

Valley landscape fades to gray

Old familiar fog settles in for customary long winter's nap.

By Jim Guy / The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

Get used to it.

The vortex of fog swirling in Tuesday evening and lingering through this morning should be familiar to Valley residents and shows no signs of fading.

It's going to be around for a while, said David Spector of the National Weather Service in Hanford.

And it brings with it the usual airline flight delays, hazardous driving conditions and poor air quality.

Several Tuesday morning flights were delayed when arriving planes could not land at Fresno Yosemite International Airport, said spokeswoman Vikkie Calderon. She said the problem cleared between 9:30 and 10 a.m. but that a similar situation could develop today.

While fog can't be directly blamed for causing deadly traffic accidents, drivers following too closely and moving too fast in it can be a dangerous combination that has led to deadly chain-reaction collisions on Valley roadways in the past.

In February 2002, a series of crashes in which two people died closed Freeway 99 near Selma for roughly 10 hours while authorities sifted through a nightmare of wreckage. More than 30 people were injured in the twisted carnage of 87 cars, trucks and big rigs over a four-mile stretch of freeway. The domino-style collisions occurred behind California Highway Patrol pace cars that were attempting to escort northbound motorists at safe speeds through dense fog.

Kirk Arnold of the CHP said there were no fatal crashes on Valley roadways Tuesday morning, but at least one collision was caused because "people are driving too fast."

Professional drivers are more sanguine about motoring through the fog. At Klein's truck stop at Herndon Avenue and Freeway 99, trucker George Hill put things in perspective.

"It makes you get tired," he conceded.

Still, he would rather deal with the fog than with snow and other conditions he encounters on runs through the Western states.

Some Valley residents find nothing can chase away the bone-numbing chill of a foggy day like a warm hearth. But recent concerns about particulate matter including dust, soot and other microscopic debris don't make that an option today, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

For fireplace lovers, the fog has pitched a shutout on burning any solid fuel — such as wood, pellets and manufactured log — today in Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera and Merced counties.

The burn ban does not include devices that use natural gas or propane exclusively; homes that don't have connections to natural gas; homes at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher; homes with no other heating device where wood burning is the sole source of heat; and cooking devices.

Spector said there is a chance that a storm near the U.S.-Mexico border might help clear the air, "but I don't think it will break the inversion." Along with the fog, expect lows in the mid- to upper 30s and highs only in the 40s where fog persists. The days will warm into the 50s when the air clears.

Particle grab bag pollutes valley air

By Ken Carlson

Modesto Bee staff writer

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

There are about 1.4 million people living in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties.

And for several days this month, they have been breathing air considered harmful to sensitive groups, and even the healthiest of people.

What's fouling the air is a grab bag of particles, including soot and other tiny granules that carry toxins into the body.

What's happening here has been studied elsewhere, with consistent results: People in cities with bad air have shorter lifespans and damage to children's lungs is irreversible.

The San Joaquin Valley has some of the country's foulest air — along with the Los Angeles basin and Houston. In the summer, ozone is the main culprit. In the winter, it's dust particles, soot and industrial ash.

Health experts say it raises the risk of heart attacks and makes matters worse for people with chronic bronchitis, asthma and other respiratory diseases.

For some, the air is deadly.

The California Air Resources Board has estimated that about 1,000 people in the San Joaquin Valley die from exposure to particle pollution each year.

While larger dust particles are trapped in the nose and throat, the smallest of these particles, PM 2.5, are not filtered out, but are absorbed in the lungs and dissolved in the bloodstream. Even in healthy people, the dirty air might trigger coughing and burning in the throat and lungs. Children will inhale higher concentrations of the particles than adults, because their lungs are smaller and they are more active.

Long-term exposure can prevent the lungs of children from fully developing.

"There was a study of 17 to 20-year-olds in Los Angeles," said Kevin Hamilton, asthma program director for a hospital group in Fresno. "Their lungs were 8 to 20 percent smaller after years of exposure. And it was not reversible by moving away."

Hamilton said one common reaction to dirty air is higher blood pressure caused by particles being absorbed in the bloodstream.

The pollutants interact with receptors that trigger a chemical called cytokines, he said. The chemical regulates inflammation in the body and serves to constrict arteries and veins.

Dr. Wallace Carroll, a Modesto allergist, worked with the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition to establish an air quality alert system using flags at local schools. It uses four colors: green for healthy air, yellow for moderate, orange for air that is unhealthy for sensitive people, and red to signify that the air is unhealthy for everyone.

Carroll said Tuesday that he hasn't seen any patients who had violent reactions to the air quality this month. He has seen patients come in with sinus infections and headaches.

"(The air pollutants) irritate the tissue in the nose and throat," he said. "If the sinuses swell, they get infected easily."

Those with sinus congestion can purchase a saline nasal wash at pharmacies, Carroll suggested.

Jane Manley, vice principal of Kirschen Elementary School in Modesto, said she wasn't aware of students suffering from asthma attacks in recent days. When the orange and red flags fly over the campus, signaling poor air quality, school officials closely monitor children who have asthma, she said.

On some days this month, the air quality warnings have extended to people with health problems, such as heart disease, emphysema, asthma and diabetes.

According to American Lung Association estimates, those "sensitive groups" represent 38 percent of the population in Stanislaus County and a significant percentage of Merced and San Joaquin residents.

Modesto resident William Stewart survived a massive heart attack in 1988. He attributed the heart problem to too much fast food and stress.

"I don't breathe as well as I used to, but I think it's 90 percent my heart and 10 percent air pollution," he said Tuesday. "I have not noticed the (dirty air), but will probably pay attention to it now."

The Harvard School of Public Health has done much to research the health effects of air pollution. Associate Professor John Godleski, quoted in Harvard Magazine, cited three theories on how fine particles can trigger heart attacks.

The particles may irritate nerve fibers in the lungs, affecting the central nervous system and rhythms of the heart.

The pollution may cause lung inflammation, with negative effects on the heart.

The particles may pass through the lungs and into the heart.

Officials formerly thought the winter air quality was worse at night and in the morning, because of residential wood-burning.

But they are finding the pollution is high even in the afternoon, said Kelly Hogan Malay, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"If the air quality is good inside their home, people with health problems should stay inside," she said.

Calif. regulators unveil \$3.2 billion plan to expand solar power

Talk To Us

Do you heat your home with a wood stove or fireplace? If the sole source of heat for your home is a wood-burning device, The Bee would like to speak with you. Contact staff writer Michael G. Mooney at 578-2384 or mmooney@modbee.com.

Calendar calls for clean air

Brenda Huang, staff writer

The Tracy Press, Wednesday, December 14, 2005

Second-grader Jeane Glenn Taruc wants people to help clean the air so that no one will get asthma. But the 7-year-old also expressed what he wants for himself in a drawing he made for a 2006 calendar: a skateboard.

That's where Jeane pictures himself: Under a blue sky and in front of green mountains, he waits for a bus on a sidewalk — skateboard in hand — and tells people, "You can ride a bike, scooter, skateboard, school bus or walk to school for cleaner air!"

Of course, the student at the South/West Park Elementary School did not forget to add his favorite windmills to the crayon artwork, which appears in the 20,000 calendars for 2006 printed by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which will be distributed for free. The calendars were sent to libraries, schools, hospitals and community groups.

Maria Victoria, mother of Jeane and his brothers — Miguel 8, and Steven, 6 — said the boys asked for skateboards, but she said they were too small for skateboarding.

Victoria's children are hardly too small to draw. Born to parents who are trained as software programmers, Steven started painting at age 2, Jeane at age 3 and Miguel at age 4.

Steven's drawing of a flying car will be published in the February issue of children's monthly "Highlights for Children," she said.

"One of them will become an author or illustrator," she said as the brothers sat quietly side by side at a kitchen table and worked on their drawings with pencils Tuesday afternoon.

Victoria sent her sons' work to the air quality agency; Jeane's was selected as one of 14 drawings to appear on the new calendar, an eight-year tradition that has become the district's biggest outreach effort.

Close to 1,000 children submitted their drawings this year, said district spokeswoman Stephanie McLaughlin.

Officials pick drawings with an eco-friendly message for the calendar, McLaughlin said.

An anti-pollution message was obviously something Jeane had in mind when he worked on the winning drawing.

"People will be sick if the air is not clean," he said.

The district sent Victoria 48 copies of the calendar, and she brought some to Jeane's school. She'll give others to friends and relatives — including Jeane's grandparents in the Philippines, she said.

On Tuesday, the boys discussed what they wanted to do when they grow up. Miguel wants to be a book illustrator, Steven a painter, and Jeane an astronaut.

"I want to see how the planet looks like," Jeane said.

Factory emissions not what sullies Kern air

By Sarah Ruby, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2005

Kern, one of the smoggiest counties in the nation, is among the least affected by toxic air pollution from factories.

Locally, the health risk from toxic industrial air pollution is a third the national median, according to an analysis by the Associated Press. A county's health risk score is based on the amount of toxic pollution released in 2000, whether that pollution hangs in the air, the danger of each chemical and the gender and ages of people affected.

Unfortunately, toxic air releases from oil fields and factories don't tell the whole air quality story, said Brenda Turner, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

While the district has cut industrial pollution in half over 14 years, the valley's smog and particulate pollution is a mix of emissions from industry, agriculture, automobiles, interstate goods traffic and other sources, Turner said.

"We still have a long way to go," Turner said. "Other factors, in particular, vehicle miles traveled, have increased dramatically."

These factors contribute to smog and particulate pollution, which scientists have linked to asthma, lung disease and premature death.

The valley spent 109 days above the federal smog standard in 2004. That's down from 134 days the previous year, but more than the smog-prone Los Angeles area, which spent 88 days in violation in 2004.

If air quality doesn't nosedive by New Year's, the valley will have gone three years without violating the federal standard for PM 10, dust and exhaust fumes less than 10 microns in diameter. Forecasts of stagnant weather through Christmas could ruin that record.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calculates an industrial toxics health risk score for every square kilometer in the nation. The scores aren't meant to measure the actual risks of getting sick or the actual exposure to toxic chemicals. They are used to compare counties to each other, and to help screen for polluted areas that may need additional study of potential health problems, according to the U.S. EPA.

Most of the Central Valley, with its notoriously bad air quality and tendency to appear on unflattering lists, is absent from the worst-of-the-worst roster when it comes to health risk from factory air releases. The Associated Press made a list of the top 5 percent of Census Tracts most at risk from industrial air pollution, and only two valley tracts in San Joaquin County made the cut. Los Angeles County had 20 Census Tracts on the list.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Calif. regulators unveil \$3.2 billion plan to expand solar power

By Terence Chea, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, December 14, 2005

San Francisco (AP) -- State energy regulators unveiled one of the nation's most ambitious programs to expand the market for solar power, proposing to offer more than \$3 billion in consumer rebates over the next decade.

The California Solar Initiative, proposed Tuesday by the state Public Utilities Commission, aims to install 3,000 megawatts of solar energy on 1 million homes, businesses and public buildings over 11 years. The five-member commission was expected to vote on the program next month after a 30-day public comment period.

Environmentalists hailed the proposal, which they said would help drive down the cost of solar energy, create jobs and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases blamed for global warming.

"With rising energy prices and continued air pollution, this is exactly the kind of landmark initiative California needs," said Bernadette Del Chiaro, clean energy advocate for Environment California. "From this, we're going to see cleaner air, affordable solar energy and California regaining its world leadership in solar power."

The initiative revives an essential component of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's bid to expand use of renewable energy in California. The governor's widely publicized "Million Solar Roofs" initiative had bipartisan support, but it died in the Legislature this year after construction unions demanded high wages for solar panel installers.

The governor bypassed the Legislature by asking the PUC to sponsor the California Solar Initiative, which shares many provisions of the "Million Solar Roofs" program.

The initiative would offer rebates to homes, businesses, farms, schools and public buildings that install rooftop solar panels. Large public utilities such as Pacific Gas & Electric Co. would not be eligible for the program.

The PUC currently offers \$400 million in solar rebates through programs funded by a surcharge on consumer utility bills. The new initiative would expand that amount to \$3.2 billion through an additional surcharge over 11 years starting in 2006.

Under the program, home and business owners who install solar panels would at first be eligible for a \$2.80 rebate for each watt of capacity they install. For example, a homeowner who installs a 2,000-watt system could receive a \$5,600 rebate from the PUC.

The rebate amount would decrease by 10 percent each year until consumers would only be eligible for a 25-cent-per-watt rebate in 2016. But regulators anticipate that as the market for solar power expands, costs will drop and offset the decreasing rebate amounts.

PG&E, the state's largest utility, supports the "concept of an expanded solar program," but was still studying its potential impacts on customers, said spokesman Paul Moreno.

In the 1970s, California was the world's leader in solar energy, but the state has been overtaken by Japan and Germany, the world's two largest solar markets. Currently, about 15,000 California homes and businesses have solar panels, Del Chiaro said.

"Given the amount of sunshine we have in California and these investments," Del Chiaro said, "we will be on pace to catch up with Germany and Japan and hopefully outpace them."

On the Net:

PUC California Solar Initiative:

http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUBLISHED/COMMENT_DECISION/51994.htm
http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUBLISHED/COMMENT_DECISION/51994.htm

EPA Would Ease Pollution Reporting Rules

By John Heilprin, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post and other papers, Wednesday, December 14, 2005

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- If the Bush administration has its way, some factories won't have to report all the pollution spewed from their smokestacks, making it harder for government scientists to calculate the health risks of the air Americans breathe.

The Environmental Protection Agency, responding to an AP analysis that found broad inequities in the racial and economic status of those who breathe the nation's most unhealthy air, says total annual emissions of 188 regulated air toxins have declined 36 percent in the past 15 years.

But the EPA wants to ease some of the Clean Air Act regulations that have contributed to those results and proposes to exempt some companies from having to tell the government about what it considers to be small releases of toxic pollutants. The EPA also plans to ask Congress for permission to require the accounting every other year instead of annually.

The agency said in September it wants to reduce its "regulatory burden" on companies by allowing some to use a "short form" when they report their pollution to the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory.

The inventory program began under a 1986 community right-to-know law. If Congress agrees, the first year the changes could be possible would be 2008.

Those changes would exempt companies from disclosing their toxic pollution if they claim to release fewer than 5,000 pounds of a specific chemical — the current limit is 500 pounds — or if they store it onsite but claim to release "zero" amounts of the worst pollutants. Those include mercury, DDT, PCBs and other chemicals that persist in the environment and work up the food chain. However, companies must report any storage of dioxin or dioxin-like compounds, even if none are released.

EPA officials say communities will still know about the types of toxic releases, but not some of the details about how each chemical was managed or released. Critics say it will reduce the information the public has on more than 600 chemicals put in the air, water and land, making it harder for officials, communities and interest groups to help protect public health.

AP: More Blacks Live With Pollution

By David Pace, Associated Press Writer

in the Bakersfield Californian, S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post and other papers, Wednesday, December 14, 2005

Chicago (AP) -- An Associated Press analysis of a little-known government research project shows that black Americans are 79 percent more likely than whites to live in neighborhoods where industrial pollution is suspected of posing the greatest health danger.

Residents in neighborhoods with the highest pollution scores also tend to be poorer, less educated and more often unemployed than those elsewhere in the country, AP found.

"Poor communities, frequently communities of color but not exclusively, suffer disproportionately," said Carol Browner, who headed the Environmental Protection Agency during the Clinton administration when the scoring system was developed. "If you look at where our industrialized facilities tend to be located, they're not in the upper middle class neighborhoods."

With help from government scientists, AP mapped the risk scores for every neighborhood counted by the Census Bureau in 2000. The scores were then used to compare risks between neighborhoods and to study the racial and economic status of those who breathe America's most unhealthy air.

President Clinton ordered the government in 1993 to ensure equality in protecting Americans from pollution, but more than a decade later, factory emissions still disproportionately place minorities and the poor at risk, AP found.

In 19 states, blacks were more than twice as likely as whites to live in neighborhoods where air pollution seems to pose the greatest health danger, the analysis showed.

More than half the blacks in Kansas and nearly half of Missouri's black population, for example, live in the 10 percent of their states' neighborhoods with the highest risk scores. Similarly, more than four out of every 10 blacks in Kentucky, Minnesota, Oregon and Wisconsin live in high-risk neighborhoods.

And while Hispanics and Asians aren't overrepresented in high-risk neighborhoods nationally, in certain states they are. In Michigan, for example, 8.3 percent of the people living in high-risk areas are Hispanic, though Hispanics make up 3.3 percent of the statewide population.

All told, there are 12 states where Hispanics are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanics to live in neighborhoods with the highest risk scores. There are seven states where Asians are more than twice as likely as whites to live in the most polluted areas.

The average income in the highest risk neighborhoods was \$18,806 when the Census last measured it, more than \$3,000 less than the nationwide average.

One of every six people in the high-risk areas lived in poverty, compared with one of eight elsewhere, AP found.

Unemployment was nearly 20 percent higher than the national average in the neighborhoods with the highest risk scores, and residents there were far less likely to have college degrees.

Research over the past two decades has shown that short-term exposure to common air pollution worsens existing lung and heart disease and is linked to diseases like asthma, bronchitis and cancer. Long-term exposure increases the risks.

The Bush administration, which has tried to ease some Clean Air Act regulations, says its mission isn't to alleviate pollution among specific racial or income groups but rather to protect everyone facing the highest risk.

"We're going to get at those folks to make sure that they are going to be breathing clean air, and that's regardless of their race, creed or color," said Deputy EPA Administrator Marcus Peacock.

Peacock said industrial air pollution has declined significantly in the past 30 years as regulations and technology have improved. Since 1990, according to EPA, total annual emissions of 188 regulated toxins have declined by 36 percent.

Still, Peacock acknowledged, "there are risks, and I would assume some unacceptable risks, posed by industrial air pollution in some parts of the country."

Government scientists and contractors spent millions of dollars creating the health risk measures. They're based on air emission reports from industry, ratings of each chemical's potential health dangers, the paths pollution takes as it spreads through neighborhoods, and the number of people of different ages and genders living near plants.

The AP used EPA risk scores from 2000 so they would match the Census data and because it takes years for the government to get corrected emissions data. Some risks may have changed since then as factories opened or closed or their emissions changed. The risk scores aren't meant to calculate a citizen's precise odds of getting sick but rather to help compare communities and identify those in need of further attention.

The scores also don't include risks from other types of air pollution, such as automobile exhaust.

Kevin Brown's most feared opponent on the sandlot or basketball court while he was growing up wasn't another kid. It was the polluted air he breathed.

"I would look outside and I would see him just leaning on a tree or leaning over a pole, gasping, gasping, trying to get some breath so he could go back to playing," recalls his mother, Lana Brown.

Kevin suffered from asthma. His mother is convinced the factory air that covered their neighborhood triggered the son's attacks that sent them rushing to the emergency room week after week, his panic filling the car.

"I can't breathe! I have no air, I'm going to die!"

The air in the neighborhood where Kevin played is among the least healthy in the country, according to research that assigns risk scores for industrial air pollution in every square kilometer of the United States.

Altgeld Gardens, the housing project where Kevin spent most of his childhood staying with his grandmother and going to school, is in a virtually all-black neighborhood where more than half the people live in poverty. The two-story project is nestled among the south Chicago steel mills, which for decades turned the night skies orange with pollution.

Most of those steel mills are now closed, victims of imports. But the area still retains enough industry to rank among the nation's neighborhoods with the highest health risks.

Just across the Little Calumet River from Altgeld, the ISG Riverdale steel plant annually releases into the air tens of thousands of pounds of heavy metals like manganese, zinc, lead and nickel. Dave Allen, a spokesman for Mittal Steel, which acquired the factory this year, said his company is committed to improvements.

"The environment is a matter of focus and pride for us and we hope to be good operators," he said.

Mrs. Brown said the asthma attacks that hit Kevin, now 29, were most serious and frequent during the time he stayed in Altgeld Gardens.

"He may now get an attack maybe once a year, if that often, where he has to go to a hospital," she said. "He was having them at one point quite frequently, at least two to three times a month."

Mrs. Brown was interviewed at the home she purchased seven years ago on a tree-lined street neighborhood south of the plant, where the health risk from industrial pollution is one-fifth the level in Altgeld Gardens.

She said she never considered pollution the culprit in her son's asthma, even after she left the neighborhood. It was only after she moved back into her mother's home for several years that she began to realize how widespread breathing problems were in Altgeld Gardens. Two children who lived next door had asthma, and one used a breathing machine as many as three times a day, she said.

"You see things happening and then you say let me start investigating," she said. "I found out a lot of people either had bronchitis or some kind of respiratory problem. Someone in each household seemed to have a respiratory problem."

In Louisville, Ky., Renee Murphy blames smokestack emissions in the "Rubbertown" industrial strip near her home for the asthma attacks that trouble her five children. Her neighborhood, which is 96 percent black, ranks among the nation's highest in risk from factory pollution.

"It's hard to watch your children gasp for breath," she said.

The Murphy family lives just a few blocks from Zeon Chemicals, which released more than 25,000 pounds of a chemical called acrylonitrile into the air during 2000. The chemical is suspected of causing cancer, and the government has determined it is much more toxic to children than adults.

Tom Herman, corporate environmental manager at Zeon, said the plant is reducing its emissions and is talking with area residents concerned about air quality to show that "there are real people working here concerned for them as well as our own health."

Malcolm Wright, 43, operates power washing equipment in Camden, N.J., where several neighborhoods also rank among the worst nationally. He said he developed asthma after moving to the city in his early 30s, and he blames the city's air pollution for attacks that sent him to the hospital four times last year.

Air pollution "works with many other factors, genetics and environment, to heighten one's risk of developing asthma and chronic lung disease, and if you have it, it will make it worse," said Dr. John Brofman, director of respiratory intensive care at MacNeal Hospital in the suburban Chicago town of Berwyn.

"Evidence suggests that not only do people get hospitalized but they die at higher rates in areas with significant air pollution," he said.

Repeated studies during the 1980s and 1990s found that blacks and poor people were far more likely than whites to live near hazardous waste disposal sites, polluting power plants or industrial parks. The disparities were blamed on a lack of political clout by minorities to influence land use decisions in their neighborhoods.

The studies brought charges of racism. Clinton responded in 1993 by issuing an "environmental justice" order requiring federal agencies to ensure that minorities and poor people aren't exposed to more pollution and other environmental dangers than other Americans.

Recent reports suggest little has changed:

_The Government Accountability Office concluded earlier this year that EPA devoted little attention to environmental equality when it developed three major rules to implement the Clean Air Act between 2000 and 2004.

_The EPA's inspector general reported last year that the agency hadn't implemented Clinton's order nor "consistently integrated environmental justice into its day-to-day operations." The watchdog said EPA had not identified minority and low income groups nor developed any criteria to determine if those groups were bearing more than their share of health risks from environmental hazards.

_The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded two years ago after an investigation that "federal agencies still have neither fully incorporated environmental justice into their core missions nor established accountability and performance outcomes for programs and activities."

EPA Assistant Administrator Granta Nakayama disputed those reports, saying the agency has been choosing its enforcement initiatives to maximize the impact on minority and poor communities.

Environmental experts say most pollution inequities result from historical land use decisions and local development policies. Also, regulators too often focus on one plant or one pollutant without regard to the cumulative impact, they say.

Short of government action, citizens in high-risk neighborhoods have little legal recourse. They can file lawsuits under the 1964 Civil Rights Act but must prove intentional discrimination, a difficult burden.

And while some federal agencies have rules that ban environmental practices that result in discrimination, the Supreme Court has said private citizens can't file lawsuits to enforce those rules.

Citizen complaints to EPA have had little effect. From 1993 through last summer, the agency received 164 complaints alleging civil rights violations in environmental decisions and accepted 47 for investigation. Twenty-eight of the 47 later were dismissed; 19 are pending.

"There is no level playing field," said Robert Bullard, director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University. "Any time our society says that a powerful chemical company has the same right as a low income family that's living next door, that playing field is not level, is not fair."

The Associated Press analyzed the health risk posed by industrial air pollution using data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Census Bureau.

EPA uses toxic chemical air releases reported by factories to calculate a health risk score for each square kilometer of the United States. The scores can be used to compare risks from long-term exposure to factory pollution from one area to another.

The scores are based on:

- _The amount of toxic pollution released by each factory.
- _The path the pollution takes as it spreads through the air.
- _The level of danger to humans posed by each different chemical released.
- _The number of males and females of different ages who live in the exposure paths.

The scores aren't meant to measure the actual risks of getting sick or the actual exposure to toxic chemicals. Instead, they are designed to help screen for polluted areas that may need additional study of potential health problems, EPA said.

The AP mapped the health risk scores to the census blocks used during the 2000 population count, using a method developed in consultation with EPA. The news service then compared racial and socio-economic makeup with risk scores in the top 5 percent to the population elsewhere.

Similar analyses were done in each state, comparing the 10 percent of neighborhoods with the highest risk scores to the rest in the state.

To match the 2000 Census data, the AP used health risk scores calculated from industrial air pollution reports that companies filed for EPA's 2000 Toxic Release Inventory. It often takes several years for EPA to learn of and correct inaccurate reports from factories, and the 2000 data were more complete than data from more recent reports that were still being corrected.

The AP adjusted the 2000 health risk scores in Census blocks around some plants that filed incorrect air release reports in 2000, after plant officials provided corrected data.

Counties that had the highest potential health risk from industrial air pollution in 2000, according to an AP analysis of government records. The health risk varies from year to year based on the level of factory emissions, the opening of new plants and the closing of older plants.

1. Washington County, Ohio
2. Wood County, W.Va.
3. Muscatine County, Iowa
4. Leflore County, Miss.
5. Cowlitz County, Wash.
6. Henry County, Ind.
7. Tooele County, Utah
8. Scott County, Iowa

9. Gila County, Ariz.
10. Whiteside County, Ill.

Factories whose emissions created the most potential health risk for residents in surrounding communities in 2000, according to an AP analysis of government records:

1. Eramet Marietta Inc., Marietta, Ohio
2. Titan Wheel Corp., Walcott, Iowa (closed in 2003)
3. Eastman Kodak Co., Rochester, N.Y.
4. American Minerals Inc., El Paso, Texas
5. F.W. Winter Inc., Camden, N.J.
6. Meridian Rail Corp., Cicero, Ill.
7. Carpenter Tech. Corp., Reading, Pa.
8. Longview Aluminum LLC, Longview, Wash. (closed in 2001)
9. DDE Louisville, Louisville, Ky.
10. Lincoln Electric Co., Cleveland

On the Net:

The Environmental Protection Agency:

Details of the EPA's Risk Screening Environmental Indicators Project at:

www.epa.gov <<http://www.epa.gov>>

[www.epa.gov/opptintr/rsei/views.htm](http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/rsei/views.html)

www.epa.gov/opptintr/rsei/views.html

Hybrid bus fleet on purchase list for San Joaquin

Units could pay for themselves in 12 years through savings in diesel fuel costs

By Aaron Swarts, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald Sunday, December 11, 2005

To combat soaring fuel prices, the San Joaquin Regional Transit District is entering into a consortium with 10 other transit agencies to build 157 diesel-electric hybrid buses.

At \$77.9 million, the contract is one of the largest diesel-electric hybrid bus orders to date, with the partnership allowing the agencies to maximize purchasing power and reduce per-vehicle costs through volume purchasing.

Transit agencies joining San Joaquin in the consortium include Benicia Transit, Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority, San Mateo County Transit and the Humboldt Transit Authority, among others.

We originally bought two hybrid buses in 2004, and shortly after held a demonstration and invited other agencies to attend, said Paul Rapp, communications manager for the San Joaquin Transit District. When the time came for us to make a larger purchase, some of those agencies decided to join us.

The buses will be built in various configurations and lengths, ranging from 29 to 40 feet long. Each bus will cost approximately \$490,000, with the transit agencies saving \$50,000 per bus through volume purchasing.

San Joaquin County will keep 50 of the buses, to be used to replace buses in its fleet that are older than 12 years or have more than 500,000 miles.

Transit officials say that based upon the present cost of fuel and the fuel mileage demonstrated with the new buses, the hybrids should more than pay for themselves over their expected 12-year lifespan.

The buses also use the same fuel as the rest of the county's fleet, which allow them to use the existing fueling stations, avoiding the millions of dollars it would take to change the present system.

However, officials also say that realizing fuel cost savings is just one positive aspect of the program and not the overall goal.

The real benefit comes from significantly minimizing air emissions, which in turn reduces the environmental impact to the region's natural land and water resources, officials said.

Our board is extremely supportive of hybrid technology, Rapp said. We are among the first to start using the diesel/electric technology in the state.

The first 10 buses are scheduled to arrive in San Joaquin County by August of 2006. The remaining fleet will be delivered by the end of 2007.

The Transit District will then auction some of the old buses while others are transferred to a transit agency out of state.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Wednesday, December 14, 2005:](#)

Valley air district considers building fees

Editor's note: On Thursday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board will take up a controversial air quality regulation called the Indirect Source Rule. This regulation would impose fees and other demands on new construction. The Bee asked supporters and opponents of the rule to give their opinions on the regulation.

We must clean up air basin

By Kathryn Phillips

The San Joaquin Valley is choking, and the question to ask is not should we act, but how quickly.

The Valley competes with Los Angeles and Houston for the title of worst air quality in the country. We have record-high childhood asthma rates and, on average, we are breathing unhealthy air at least one day out of every five.

Air pollution is a health crisis in the Valley and this health crisis costs money and lives. Air pollution can cause or trigger lung disease in children, heart disease in adults and even result in premature death. Avoiding cleaning our air has much higher costs -- to our health and to our quality of life -- than any single rule implemented by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, including the Indirect Source Rule.

Everyone's concern

If the Valley ever is going to have the clean air everyone needs, then everyone has to be part of the solution. The region's manufacturers and refiners, after initial resistance, began cleaning their smokestack emissions years ago. Farmers also are taking responsibility by meeting regulations to reduce their pollution emissions.

Now is the time for developers to step up and do their part. If a person were choking in a restaurant, we wouldn't stand around and point fingers to assign blame; we would figure out who has the best solution and how quickly we could act. The Indirect Source Rule is a virtual Heimlich maneuver for clearing the Valley's air.

Developers can control how much energy a building uses, how much polluting vehicle traffic is generated and how much diesel soot and dust is produced during construction just by how they design and build their projects. Thoughtful developers already know that how they angle the building, how much insulation they use, how sidewalks are situated and whether and how closely the development is situated to local jobs and shopping influences how much pollution is created by traffic and energy use.

Developers will find that the Indirect Source Rule gives them credit for the good things they're already doing that reduce pollution, and we all will benefit by living in a community that is designed well, protects our quality of life and attracts new business and development.

The title of "smog capital of America" can't be good for business. If people are allowed to create pollution and don't clean up their messes, then the cost of cleaning up will reside with someone else. Owners of new businesses don't want to move to a region where they believe they'll have to pick up the tab for pollution other sectors create and won't solve.

'Responsible growth'

By proposing this rule, the San Joaquin air district staff is doing its part to clean the air and encourage responsible growth and development. It has upgraded a well-respected computer model and a logical formula to arrive at a reasonable fee for each ton of pollution produced from a new development project. Developers who produce less pollution will pay less in fees.

The air district board should pass the Indirect Source Rule on Thursday, and it should be lauded for doing so.

The Indirect Source Rule is providing an incentive to developers to create the cleanest air possible. Estimates are that this could add a one-time cost of up to \$800 to the price of a home in the near term (until 2008). Eight hundred dollars is a small price to pay to protect a family's health. And the returns are abundant --- cleaner air, a thriving economy and great communities.

Kathryn Phillips manages the Clean Air for Life Campaign of Environmental Defense, a national nonprofit organization with more than 400,000 members.

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Extra costs will harm economy, consumers

By Nathan Magsig, Joy Madison and Mark Hendrickson

San Joaquin Valley residents beware: The size and scope of a little-known government agency is about to mushroom into one of the biggest bureaucracies and taxing authorities in the state. And the result is that the cost of living in our region is going to increase for everyone.

Added fees

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is poised to enact two monumental regulations (draft rules 9510 and 3180) that will impose hundreds of millions of dollars in new fees -- in the name of cleaning the air -- on every newly constructed home, business or public facility, and other projects.

If at Thursday's meeting the air district governing board adopts the proposed regulations, it will have the authority to collect fees we estimate could exceed \$670 million over the next five years.

By 2008, every homebuyer will pay a \$1,700 surcharge to this new bureaucracy. The proposed regulations will impose an equally taxing tab on new businesses. For example, by 2008, fees will add hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cost of shopping centers -- large and small.

Many of these developments house mom-and-pop businesses, including restaurants and small retail shops that simply cannot absorb new costs of this kind. With the Valley having some of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, we should be encouraging new business development, not taxing it.

'Off track'

How did this happen? About two years ago, the Legislature put a provision into a bill that encouraged the district to develop strategies for reducing "indirect sources" of air pollution. Improving the quality of the Valley's air is something we strongly support and, as residents, employers and employees in the region, something we think all Valley residents are concerned about. The Legislature's plan didn't sound like a bad idea at the time.

But things got profoundly off track as the district transformed this legislation into a revenue-raising project. The legislation was aimed at developing air-quality improvement strategies, not expanding government bureaucracy.

The current operating budget of the district is about \$36 million per year. If enacted, the proposed regulations will quadruple that budget.

What's the district's plan for spending its new millions? Depending on who asks, one gets different answers. For the general public, the district lists several activities that will be funded by the new regulations. To new business owners, home builders and others who have to pay the fees, the district says that if these groups follow certain guidelines, they won't have to pay a thing. That doesn't add up.

Questioning estimates

Neither does the science the district has employed. Experts repeatedly have warned that the methodology being used by the district contains serious flaws. For example, the district's calculations overestimate emissions from new homes and businesses by as much as 70%, which is how the sky-high fees are calculated. Neither the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency nor any other air district in the nation uses this unreliable and inappropriate methodology.

At best, the district has done a sloppy job of interpreting state law. At worst, it has misappropriated statutory authority so it can raise extraordinary amounts of money for some uncertain use. Regardless, the district has an obligation to demonstrate that its proposed new taxing power is necessary and that the way it would use that power would be fair and cost-effective, and would produce a real benefit to the residents of the Valley.

So far, the air district has failed on all counts.

Nathan Magsig is mayor of Clovis. Joy Madison is chief executive officer of the Modesto Chamber of Commerce. Mark Hendrickson is president of the Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, December 14, 2005:](#)

Paying for clean air

Valley's building industry must do its share against pollution.

Awareness of our air quality problems in the Valley has gradually seeped into just about every corner of the region. We still struggle, though, with the notion that we, individually and in our special interest groups, might actually be called upon to do something about it.

Most recent case in point: The debate over proposed rules that would tack fees for pollution mitigation onto the price tag of new construction of all types in the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. (See the pro-con opinions on the facing page.)

The idea is that new construction will add to air pollution, so builders — and ultimately those who buy or lease the new buildings — must pay to help ease the problem.

Homebuilders, in particular, object to the new fees, claiming they will be so onerous as to drive many prospective homeowners out of the market. Those claims are, to be charitable, overstated. Using the actual model the air district has constructed for figuring the new fees, the following numbers emerge for a hypothetical 120-unit residential development on 24 acres in the Valley:

If the builder does nothing to reduce air pollution — no landscaping, no sidewalks, no nearby retail outlets, no bike lanes, nothing — the fee would be about \$780 per home.

With what the air district regards as "typical on-site mitigation measures" — no woodstoves allowed, energy efficiency increased by 5%, some nearby retail outlets, sidewalks on most of the streets — the fees would be about \$560 per home.

With "more than typical" mitigation — energy efficiency increased by 10%, more nearby retail, sidewalks on both sides of all the streets, closer to job centers — the fee would be about \$450 per home.

The cost could go even lower. Building downtown residences, where commutes could be very short or non-existent, could wipe out the fees altogether.

Spread those figures over the life of a mortgage, and it just isn't that much.

Air district officials have said all along that their ideal would be new construction so full of measures to lower air pollution that the fees would not be charged.

And whatever money is collected will be spent to alleviate other sources of pollution, such as buying new school buses or helping farmers replace dirty diesel engines used in the fields.

It's understandable that builders would object; such fees appear to them as a threat to their livelihoods. The Valley's ag interests made similar objections when the first new regulatory measures in this fight for cleaner air were aimed principally at them. They objected most loudly to being singled out.

And ag was made to go first. But they weren't ever expected to be the only group that had to change its ways. Now it's the turn of those in the building industry, and they don't like it. That's understandable.

But we all will face such changes, and we need to get used to it. Without these sacrifices — however small they may actually be — we'll never have clean air in the Valley.

The air district board should adopt the new rules and fees at its meeting tomorrow. We'll all be better off in the long run.

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2005](#)

Builders must clean up their act

It's the law. It makes sense. It's the right thing to do. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board will consider new rules Thursday requiring builders to pay a fee to offset the air pollution consequences of their projects.

Fees can be reduced or nearly eliminated if projects are built with pollution-reducing features such as bike and pedestrian paths, shopping areas near mass transit routes and energy-efficient systems.

Without pollution-reducing features, by 2008 builders may be paying a fee of \$1,772 per home to fund the use of low-emission vehicles, public transportation and other pollution-reducing strategies.

State regulators oversee mobile sources of pollution emissions from cars, for example. Local air pollution districts, such as the San Joaquin Valley's, regulate stationary sources, such as industrial plants, oil fields and dry cleaning shops. In 2004, authority was expanded to include agriculture.

With this expansion, the Legislature required the district to control "indirect sources" the consequences of residential and commercial development. Traffic congestion and vehicle pollution increase as more people move into the valley, and homes and stores are built in sprawling subdivisions.

The San Joaquin Valley is one of the most polluted air basins in the nation. It has the highest child asthma rates in the state. The air district is under the federal gun to clean up the air.

For the sake of our health and our economic well-being, we must demand these new rules be imposed to control the indirect sources of air pollution.

Environmental organizations in Kern County are suing builders, contending the indirect environmental consequences of their projects have not been adequately assessed. To settle these lawsuits, builders are agreeing to pay private fees to the groups and include pollution-reducing features in their projects.

Failure to impose an indirect source rule will expose the entire district to similar legal action and could lead to hundreds of millions of dollars in federal transportation funds being withheld.

Builders' groups hope to block or delay the rule. They claim the fee will make housing unaffordable to low-income families. Blame unaffordable housing and skyrocketing prices on greed and other economic factors.

The proposed indirect source rule and its pollution-reducing design strategies are reasonable approaches to helping clean up the air, while maintaining and improving the overall quality of life in the valley.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, December 14, 2005:](#)

Measure C concerns

I read with interest your article on the nearly formed Measure C plan. While I want to see some money spent on mass transit, I question why Measure C money would buy 900 new school buses. Don't the schools already receive billions of dollars per year from us taxpayers?

If we can have the fireplace police out and about at the drop of a new mandate, let's pass a law firing some school administrators and use that money to buy the new buses.

And about that rail consolidation in Measure C: I spent 47 minutes in the middle of the afternoon last week at Shaw Avenue and Golden State Boulevard waiting for a train to move out of the way. And I have to wait another 15 years before an estimated \$100 million might be spent to build grade separations?

Consolidation will never happen. The state spends too much of the budget on social programs, political correctness, fat retirement programs and wasteful prevailing wage mandates, and will never have enough to meet all of the infrastructure needs.

Make the schools buy the school buses, and build the grade separations now.

Jon Alsdorf, Fresno