

SJ Valley may need more time to clean dirty air

By MARK GROSSI - THE FRESNO BEE

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The San Joaquin Valley faces what might be an impossible air-quality hurdle: meeting a new smog standard in four years.

That message surfaced Wednesday at an air-science symposium in Fresno where researchers, industry lobbyists, regulators and environmentalists talked about the latest findings on the valley's dirty air.

The area needs to trim 60 percent of smog-making chemicals by April 5, 2010, according to estimates from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"Reductions of even half that much would be difficult," said district Executive Director Seyed Sadredin. "To give you an example of how hard it would be, we couldn't get there if we shut down every business in the valley."

The district always has said the new standard would be a challenge — this area never attained the old, less-stringent standard. But this was the most pointed assessment to date.

Sadredin said the district will need the help of stricter state and federal fuel and engine standards planned in the next few years.

But the district still may have to extend the cleanup time by asking to be designated in the same worst-offender category as Southern California, which has the highest concentrations of smog in the country.

Scientists and regulators said Wednesday that the valley's air problem is quite different from Southern California's. While smog does not spike as high here as it does in Southern California, the valley's pollution simmers longer above the threshold for healthy air and generally causes more violations.

An official from the California Air Resources Board, which supervises the state's air quality, said the days of focusing mostly on Southern California's needs are over.

"The Valley is also front and center in our efforts now," said Lynn Terry, deputy executive officer.

The valley air district this year has asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to declare the air healthy for dust and soot pollution.

Officials said there has not been a violation of the PM-10, or particulate matter standard, in three years.

But this area still regularly violates the standard for smaller particles, known as PM-2.5, which are about one-30th the width of a human hair. The combination of nitrogen oxides from cars and ammonia from agriculture can form tiny particles called ammonium nitrate.

"There is no single cause of PM-2.5," said researcher John Watson of the Desert Research Institute, who has studied valley air pollution since the 1980s. "It's a regional problem. You can't just go in and work on one place."

Air board sees increase in funding

Californian staff reports, Friday, May 19, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will have \$25 million more to work with than last year if the board approves a proposed \$90 million budget in June. Here's how the numbers break down:

- More than 90 percent of the budget increase would fund grants and other programs, including those that offset pollution from newly regulated industries such as builders and wineries.
- This pot of money comes from vehicle registration fees, state allocations and fees paid by builders, winemakers and others.
- The rest of the budget increase -- some \$1.9 million -- will pay for increasing benefits costs, retirement costs and added staff positions.

Traffic issue backs up subdivision plans

BY JASON KOTOWSKI, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, May 19, 2006

Concerns over traffic are hindering the approval of a planned subdivision at Gosford Road and Ming Avenue.

In other business, the Bakersfield planning commission voted Thursday in favor of zoning changes for the McAllister Ranch project and a senior citizen condominium development.

Commission members voted 4-0 to postpone their decision on McIntosh & Associates' proposed 217-lot development at Gosford Road and Ming Avenue to June 1.

Commissioner Ted McGinnis said speeding is a problem along Gosford Road. He would like to see police reports on the number of accidents at the corner of Gosford Road and Ming Avenue, he said.

"A traffic study may be in order on Gosford Road," McGinnis said. "It could alleviate some doubts I personally have about the project."

Roger McIntosh, an engineer representing property owner Castle & Cooke, said a traffic light had been requested for the subdivision's entrance on Gosford Avenue in the original plan. McIntosh said he had been told by traffic engineer Steve Walker that the signal would be denied because it would be in conflict with the synchronicity of the rest of the traffic signals along Gosford Road.

Walker wasn't at the meeting.

The signal would make entering and leaving the subdivision safer, McGinnis said. He told McIntosh he would not support the project until he gets more information about traffic problems in that area.

"I want to hear why we can't do a traffic signal," he said.

Vice Chairman Ted Blockley recused himself from voting.

While McIntosh has to wait for an answer, the 2,080-acre McAllister Ranch project received unanimous approval in changing its zoning from agricultural to a variety of other uses, including residential and commercial.

The zoning change qualifies the 3.25-square-mile master-planned community for annexation to the city. The Local Agency Formation Commission will eventually make the annexation decision.

McAllister Ranch is bounded by the Sunset Pacific rail line to the north, Panama Lane to the south, and between South Allen Road to the east and Nord Avenue to the west.

Also unanimously approved was a zoning change for a senior citizen community from one-family dwelling to planned unit development.

The development, at the northeast corner of Stine and Berkshire roads, had at least one neighbor unhappy with the decision.

"The commission should protect the privacy of residents in the area," said Terry Russell, who contends that balconies in the condos will allow seniors to look into nearby homes and yards.

But the commissioners said the developer did plenty to address privacy concerns. Changes made to the proposal included increasing the building setback along the east property line from 15 feet to 30 feet and planting 72-inch box California pepper trees to screen balcony overlooks not already screened by existing eucalyptus trees.

Benjamin T. Lingo, a representative of Lynx Realty & Management, said they did their best in taking neighbors' concerns into consideration while changing the plan.

The commissioners agreed.

"I'm sorry Mr. Russell doesn't like where the road is, but he can't get it all," McGinnis said.

Chairwoman Barbara Lomas was impressed with the concessions the plan made to neighboring homeowners.

"You've done more than most developers do in mitigating impact to the community," Lomas said.

Commissioners Murray Tragish and Jeff Tkac were not at the meeting.

Gov. Widens His Distance From Bush

Schwarzenegger, who is running for reelection, battles the White House on several fronts to avoid the taint of GOP's declining popularity.

By Robert Salladay, staff writer

L.A. Times, May 19, 2006

SACRAMENTO — With a methodical series of public gestures, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is distancing himself from President Bush and fellow Republicans in Congress as he seeks to avoid harm to his reelection effort from their declining political fortunes.

Schwarzenegger has challenged Bush on border security and global warming regulations. He publicly threatened to sue the Bush administration over Medicare regulations. He has tacitly sanctioned at least three other state lawsuits against the federal government.

He has demanded that Bush dispense more money to the state to cover the costs of disasters, immigration and welfare, and chastised Republican efforts in Congress to expand offshore oil drilling. In the last few weeks, he has labeled actions by Bush and Congress as terrible, irresponsible, unacceptable and embarrassing.

Schwarzenegger's more aggressive stance against Bush and national Republicans — including a skeptical reception of the president's immigration speech Monday — is part of a dramatic return to the centrist approach of his first year in office, after two years of hewing to his Republican base.

A Republican who is seeking reelection in a heavily Democratic state, Schwarzenegger this year has appeased his critics on the left and center by making big-ticket deals with the Democrat-run Legislature. Though that may dilute past criticism of his leadership, his campaign still expects his Democratic opponent in November to try to link him with the unpopular president.

Both of the potential Democratic nominees are signaling that they intend to do so.

Anti-Republican feelings over the war in Iraq, congressional lobbying scandals, high gasoline prices and domestic eavesdropping will lead to a "Democratic tsunami ... right over the Republican beachhead," said Bob Mulholland, a senior strategist for state Treasurer Phil

Angelides, one of two major Democratic candidates.

If Angelides wins the Democratic primary in three weeks, Mulholland said, the campaign "absolutely" would run television ads featuring Schwarzenegger and Bush together at various political events.

"We have the video. It's Bush and Schwarzenegger playing patty-cake," Mulholland said.

Angelides is facing state Controller Steve Westly, who has been far less vocal about Schwarzenegger's relationship with Bush.

Nonetheless, Westly spokesman Nick Velasquez said the campaign would challenge Schwarzenegger for failing to push harder for federal funds, among other accusations.

"Time and again, Bush has told California to drop dead, and the governor has been silent until he finds himself in an election year," Velasquez said.

Schwarzenegger's campaign insists that voters view the California governor far differently than they do Bush — as a unique blend, not a partisan. Indeed, a recent Times poll found the governor with a firmer job approval rating than the president among registered voters in California — 44% said Schwarzenegger was doing a good job, to 31% for Bush.

"At the end of the day, I don't think people see Arnold Schwarzenegger as anything other than an Arnold Republican," said Steve Schmidt, the governor's campaign manager.

For Schmidt and a few other Schwarzenegger campaign aides, the governor's anti-Bush stance involves a bit of whiplash. They moved to jobs in the reelection campaign directly from the Bush White House, where they had aggressively defended the president on his Supreme Court nominees and many other issues.

Asked whether Schwarzenegger was trying to separate himself from Bush as he enters the reelection campaign, Schmidt replied: "Gov. Schwarzenegger's first priority is standing up for California, and that is precisely what he is doing. He has taken exception with the federal government on a range of issues ... and he is going to go out there and express those opinions every day."

Clearly, however, Schwarzenegger's moves underscore the dilemma of Republican candidates nationwide: how to deal with a president and Congress whose approval ratings are perilously low.

Schwarzenegger and Bush have never been particularly close. But in 2004, the GOP governor gave the keynote address at the Republican National Convention, where Bush was nominated for a second term. At the close of the hard-fought election, Schwarzenegger flew to campaign with Bush in Ohio, a key electoral state and one where Schwarzenegger owns an upscale mall, holds an international bodybuilding contest and remains popular.

"There is no match for the leadership and the resolve of George W. Bush," Schwarzenegger told Bush supporters in Ohio.

Lately, however, the governor has forwarded a different message.

When it comes to illegal immigration, Schwarzenegger said recently, the federal government — and by extension Bush — "has failed the people of America in a terrible way, in a disastrous way." On Tuesday, he added that Bush's protection of the border had been "embarrassing."

Schwarzenegger and Bush have clashed over clean-air standards that the governor, among others, has been pushing to reduce global warming.

In pressing state standards, the governor said, "The federal government has so far fallen short with showing leadership when it comes to the environment. I think that I, as governor, don't want to wait for the federal government or for any other states, as far as that goes."

Putting the blame on Bush also can deflect criticism from Schwarzenegger, who came into office promising to get California a bigger share of federal tax dollars to cover the costs of housing illegal immigrants in jails and prisons, and for cleanup from natural disasters such as last winter's storms.

So far, he has not been particularly persuasive.

This week, Schwarzenegger again asked Bush to declare a state of "major disaster" in California and give the state \$69 million for storm cleanup. U.S. Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, both Democrats, joined the governor in pressuring the White House.

When Bush rejected the governor's previous request for a federal emergency declaration, Schwarzenegger called it "unacceptable" and warned that the state could face catastrophe.

"We have seen what happens in New Orleans when people waited for the federal government," he said in a gibe at Bush's much-derided response to Hurricane Katrina. "Their response was terrible there, and we don't want to be a victim of that."

The administration subsequently did receive some federal assistance and regulatory changes.

On a related front, Democratic Atty. Gen. Bill Lockyer's office has been filing a steady stream of lawsuits against the federal government over its efforts to overturn or weaken state laws. Lockyer is representing Schwarzenegger in three lawsuits that contest the federal government's attempts to challenge California's air pollution and energy efficiency standards.

This year, Schwarzenegger upbraided the federal government after the rocky start-up of its prescription drug plan for seniors, known as Medicare Part D. Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency, which he renewed Tuesday when tens of thousands of Californians were left without coverage. He freed up \$150 million to buy prescriptions and held a news conference at a pharmacist's window where he said the federal program had been "disastrous."

When Lockyer threatened to join six other states that had sued the federal government over the program's unexpectedly high costs, Schwarzenegger jumped to join him. The Bush administration relented, and no lawsuit was filed.

Nathan Barankin, communications director for Lockyer, said Schwarzenegger has "in the past been quietly supportive of our efforts" to challenge the federal government in court.

"What is different now is he is public about it," he said.

Beijing Planning to Cut Olympic Traffic

By Charles Hutzler, Associated Press Writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, May 18, 2006

BEIJING, China (AP) -- Faced with traffic and pollution problems as they prepare for the 2008 Summer Olympics, officials in the Chinese capital are drafting contingency plans that include an extended holiday for the city's huge government work force during the games or limiting the days residents can drive.

Partial traffic bans and special lanes for Olympic traffic on some roadways already are being planned, and other measures are being considered to deal with the city's smothering traffic and smog.

"We're striving to achieve better air quality by the 2008 Games to welcome the athletes and the Olympic family," Jiang Xiaoyu of the Beijing Olympic organizing committee said at a news conference Thursday at the end of a three-day inspection visit by the International Olympic Committee.

With soaring car ownership and other effects of economic growth, the city of more than 15 million residents regularly is choked in brown haze and jammed traffic, lengthening commutes and frustrating citizens and officials.

The IOC inspectors' visit occurred as a sandstorm coated the city in yellow grit. For much of Tuesday and Wednesday, the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau recorded severely polluted air in the capital.

City and Beijing Olympic officials insist the situation is improving. Jiang said nearly two out of three days last year had air quality ranked good or better. He ticked off a list of measures being taken to improve traffic, from adding more highways to lengthening the subway system.

In reviewing Beijing's progress toward the Olympics, the IOC delegation expressed confidence in the city, said it was meeting its targets and praised the construction of sports venues, especially a futuristic swimming center and a national stadium known as the "Bird's Nest" because of its lattice steel exterior.

"You can't think of any other word than 'stunning,'" said Hein Verbruggen, the head of the IOC's coordination committee.

Verbruggen acknowledged the challenge that traffic and pollution pose for the city. Beijingers purchased about 1,000 new cars a day last year, giving the city 2.6 million vehicles, half of them private.

"Staggering figures like that give an idea of the problems they have to solve," Verbruggen said. "It's an uphill battle for them."

Beijing dropped from fourth to 15th place in a Chinese survey of livable cities this year, in part because of pollution and traffic. The city has 7,000 building sites, many of them being rushed to completion ahead of the Olympics. A relay marathon went ahead last month despite hazardous smog.

Beijing's mayor regularly cites air pollution, traffic and water shortages as among his gravest problems.

"You're lucky the air quality is good during your visit," Mayor Wang Qishan told visiting Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley on Monday. When Daley handed Wang a photograph of the Chicago skyline with Lake Michigan in the foreground, Wang said, wistfully: "Look, the sky is blue, the water clean."

Beijing has a history of taking extreme measures during important public events. In 1993, during an unsuccessful bid for the 2000 Olympics, police drove beggars and the handicapped from the city before an IOC visit. For the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic in 1999, city residents were ordered to stay home while floats and military units moved through neighborhoods for a parade.

The IOC and Beijing organizers have said they are counting on the traditional hospitality of ordinary Chinese and their enthusiasm for the Olympics to make the 2008 Games a success. But

the Olympic contingency plans are testing the tolerance of ordinary Chinese, who have grown more free and assertive after two decades of economic reforms.

Beijing Olympic organizers have said privately that city residents, if given vacations during the Games, might swarm the venues rather than leave the city on holiday. Excessive security that keeps Chinese away also could spark negative media reports and spoil the atmosphere.

"The temporary administrative measures we will take will be in line with international practices," Jiang said.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Friday, May 19, 2006:](#)

Large animal farms should meet smog rules

By LINDA MacKAY, Lebec

I live in the Frazier Mountain community of Lebec, and I recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to represent the regional organization I belong to, the Association of Irrigated Residents, to lobby against several bills.

If passed, they will exempt large animal facilities from federal laws that require air quality monitoring, and also exempt these facilities from financial responsibility for any pollution cleanup the facilities may cause while operating.

Currently, agricultural lobbying groups and some members of Congress are looking for those exemptions through the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act and the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act.

The San Joaquin Valley-based group, AIR, along with our legal counsel, the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, have been key organizational forces behind requiring new large dairies to file for permits and reduce smog-forming pollution under the Clean Air Act in California.

California is the first state to require these permits. While in Washington, I was joined by other community representatives from Missouri, Ohio, Iowa, Oklahoma and Texas who are also concerned about large animal facilities and the impacts these facilities have on health and the environment.

Seven or eight years ago the average dairy in the San Joaquin Valley had well under 1,000 cows. But today there are dairies and dairy complexes being built in the valley that have several thousand cows.

The 28,000-cow Borba dairy complex near Bakersfield will emit at least 2.13 million pounds of ammonia each year if it reaches its maximum growth, making it the 16th largest source of ammonia in the country.

Ammonia is a toxic gas and a precursor to the most prevalent form of wintertime particulate matter in the San Joaquin Valley air basin.

I strongly believe that in addition to Bakersfield, mountain communities also need to be concerned about the valley's air. The bad air of the valley becomes concentrated at its south end, and there are times when you can see the brown air coming up into the mountain communities as you drive down the Grapevine. It looks like smoke coming up the mountain.

Small family farms that operate responsibly and don't pollute are already exempt within CERCLA and EPCRA, but the large animal facilities that are moving into the valley should be regulated like all other factories.

We have a public health crisis in Kern County. Bakersfield is the most smog-polluted city and the second most particulate matter-polluted city in the country, according to the recent State of the Air Report by the American Lung Association, reported by *The Californian* recently.

This smog and particulate pollution causes huge consequences, including at least \$3.2 billion in costs that the public bears by not meeting federal health standards.

We must all do our share to clean the air -- exempting animal facilities from air pollution laws is very bad policy.

Linda MacKay of Lebec is secretary of Association of Irrigated Residents.