

Air district advises caution during dust

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

A health cautionary statement was issued through this evening by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District due to gusty winds and blowing dust in the Valley.

Older adults, children and those with respiratory health problems are advised to avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion in areas of blowing dust, the district said. Everyone else should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

Exposure to dust and other particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Winds in Valley prompt air quality warning

The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Gusty winds in the San Joaquin Valley have prompted local air-pollution officials to issue a health cautionary statement through Wednesday evening.

Winds in the San Joaquin Valley may produce areas of localized blowing dust throughout the Valley, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Blowing dust can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller, or PM10.

Exposure to dust and other particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality when dust is present. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion in affected areas. Everyone else should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

Gusty winds, blowing dust leads to health warning

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Strong winds and blowing dust will continue throughout the day.

The National Weather Service forecasts winds of 15 to 25 mph, with gusts of up to 40 mph. A wind advisory will be in effect until 4 p.m.

The dusty conditions have led to a health warning for people with lung or heart problems.

The high today will be 76 degrees, with lows around 52.

Wind, dust create dangerous driving conditions, CHP warns

The Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

The California Highway Patrol has put out a warning for all drivers in the south end of Kern County. The advisory warns that high winds are kicking up dust, causing low visibility.

Drivers are specifically warned not to travel on Highway 99 between Highway 119 and Highway 223 where visibility has been declared zero.

The advisory will last until at least midnight.

Critics voice track issues

Opponents to proposed sports complex raise concerns at Planning Commission hearing

By Luis Hernandez

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Tulare residents took full advantage of their first opportunity to speak on the draft environmental impact report for the proposed Tulare Motor Sports Complex Monday, blasting the project for the expected increased in noise, pollution and traffic.

Opponents, who spoke for about an hour during a Tulare's planning commission public hearing, said the project is wrong for Tulare.

"We don't want it in our neighborhood," Phillip Mattingly said. "I definitely oppose it. It's a terrible idea."

Developer Bud Long didn't attend Monday's meeting. No one in the standing-room only crowd at the council chambers spoke in support of the project.

As proposed, the complex will encompass 711 acres off South Laspina Street and will include a 50,000-seat race track, a 3,500-foot drag-racing strip, hotels and retail space.

The complex would create 16,359 new jobs and bring an estimated \$1 billion each year to the area, according to the report.

In the past, track supporters have said the project would have significant boost for the local and regional economy bringing:

- \$355 million in labor income
- \$105 million in tax revenue for state and local governments
- \$224.6 million in taxable sales per year
- \$512.2 million in business sales.

But those benefits are not enough to compensate for the track's drawbacks, opponents said.

"My main concern is air quality," Pat Phillips said. "This will make it worse."

Rachel Dysart said approving the track would go against all the recent environment-friendly decisions the city has made, including switching its city bus service, police and fire fleet from gasoline and diesel to natural gas.

Felix Mata, who lives on the Sunrise Estate housing development, said noise would be a problem. When he first moved into the neighborhood, Mata said it was quiet. The proposed track would take that quiet away.

Eric Nunes said he's a racing fan, but opposes the project because the Tulare track won't attract the big names.

"Dale Earnhart Jr. is not coming," he said. "Neither is Jeff Gordon or some of the guys people like or like to hate."

Bud Mouw, whose dairy is east of the proposed project, said he's concerned about the affect of the noise on his milking cows. And he said the report didn't address those concerns.

Tom Jones said the track would have an adverse affect on wild animals that use the Elk Bayou Creek as a home or nesting place.

The draft environmental impact report will remain under public comment until June 20. A second public hearing will be held June 2.

Tulare Planning Director Mark Kielty said all comments received will be addressed when the final report is prepared.

The project is expected to come before the planners and city council for a vote in the fall.

Bay Area air regulators to vote on global warming fees

By Terence Chea, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO-Air pollution regulators in the San Francisco Bay Area aren't waiting for state or federal authorities to do something about global warming.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's board of directors was set to vote on new rules Wednesday that would impose fees on factories, power plants, oil refineries and other businesses that emit carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases.

If the board approves the plan, the agency, which regulates air pollution in the nine-county Bay Area, would be the first in the country to charge companies fees based on their greenhouse gas emissions, experts say. The new rules would take effect July 1.

The modest fee - 4.4 cents per ton of carbon dioxide - probably won't be enough to force companies to reduce their emissions, but backers say it sets an important precedent in combating climate change and could serve as a model for regional air districts nationwide.

"It doesn't solve global warming, but it gets us thinking in the right terms," said Daniel Kammen, a renewable energy expert at the University of California, Berkeley. "It's not enough of a cost to change behavior, but it tells us where things are headed. You have to think not just in financial terms, but in carbon terms."

But many Bay Area businesses oppose the rules, saying they could interfere with the state's campaign to curb greenhouse gas emissions under a landmark global warming law signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006.

The California Air Resources Board, which is charged with implementing the law, is expected next month to issue its preliminary plan to reduce the state's emissions before it approves a final plan later this year.

Climate change is "a big issue that needs a comprehensive statewide plan to address it," said Cathy Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer for the Western States Petroleum Association. "We believe it's premature for local air districts to design local programs before we have a state program."

If approved, the fees are expected to generate \$1.1 million in its first year to help pay for programs to measure the region's emissions and develop ways to reduce them.

More than 2,5000 businesses would be required to pay the proposed fees. About seven power plants and oil refineries would have to pay more than \$50,000 a year, but the majority of businesses would pay less than \$1, according to district estimates.

The proposed program, which would require companies to measure and report their own emissions, could make it more complicated and expensive to do business in the Bay Area, said Shelly Sullivan, who heads the AB32 Implementation Group, a coalition of business groups working with state regulators to implement California's global warming law.

"It's going to make Bay Area businesses less competitive because companies outside the area won't face similar costs," Sullivan said. "There would be a patchwork of plans that would not be consistent."

Opponents also question whether the agency, which is charged with regulating air pollutants such as ozone and particulate matter, has the authority to impose fees on greenhouse gas emissions.

Bay Area district officials believe the agency has that authority because global warming is raising surface temperatures, which worsens air quality.

"We see a direct connection between the climate and air pollution," said Jack Broadbent, the district's executive director. "We believe think the changing climate is going to require effort on the federal, state and local level."

Supes delay vote in S.F. power plant fight

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors again Tuesday delayed a vote on whether to close an old and heavily polluting power plant on Potrero Hill and replace it with three natural-gas-powered generators. The proposal was amended so the general manager of the city's Public Utilities Commission could conduct a 90-day "final due diligence review." Under this plan, the project would proceed if the PUC cannot find a viable alternative to erecting the fossil-fuel-burning generators. Some officials have suggested the current dirty plant could be retrofitted for less money and still cut pollution.

EPA chief on the hot seat at House panel hearing

H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Washington - -- The head of the Environmental Protection Agency came under sharp attack at a House hearing Tuesday, with Democratic lawmakers accusing him of repeatedly caving in to White House pressure on environmental issues such as global warming and a recently enacted health standard for smog.

EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson rejected the characterization and said that while he frequently discusses EPA matters with the White House, the decisions are his.

But Johnson, appearing before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee for nearly three hours, repeatedly refused to discuss conversations he had with the White House and refused to provide a number of documents that have been subpoenaed by the committee concerning the smog standard and his refusal to allow California to proceed with rules to cut greenhouse gases.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, the committee chairman, said depositions provided by senior EPA staff members suggest that Johnson was overruled or heavily influenced by the White House on recent EPA decisions on the smog standard, its rejection of a waiver for California on global-warming regulations, and the EPA ongoing deliberations on whether to regulate carbon dioxide.

"You have essentially become a figurehead," Waxman told Johnson. "In each case, you backed down."

He said that in each of the EPA cases, "the pattern is the same. The president apparently insisted in his judgment and overrode the unanimous recommendations of EPA scientific and legal experts," said Waxman.

"You reversed yourself after having candid conversations with the White House."

Johnson, a 27-year career EPA scientist himself before being elevated to head the agency, repeatedly insisted that he was the final decision-maker on the issues cited by Waxman, although acknowledging frequent discussions with the White House on those and other matters.

But Waxman's committee can only guess on the details of those conversations and communications.

Johnson declined repeated requests by Democrats on the panel to provide any details about conversations he had with the White House, refusing at one point to even acknowledge whether he did or did not discuss the smog, California waiver or carbon dioxide rule making with the president.

"I don't think it's appropriate for me to discuss the conversations," said Johnson.

Johnson acknowledged that in at least one case he had been overruled directly by the president.

He had sided with the EPA staff and the agency's science advisory board that preferred a "seasonal" standard to determine smog air minimums as they apply to protect vegetation, forests, farmland and wildlife, suggesting such an approach was better than using the one designed for protecting human health.

White House staff disagreed and just hours before the standard was announced last March, President Bush weighed in on the side of the staff, and Johnson relented, according to documents and depositions cited by Waxman's committee.

Senate panel votes to overturn EPA on Calif. Waiver

Capital Press, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A Senate panel has narrowly voted to overturn the EPA's decision to block California and more than a dozen other states from limiting greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

The bill by Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer of California passed the Environment and Public Works committee by a 10-9 vote Wednesday, sending it to the full Senate.

One committee Democrat, Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, broke with others on his side of the aisle and voted no. Republican John Warner of Virginia voted yes, allowing the bill to pass.

Honda to sell new gas-electric hybrid next year

By Yuri Kageyama, AP Business Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, USA Today and other papers, Wednesday, April 21, 2008

TOKYO—Honda will sell a new, improved and affordable gas-electric hybrid in the U.S., Japan and Europe starting in early 2009, underlining the Japanese automaker's commitment to "green" technology, the company president said Wednesday.

The new model—to be sold solely as a hybrid, and not as a traditional, gasoline-powered car—is a key part of Honda Motor Co.'s strategy for the next three years that President Takeo Fukui outlined at Tokyo headquarters.

The plan also included production innovations and expansion in Japan to cut costs so Honda can stay competitive amid soaring material and energy costs, he said.

In addition to the new hybrid, Honda will introduce several other hybrids: a Civic, a new sporty model based on the CR-Z and a Fit subcompact, sold as the Jazz in Europe, Fukui said.

"Hybrids have drawn attention for their image, but time has come to go to the next step," he said, stressing that Honda was serious about selling hybrids in numbers.

Fukui refused to give the price for the new vehicle, which would be offered solely as a hybrid.

But he said the difference between hybrids and their comparable standard models should be kept within 200,000 yen (US\$1,900; euro1,200), although such price gaps can now reach as much as 500,000 yen (US\$4,800; euro3,000).

"The 200,000 yen difference is a must," said Fukui.

The new hybrid's name was not yet disclosed. It will be a five-door sedan seating five passengers, and feature new technology that reduced the size and weight of the hybrid system to increase fuel efficiency, according to Honda, Japan's second-biggest automaker.

Although Honda already has developed hybrids, it has fallen behind Japanese rival Toyota Motor Corp. in this segment.

Last year, Honda discontinued the gas-and-electric version of its Accord sedan—sold only in North America—which sold just 25,000 units since going on sale in 2004. In 2006, it pulled the plug on the slow-selling Insight hybrid.

Over the past decade, Toyota has sold more than a million Prius gas-electric hybrid cars worldwide. When including other hybrid models, cumulative overall sales of gas-electric vehicles total 1.46 million, according to Toyota, which also makes the Camry sedan and Lexus luxury cars.

Honda has sold nearly 262,000 hybrid vehicles worldwide since it started selling them in 1999. Hybrids deliver a cleaner, more efficient ride by switching between a gas engine and an electric motor at different speeds, and by recycling the energy the car produces as it moves.

Honda said Wednesday that it plans to sell 500,000 hybrids a year sometime after 2010, half the number that Toyota has already announced it seeks to sell a year by the same time period.

Fukui said he didn't consider that as a defeat to Toyota. But he acknowledged the Prius was a smart success, partly because it's only offered as a hybrid.

"It's very clear to see the Prius is a hybrid," he said.

At the end of this year, the production line for the hybrid motor will be raised to 250,000 units annual capacity from the current 70,000, Honda said.

Honda said it's also pushing its fuel-cell technology to ease environmental concerns.

A fuel cell vehicle has no emissions because it runs on the power created when hydrogen, stored as fuel in the vehicle, combines with oxygen in the air to emit water.

Honda said it expects to lease several dozen of its new fuel cell vehicle, FCX Clarity, a year, mostly in California, reaching 200 vehicles in the first three years. The leasing is set to start in July 2008 in the U.S., and a few months later in Japan.

Under the plans for production cost cuts, Fukui said a new car plant will reduce energy needs by 30 percent compared with an existing Honda plant. A new engine plant will have flexible lines that can produce different engines, including diesels.

Honda will invest 158 billion yen (US\$1.5 billion; euro960 million) for the two "next-generation plants," which will be able to trace components for better quality control, it said.

Fukui said such production finesse will be expanded to Honda's global operations but must first begin at home in Japan.

"The power of Japan is needed," he said.

Its booming motorcycle business is a key strength that helps makes Honda unique among the world's major automakers, the company said.

Honda motorcycles are hugely popular in developing economies such as Vietnam and Thailand, and Honda is beefing up its motorcycle production methods so that it can withstand a potential drop in the dollar to 90 yen levels.

A weak dollar, now trading at about 103 yen, down about 10 percent from the previous year, hurts the earnings of Japanese automakers by eroding their overseas income when converted to yen.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses legislative reports indicate that the white house refused the California waiver. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Dice reporte legislativo que la Casa Blanca negó permiso ambiental a California

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, May 20, 2008

Un reporte legislativo demócrata aseguró que fue la Casa Blanca y no la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA, por sus siglas en inglés) quien negó a California un permiso para poner en vigor la ley de protección ambiental del aire más estricta del país.

Según miembros demócratas del Comité de Supervisión y Reforma Gubernamental del Congreso, el administrador nacional de la EPA, Stepehn Johnson, estaba de acuerdo con autorizar a California pero que se opuso la Casa Blanca.

La administración del presidente George Bush todavía no responde al reporte.

La negativa a California repercute en otros 16 estados, con réplicas de la ley californiana.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses San Francisco may set higher fees for contaminated businesses and individuals.](#)

San Francisco podría sentar hoy precedente de tarifas por contaminación

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, May 21, 2008

La Administración Regional de Calidad del Aire de la bahía de San Francisco podría sentar hoy un precedente al imponer tarifas proporcionales por contaminación generada, a las empresas e individuos en su jurisdicción.

La decisión será sometida hoy a votación. El dinero que la región obtenga por tarifas se destinará a medidas para limpiar el aire, y prevenir el sobrecalentamiento terrestre.

De aprobarse, la medida se aplicará a unas dos mil 500 empresas de las inmediaciones de San Francisco.

Un cálculo preliminar dice que, por ejemplo, una refinería tendría que pagar unos 190

[S.F.Chronicle commentary, Wednesday, May 21, 2008:](#)

OPEN FORUM

Greening the grid while keeping the lights on

By Yakout Mansour

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors will soon decide how long the heavily polluting Potrero power plant will need to continue operating. Right now, the Potrero plant is required to keep the lights on in San Francisco. The supervisors will decide whether to approve replacing Potrero with several small power plants. These "peaker" plants, along with upgrades to the transmission grid, would allow all four existing Potrero generators to close. There are alternatives to the peakers, but the Potrero power plant cannot be closed until an equally reliable alternative is in place.

Basically, the supervisors must decide how to balance the urgent need to improve our environment with the need for reliable electricity.

The California Independent System Operator Corporation (California ISO) is the not-for-profit public-benefit corporation charged with operating the high-voltage transmission grid in the state. It is also responsible for maintaining electric reliability in California, and is actively involved in the power issues in San Francisco.

San Francisco is facing important and difficult choices. The supervisors' decision will dictate how long the aging, pollution spewing Potrero plant must stay in service. Time is critical because, each week, Potrero puts out almost 2 tons more pollution than the alternatives the supervisors must weigh.

The peaker plants, which already have the permits needed for construction, maintain the federally-required level of electric reliability in San Francisco and are much cleaner, but they do

burn natural gas. The Trans-Bay Cable, due to come on line in 2010, will help meet San Francisco's growing power needs through 2020. However, it does not by itself replace the reliability OF the Potrero power plant. With that in mind, there are alternatives:

- 1) The owner of the Potrero plant, the Mirant Corp., would retrofit three small existing peaking units (Potrero Nos. 4, 5, and 6), to burn natural gas instead of diesel fuel and close the larger Potrero unit No. 3. This relatively new alternative is approximately as clean as installing new peakers.
- 2) Build new transmission lines to feed more power into San Francisco. It will take years to study, license, site and build these projects. Potrero, still spewing pollution, would have to continue to operate in the meantime.
- 3) Close the Potrero plant and bring on line a combination of solar power, energy efficiency and other conservation programs to make up for the loss of the Potrero-generated power. The California ISO strongly supports these alternatives and has major initiatives underway to help make them work. They do not meet federal reliability criteria, however, because they cannot be turned on and off 24-hours-a-day. Some additional 24/7 generation would still be required.
- 4) Close Potrero unit No. 3 without adding power sources. San Francisco then would fail to meet federal reliability standards, greatly increasing the risk of rotating blackouts under some conditions. Rotating outages might also be needed when key parts of the system that feeds San Francisco are down for maintenance.

San Francisco is wrestling with this dilemma today, but it is worth noting that similar situations exist elsewhere in the state. As California seeks additional renewable energy resources, considers new water quality regulations for coastal power plants, and limits greenhouse-gas emissions, important issues must be addressed. It can be done, as the closure of the Hunters Point power plant in 2006 illustrates, but not without hard decisions that recognize the physical characteristics of the transmission grid that serves California.

The California ISO applauds San Francisco's commitment to these environmental goals and will continue to support the effort by providing impartial information and expertise to the decision-makers and the community. If we work together, we can "green the grid" and keep it reliable at the same time.

Yakout Mansour is president and CEO of the California Independent System Operator.

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, May 21, 2008:](#)

GET needs to get going

A year ago, I wrote to the Bakersfield City Council and the Kern County Board of Supervisors about the lack of mass transit in this area, and how Golden Empire Transit had become a stealth public agency not in tune with the needs of greater Bakersfield. I also filed a complaint with the Kern County Grand Jury and was advised they have no responsibility for GET. If they do not, who does?

As usual, I heard nothing from either governmental body. A year later, GET's CEO was fired with absolutely no reason given -- and again the public is kept in the dark.

Today, gas prices are approaching \$4 per gallon, [air pollution is killing us](#) and GET still does not have a new CEO. We the people of Bakersfield continue to suffer. Why?

Someone needs to hold this public agency accountable for their total lack of action when it comes to the mass transit needs of Bakersfield. The federal government and Kern COG are literally

pouring hundreds of millions into the coffers of GET. Why is there no plan of action for the consumer/rider?

Why do the City Council and Board of Supervisors completely ignore this crisis?

I'm not asking, I'm now demanding action. Enough is enough. If GET does not want to step up to the plate and start providing low-cost mass transit, let's find somebody else to give out tax dollars to.

Donald F. Kurtz, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., May 21, 2008:](#)

Make traffic changes

In light of letters regarding traffic flow in Fresno, we all know that red lights sap fuel efficiency, increase smog and increase driving time.

Outdated sensors slow traffic by detecting a lull, then turning red -- just as cars arrive from the previous light. To prevent this aggravation, very expensive technology is needed, sensors of which would also detect increases in traffic, thus keeping the light green.

State-of-the art signal coordination is so sophisticated that at the same intersection, a motorist may encounter a left arrow at the beginning of the green light in the morning, then a left arrow at the end of the green later in the day. This system greatly decreases delays and stops.

Fresno is not alone in its traffic snarls, but does not approach the gridlock of the top four cities -- New York; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; and Chicago (fblink.com/wnj) -- since Fresno's freeway traffic is ranked sixth in the nation in commuter speed. It's our thoroughfares and streets that are antiquated.

We need big money to make this change, a change that would make us a great micropolitan city.

Kendall Bartela, Fresno