

## **Future road projects may be limited**

Nick Juliano

Tracy Press, Monday, Nov. 28, 2005

The county's transportation agency will be unable to undertake any new projects for the next eight years without delaying work that's already scheduled, and officials fear it could be targeted by an environmental lawsuit because of the region's poor air quality.

There is no more room in the 30-year Regional Transportation Plan because of federal air quality standards the agency must meet, said Andrew Chesley, executive director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments. Every project within the plan is measured for its effects on air quality; for example, a widened roadway would lead to increased traffic and more smog.

Adding another project would put the county over its federal emissions limit, triggering a series of repercussions, including cuts in money given by the federal government, Chesley said.

"We've bumped up against the ceiling," Chesley said.

"That's where we are."

The San Joaquin Valley Air District had ozone levels classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as "extreme," a distinction shared nationwide only by Los Angeles County, said Tom Jordan, a spokesman for the district, which comprises eight counties stretching from San Joaquin to Kern.

The "extreme" classification was based on one-hour measurements taken at the worst time of the day. The EPA earlier this year suspended that classification and replaced it with an eight-hour average.

Under the new standard, the Valley's air quality was simply "serious," but it could be termed "severe" (the second-worst classification behind "extreme") if air quality does not improve by 2013, Jordan said.

The Air District establishes air quality improvement plans, which are consistent with federal and stricter state standards that county authorities, such as SJCOG, must meet in drawing up transportation plans. If the transportation plans don't meet the air quality goals, federal dollars cannot be spent on the projects, Jordan said.

The EPA also changed its rules to more closely tie the evaluation of local transportation projects among counties, meaning that federal money would be denied to the entire area if just one county exceeded air quality standards, Jordan said. So, if Fresno County pumps too much ozone into the air, for example, it could put a hold on federal money headed to San Joaquin County.

The concern of local officials isn't that any of the dozens of projects currently within the plan would have to be sidelined, but that there is little wiggle room to add projects that would be fast-tracked to address an emerging need, Chesley said.

The council updates the plan every few years, most recently in October, and any new construction between now and the 2013 deadline will have to be accompanied by another project being canceled or delayed.

After the 2013 deadline, changes in air quality measurements and improvements in technology (such as having more hybrid cars and buses on the road) are expected to give the council more room to work with in planning future projects, Chesley said.

Officials also fear the region's explosive growth, fueled largely by an influx of Bay Area commuters, could trigger a lawsuit from an environmental group arguing that not enough is being done to combat pollution.

In Atlanta in 1999, the Sierra Club and several other groups filed a lawsuit designed to halt transportation projects in the traffic-snarled city when officials tried to move forward without federal approval. The environmental groups and transportation officials reached a settlement that kept federal money from going to 44 of 61 projects the groups wanted to stop.

"That sent a chill through everybody," Chesley said.

An environmental lawsuit is always a possibility, Jordan said, but there's no indication that any groups are planning imminent litigation.

"We already receive a lot of scrutiny on the plans we develop," he said adding that there is "a lot of attention for our air quality issues now."

## **S.J. County contracts for 50 diesel-electric hybrid buses**

ERIN SHERBERT, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Sunday, Nov 27, 2005

San Joaquin County will have cleaner and more environmentally friendly buses when the San Joaquin Regional Transit District rolls out new diesel-electric hybrid buses next year.

The district board recently awarded a contract to buy 50 new hybrids to replace the oldest and dirtiest buses in the fleet, said Paul Rapp, a spokesman for the district. The hybrids will serve Stockton and routes to other cities in the county.

Rapp said the district already has three hybrid buses and plans to eventually replace all 131 of its buses with hybrids.

Diesel-electric buses are designed to save fuel and lower emissions by as much as 90 percent, Rapp said. Though the hybrids are more expensive than diesel buses, the fuel savings make up that difference, he added.

By using less diesel fuel, the hybrids will emit less carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, both of which pollute the air.

"Those are the goals -- reducing fuel cost and running a cleaner fleet," Rapp said.

The hybrids will have a better design, with larger doors and better wheelchair ramps. The front of the buses will be at curb level so riders with mobility issues can get onto the buses, he said.

Barbara Toler, a Tracy resident who frequently rides the bus to Stockton, says she would like to see buses that are bigger and easier to board. "That would make accessibility easier," she said.

The district board awarded the \$78 million contract last week to Gillig Corp. of Hayward, which included buses for 11 other transit agencies, most of which are from California. Rapp said by buying the buses together, it saved each agency about \$50,000 per bus.

The district's 50 buses cost more than \$20 million, most of which is covered with federal grant money. The remaining money will come from state and local funds, Rapp said.

Eventually, the district wants to operate a fleet of hybrid fuel-cell buses, which emit no emissions, he said.

## **Don't discount veggie oil for the car**

### **Slightly inconvenient for now, bio fuels could have a viable future.**

By David Chircop / Merced Sun-Star  
in the Fresno Bee, Saturday, November 26, 2005

Driving his 1986 Ford F250 past gasoline stations that posted prices nearing \$3 a gallon this fall, rancher and software developer David Raboy felt liberated.

Unlike the grumbling masses confronted with rising oil prices, his pocketbook wasn't hit by a spike in fuel prices following Hurricane Katrina and geopolitical jitters in the Middle East.

In May, he purchased a conversion kit on the Internet that allows his diesel 4x4 to run almost exclusively on vegetable oil.

The truck gets roughly the same fuel efficiency as it would with petroleum-based diesel.

The cost: \$1,500, including installation.

It may sound farfetched, but Raboy, 34, is among a growing number of Americans weaning themselves off of fossil fuel in favor of alternative energy sources, including pure vegetable oil.

Country music legend Willie Nelson recently formed a company that promotes biodiesel, a renewable alternative to petroleum-based diesel fuel, at truck stops.

But unlike biodiesel, pure vegetable oil uses heat, rather than blending chemicals to thin the oil so that it can be ignited.

Collecting the oil isn't as convenient as pumping gasoline from a station, Raboy admits. But he contends the greasy task is worth the effort.

It's a little messy: "But I'll tell you what, I'd gladly take the free fuel," he said.

Raboy and his wife, Heather Bernikoff, frequently take trips into Merced from their Cathys Valley cattle ranch in the rolling foothills 30 miles northeast of the city.

The commute costs them next to nothing.

When warming up the truck, they switch to a tank of veggie oil blended with about 30% diesel fuel for about five minutes until a second tank with pure vegetable oil is heated. At the end of their trip, they switch back to the blended tank to clean the lines and filters.

After a recent breakfast, Raboy drove to the back of Paul's Place restaurant where a few kitchen workers collected to smoke cigarettes and watch.

He opened the hood, clipped a portable 12-volt pump to his car battery, fished out a cigarette butt, plunged a filtered hose into a vat of used oil and started pumping the viscous fluid into a 5-gallon bucket.

Pointing to a "graveyard of gnats" on the side of the truck affectionately called the "greasy beast," Bernikoff, 35, said they are spilling less than when they first started.

Still, with no infrastructure of fueling stations in place, they have to deal with the ragtag reality of finding, pumping and filtering their own fuel.

Two local restaurants donate about 100 gallons of used cooking oil to the pioneering couple every month.

It usually isn't clean enough to pump directly into the fuel tank, requiring additional filtration through porous bags.

Another challenge presented by pure veggie oil is that it hardens and can clog hoses and filters at colder temperatures.

To avoid that, Raboy's truck is equipped with a system that uses hot coolant to warm hoses and filters.

"It's really not rocket science," said Charles Anderson, owner of greasel.com, the company that sold Raboy his conversion kit.

The first diesel engine, he points out, was powered by peanut oil, more than a century ago.

"It's an old concept, but like a lot of good old concepts, it tends to get swept under the carpet by the powers that be," he said.

During the 1920s, cheap petroleum prompted engine manufacturers to move away from bio-fuels, which were more expensive to produce.

But the increasing cost of the precious commodity is spurring a renewed interest, Anderson said.

He claims his Missouri-based company has converted more than 4,000 engines in the past few years, ranging from electrical generators to tractor trailers.

"If you convert a brand new vehicle under warranty, you're taking a risk," he said. "It is in its infancy as far as widespread acceptance. But it does work."

Since Hurricane Katrina slammed ashore, shutting down several Gulf Coast oil refineries, Anderson said business has tripled.

"It's absolutely gone insane," he said.

Bryan Jenkins, a UC Davis professor of biological and agricultural engineering, said petroleum has better fuel characteristics than pure vegetable oil, but he does see more acceptance of blended fuels that use vegetable products.

"I think we'll all be driving a lot more on bio fuels in the future," he said.

He added that Californians burn about one billion gallons of ethanol, a corn and sugar derivative used as a blending stock in gasoline, every year.

Sam Traina, University of California at Merced's director of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute, said burning cooking oil isn't perfect.

It does produce more nitrogen oxide than petroleum-based diesel. But it also produces less particulate matter and volatile organic compounds than regular diesel.

Beyond saving money, Raboy and Bernikoff said they have strong political and environmental motivations for moving away from fossil fuels.

"I tell people think about your kids," he said. "That always kills me these parents who have kids with asthma who buy Hummers and don't even connect the two."

## **Clean-air rules under attack**

### **Carmakers take aim at states following California's model**

Danny Hakim, New York Times

in the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, November 26, 2005

Albany, N.Y. -- New York is adopting California's ambitious new regulations aimed at cutting automotive emissions of global warming gases, touching off a battle over rules that would sharply reduce carbon dioxide emissions while forcing the auto industry to make vehicles more energy-efficient over the next decade.

The rules, passed this month by a unanimous vote of the State Environmental Board, are expected to be adopted across the Northeast and the West Coast. But the auto industry has already moved to block the rules in New York, and plans to battle them in every other state that tries to adopt them.

Environmentalists say the regulations will not lead to the extinction of any class of vehicle, but simply pressure the industry to sell more of the fuel-saving technologies it has already developed, including hybrid systems that use a combination of electricity and gasoline. And that, they say, will curtail a main contributor to global warming.

"The two biggest contributors to global warming are power plants and motor vehicles," said David Doniger, a senior lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "If you deal with them, you deal with more than two-thirds of the problem."

But automakers contend that the regulations will limit the availability of many sport utility vehicles, pickup trucks, vans and larger sedans, because they will require huge gains in gas mileage to curtail emissions. The industry also says the guidelines will force them to curb sales of more powerful engines in New York, and ultimately harm consumers by increasing the cost of vehicles.

The standards are the most ambitious environmental regulations for automobiles since federal fuel economy regulations were enacted in the 1970s. They will be phased in starting with 2009 models and require a roughly 30 percent reduction in automotive emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by the 2016 models.

The new rules will also require about 40 percent better fuel economy for vehicles sold in the state.

Ten states follow or plan to follow California's air quality rules, which have previously focused on auto emissions that cause smog; the latest set of rules would for the first time limit carbon dioxide emissions. And as the largest of the 10 states, New York is being closely watched as it institutes the new rules.

If all 10 states and California succeed in enacting the rules, they will form a powerful alternative regulatory bloc accounting for about a third of the nation's auto sales.

"That is so much of the market it should reach a tipping point," Doniger said. "It won't make sense for the automakers to build two fleets, one clean and one dirty."

New Yorkers will certainly notice the regulations, should these survive the court challenges. The state estimates the rules will increase the cost of a new car or truck by more than \$1,000 when fully phased in, an amount it expects car owners to recoup over time through savings at the pump. Vehicles will have to comply with the new standards to be registered in the state.

In early August, more than three months before the regulations were even adopted, automakers from Detroit to Tokyo joined in a suit to block them, making New York the latest legal front in the industry's fight against the measures. After California adopted the regulations in their final form in September 2004, automakers sued in state and federal courts, where the battle is still playing out.

California, unlike other states, has special authority to set its own air quality rules because it did so before passage of the federal Clean Air Act. Other states can pick California's tougher regulations over the federal ones.

The 10 states that either follow California's car rules or are in the process of adopting them are New York, Maine, New Jersey, Vermont, Massachusetts, Oregon, Washington, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

## **Lawmakers tap constituents' playbook**

### **Legislators are looking for bills for upcoming session.**

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger / Bee Capitol Bureau  
The Fresno Bee, Sunday, November 27, 2005

SACRAMENTO - Have an idea for a new law? Now is a good time to contact your state legislator.

This time of year, elected state representatives are gathering suggestions for bills that could become state law. They're sorting through ideas, deciding which ones to convert to legal language for introduction in the Legislature, which begins the second half of its two-year session in January.

Ideas have been pouring in, at least to some central San Joaquin Valley legislators. They say voter ideas have a good chance at becoming bills that, at some point, the entire Legislature could debate and send to Gov. Schwarzenegger for a final verdict.

Ron Silva, chief executive officer of Westar Transport, a trucking company in Selma, sent an e-mail to Assembly Member Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, suggesting a law that would require California to study and, if necessary, build an ocean shipping system to haul trailers full of goods between Southern and Northern California and other states.

Silva says such a system could take thousands of trucks off Valley highways, making roads safer and the air cleaner.

He has pitched his idea to several policymakers but so far has gotten little response. He hopes Parra will turn his idea into legislation.

"If we have a way to get trucks off the highway and save lives and pollution, why aren't we doing it?" Silva says. "This is a missing link in the transportation system that needs to be constructed."

Parra, now asking for bill ideas in her electronic newsletter sent each week to more than 800 people, has received several responses and is considering them for new legislation.

She and her staff scrutinize each idea before deciding whether to send it to legislative counsel, which turns the idea into a bill. Then, Parra decides whether she will introduce the legislation. She considers how much time a bill will take to carry and whether it fits into her priorities of economic development, public safety and consumer protection.

Parra says voters suggest bill ideas out of frustration with existing laws.

"These are folks who have tried to work within the process," Parra says. "When it gets to me, it's usually because it's almost a last resort."

Doctors from the Tulare County Medical Society, a professional organization of about 220 physicians, also are pitching legislative ideas.

Steve Bargeon, executive director of the society, says legislation should address a shortage of physicians. Tulare County has a tough time recruiting doctors who specialize in areas such as dermatology and surgery because low Medi-Cal and Medicare reimbursements make it difficult for them to make a living.

Medi-Cal is the state-federal health insurance program for the poor. Medicare is the federal health care insurance program for senior citizens and the disabled.

"It is difficult to recruit physicians in Tulare County to serve patients when they can't financially survive in a practice," Bargeon says.

He hopes Parra, Assembly Member Bill Maze, R-Visalia, and Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, can help, but he realizes that attracting the attention of big-city lawmakers from outside the Valley is a challenge.

"We don't have the legislative power to make a lot of change, but we do feel the legislators who do represent us are sympathetic and are trying to intervene on our behalf," Bargeon said.

This year, more than 3,000 bills were introduced by 120 state Assembly and Senate members. More than 960 bills passed both legislative houses and were sent to Schwarzenegger, who signed 729 of them and vetoed 232.

Lawmakers can carry up to 40 bills per legislative session. Up to 90% of their legislation originates from constituent ideas, they say. Other bill ideas come from lobbyists employed by

interest groups and from other lawmakers, who for various reasons can't or don't want to carry a certain bill.

"I get all kinds of good ideas from the district. Those are what I prefer to carry as legislation," says Assembly Member Mike Villines, R-Clovis. "You get a lot of common sense in the district that usually applies statewide."

Car enthusiast Craig Hansen of Madera is talking with Villines about possible legislation that would allow cars built in 1969 or older to have license plates issued in that era.

Existing law allows older plates only for cars built in 1962 or before. Newer cars must be fitted with modern license plates.

Hansen says having an original-type plate makes a classic car more authentic.

"It just doesn't look right if it has a white reflectorized plate," says Hansen, who hosts a KMJ radio show.

Hansen worked with former Assembly Member Mike Briggs, R-Clovis, on similar legislation. On two occasions, bills passed the Legislature but were vetoed by then-Gov. Gray Davis.

Davis said in one veto message that license plates are for identification purposes and are not intended to enhance the beauty or value of a vehicle.

This time, Hansen is more confident.

"I feel pretty good about the possibility of getting it through the state Legislature," Hansen says. "I would hope Gov. Schwarzenegger would take a different angled approach when this bill goes before him."

Villines likes Hansen's idea, but isn't sure yet whether he will carry the bill.

About a month ago, Villines and his staff sat down to go over about 35 ideas for bills. He narrowed those possibilities to 18 - 10 that will become bills and eight that are good ideas but need more research.

Hansen's idea is in the latter group.

This year, Villines introduced 13 bills, seven of which started as ideas from people who live in his district. Just one was signed into law, requiring all California State University campuses to close on Nov. 11 in observance of Veterans Day.

Maze introduced 23 bills this year. Three of them were local ideas. One was signed into law, allowing the Friends of the Mount Whitney Hatchery to lease the Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery facilities.

Says Maze: "The point of representing folks in the general public is that we're acting on areas of interest to them."

## **Rising Valley population poses problems**

### **Report finds poverty, bad air, water quality among the challenges**

by Jennifer M. Fitzenberger, Bee Capital bureau

Modesto Bee, Friday, Nov. 25, 2005

SACRAMENTO — The San Joaquin Valley's population is growing fast and facing considerable challenges, according to a new state report.

Since 2000, more than 427,000 people have moved to the valley — equal to almost the population of Fresno — and its population will continue to climb in coming decades.

As it grows, the valley continues to struggle with high poverty rates, low higher-education attainment and poor air and water quality, states the report by the California Research Bureau, a branch of the California State Library.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley requested the report, which focuses on the land, people and economy of the valley's eight counties.

The partnership, formed by Gov. Schwarzenegger to suggest ways to improve the valley's economy and living conditions, will use the data as a starting point to develop ideas.

"It will serve as the factual basis for other steps to follow," said Assemblyman Juan Arambula, D-Fresno. "It will give us objective information. You always need to have your facts straight before you can come up with good policy decisions."

The valley has large rural areas, but 36.3 percent of its population lives in Fresno, Visalia, Bakersfield, Stockton and Modesto.

Since 1975, the population of every valley county has grown faster than California as a whole, and the valley's population is expected to grow substantially larger. About 3.3 million people lived in the valley in 2000, and more than 7.9 million people are expected in 2050.

The valley is facing challenges as it grows.

The percentage of valley residents age 25 and older who have a bachelor's degree is lower than the state average. About 27 percent of Californians had four-year degrees in 2000, while 14.1 percent of Stanislaus County residents and 14.5 percent in San Joaquin had degrees. In Merced County, the figure stood at 11 percent.

The report states that the University of California at Merced, which opened in September with 1,000 students, will make college more accessible to valley students. About 250 students in the first class are from the valley.

"We have people with low levels of formal education and more than our share of school dropouts," Arambula said. "We have to balance bringing new jobs with making sure that the people who are here will be able to do those jobs."

Agriculture dominates the valley, accounting for 13.8 percent of employment compared with 2.5 percent statewide. Local and state governments also are major employers in the region. Other big employers are retail trade, health care and construction.

Valley counties' unemployment rates remained above the state average of 6.2 percent for 2004, though they've been improving since 1992.

Stanislaus County's rate went from 16.6 percent to 9.1; San Joaquin's from 14.2 percent to 8.5 and Merced's from 17.5 percent to 10.8.

The report's author, Ken Umbach, a policy analyst with the research bureau, said the change in unemployment rates is notable.

The valley is "chipping a bit more at the unemployment numbers," Umbach said.

He also reported that water and air quality continue to be issues of concern to the valley. Long-standing drainage problems hamper water quality, and the valley's air basin tends to trap contaminants.

The report is the first of two requested by the partnership. The second study focusing on state funding inequity is being prepared and should be ready for the partnership's next meeting in early December.

Said Connie Conway, chairwoman of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors and deputy co-chairperson of the partnership: "Our challenge is how do we turn all of these statistics ... into an actual plan."

## **Asthma, pollution studied**

### **Team gets grant to find link between them**

By Kerry Cavanaugh, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Nov. 25, 2005

Hoping to show how microscopic particles in air pollution can cause asthma, heart disease, low birth weight and other conditions, the EPA has awarded an \$8 million grant to a Southern California research team.

The money will allow the the Southern California Particle Center to continue its groundbreaking work, funding four new investigations into the health impacts of particles that are 1/100 the diameter of a human hair.

"What we've shown in the last five years is the scope of the problem and how many different health end points exist, at current (pollution) levels," said Dr. John Froines, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Public Health and the principal investigator at the particle center.

"We're now trying to answer the question of what is it about particles that causes these effects and what do we have to do to improve the situation."

Particulate matter is created from the exhaust of gasoline- and diesel-fueled vehicles and from fires and industrial pollution. Composed of microscopic bits of acids, chemicals, metals, dusts and allergens, it can reach deep into the lungs, enter the bloodstream and even damage cells.

With its grant, the Environmental Protection Agency hopes to understand which pollution sources and which kinds of particulate matter may be responsible for unhealthy air, said Stacey Katz, assistant director of the agency's National Center for Environmental Research.

"We've made great strides from the early days with epidemiology studies showing particulate matter and premature death but nobody could understand biologically how that could happen."

One of the center's projects will examine how particulate matter can cause asthma, which has been a big concern for public health officials who struggle to understand why cases of the respiratory ailment have tripled over the last 20 years.

Researchers can't prove with 100 percent certainty that air pollution causes asthma, although researchers recently determined that Southern California children who play sports in areas with high air pollution are at greater risk of asthma and children who live near freeways are more likely to develop the disease.

The Southern California team also placed allergic mice near busy freeways and found the animals closest to traffic had the worst airway inflammation and stronger allergic responses.

For the new study, Froines wants to follow the path of particles in the body and understand the biological reactions they spur in the body that can cause asthma.

"If you think about it, there's a process between exposure and the ultimate disease and there's a series of steps between them," Froines explained. "We're trying to define those steps."

Another team will study impacts of pollution and particulates on nursing home residents with cardiovascular disease. Their work expands on research that links particulate matter pollution with an increased number of hospital admissions and heart-related deaths.

The Southern California Particle Center's work could eventually affect regulations on tail pipe emissions, diesel truck pollution and increased port traffic, which are under the jurisdiction of the EPA.

The center includes researchers from the University of Southern California and University of California, Irvine.

## **Wood-burning restrictions blamed on stagnant air**

The Associated Press

in the Fresno Bee and San Francisco Chronicle, Thurs. Nov. 24, in the Merced Sun-Star, Fri. nov. 25, 2005

FRESNO -- Residents in the San Joaquin Valley refrained from lighting fireplaces during Thanksgiving to help clear the region's persistent air pollution, air regulators said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District banned wood burning in Kern and Kings counties on Thursday, and asked residents in five other counties -- Fresno, Madera, Merced, Tulare and Stanislaus -- to refrain from lighting fires during the holiday.

Officials blamed the stifling haze hanging over the region on stagnant weather, and said fireplace smoke would add to the dust, soot and other microscopic debris trapped in the still atmosphere.

The concentration of airborne pollution particles was great enough on Thursday to make the air unhealthy even for adults without respiratory problems.

The news is disheartening for many in the region. If the Valley's air had remained clean until the end of the year, the area would have achieved the federal particle pollution standard for the first time.

## **Haze dims hope of clean air milestone**

**As pollution builds, residents asked not to burn during holiday.**

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, November 24, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley's air this week has become a stifling haze that raises concern about holiday wood fires and dims hope for a clean-air milestone.

Local air authorities blame the haze on stagnant weather and ask residents in five counties - Fresno, Tulare, Madera, Merced and Stanislaus - not to burn wood on Thanksgiving.

Wood burning is banned today in Kings and Kern counties because the air is worse there than in other San Joaquin Valley counties. Authorities said fireplace smoke will only add to the buildup of pollutants trapped in the air.

"We want people to be vigilant during the holiday," said Tom Jordan, special projects administrator for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The bad air has caused apparent violations of the PM-10 standard - particulate matter including dust, soot and other microscopic debris. If the Valley had remained clean until the end of the year, it would have achieved the standard for the first time.

Even for adults with sound lungs, the air is considered unhealthy through most of the eight-county Valley from Stockton to Bakersfield. But relief may be on the way.

The National Weather Service said a storm may pass through the center of the state early next week. Weather Service meteorologist Daniel Harty said daytime temperatures will drop Friday from the 70s to the 60s.

"We are forecasting afternoon wind from 15 to 20 miles per hour on Friday," Harty said. "The cool-down should continue through the weekend with a slight chance of precipitation in the Fresno area on Sunday, and better chances on Monday and Tuesday."

If the storm had arrived this week, the Valley might have avoided problems with the PM-10 standard.

Instead, air monitors showed PM-10 pollution exceeded the standard in Corcoran on two days and in Bakersfield on another day. The readings must be confirmed by state authorities before they are officially considered violations.

For the past two weeks, no storms have disrupted the air to move pollutants out of the Valley. An inversion layer - warm air well above ground level - has hovered over the Valley, trapping the pollution.

"This lid has been sitting on top of us for days," said meteorologist Gary Arcemont, an air quality specialist with the air district. "Coming into the Valley, you see it's very clear above the gray haze. There's an amazing demarcation."

The pollution is coming from many sources, including fireplaces, farm tilling, construction and cars kicking up dust on roadways.

The tiny specks in the air are small enough to bypass the body's defenses and pierce lung tissue, triggering asthma attacks, bouts of bronchitis and sinus infections.

The pollution also is linked to an increase in heart attacks in people with cardiac problems. According to one state study, more than 1,000 Valley residents die annually as a result of exposure to this pollution.

"We're concerned that people are going to be outside more during the next four days because they are at home on holiday," said spokeswoman Jaime Holt of the air district. "Burning wood or starting up a barbecue is not a good idea today."

## **Stifling air leading to restrictions on burning**

### **Forecasted rainy weather would clear valley's haze**

Bee staff reports

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Nov. 24, 2005

Two weather streaks in the Northern San Joaquin Valley are likely to end today.

The record-setting high temperatures are expected to fall, along with raindrops, which have yet to make an appearance this month.

"We're calling for a shower in spots," said Kerry Schwindenhammer, senior meteorologist at AccuWeather. "I also think we'll be done with the heat for the time being. They'll be a degree or two above normal on Friday, then head down toward normal."

Wednesday, the high in Modesto reached 74, matching a record reached in 1959 and 1997, according to the Modesto Irrigation District, which has been keeping track of the city's daily temperatures since 1939.

It was the fourth straight day of record temperatures for Modesto. A high of 67 is expected today, well off the record 74 reached in 1939, 1995 and 1997.

If rain falls by month's end, this November will avoid becoming the fifth without rain since 1888, when MID began charting rainfall.

Schwindenhammer pointed to an unusually north-oriented jet stream as the reason for a huge ridge of high pressure that has kept Northern California under a sunny sky.

The rainy weather should help clear up the San Joaquin Valley's air, which this week has become a stifling haze that raises concern about holiday wood fires and dims hope for a clean-air milestone.

Valley air authorities blame the haze on stagnant weather and ask residents in five counties not to burn wood today. They include Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno and Tulare counties.

There are no restrictions for San Joaquin County.

Authorities said fireplace smoke will only add to the buildup of pollutants trapped in the air.

"We want people to be vigilant during the holiday," said Tom Jordan, special projects administrator for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The bad air has caused apparent violations of the PM-10 standard — particulate matter including dust, soot and other microscopic debris. If the valley had remained clean until the end of the year, it would have achieved the health standard for PM-10 for the first time.

Even for adults with sound lungs, the air is considered unhealthy through most of the eight-county valley from Stockton to Bakersfield.

"We're concerned that people are going to be outside more during the next four days because they are at home on holiday," said spokeswoman Jaime Holt of the air district. "Burning wood or starting up a barbecue is not a good idea."

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial Page, Sunday, Nov. 27, 2005:](#)

### **Sound off for Nov. 27**

Reader: On Sunday, Nov. 20, Dianne Hardisty wrote an editorial that criticized the director of the state Department of Conservation, Bridgett Thompson, of "crashing the party," that is, attending a City Council meeting by not being invited. Ms. Hardisty's editorial criticized Ms. Thompson of being "lost" and of having an "off night." Now I believe it is the time to explain how Ms. Hardisty has been lost and maybe had an off day in writing the editorial.

First, using Sen. McCarthy's tactic of "guilt by association" (see movie "Good Night, and Good Luck" or your American history book), she stated that since Ms. Thompson was a member of the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society, she could never be objective in her role as head of a department that was created by the Legislature to conserve agriculture. However Ms. Thompson has also been a Realtor. It seems as if membership in both organizations along with being a Realtor definitely attests to her objectivity, not to a bias.

Second, Ms. Hardisty stated that the "Sierra Club has blocked home and commercial projects by suing developers." Not one lawsuit has been filed. Not one development has been stopped. All have proceeded and been built. What has happened is that developers have agreed that development exacerbates a major valley problem: air pollution and that mitigation measures can reduce an increase in this problem.

Third, Ms. Hardisty said that developers have given "thousands of dollars to a private Sierra Club foundation," a gross misrepresentation of the facts. Ms. Hardisty was present at an editorial board meeting with Sierra Club members (myself included) at which The Rose Foundation was mentioned as the collector of these funds. It is not an arm of the Sierra Club. Not one cent from the settlements has gone to the Sierra Club.

Fourth, and finally, Ms. Hardisty has implied that the Sierra Club is a special interest organization, an organization that makes its financial well-being and that of its members primary. It is a public interest organization. It is made up of volunteers, like Gordon Nipp, who work endlessly for the common good. It speaks on behalf of our air, our agriculture and our future.

Ms. Hardisty concludes her article that "maybe Wednesday was just an off night for Thompson." My addendum is that maybe Sunday was an "off day for the editor."

-- Harry Love, vice chair, Kern-Kaweah Chapter, Sierra Club

Editorial Page Editor Dianne Hardisty responds:

I regret that Harry Love of the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club misread my Sunday column and mischaracterized its contents.

I did not write that California Department of Conservation Director Bridgett Thompson was an uninvited guest to a public meeting of the Bakersfield City Council. In fact, the column reported what Thompson told council members -- that she was supposed to have arrived at 6:30 p.m. to address earlier development issues on the agenda. Instead, she showed up unexpectedly after 11 p.m. and testified during a public hearing on an unrelated development project. The surprised proponent of that project hurriedly explained to council members that the points Thompson made had nothing to do with his project.

It was not stated nor implied that Thompson "could never be objective" since she is a member of the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society. The column also mentioned she had been a Realtor.

City Attorney Virginia Gennaro confirms that the Sierra Club has filed several lawsuits targeting Bakersfield developers. The lawsuits have been settled during their initial phases by developers

agreeing to pay a hefty fee. Initially the settlements called for the money to be paid to a committee that included representatives of the city, Sierra Club and others. The city declined to participate and declined to collect the fee, apparently leading to the Rose Foundation's involvement on behalf of the Sierra Club and others who sued.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, Nov. 26, 2005](#)

### **Curtail smoking, exhaust fumes**

In regard to the community column by Dave Bowman, "Let's clear the air about the 'right' to smoke in public" (Nov. 2): Let me first agree that smokers should be considerate of nonsmokers. Smoking near any public egress/regress is offensive to nonsmokers. That said, I find Bowman's article a tad hypocritical. There was no mention of the automobiles he had to pass that I'm sure were circling the parking lot in search of the perfect parking spot.

No argument from me that smoking causes cancer, but automobile exhaust contains known carcinogenic compounds and toxic gases. These gases are odorless, colorless and tasteless. Yes, automobiles are a necessity. They help us sustain ourselves and our families. But they are not needed for trips to the mall to blow some money.

So yes, let's enact a law in Modesto prohibiting smoking within 20 feet of any entrance to a public building. But let's not stop there. Let's also prohibit idling any motor vehicle within 20 feet of any publicly accessible building, doorway, window or air-conditioning intake. No more drive-throughs.

JAMES CARPENTER, Modesto

[Letters to the Fresno Bee](#)  
[Saturday, November 26, 2005:](#)

News of the San Joaquin Valley's progress toward cleaner air comes as welcome relief to residents, many of whom suffer needlessly with inadequate or no health care. All of us working together have managed to reduce coarse particulate matter (also called PM-10) to the point where the Valley is on the verge of meeting the federal health-based standard.

When we are done congratulating ourselves, we should not forget that greater challenges lie ahead: The Valley must meet additional federal clean air standards for ozone (smog) and fine particulate matter. Over the last five years, the Valley had more days that violated the ozone standard than any other place in the country.

Fine particulate matter (PM-2.5) levels are among the nation's worst, and, according to the California Air Resources Board, more than a thousand Valley residents die each year from long-term exposure to this deadly pollutant.

The Valley's air district must develop plans to meet these standards during the next two years. As a longtime resident of the Valley, I am tired of breathing this toxic air and want the district to act aggressively to solve this public health crisis. Every day that we delay results in unnecessary deaths.

Tom Frantz, Shafter

[Friday, November 25, 2005:](#)

### **Simple solution**

Government likes to talk about ways that we can reduce air pollution in the Valley. Most ideas revolve around the use of our bus system, carpooling or the construction of a light-rail system.

On Veterans Day, the solution presented itself to me. Historically, Veterans Day was "observed" on the Friday after Thanksgiving, thus our four-day weekend. Most of us in the civilian work force follow the traditional day-after-Thanksgiving observance, however, government takes a holiday.

So, what is the solution to improving our air quality? Put simply, it is this: Commuter traffic on Veterans Day was approximately half its normal volume. Instead of spending millions of dollars to construct light-rail lines or improve our bus system, our government employees should be required to commute to work by using our existing bus lines. At the very minimum, they should be required to carpool.

The next time you hear a government official making a statement on air quality and how we can improve it, remember that we could make huge improvements to air quality if our government were required to use the systems which it attempts to foist on us.

J.K. Motschiedler, Fresno