

[Stockton Record, Guest Columnist, Saturday, Oct. 29, 2005](#)

## **Winning the race on Valley pollution**

To borrow shamelessly from a sports-drink advertisement: Is it in you?

That is, the stamina to stay the course in the next crucial mile of the race to clean the San Joaquin Valley's air.

By complying with the check-before-you-burn program, Valley residents the past two winters have helped record some of the cleanest wintertime air data in years.

If concentrations of particulate matter PM 10 remain low through Dec. 31, the Valley could meet an important federal health-based standard.

Particulate matter is a harmful mix of soot, chemicals, dust, salts, smoke and toxins that can lodge deep in the lungs.

Exposure to it can trigger heart attacks, increase risk for lung cancer, aggravate conditions such as asthma and bronchitis and reduce lung function.

On winter days when air quality is poor, uncontrolled residential wood-burning could be responsible for up to one-third of all such emissions in the Valley's urban areas.

Valley residents understand the importance of cleaning up the air and are choosing to reduce their contribution to air pollution.

The check-before-you-burn program prohibits the use of wood-burning fireplaces on days when air quality is unhealthy for the general public and discourages wood-burning when air quality is unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Public compliance has been a critical factor in improving air quality. In 1990, the Valley exceeded the federal daily particulate limit on 55 days. That dropped to 12 days by 2001, and none have been recorded since 2002.

That's monumental progress.

As we brace for an anticipated jump in natural gas prices, it's as important as ever to stop and think before lighting a fire.

Despite the picture of coziness a roaring fire brings to mind, wood fires aren't as heat-efficient as we might think.

Most heat from an open-hearth fire goes up the chimney.

Although meeting the federal standard would be a major milestone, such success won't mean regulations can be relaxed or public cooperation no longer is needed.

We still have much work ahead to meet the more stringent state standard, as well as state and federal standards for PM 2.5 and ozone, the primary ingredient in smog.

We continue to make major strides toward meeting those standards. The Valley Air District is the first major district in the state to regulate residential fireplaces.

The district's governing board also has adopted 500 rules or amendments, resulting in a nearly 50 percent reduction in air pollution from refineries and manufacturing plants.

The district also has distributed \$100 million for voluntary emission reductions.

By working together , we can clean up our air.

*by Dave Crow, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District*

NOTE: Beginning Tuesday, wood-burning restrictions will be published on Page A2 in The Record. Information also is available at [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org)

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2005](#)

### **For Better air, the home fires shouldn't burn**

Farmers have been asked to do a lot to help the San Joaquin Valley clean up its dirty air. So have some businesses. Individual residents, however, haven't been asked to make many sacrifices.

In the fall and winter, there is something they can and should do — restrict the use of their wood-burning fireplaces when the air quality is poor.

The San Joaquin Valley has become one of the dirtiest air basins in the country and never has met the federal standard for PM-10 pollution. (PM-10 refers to particulate matter, the tiny and dangerous specks of ash, soot, dirt and chemicals.) But if there are no violations between now and Dec.31, we will achieve this important milestone for 2005. It's crucial that residents continue to do their part by not burning wood when such particles would hang in the air.

From Nov. 1 through February, the air district issues alerts calling for voluntary wood-burning cutbacks on bad-air days. On days when the air gets unhealthy for most people, air officials ban wood burning altogether.

That might sound like a burden, but it's not. Last year, there were no days for which fireplace use was prohibited in Stanislaus County. The air district issued "burning discouraged" alerts on 28 days in Stanislaus County, 15 days in Merced County and 11 days in San Joaquin County.

Consider the consequences before you burn this winter. If you are worried about the cost of heating your home, this winter's increase can be offset easily by making fewer trips in your cars, especially when gasoline is at \$3 a gallon. Reducing our driving also would help clean up the air.

Wintertime wood burning in the valley can put as much as 24 tons of particulate matter into the air each day.

This is not some bureaucratic exercise. The particles of pollution can lodge in human lungs and do serious damage, even causing heart attacks and premature death. Particulate pollution also can trigger the onset of asthma, which makes the problem especially acute for young, growing children. An estimated 34,000 people in Stanislaus County have asthma.

Fireplaces might appear to make our houses cozy, but they are dangerous when we burn wood in them. We can solve our air quality problems in the valley if we all are willing to make minor sacrifices.

### **Fuss brewing over drive-throughs**

Associated Press

Published in the LA Daily News 10/27/05

ROHNERT PARK, Calif. - Residents here may soon lose the convenience of ordering food without ever leaving their vehicles after a majority of the City Council said they would support a restriction on drive-throughs to cut down on air pollution from idling vehicles.

A final vote is expected soon.

"If we're serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, we need to be looking at how people use their automobile," Mayor Jake Mackenzie said.

The majority of council members agreed that drive-up windows should be confined to a central commercial zone.

But Councilwoman

Amie Breeze said drive-throughs are important to parents with children and the disabled.

"As far as the convenience of being in the car with eight kids, you could quickly go through the drive-through and you're done with it," she said.

## **Senators Discourage National Park Changes**

By John Heilprin, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle and Washington Post, Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Republican senators joined Democrats in telling the National Park Service on Tuesday to back off proposed new guidelines that could allow Segway scooters and more cell phones, noise and air pollution in the national parks.

Instead, members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources' national parks subcommittee urged Park Service officials to undertake more modest changes to their overall plan for managing a 388-park system.

"It's very controversial and it (the Park Service) put the wrong emphasis on it," Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo., the panel's chairman, said after a two-hour hearing. "I don't think we're satisfied yet."

Other Republicans and Democrats were more pointed in their assessment of the Park Service's draft guidance to supervisors. Nearly 300 million people visited the U.S. parks last year, which cover 132,000 square miles.

"There's no reason to do this when you're going to diminish what's in the parks," said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn. He said the document raises the odds of more cell phone towers, air pollution and noise in the national parks, and he urged the Park Service to lengthen its 90-day public comment period on it to 180 days.

"Frankly, we don't understand what the true motivation was," said Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo.

The Park Service's "Management Policies," its official manual guiding the agency's day-to-day work, was last revised in 2001 and, before that, in 1988.

Steve Martin, the Park Service's deputy director, said the agency began updating policies three years ago to provide "further clarity" and professionalism after inquiries from park supervisors and the House Resources Committee.

"It's to continue to improve how we manage the service for the 21st Century. It's very complex and there are many different reasons," Martin told the panel. "We're also saying that this is a draft, and if we have inadvertently dropped a sentence that is that important, we can have a discussion and put it back in."

Martin said the draft would "allow us to consider new technologies like Segways," two-wheeled battery-powered transporters that can zip along at up to 12 mph with almost no effort. After the hearing, he said that also could extend to other "battery-powered machinery" and "clean-fuel vehicles."

William Horn, a former assistant interior secretary for fish, wildlife and parks, said it was the right of every administration to update its policies.

The latest proposal, more than 200 pages, is an improvement in the eyes of environmentalists and some Park Service's employees from a draft floated earlier this year by Assistant Deputy Interior Secretary Paul Hoffman.

That version would have allowed expanded use of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles on federal land. It was scrapped after it was leaked to the press.

"This seemed as though it was a secret thing that took place in a smoke-filled room somewhere," said Don Castleberry, a former Midwest director for the Park Service and a member of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, an advocacy group.

One provision, for example, would have made it harder to block activities in the parks by banning what "irreversibly" harms them, instead of only harming them. The current version removes the word "irreversibly" and it uses the terms "conservation" and "preservation" as if they have the same meaning, Martin said.

Sen. Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii, said he also worried the current draft could weaken protection of cultural resources .

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said a provision in the proposed guidelines that would allow parks to recognize businesses and private donors with logos and plaques sets a dangerous precedent. "I've always thought of the parks as a commercial-free zone," he said. "Strikes me this is a slippery slope and a very major change."

Martin countered that the new guidelines merely acknowledge this practice is already going on, with parks receiving \$17 million from such outside sources. "I think we're searching for (financial) partnerships because we need it," he said.

### **Today in Merced History**

Excerpt from Merced Sun-Star  
Nov. 2, 1955

**FEW CANDIDATES QUALIFY FOR JOB ON POLICE FORCE:** Difficulties in building up an eligibility list for the position of police officer were described last night at a meeting of the City Personnel Board. ...

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Nov. 2, 1980

**COUNTY RECEIVES FEDERAL FUNDS FOR COURTHOUSE RESTORATION:** Merced County will get \$484,000 in federal money to wind up its \$795,000 project of restoring the old county courthouse and turning it into a museum and historical site. ...

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[Nov. 2, 1995](#)

[AIR DISTRICT ASKING PEOPLE TO BURN CLEAN:](#) Valley residents are being asked to watch how and when they use their fireplaces and wood-burning stoves during the winter months.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District kicked off its voluntary wood-burning curtailment program, requesting that people not burn when the air quality is listed as unhealthy.

The agency reintroduced its traffic-light system of advising people when it's unwise to burn. A red light means no burning; yellow means limited burning and green means the air is clear enough to burn without worry.

"When people do burn, we hope they burn clean," said Carey Madill, an air quality education representative for the district. "We certainly don't want them to think they can't use their fireplaces. We just want them to be smart about when and how."

[Modesto Bee, Community Column, Wed. Nov. 1, 2005](#)

### **Let's clear the air about the 'right' to smoke in public**

In August, Stockton passed a tough anti-smoking ordinance that prohibits smoking within 20 feet of the entrance to any public building — and not just government buildings.

This is a step Modesto would be wise to follow, and we quickly should pass the same kind of anti-smoking ordinance.

Recently, I found myself with some unscheduled vacation time and more money than common sense, so I decided to visit our local mall. It would have been nice to have been able to enter the mall without having to run the gantlet of large groups of people exhaling carcinogenic toxic gas into the air. Virtually all of them were within 20 feet of the door.

Back in my days aboard a submarine, we had to practice holding our breath in case of fires; so I have been trained to pass through this poisonous cloud of unnecessary smoke.

Let's face this essential fact: Smoking is stupid.

We could argue about this premise all day, but the scientific proof of the dangers of smoking seems to make it a pretty clear-cut case. Smoking causes cancer, and cancer can cause death; q.e.d., smoking is a stupid thing to do — like skydiving without a parachute.

But putting aside, for the moment, the inarguable fact that smoking is clearly and obviously a misuse of brain cells, it is important for those who insist on standing in the doorways to public buildings to smoke to understand this message: You are not cool and you are being rude.

After all the recent nonsense about bovine flatulence contributing to the bad air in the city and valley, why don't the science geeks get a huge taxpayer-funded research grant to demonstrate that smokers at the mall entrance are at least as bad a cow gas? That's a grant I'd vote for.

While the predicable results of such a study seem obvious to the non-nicotine-infected brain, maybe a blue-ribbon panel of scientists who wear lab coats and pocket protectors standing in front of computers and lab equipment finally might convince these people that smoking is A) stupid and B) best done at home in a closed-loop atmosphere.

At least cow flatulence is a positive indicator of production — either milk or hamburger are the results. Cigarette smoke is an indicator of nothing getting done, except to the lung tissue of those who have to inhale it — even that of the unwilling.

As a good libertarian, I realize I should be more sympathetic to smokers' rights, but I've reached the point in life where I finally understand that the "right" to smoke doesn't make it the right thing to do — especially in front of entrances to the mall, which will pretty much lose my business until there is a designated smoking area.

Perhaps they could put the big empty field on Dale Road to good use.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2005](#)

### **Editorial: Importing natural gas**

#### **West needs terminals; challenge is where**

For residents with heaters fueled by natural gas, this winter's bills will teach a painful lesson about supply problems with this energy source.

Pacific Gas and Electric is bracing customers for prices that are 50 percent higher than last year. Part of the problem is hurricane-related, with production in the Gulf of Mexico running at about half of pre-hurricane levels. But part of the problem has nothing to do with hurricanes and everything to do with a lack of capacity in California to import natural gas.

North America contains only about 4 percent of the world's known gas reserves. Like it or not, this fuel is increasingly going to come from somewhere else and arrive in tankers filled with gas that has been super-chilled to the point that it is liquefied.

The high winter heating bills may coincide with some red-hot politics over proposals to build liquefied natural gas terminals in California. There is one proposal to construct a large terminal in the port of Long Beach and two proposals to construct offshore facilities off the coast of Oxnard.

Ironically, California may have more say over facilities constructed offshore than on land. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has the authority to veto offshore terminals, but not proposals onshore. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has the lead authority to approve onshore liquefied natural gas terminals. The Coast Guard reviews the offshore proposals.

A coalition of firms (including Mitsubishi and ConocoPhillips) is preparing the final environmental paperwork for the Long Beach facility. FERC will likely be prepared to approve or reject the proposal early next year.

If FERC does approve the Long Beach facility, the state has some leverage, but not a lot. The facility would have to meet regulations relating to coastal protection, air pollution and water quality. But California can't simply say no because of some risks, even though these risks are real and to be taken very seriously. Liquefied natural gas is a highly explosive fuel, were the explosion to happen due to an accident or an act of terrorism. While FERC must make safety its top priority, the best proposal can only minimize the risk.

These terminals are essential to improving the reliability of supplies and preventing the same price gyrations that plague oil and gasoline. While high natural gas prices can raise the home heating bill, they can affect the electricity bill as well. The state is increasingly dependent on a new generation of efficient, low-pollution power plants that are fueled by natural gas. So long as natural gas is the cornerstone of the state's electricity policy, an adequate supply of natural gas is essential. Some of this supply will come in the belly of large ships, and must be transferred to shore with the utmost care.