

[The Fresno Bee - Friday, April 9, 2004 \(also published in the Modesto Bee\)](#)

By Barbara Anderson

EPA agrees to lower smog rating for Valley

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday agreed to downgrade the San Joaquin Valley's smog rating, putting it into an unhealthy air category previously held only by Los Angeles.

The federal agency's action to move the Valley air basin from "severe" to "extreme" nonattainment of the federal one-hour ozone standard will become final 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

The change in pollution classification extends the Valley's deadline for cleaning the air from 2005 to 2010. And it stops federal air-pollution sanctions that would have cost the Valley \$2 billion in federal road-building funds. Industry also escapes an estimated \$36 million in fines.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District took the controversial step in December of asking the EPA to drop the the air basin into the worst-offender category.

"The reality was the Valley was not going to be able to bring their air into federal compliance by the 2005 deadline," said EPA spokeswoman Lisa Fasano. Ground-level ozone is the primary ingredient in smog. The 25,000-square-mile San Joaquin Valley, extending from Stockton to Bakersfield, exceeded the one-hour national ozone standard 37 times in 2003.

The EPA's decision was a good one, said Jerry Martin, chief spokesman for the California Air Resources Board.

Martin said cleaner diesel fuels and engines that will be in place by 2006 and 2007 will help reduce vehicle emissions -- the biggest source of pollution in the Valley.

The new technology "will be allowed to mature and bear the fruit that we can expect from it, and that is a lot of lower emissions," Martin said.

But environmentalists say bumping the region into extreme status allows the air district to delay smog cleanup.

"The bottom line is that smog levels would have gone down faster if the district had remained severe, and the decision has extended and increased smog levels in the Valley," said Brent Newell, a lawyer at the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Newell represents the Association of Irritated Residents, which sued to stop the Valley from dropping into the worst-offender status. A Kern County Superior Court judge ruled against AIR in March, but the Valley-based group filed an appeal March 24. AIR is asking the 5th Appellate Court of Appeals to order the district to do an environmental review of the extreme designation, including effects on public health.

AIR President Tom Frantz, a Kern County resident, said: "The primary message has always been we have a human health crisis in the Valley. People are suffering unnecessarily. This isn't going to end that suffering any time soon."

Air district officials recognize the decision to go to extreme status is viewed by some as a delay, said Don Hunsaker, district plan development supervisor. "But our calendar is very ambitious, very aggressive. We're going full speed ahead in reducing emissions."

The district is working on a cleanup plan that must be sent to the EPA by Nov. 15, 2004, showing how the Valley will meet air quality standards by 2010.

The extreme designation also calls for the district to write rules within a year that include tougher permit requirements for industry. Businesses that emit 10 tons or more of pollution per year will require permits. Under the severe category, permits weren't issued unless the source emitted 25 tons per year.

The Valley's extreme designation for nonattainment of the one-hour smog standard comes before the federal government moves to an eight-hour standard average, which health experts consider a better gauge of long-term exposure to bad air.

The EPA next week will announce which areas in the country do not comply with the eight-hour standard.

The Valley air basin most certainly will not be in attainment for the eight-hour ozone standard, said Matt Haber, deputy director of the EPA's Region 9 air division. In 2003, the Valley exceeded the eight-hour standard on 134 days.

Yosemite National Park is expected to be in nonattainment of an eight-hour ozone standard. The park currently meets the one-hour.

But, as the Valley cleans up its air under the extreme status, it will clear the skies in the park, which receives pollution from the Valley floor as well as smog drifts from the Bay Area, said Fasano of the EPA. "There won't be as much air pollution to transport up into those areas."

The reporter can be reached at banderson@fresnobee.com or 441-6310.

[Los Angeles Times - April 9, 2004](#)

By Sara Lin, Times Staff Writer

Gov. Backs Hybrids in State's Carpool Lanes

The administration of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Thursday endorsed new legislation that would allow solo drivers in hybrid electric vehicles to use carpool lanes, saying the measure would help reduce air pollution and encourage energy independence.

Standing outside the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, with the San Diego Freeway as a backdrop, state Treasurer Phil Angelides and California Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Terry Tamminen also voiced support for the bill sponsored by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills).

"At a time of record gas prices, this reminds Californians that there are smart ways in which they can cut their gasoline bills," Angelides said.

Current law limits carpool lane access to vehicles carrying two or more people, motorcycles, and zero-emission cars such as electric and compressed natural gas cars. Hybrid vehicles have a gasoline engine with an electric motor.

Administration officials say the governor supports the bill, which they said represents the first step toward achieving his vision of a "hydrogen highway" in which cars would be powered by hydrogen rather than petroleum. Schwarzenegger has promised to convert his own fleet of Hummers to run on hydrogen.

"His support of this bill is saying that he believes in this technology and he knows how important it is," said Michele St. Martin, a spokeswoman for Cal-EPA.

To show his support for fuel-efficient technologies, Schwarzenegger on March 30 climbed behind the wheel of a new hybrid diesel FedEx delivery truck — one of hundreds that will eventually replace the company's current diesel fleet.

The bill will be considered by the Legislature for the first time Monday when the Assembly Transportation Committee begins hearings. If passed, the legislation would allow hybrid cars that achieve at least 45 miles per gallon and meet strict emission standards to travel in carpool lanes. The legislation would require a federal waiver called for in a transportation bill now before Congress.

Cars currently on the market that meet the standards called for in the state proposal include the Honda Insight, Honda Civic Hybrid and Toyota Prius. Other companies have announced plans to make hybrid sport utility vehicles.

Drivers with eligible cars would obtain a "Clean Air Vehicle" sticker from the Department of Motor Vehicles. The bill would limit the number of decals that could be given out to 75,000.

California has 1,112 miles of carpool lanes, roughly 40% of the nation's total. The state hopes to add about 1,045 more miles of carpool lanes by 2030, state officials say.

Hybrid cars appear to be gaining in popularity, said Michael Love, national regulatory affairs manager for Toyota. Buyers in California have to wait at least three months for its 2004 Prius. As of October, there were an estimated 20,000 hybrid cars in California.

Pavley and Angelides noted that they both own hybrid cars. Said Pavley: "If it means you only go to gas station half as often, that's a good thing."

[The Bakersfield Californian - Thursday April 8th, 2004, 11:35 PM](#)
By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer

Planners OK southeast county project

After more than two hours of discussion, planning commissioners unanimously approved plans for a 1,200-home development proposed for southeastern Kern County Thursday night.

The Copa de Oro project, an upscale development revived from plans originally approved in 1991, would set a golf-course community on 632 undeveloped acres in Willow Springs, about nine miles west of Rosamond.

Commissioners, developers and representatives of Rosamond's water district spent much of the meeting sparring over water issues.

Although reclaimed wastewater would be used whenever possible to irrigate landscaping and the golf course, an engineer for the Rosamond Community Services District said the project would draw down a net 509 acre-feet from the water table annually.

One acre-foot is enough water to cover an acre one foot deep.

The 632-acre development would use some 1,900 acre-feet of water per year, according to county planning department staff.

A condition added during Thursday's meeting would allow the district to monitor groundwater levels.

The project would include a metered water system and on-site wastewater treatment.

Randall Abbott, a representative for developer Palmer Investments Inc. of Santa Monica, told commissioners the expanded project was "a minor revision of an already entitled project."

The conditions for the expanded project, Abbott said, were more restrictive than those for the old plan, making it better overall in terms of environmental considerations.

Plans for 933 homes on 300 acres were approved in 1999. The project has been through several modifications since originally proposed in the early 1990s.

Arthur Unger, a Sierra Club representative, spoke against the project.

"This project should not be built because it is situated so far from other development and because it would consume so much water," Unger told commissioners.

Unger said the development should warrant an environmental impact report.

The project will now move to the Board of Supervisors.

If approved, building could start in a year, the developer said.

The Modesto Bee - Friday, April 9, 2004

By MICHAEL MELLO-BEE STAFF WRITER

Report says Yosemite's air not mountain fresh

YOSEMITE -- Yosemite National Park is a place where people expect to breathe some fresh air. But a federal report due out next week adds Yosemite to a number of national parks with air pollution problems.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency report, Yosemite violates a new, more stringent federal smog guideline. So do Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks and Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California.

The cause is ozone, a form of oxygen that can irritate the lungs and is a chief ingredient in smog. Yosemite Superintendent Michael Tollefson said park officials haven't received the EPA report yet.

"We assumed we would be" out of compliance, Tollefson said. Despite the apparent smog violation, Tollefson said, he hasn't had any complaints about air quality from park visitors: Hikers, climbers and campers don't seem to be choking on the air.

"We're not a major generator" of the smog, Tollefson said. Yosemite sees more than 3 million visitors each year, most of whom arrive by car. But that alone doesn't generate enough ozone, Tollefson said; instead, it drifts eastward into the park from the San Joaquin Valley and Bay Area.

Pollution wafts in from valley

Mariposa County Supervisor Lee Stetson, whose district includes Midpines, El Portal and a portion of the park, agreed.

"It's dragged in from the Central Valley," he said. "We import a great deal of pollution." The solution, he said, is to have "cleaner buses ... cleaner automobiles."

"We're not the worst," Tollefson said, explaining that Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks, because of their location, get far more pollution. "I don't think there's been a day where we've had to give health advisories" like other areas of the state, including the San Joaquin Valley.

The report comes as a surprise to Patty Roman, a former Stockton resident who brought her daughters Nicki, 12, and Katie, 9, from their home in the Florida Keys to see Yosemite's beauty.

She said Thursday that she hiked up to Bridalveil Fall and rode a bicycle all over the Yosemite Valley without noticing any problem with the air.

The report shocked her, she added, because "when I was little, the pollution was horrible," due to long lines of older cars and more campsites that put smoke into the air. Those backups have lessened, she said, and "there are less campers."

The EPA report says the park violates the new standard of smog, which means the ozone level remains above 80 parts per billion over an eight-hour period, a level considered unhealthy for sensitive people. However, statistics were not available on how often the park violated this measure and when.

And what consequences could result from the nonattainment have yet to be determined, though Tollefson said park rangers aren't going to turn cars around at the gate.

Niki Nicholas, the park's chief resources manager, said the ozone level fluctuates over the years, lowering in cooler years and rising during warmer summers.

But park rangers are always wary of pollution, which can damage Jeffrey pines and other plants.

"Our goal is to have the cleanest possible air," she said.

The park is taking steps in that direction, Tollefson said.

Cleaner fuel aims to spare air

One took place Thursday morning, when the National Park Service unveiled a fuel cell system that will provide one-third of the administration building's heat and electricity. Fuel cells, a new technology, convert fossil fuels directly into electricity and do so more efficiently than ordinary engines.

The Construction Engineering Research Laboratory of the Army Corps of Engineers is studying the use of the cell in this pilot project. If successful, the park service hopes to use it in more rural areas of the park where dirtier diesel generators now are used.

In addition, Tollefson said, the park has ordered 16 cleaner electric-diesel hybrid buses to replace the diesel shuttle buses. The new shuttles could be running by early next year. Park officials have said that they would prefer to buy buses that operate on electricity only, but those engines are not powerful enough to navigate Yosemite's steep grades.

As part of the Yosemite Valley Plan, park officials are consolidating parking into fewer locations.

The Los Angeles Times contributed to this report.

[Modesto Bee \(Section: The Region\) - Friday, April 9, 2004](#)

ART 'A clearer future'

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is asking young people to illustrate the district's goal of "a clearer future."

Artists are asked to depict any air-friendly activity, message or concept. The drawings will be judged, with the winning work to be used in the district's 2005 calendar, officials said.

The contest is open to elementary, intermediate and high school students in the valley, and entries are due by Sept. 30. Officials said the winners will be selected based on artistic ability, appropriateness of the art and creativity.

More information is available by telephone, 559-230-5800, and online at www.valleyair.org
[<http://www.valleyair.org>](http://www.valleyair.org).

The Stockton Record - Friday, April 9, 2004

'Extreme' pollution designation buys Valley more time Federal decision gives air district until 2010 to meet rules

By Audrey Cooper
Record Staff Writer

Federal air regulators Thursday gave the San Joaquin Valley an extra five years to cut smog levels drastically.

The decision by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to designate the Valley as an "extreme" pollution zone gives local regulators until 2010 to meet federal clean-air standards.

The "extreme" designation previously was held only by Los Angeles.

Officials from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had argued it was nearly impossible to meet the early-2005 clean-air deadline, in part because the district has no control over vehicle tailpipe emissions -- the Valley's No. 1 smog source. The federal government regulates vehicle emissions.

The five-year deadline extension will help Valley businesses escape millions of dollars in higher costs that the EPA would have ordered for missing the 2005 deadline.

The news wasn't a surprise to district officials, who had been told the EPA eventually would approve the district's decision to be bumped up to the "extreme" designation.

"This will in no way slow our efforts to clean the air. We'll continue to take every feasible control measure possible to continue those clean-air efforts," air district spokesman Anthony Presto said.

Some environmental groups have argued the air district should have examined whether the deadline extension was a good idea. The sanctions that come with not meeting the 2005 deadline could have forced the EPA to draft its own clean-air plan, which might have cleared the air sooner, the Delano-based Association of Irritated Residents argued.

A lawsuit was filed in January that challenged the air district's decision not to study the environmental effects of a deadline delay. That lawsuit was defeated, but the groups have appealed, said attorney Brent Newell, who filed the suit on the groups' behalf.

NEW YORK TIMES - April 8, 2004

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EPA Ready to Assess Smog Across Country

WASHINGTON (AP) -- When the Environmental Protection Agency decides next week which counties violate its more protective federal smog standard, more than 500 counties could be on the list -- mostly in the eastern third of the country and Southern California.

``This is a major event in clean air. This kind of event happens only every decade or so," EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt said Thursday. ``We list this under the banner of clean air, but it really is about longer lives, and about better health and also economic prosperity."

States and counties were told by EPA in December they were being considered possible ``non-attainment" areas. The agency in 1997 adopted a new standard for ground-level ozone, a precursor to smog, that requires state and local governments

to cut pollutants from power plants or other sources according to deadlines varying three to 20 years.

More than 110 million people live in areas with unhealthy levels of ozone, one of the leading causes of severe respiratory illnesses. Those areas also could include dozens of sites with the National Park Service, including several of its most popular national parks.

Leavitt told reporters summoned to his office Thursday that the agency will produce next week a final list of counties -- up to 506 -- that do not meet the more stringent air quality standards for ozone. State and local officials will have three years to submit plans on how they intend to clean the dirty air and come into compliance.

Counties on the list also will be put into one of six categories, ranging from ``marginal'' to ``extreme'' noncompliance that require action such as vehicle inspections and maintenance programs, Leavitt and other senior EPA officials said.

The tougher smog requirement and a new standard for soot, or fine particles, was issued by the Clinton administration out of concern that vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and people with respiratory illnesses were not adequately protected by the old standards.

The new standard is based on an eight-hour, rather than one hour, measurement of smog averaged over three days. It also requires fewer parts per billion of ozone in the air, from 120 parts per billion down to 85.

Its implementation was delayed by failed court challenges by the trucking and other industries. EPA officials had cited studies showing that longer-term exposures to moderate levels of ozone may cause irreversible changes in the lungs.

Leavitt said EPA was focusing on several major initiatives to clean the air, including a program to reduce nitrogen oxide and sulfur releases from power plants and a requirement for cleaner diesel fuel and less polluting large truck engines.

In deciding which counties are violating the new standards, Leavitt minimized the significance of recent private meetings he had with members of Congress, such as Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Leavitt said the meetings let lawmakers air concerns, but his decisions would be based on the law's requirements.

Barton has been trying to remove Ellis County, part of his congressional district, from the list of smog-violation areas but has denied being influenced by campaign contributions from cement makers there that would benefit. His office had no immediate comment Thursday.

[The Press-Enterprise - April 8, 2004](#)

MARISA AGHA

Air board honors researcher at UCR

The California Air Resources Board has honored a UC Riverside professor for his work researching air pollution.

Roger Atkinson, director of UCR's Air Pollution Research Center and professor of environmental sciences, is among three recipients of the 2004 Haagen-Smit Clean Air Awards. Atkinson is known for his research on the formation of ozone and other air pollutants.

"He has been a big contributor to what we know about California air pollution," said Jerry Martin, board spokesman. Atkinson was honored for 30 years of work. "Our work is at the very base level of this process," Atkinson said in a statement. "It's never a 'eureka' moment, but a steady progression of knowledge that changes over the years."

Atkinson's co-recipients were Leon Billings, a former staff member for U.S. Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, and Dr. David Bates, a professor of medicine at the University of British Columbia.

[SAN FRANCISO CHRONICLE - Thursday, April 8, 2004](#)

Tim Molloy, Associated Press

Bill would allow hybrid cars in California car pool lanes

Solo motorists driving hybrid vehicles would be allowed on California car pool lanes under a bill that received support Thursday from a coalition of elected officials and environmentalists inside.

The bill would apply to hybrids that get more than 45 mpg and meet the state's strictest emission standards. Current law allows electric and some other very low emission vehicles to use the lanes, as well as carpoolers in normal vehicles, said Michele St. Martin, a spokeswoman for the California's Environmental Protection Agency, which supports the bill.

"It's to recognize consumers who have already done the right thing and purchased fuel efficient and clean emitting vehicles, but also to encourage consumers to purchase more of them," said Susan Little, spokeswoman for the bill's author, Assemblywoman Fran Pavley.

Those attending a news conference to support the bill were state Treasurer Phil Angelides, EPA Secretary Terry Tamminen, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

Also attending was National Resources Defense Council Trustee Laurie David. The Toyota Prius, one of the hybrids that would get car pool lane privileges, gets frequent exposure on her husband Larry David's HBO television show, "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

In a statement, Gov. Schwarzenegger's office said he also supports the legislation. The statement said the bill would provide an "incentive for intelligent-minded consumers who are seeking fuel-efficient and environmentally sound modes of transportation."

There are now about 6,000 electric and low-emission vehicles authorized to use the lanes, St. Martin said. The bill would also open the lanes to the 20,000 hybrids currently on the state's roads, she said.

The bill would allow up to 75,000 hybrids to get special passes to use the lanes, and would extend through 2008. State transportation officials would be allowed to end the privilege if the law led to too much congestion, St. Martin said.

The bill, AB2628, was introduced Feb. 20,