seem to have caused any problems in the past 10 years.

But that hasn't stopped a local water agency and at least one San Joaquin Valley lawmaker from trying to figure out how to get rid of it.

At a state Senate committee hearing held Monday night in Bakersfield, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, seemed to want to know two things about the sludge known as biosolids. How does it help Kern County, and how do we get rid of it?

Biosolids have been trucked up to Kern County from L.A. since 1994, but it wasn't until 2002 that the county supervisors banned all but the highest grade sludge.

Since 2002, Kern County has only accepted "Class A" waste, the most highly treated type of waste. Still, an overwhelming majority of Los Angeles' biosolids find their way to a farm just south of Taft Highway.

Along with waste that comes from Orange County and the city of Oxnard, Kern County receives about 350,000 tons of biosolids each year. The city of Los Angeles alone sends about 25 trucks a day to Kern County, according to Diane Gilbert, a sanitation engineer from Los Angeles.

Jim Beck, assistant general manager of the Kern County Water Agency, admitted on Monday night that there has been no evidence of groundwater contamination coming from biosolids.

But Beck said the county needs to look toward the future and talk about getting rid of the sludge now.

Ideally, Beck would like to see biosolids leave the county entirely. But that's not feasible at this time, he said, so the biosolid fields should at least be moved off land above the water table.

"The prudent action for Kern County is to be very conservative with such a valuable resource," Beck said.

Gilbert said trucking the biosolids in is good for the county. The sludge can be used as fertilizer for crops not intended for human consumption and has been known to revitalize marginal land. The facility the city of Los Angeles operates also has hired Bakersfield workers, she said.

Others who attended the meeting didn't see the benefits for Kern County.

"We don't really see any benefits at all that warrant the kind of risk we put ourselves under," said Paul Giboney, ranch soil scientist and member of Kern Food Growers Against Sewage Sludge.

Giboney said bringing in biosolids could introduce heavy metals and pathogens, and cause groundwater contamination. There's also the perception that it might be used on crops destined for human consumption, Giboney said.

Florez added extra traffic tearing up the roads and more air pollution to the list of biosolid detriments.

Florez questioned whether the permit fee for bringing biosolids into the county, currently about \$8,000, should be raised to cover the damage it does.

"How much are you willing to pay?" Florez asked Gilbert.

The county does not have power to ban biosolids outright, but county officials can set their own standards of the type of sludge it will accept, the senator suggested.

"We can set a standard that is so high that it would, in essence, ban it," Florez said.

That's what Riverside County has done, according to Michelle Randall, a member of a biosolids advisory committee in Riverside.

Randall said in the past couple of months since higher standards have been set, sludge application in Riverside has virtually stopped.

Randall recommended the county set its own standards, and not wait for statewide regulations.

"The county can put much more stringent controls on this issue than the state can," Randall said.

## **Cleaner Diesel for Tulare County**

Valley Voice Newspaper, December 21, 2004

*Tulare County* - Tulare County is looking to switch its 220 heavy work vehicles to a cleaner diesel fuel that could cut PM10 emissions by 20 to 46% and smoke by 70%.

Sooty diesel fuel is one of the biggest problems in the central valley categorized by the Air Resource Board as the number one toxic contaminate in the state.

Mandates to clean up diesel emissions have hit farmers and truckers hard requiring them to make big capital investment to buy cleaner engines or switch altogether from diesel technology. Recently power utilities offered price

concessions to valley farmers to switch their stationary engines to electricity to help clean the air but forces them to pile up debt doing it.

While it may take many years to convert over a million diesel vehicles, 16,000 stationary engines and 50,000 portable engines in the state - all those engines could run lots cleaner by burning alternative diesel fuel tomorrow.

Cash strapped Tulare County can't afford to convert its fleet of dump trucks, flat beds or earthmovers. But it can afford a new tank at its work yard full of cleaner burning diesel fuel.

Right now the fuel is about 11 cents a gallon more than standard number 2 diesel, says fleet manager Dan Hurt, who says he is just beginning using a new ethanol added diesel fuel - O2 Diesel on 12 vehicles stationed at the yard on Lovers Lane.

If things work out, the yard will adopt the new fuel supplied by Silva Oil of Fresno for all its diesel vehicles after this test period. "So far so good," says Hurt.

Silva Oil representative Richard Bias says his firm supplies O2 diesel to other jurisdictions, like Fresno County, and private firms like PG&E and FedEx who are trying the fuel out as well. Bias says his company is also selling a biodiesel blend 20% with regular diesel in a fuel called B-20. This fuel, too, cuts harmful emissions including a 30% cut in hydrocarbons and a 22% reduction in PM, he says. With an additional additive B-20 also reduces emissions of Nox from standard diesel.

The latest with biodiesels is a new federal law that lowers the cost of biodiesel to customers, the same price as standard diesel after January 1, 2005, says Bias.

These are just two fuels the California Air Resource Board is currently testing to verify its use as an alternative diesel fuel that can be used as a strategy to meet the state's pollution mitigation program. The state offers various fuel incentives if you are verified.

Another fuel with high marks that can help cut emissions ultra-low diesel (11 ppm sulfur) with an added particulate filter that can cut PM by 80%. This is the type of emission control equipment that will be required to be placed on vehicles beginning in 2006.

Tulare County's largest fleet of passenger vehicles, 850 strong, is also being cleaned up, says passenger fleet manager Mark Christian. The county is trying to convert its standard gasoline fleet into hybrid at a rapid pace with 15 Toyota purchases and 36 Honda hybrids so far with about 12 expected in this new year. Christian says obtaining the vehicles has been a challenge because of their popularity.

Another alternative at the county is to replace older diesel vehicles with CNG vehicles says the county's James Blair assistant director of transportation. CNG is the technology that has been adopted by the city of Visalia and the school district as the way to meet air quality regulations with two new CNG fueling stations going into Visalia soon. Dinuba, too, has adopted CNG technology as a cleaner alternative than diesel and is dedicating a fueling station in the next few weeks. Blair says the county is applying for \$2.7 million in air quality grants to help replace county vehicles.

Blair says while it is the practice to move to clean up the county's overall fleet, there is no actual board policy. He expects that to change soon with a policy being presented to the Board of Supervisors.

Lemon Cove farmer Jim Little says he uses biodiesel delivered from Silva Oil on his farm to heat the house, fuel the tractors and power two Mercedes cars. "I started using it nine months ago and I wouldn't use anything else," says Little. He says the renewable fuel cleans his engines and "you can put your nose right down on the tailpipe and there is no exhaust." Biodiesel is made typically from soybean oil or cooking oil. Little says her recommends the fuel to his farmer friends.

## **What's New**

Valley Voice Newspaper, December 21, 2004

Bakersfield Shell refinery will stay open at least until March. The government will allow the company higher emissions this year - an extra 7 tons of nitrogen oxides to be emitted by the end of this year - a level Shell had promised to meet but only by closing the plant last October. After October Shell announced it would reduce its per year tonnage of Nox in 2005 but they are doing that by closing the end of the first quarter of 2005 - not by spending money on technology. The company has said they would close the refinery based in part on the lack of oil in the area, even though the company admitted the plant was profitable. But it appears a settlement agreement by the company forcing them to clean up emissions at the Bakersfield facility was a major part of the equation. Selling the plant means they don't have to do the investment. The latest is that Shell is working with a New York investment firm Kelso and Co. who may buy the plant continuing its operation. The plant produces about 2% of the state's gasoline and 6% of the diesel fuel. Shell says only that they are working with a short list of bidders for the refinery. California officials are worried about the fuel supply in a very tight market.

The Tulare planning commission is expected to certify the EIR for the new Kaweah River Rock project this week. If that happens, it's on to the county Board of Supervisors for final approval of the project near Woodlake.

[Editorial in the Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2004](#)

## **Air pollution fight is uphill**

Two stories at opposite ends of the newspaper last week indicated the growing gravity of the air pollution problem in the San Joaquin Valley.

The stories also represented the opposite ends of the problem. The first story carried the news that vehicle owners in the San Joaquin Valley will pay an extra \$2 in registration fees to raise money to combat air pollution. That is in addition to \$5 a car they already pay. The money will be used to promote programs to reduce air pollution, such as converting diesel engines on agriculture pumps to cleaner-burning gas, or replacing municipal vehicles such as buses and garbage trucks with natural gas burners.

That might represent part of the cost of the solution, but the other story represents the toll enacted by air pollution: Researchers at California State University, Fresno have calculated that asthma in children is more costly to schools in the Central Valley than in any other region in California. Asthma-related absences cost Valley schools about \$26 million last year in missed attendance.

When researchers come up with figures like that, they are usually extrapolated, and that one is based on the fact that one in three children with asthma living in the Valley ends up missing at least one or two days of school. They have added that up to 808,000 days of absence. School districts are reimbursed according to their daily student attendance.

Asthma is a pervasive problem among children in the San Joaquin Valley for certain. Poor air quality does not cause asthma, but it exacerbates the symptoms and makes the illness difficult to deal with. It is logical to conclude that were Valley air cleaner, students with asthma would not miss so many days of school.

School attendance is the tip of the iceberg when discussing ill effects of the Valley's bad air, however. Air pollution also contributes to higher health-care costs, lower worker productivity, lower crop yields and increased costs for doing business.

Solutions such as surcharges on motor vehicle owners might seem like extreme solutions, but they are necessary. Until this area turns the corner on reducing air pollution, it will need to invest in mitigation measures to reduce the effects of air pollution.

These are still stopgap measures, however. And the irony of the \$2 surcharge on vehicles is that it will do nothing to reduce air pollution from vehicles. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has no control over that kind of pollution.

Getting people out of their cars and turning those cars into cleaner-burning vehicles is the ultimate solution. So far, the incentive for developing and marketing cleaner-burning vehicles isn't strong enough. Obviously, nobody is counting the \$26 million of losses in education funding a year as a possible source for incentives.

Once all the costs connected with air pollution are added up, we will finally realize that it's not too expensive to clean up the air; it's too expensive not to.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2004](#)

## **APCD uncontrollable**

The Air Pollution Control District is a government agency that is unbridled and uncontrollable. Generously funded by fines levied against the oil companies (which they pay rather than fight) the large staff is a classic bureaucratic operation.

Bakersfield is situated at the bottom of the bowl, the recipient of particulate and detritus, carried on the wind from the San Francisco Bay Area. The APCD switches this remotely caused problem to Kern County and its inhabitants.

Restricting fireplace burning has little or no effect on the atmosphere but it provides a cause celebre for the inspectors.

Inversion conditions prevail here and if no people were in the area, the atmosphere would be exactly the same. As Mary K. Shell pointed out in her recent letter to *The Californian*, diesel trucks alone contribute multiples of any fire place exhaust.

An APCD operational example: A couple years ago a local firm cranked up and refurbished an idle almond plant in Delano, hiring about 100 people to sort and grade almonds. Shortly after opening, a rep from the APCD showed up and asked what was going on?

Since the rep had no knowledge of the operation, she was thoroughly toured and briefed on the procedure. She left stating that all looked well.

However, she returned in a week with a list of possible problems and essentially demanded that the plant prove it was not a polluter. Testing to accomplish the proof cost over \$17,000 and critically inhibited the operation in mid season for two weeks.

This plant was shut down after the season, one of the reasons being that it could not operate with the uncertainty of agencies such as the APCD.

Lacking the precision, professionalism and definition of the Highway Patrol and local police forces, the APCD can and does adjust any problem to suit the situation.

-- RICHARD JENNINGS, Bakersfield

[Column in the Madera Tribune, Monday, December 20, 2004](#)

## **Two-pronged attack needed on fuel front**

By Thomas Elias - Columnist - The Madera Tribune

The advantages of hydrogen fuel-cell cars are obvious: They produce no pollution, burn no oil or gasoline and would give America total energy independence.

But there is no mass production of fuel-cell cars today and no one expects them in dealer showrooms before 2010 at the earliest. What's more, there is no network of refueling stations to pump hydrogen into innovative cars and one energy expert at the University of California at Berkeley estimates it would cost billions of dollars to create one, an average of about \$5,000 per vehicle.

None of this fazes President Bush, who has begun spending \$1.7 billion over five years to develop engine technology and build the infrastructure needed to put hydrogen in service stations.

Some consumer advocates wonder why Bush would steadfastly advocate research and development on a breed of car that could eventually end the business of the oil drillers and distributors who have long backed his campaigns.

The answer may be that hydrogen cars are so far away they pose no realistic threat to oil companies in this generation or the next. Which means the Bush push for fuel cells may be little more than a feint designed to frustrate and delay realistic tactics that could quickly make a dent in both smog and the cost of gasoline.

For there's no reason Americans can't have both.

In a Science magazine analysis, UC Berkeley Prof. Alex Farrell and colleague David Keith of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University contended it's unrealistic to count on fuel cells to solve the problems of automobiles anytime soon, even if General Motors has built one "Hydrogen Hummer."

Researchers for the National Resources Defense Council agree. "We have found it will take 20 years to develop fuel cell technology even with an aggressive policy," the group's science director told a reporter. "There's no doubt in the short-term, and even the middle-term, improving vehicles is the way to go."

The NRDC forecasts there may be commercial production of as many as 100,000 fuel cell cars by 2015. That would be in keeping with a General Motors estimate that it may have the innovative vehicles at dealers around the year 2010.

But California's experience with electric cars indicates that even if a few cars turn up in showrooms by then, they won't sell very well. That's because there are bound to be bugs with a technology using chemical reactions between hydrogen and a catalyst to produce electricity and steam. The electricity then powers the car, with harmless vapors the only emission. Demand also cannot be high until refueling becomes easy and there are now just three hydrogen stations in California.

Electric cars are just as clean-running as fuel cells, but short driving ranges and a

dearth of recharging stations doomed them to failure. That's why the state's realistic Air Resources Board last year eased off on its earlier mandate that carmakers create a large fleet of EVs by the middle of this decade, switching their emphasis to gas-electric hybrids like the Toyota Prius and the Honda Insight.

Meanwhile, Bush's administration and a congressional majority that draws much of its campaign funding from automakers, auto workers unions and the oil industry steadfastly refuse to require significant improvements in the fuel efficiency and emissions of plain old gasoline-powered cars.

Farrell told a reporter that "If we use the technology we have today on gasoline-fueled vehicles, we can raise gas mileage significantly, reduce oil consumption and help ease pollution - right now."

But that would create retooling and design costs for carmakers and cut oil company profits. Which is why there are few immediate improvements beyond the ever more popular hybrids.

And yet, the obvious answer is to do both - improve gasoline cars and develop fuel cells. If Bush and Congress are willing to invest in fuel cells because they represent no short-term threat to their big donors, fine. But voters should insist their representatives back tougher fuel efficiency standards and other improvements to today's cars, things that require strong political will but little or no new technology.

As last year's recall election proved, politicians can be held to account, and when it comes to mandating automotive improvements, they should be.

*Tom Elias is author of the current book "The Burzynski Breakthrough: The Most Promising Cancer Treatment and the Government's Campaign to Squelch It," now available in an updated third edition. His e-mail address is [tdelias@aol.com](mailto:tdelias@aol.com)*