

Check air quality before burning

San Joaquin district will charge \$50 for first-time offenders

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 14, 2007

As fall settles into the Central Valley, residents are being reminded to check local air quality before using their fireplace, wood-burning or pellet stoves.

Those found to be in violation of the San Joaquin Air District's "Check Before You Burn" program may be subject to fines of up to \$50 for first time offenders.

The program, which runs through February, helps reduce wintertime air pollution by either discouraging or prohibiting the use of wood fireplaces, wood-burning stoves and pellet stoves when air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

"The public's cooperation has played a big role in improving the Valley's air quality during the winter over the past four years," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's air pollution control officer.

Officials say cooperation in the program has helped the Valley meet some federally mandated health standards.

Through February, the Air District will issue a daily "air status" report on a county-by-county basis.

Burning any solid fuel will be prohibited when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy for everyone, which equals an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher. Burning wood in an open fireplace or older insert is discouraged on a voluntary basis when air quality is projected to be "unhealthy for sensitive groups" with an Index range of 101 to 150.

The restrictions do not apply to devices fueled exclusively by natural gas or propane; cooking stoves; homes in areas with no natural-gas service; homes

at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher; and homes in which no other heating device exists and wood-burning is the sole source of heat.

Air quality can be checked on a daily basis toll free by calling 1-800 SMOG INFO (1-800-766-4463) or online at <http://www.valleyair.org>

Valley air district sues EPA over regs

in the Stockton Record, Wednesday, November 14, 2007

FRESNO - San Joaquin Valley air pollution cops have followed the state's lead and are suing the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to grant a request for California to set its own greenhouse gas emission regulations.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District filed suit earlier this week in federal court in Washington, D.C.

The state filed a similar suit last week. California officials want to set their own tailpipe standards for some cars and trucks beginning in 2009, but the EPA has not issued a waiver allowing them to do so.

State-imposed standards would yield much-needed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the Valley, air district officials said Tuesday.

Emissions from mobile sources, such as cars and trucks, contribute more than half of the total air pollution in the Valley.

Valley air plan not enough, critics say

Program to clear pollution by 2024 is set for approval; activists want results sooner.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
Wed., Nov. 14, 2007

The state is expected Thursday to approve a disputed Valley air cleanup plan that has been made more aggressive in the past three months, but activists complain that more progress should have been made.

Activists are upset that a state-led task force came up short of additional ozone reductions needed to clean the air before 2024, the completion deadline.

Years of human suffering could be eliminated with tighter rules on industries in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, activists say.

"To see the white flag now is very disappointing," said Delano-based Daniela Simunovic of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, a national nonprofit group. "We're not giving up."

Governing members of the California Air Resources Board are expected Thursday to send the Valley's ozone plan to federal officials, which is the state's final step in approving it. State officials said they will continue to pursue further ozone reductions for the Valley.

The region violated the federal ozone standard 65 times this year, second-most in the country behind South Coast Air Basin, which had 79. One in five Valley children has asthma, a lung condition often triggered by ozone.

In June, the state board accepted the local air district's plan, laying out the timetable and rules for the cleanup. Governing board members also heard activists who said that the district ignored their suggestions for more stringent rules. The board decided to form the task force.

The task force -- including activists, local district officials, state air board staffers and two governing board members -- found more pollution reductions were possible from diesel trucks and farm equipment.

The state air board, not the Valley district, regulates those pollution sources.

Officials also estimate that there is less pollution in the Valley air than previously thought, meaning the cleanup will go faster.

The task force found ways to eliminate more than half of the excess pollution needed to move the 2024 target to an earlier date, but it's still not enough.

Officials said technology is not available to go further at the moment, but they said technological improvements likely will speed up the process in the future.

"In our minds, we made tremendous progress with this plan," said Kurt Karperos, chief of air quality and transportation planning for the resources board.

An independent study group, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, disagrees. The Independent Sustainable Systems Research Center concludes that clean air can be achieved by 2017.

The center said state and regional air district officials should look again at the estimate of how much air pollution the Valley produces each day. Center researchers said it still is overstated.

As for pollution reduction ideas, the center suggests such measures as better control of glass furnaces and diesel engines for farm water pumps. One researcher said officials should investigate the newest technology -- selective catalytic reduction, similar to a car's catalytic converter.

"It is being used in other parts of the world," said center researcher Alvin Valeriano, an engineer who formerly worked at the Valley air district.

State officials said study of such technologies is the next step. Dorene D'Adamo, the air resources board member who suggested forming the task force, said state officials will not give up on improving the Valley ozone plan.

"This is a solid plan," D'Adamo said. "But it's important to take another look, and let's see what more we can do."

California fighting global warming with technology, greenbacks

David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, November 14, 2007

California is leading the way in the fight against global warming as its investors have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into green technology companies and its citizens have cut per-capita emissions of greenhouse gases by nearly 10 percent in recent years.

So says a new report that praises the Golden State for making a fast start but warns that much more effort and innovation are needed to truly make a difference in the crisis.

The California Green Innovation Index, due to be released Wednesday by a local public-policy group and an economic consulting firm, shows progress on a number of fronts.

The amount of greenhouse gases emitted per capita in California has dropped 9.8 percent since 1990, although total emissions continue to rise along with the state's population. California has become the nation's biggest hub for green tech companies, which are developing new fuels and smarter ways to use energy. Those companies employ 22,000 Californians and are soaking up more venture capital money than similar businesses in other states, about \$884 million in 2006.

Perhaps most important, the report's authors found that California has the right political environment for more progress.

The state's government says it is committed to fighting global warming and has passed laws to cut emissions and increase the use of renewable energy. Many Californians support the effort and have shown willingness to change their habits as a result, according to the report. They are buying energy-efficient appliances and are driving less - a stunning change in a state known for its car-centric culture.

"California is a model," said F. Noel Perry, founder of the Next 10 policy group, which commissioned the report. "The people of California are very forward-looking, and they like to solve problems."

Perry's nonpartisan group, which looks for solutions to statewide problems, worked with some of California's most prominent energy experts from government, academia and private industry to draft the report.

Collaborative Economics, a consulting firm that has a long history of tracking Silicon Valley's ups and downs, conducted the research.

This problem of global warming will take more than enthusiasm to solve, Perry said.

"We are on the right path, but our emissions are still rising," he said. "We need some breakthroughs here."

The group's index is designed to serve as an annual report card for California's global warming efforts, beginning with this year. Many of the financial and environmental statistics the report pulls together aren't new, but they take on added resonance when viewed together.

"There are some policymakers who look at the economic side, and there are some who look at the environmental side," said Collaborative Economics President Doug Henton. "What we really need to do is look at both."

The index contains a few surprises:

- The amount of greenhouse gases produced for every Californian has dropped since 1990. At the same time, California's per-capita gross domestic product - the value of the services and goods produced in the state - has risen. The state's economy, in other words, has been thriving despite the reduction in per-person emissions.
- California emits less greenhouse gas per person than any other state except Rhode Island. California's economy produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions for every dollar of gross domestic product than Germany, Japan or the United Kingdom.
- Californians pay less on their monthly electricity bills than do residents of many other states. In 2005, for example, California's average monthly electricity bill was \$74, compared with \$135 in Texas. Although mild weather plays a part, so do tough energy-efficiency standards adopted in the 1970s for buildings and appliances.
- Those energy-efficiency standards saved California residents and businesses \$56 billion between 1975 and 2003.
- About 22,000 Californians were directly employed by green-tech companies in 2006. In the same year, California's green-tech businesses soaked up 36 percent of all the money venture capitalists spent on the industry within the United States.
- About 76 percent of Californians polled as part of the study said they are using energy-efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs, and 84 percent said they have turned down their heating and air-conditioning systems to save power.
- Although California's overall demand for petroleum has increased since 1970, the amount consumed per person has fallen.
- The number of miles Californians drive each year per person peaked in 2002 at 9,068 and dropped to 8,943 miles in 2005, the last year for which information is available. Despite California's reputation as the land of the long commute, people in the rest of the country actually drive more, logging 10,249 miles on the road each year.

Although the report documents Californians' concern about global warming, many of the statistics reflect other forces at work.

The drop in greenhouse gas emissions per person over time could reflect the changing nature of the state's economy, for example. California today relies far less on manufacturing than it did in 1990, said

James Bushnell, research director at the University of California Energy Institute. Factories demand far more power and produce more greenhouse gases than software companies or financial services firms.

"The broader trend is right: the economy is just not that energy-intensive here," said Bushnell.

Similarly, the drop in the number of miles Californians travel each year probably has more to do with fuel prices than global warming. It might also be the result of more people working from home, either for their companies or for themselves.

"If you're spending eight hours in front of your computer, it doesn't matter if it's in an office or your home," said Bruce Klafter, the head of corporate responsibility and sustainability programs at Applied Materials, a Santa Clara company that makes tools for producing computer chips and solar cells. Klafter served as an adviser on the index.

House Votes to Ban Mercury Exports

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, November 13, 2007

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The export of highly toxic mercury would be banned and federal agencies prohibited from selling or distributing mercury under legislation the House passed Tuesday.

The United States currently exports mercury for use in thousands of small-scale gold mines, often in developing countries. Environmental and health groups warn that mercury toxins from those sites can return to this country, either through the atmosphere or contaminated fish, posing particular danger to young children and the fetuses of pregnant women.

Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, a sponsor of the bill, cited estimates that up to one-third of U.S. mercury air pollution travels into the country from Asia, where mercury pollution is extensive. He said that much of the fish Americans eat, including tuna, is imported from off the coasts of Asia and South America where the use of mercury in small-scale gold mining is widespread.

The export ban would go into effect in 2010. The bill, H.R. 1534, also directs the Energy Department to provide permanent storage for domestic stocks of mercury, allowing for the safe disposition of some 1,500 tons of mercury still in use at plants in this country.

The White House opposes the bill, which passed on a voice vote. The White House said in a statement that an export ban might lead to more mining and an increase in the release of mercury into the environment. Sens. Barack Obama, D-Ill., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, have introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

Plan to Cut Jet Pollution Is Approved in Europe

By MATTHEW L. WALD and JAMES KANTER

N.Y. Times, Wed., November 14, 2007

Washington, Nov. 13 —The European Union voted Tuesday to impose quotas on the emission of carbon dioxide by airlines, setting up a fight with the United States, which argues against unilateral actions on aviation, a relatively small but rapidly growing source of global warming gases.

The European Parliament gave preliminary approval to a global warming control plan that would require, beginning in 2011, that airlines flying to and from Europe offset some of their emissions by buying carbon dioxide allowances on the open market.

A result would be increased pressure on airlines to do more to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases from burning jet fuel. Europe has imposed similar emissions limits on other industries for several years in search of steep reductions in its greenhouse gas production.

The cost of this proposal to the airlines is hard to estimate, because the price of carbon allowances has varied widely, as has the value of the currency in which they are denominated, the euro. The goal would be to reduce future emissions to 90 percent of the average given off in recent years, or to offset any excess above that limit.

The backers of the plan said they hoped other countries would emulate the European approach.

“We want a worldwide system as soon as possible,” said Peter Liese, a German member of the Parliament who helped to guide the legislation through the assembly, which met in Strasbourg, France. “There must be an end to the status quo that nothing is done in the aviation sector and which has predominated for many years now.”

Airline emissions were not part of the Kyoto Protocol’s targets for reducing each nation’s output of greenhouse gases. Limits on airlines were left to the International Civil Aviation Organization, a United Nations agency. This year, in anticipation of the European action, that organization passed a resolution emphasizing that it would be in charge of carbon reduction agreements, but it has not acted.

Carl Burlison, the director of the office of environment and energy at the Federal Aviation Administration, said after the European vote, “This doesn’t go along with what the world community agreed to, which is that you should undertake this on the basis of mutual agreement.”

To reduce the region’s emissions of carbon dioxide, which come mostly from burning fossil fuels, Europe has established a trading arrangement. Companies that face high costs for reducing their emissions can purchase credits from other companies that can cut emissions at less cost. The price of credits fluctuates.

The United States has never joined in the Kyoto agreement, although Congress is debating regulations on carbon emissions.

Some American environmentalists hailed the European action. “It’s a big step forward to include airlines,” said Rafe Pomerance, president of the Climate Policy Center, an environmental advocacy group. He helped negotiate the Kyoto agreement during the Clinton administration.

The European Union plans to begin by putting internal flights under its existing carbon control plan.

The airlines have been stressing technology as a way to cut emissions per flight. For example, the jumbo Airbus A380 is supposed to burn 17 percent less fuel per seat than a Boeing 747-400, and the Boeing 787, which is supposed to begin test flights next year, is supposed to burn 30 percent less fuel than average planes.

The Federal Aviation Administration argues that improvements in air traffic control will reduce emissions per flight, by letting airplanes fly on more direct routes and at altitudes that are more efficient for their engines. But experts also say the improvements will allow more traffic, driving total emissions higher.

On average, studies have found, a traveler making a typical trip in a plane accounts for roughly the same greenhouse gas emissions as one traveling alone by car — although much depends on the details of any particular trip.

At a conference last month in Washington on global aircraft emissions, Shigenori Hiraoka, a researcher at the Japan International Transport Institute, pointed out that transportation emissions were 14 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions in 2004, but that aviation was just 6 percent of those emissions. That puts emissions from aviation in the range of 1 percent of all emissions. “Aviation’s share is still small,” he said. “Why bother?”

The answer, he said, was that aviation is galloping ahead, with growth of about 4.4 percent a year, overwhelming the fuel economy gains of about 1.3 percent a year.

While American carriers resist being brought into Europe’s control system, European airlines oppose it, too. Last week Willie Walsh, the chief executive of British Airways said in a speech at the International Aviation Club in Washington, “We need a mechanism that will allow us to

continue to meet the rising demand for air travel until more fundamental technological breakthroughs are made.”

Losing their cool

Automakers sweat plan for special paint, windows

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Friday, November 9, 2007

To fight global warming, state regulators want new cars to work like anti-greenhouses.

In vehicles with sun-shielding windows and specially treated paint, the thinking goes, drivers will use their air conditioners less. That will save fuel and cut carbon dioxide emissions.

But automakers are sweating about the plan. They contend that controls on paint or glass will hobble designers and drive up costs.

On a hot day, so-called "cool coatings" can reduce the air temperature in a parked car by more than 17 degrees, according to a federal study. That's enough to make it almost pleasant to take the wheel on a blazing Sacramento afternoon.

The proposal from the California Air Resources Board is part of the state's effort to cut greenhouse gas emissions 25 percent by 2020. It's still just a draft and won't come to a vote before early 2009 – even though the windows and paints likely to be required are ready for market, or nearly so.

Several U.S. companies make windshields treated with an ultra-thin layer of silver that cuts the amount of the sun's energy hitting the driver by 40 percent or more compared with standard tinted windows.

Paint firms and carmakers are testing formulations of black, blue and other dark colors that beat back the sun's energy like white does.

Here's where carmakers get nervous. Cool windows cost more than standard auto glass. Cool paints haven't been commercialized and don't yet match existing hues. And neither technology would help automakers meet federal mileage targets, because the tests used to evaluate compliance are done with the air conditioner turned off.

"I know that all the auto companies have started to think about the input that they'll give to the ARB. I think we all have the same concerns," said Fred Sciance, a manager in the public policy division of General Motors Corp.

Perhaps of most concern: Automakers are loath to cede control over something so crucial to a vehicle as its appearance.

"The view is that this is restricting freedom," said David Cole, head of the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich.

When picking colors, the auto industry rivals the fashion business for focus groups and trend-watching, said Michael Jordan, executive editor at Edmunds Inside Line, the automotive news Web site. Paint selection wraps up years before models reach the showroom: GM has just settled on its 2011 palette.

"There are these big conferences where the experts tell us what the hot colors are going to be," Jordan said.

The state Air Resources Board has jostled with automakers since the 1960s over ways to control air pollutants.

Because of California's large share of the automobile market and its special regulatory powers under federal law, the air board's power extends far beyond the state's borders. Emissions standards adopted in California are often copied by other states and even other nations.

For most of the air board's history, it has focused on reducing the levels of tiny particles and smog-forming chemicals in the air. But California's campaign against global warming has expanded the regulatory battleground to include emissions of carbon dioxide – which are tied to fuel economy. That focus has spawned ideas like the cool-coatings proposal.

The concept shot into the political headlines during the summer when Robert Sawyer, then chairman of the Air Resources Board, championed cool coatings as a simple, low-cost way to cut carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles by 1 percent or 2 percent.

Sawyer, an emeritus professor of mechanical engineering with decades of experience evaluating automotive technology, felt it was reasonable to bring a regulation to a vote by late 2008. Gov. Arnold's Schwarzenegger's staff, leery of a new battle with automakers, wanted a delay.

Still, Sawyer pushed for the early deadline at a June meeting of the agency's board – and was fired a week later. The item remains on the board's agenda for 2009, but air board staff members have yet to propose a schedule for implementing the regulations.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wed., Nov. 14, 2007:](#)

State can't become divided over rail California leaders must be united before Congress.

A battle over which route the proposed high-speed rail line should take in and out of the Bay Area threatens the prospects for the entire system. It's time for Bay Area interests to resolve their issues so the campaign to get the high-speed system built can get in gear.

What we don't need is a bunch of elected officials vowing to torpedo the entire project if they don't get their way on route adoption. But that's exactly what we're hearing from some Bay Area Congress members.

The issue is whether the line should move through Pacheco Pass before turning north to San Jose and the Bay Area, or go through Altamont Pass into the East Bay.

In an ideal world, both routes would be built. Then passengers from Fresno and points south could choose a train that stops in San Jose before ending up in Oakland or one that runs up the Peninsula into San Francisco after leaving San Jose.

That's the recommendation of the staff of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, whose governing board must choose the route into the Bay Area soon.

The staff will propose today that the Pacheco Pass route be used to connect San Jose and San Francisco. The Altamont line would split in the East Bay, going north to Oakland and south to San Jose. That line could also be used for commuter trains.

The rub there is that such a dual route would add some \$5 billion to the \$40 billion estimated cost of the system. But it's worth the price, both in terms of passenger options and political realities.

Each alternative has pluses and minuses. There are environmental difficulties with both routes, and passengers would have to make connections to the cities not directly served by each of the choices.

Five members of Congress who support the southern route through Pacheco Pass have said they would oppose federal funding if they don't get their way. They are: Reps. Zoe Lofgren, D-San

Jose; Anna Eshoo, D-Atherton; Sam Farr, D-Carmel; Mike Honda, D-San Jose; and Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo. That's crucial because federal funding will be essential to building the high-speed system.

But if there's opposition from California representatives, it becomes very easy for members of Congress from other states to dismiss the idea.

That would be tragic. The high-speed rail system offers the enormous promise of economic development, better air quality and reduced dependence on imported oil.

It would connect the Valley to the rest of the state in ways that are long overdue. It would facilitate business in California, and provide a comfortable and enjoyable alternative to increasingly congested freeways for tens of thousands of passengers.

We urge the authority to adopt the dual route proposal. It would better serve Californians.

The high-speed rail project is too important to the state's future to be grounded by a turf battle among elected representatives.

[Lodi News Sentinel, Letters to the Editor, Tuesday, November 13, 2007](#)

On alternatives to wood fireplaces:

"San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the smoke Nazis, drive around looking for violators in their non-eco friendly non-clean fuel burning pick-up. Great example of how we should be. If they wanted to show their concern they'd drive an electric car." — Up in Smoke

"The new enclosed fireplaces are more efficient at heating homes than old fireplaces and use a renewable resource rather than natural gas. ... This is just another tax on the people when they are trying to get by with less. Take a few cars off the road and then talk to me about dirty air." — killio

"Pellet burning wood stoves are even better, but I happen to like a fireplace as well. Wood is a renewable resource, and you're taking fuel away from wild fires." — Mickey