

Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, late Thursday, January 7, 2009

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 1/7/2010: 58 Moderate (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 1/8/2010: 62 Moderate (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 1/8/2010: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/7/2010: Wood burning prohibited

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/8/2010: Please burn cleanly

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Daily Air Quality Forecast

More information about the Daily Air Quality Forecast can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

More information about the Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>.

Loose Lips: We farm, you research weather

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, January 8, 2010

It's no secret the Merced County Farm Bureau is a champion of farmers and agriculture. You've seen its signs: "We Farm, You Eat."

But when it comes to the weather, that all-important factor in farming, its position is more like a weather vane stuck pointing south in the middle of a storm blowing north.

Apparently, the county bureau's national parent, the American Farm Bureau, isn't altogether sure that global climate change is happening. You'd think an organization looking out for Farmer John might want to keep an eye on the weather above Johnny Boy's fields, too. Apparently not.

On Jan. 7 a group of scientists sent a letter to the organization to address its "inaccurate and marginalized" position. The Farm Bureau folks must have been shaking in their loafers. There's nothing more frightening than a group of white-coated scientists beating their chests with beakers. "We are disappointed that the American Farm Bureau has chosen to officially deny the existence of human-caused climate change when the evidence of it has never been clearer," stated the letter.

While the American Farm Bureau couldn't be reached for comment, Lips called the local boys to see if they agreed with daddy. But they didn't have much to say on the matter.

"We don't really have a position at this point in time," said Peter Koch, president of the county's farm bureau.

He said they were still reviewing the legislation on climate change. When Lips pointed out that legislation on climate change and actual climate change are two different issues, the phone went dead. Koch couldn't be reached for further comment. Maybe it was the weather?

It looks as if turkeys aren't the only birds that can drown in the rain -- ostriches can, too.

Where there's fire

Meanwhile, Merced's new City Councilman Bill Blake has been causing some warming himself. He may be an ex-lawman, but that doesn't mean he doesn't break the rules sometimes.

Last week Blake was busted -- by the burn police. Blake had a fire blazing in his fireplace and it was a no-burn day. Tsk, tsk, tsk.

Blake said two men were outside of his house taking pictures. He went outside to ask what they were up to. They said they were documenting his illegal fire. So there.

Caught red-handed, Blake told the two men they might as well come into his house and get a shot of him and his grandson in front of the fireplace. They declined.

Blake wasn't coy about the infraction. "There's no excuse for it, I just didn't check the paper in time," he said. "Since then I've been dialing 1-800-SMOG info." (The Sun-Star's Web site publishes the wood-burning rules and air quality standards each weekday afternoon.)

Where there's smoke, there's fire. In this case, literally.

Industrial pollution in San Joaquin County

Stockton Record, Friday, January 8, 2010

Each year, the Environmental Protection Agency publishes pollution data for industrial facilities ? such as factories and power plants ? throughout the nation.

In San Joaquin County, 39 facilities were required to report how much pollution they released in 2008 to land, water or air. The data show a slight bump in emissions, from 372,094 pounds of pollution to 386,147 pounds. However, emissions over the past decade have declined sharply in part because of more rigorous environmental oversight and in part because of businesses closing.

In the database at right you can search for polluters in your city and note emissions from 2001-08. A few disclaimers before you begin:

- Not every facility in the county is required to report. Only those that emit a certain quantity of chemicals, heavy metals or other toxics must report.
- These facilities represent only a small portion of the region?s pollution problem. Throughout the San Joaquin Valley, officials estimate that 70 to 80 percent of pollution is caused by cars and trucks, not factories.
- The data, available in great detail on the EPA Web site, merely reports emissions totals. It does not attempt to determine whether the public has been exposed nor whether the facilities cited pose a significant public health risk. To learn more about possible risks in your neighborhood, click the link above take a look at The Record?s interactive map showing cancer risk due to air pollution throughout the city.

An EPA spokeswoman said the database, known as the Toxics Release Inventory, does arm communities with powerful information.?

Definitions

- All quantities are in pounds.
- Total releases: Total toxics released.
- Total air releases: Toxics released to air.
- Surface water discharges: Toxics released to water, including streams, rivers or lakes.
- Total onsite land releases: Total toxics released at the facility.
- Total offsite land releases: Total toxics released away from the facility.

Cleaning Bay Area's air may get harder to do

By Denis Cuff

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

The federal Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed a stricter public health standard for smog, a move that would force the Bay Area and many other urban regions to do more to reduce pollution from cars and industries.

Less than two years after the Bush administration tightened the smog standard slightly, the Obama administration said the standard is too weak to protect the public from ozone, the pungent gas in smog that causes eyes and lungs to burn and triggers asthma attacks.

For regions like the Bay Area that now fall short of meeting the existing smog standard, the stricter limit would mean more Spare the Air days in summer and more work to reduce auto and industrial pollution.

"We are going to have to work harder at cleaning the air," said Lisa Fasano, a spokeswoman for the nine-county Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "There is no single answer. As part of it, we will have to look at getting people out of their cars, and planning communities that make it easier to drive less."

Areas that fail to meet the federal standard can be penalized with loss of federal highway funds.

Hundreds of communities across the country that met the existing federal smog standard could find themselves in violation of the proposed one.

Even in Coastal California, in counties like Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo where ocean breezes help sweep the air clean, the new standard would not likely be met, the California Air Resources Board reported Thursday.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson proposed to change the standard from a current limit of 75 parts per billion of ozone to a new limit somewhere between 60 and 70 ppb, as recommended by a science panel that was overruled during the Bush years.

"EPA is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face," Jackson said. "Using the best science to strengthen these standards is long overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier."

The proposal is subject to a 60-day public review period before the EPA can enact it.

While it would cost billions of dollars meet the new standard, the new limit would save billions of dollars in emergency room visits, premature deaths and missed work and school days, the EPA said.

The proposed federal limit also would create an environmental milestone because for the first time the federal smog standard would be as strict as or stricter than California's smog standard of 70 ppb. The Bay Area and many other regions fall short of the state standard.

"We support the federal proposal," said Leo Kay, a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board. "We should have a level playing field on pollution control."

The state standard is considered a less potent regulatory club because highway funds are not withheld for failure to meet it — as is the case with the federal standard. However, air pollution districts in California must develop plans trying to reach the state standard.

Several environmental groups praised the proposed new federal standard as overdue, while some industrial and electrical power groups said it would be too costly.

New smog rule could be a surprise to some counties

By Noaki Schwartz, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald other papers, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

LOS ANGELES—Parts of the country that haven't worried about air pollution may soon be in the fight California has faced for decades: cleaning up smog.

Stricter rules proposed Thursday by the Obama administration could more than double the number of counties across the country that are in violation of clean air standards. That would

likely have a big impact on other parts of the nation since California already sets stringent standards for cars, ships and trucks.

"This kind of levels the playing field," said Leo Kay, spokesman for the California Air Resources Control Board. "In California we've set pretty tough air pollution standards for a long time now and this brings the rest of the country to the same level."

More than 300 counties—mainly in southern California, the Northeast and Gulf Coast—already violate the current, looser requirements adopted two years ago by the Bush administration.

For the first time, counties in Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, the Dakotas, Kansas, Minnesota and Iowa might be forced to find ways to clamp down on smog-forming emissions from industry and automobiles, or face government sanctions, most likely the loss of federal highway dollars.

The tighter standards will be costly but will ultimately save billions in avoided emergency room visits, premature deaths, and missed work and school days, the EPA said.

The proposal presents a range for the allowable concentration of ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, from 60 parts per billion to 70 parts, as recommended by scientists during the Bush administration. That's equivalent to a single tennis ball in an Olympic-sized swimming pool full of tennis balls.

EPA plans to select a specific figure within that range by August. Counties and states will then have up to 20 years to meet the new limits, depending on how severely they are out of compliance. They will have to submit plans for meeting the new limits by end of 2013 or early 2014.

Former President George W. Bush personally intervened in the issue after hearing complaints from electric utilities and other affected industries. His EPA set a standard of 75 parts per billion, stricter than one adopted in 1997 but not as strict as what scientist said was needed to protect public health.

Parts of the country that have already spent decades and millions of dollars fighting smog and are still struggling to meet existing thresholds questioned what more they could do.

"This EPA decision provides the illusion of greater protectiveness, but with no regard for cost, in terms of dollars or in terms of the freedoms that Americans are accustomed to," said Bryan W. Shaw, chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Texas, with its heavy industry, is home to Houston, one of the smoggiest cities in the nation.

Even in California, easily the country's smoggiest state, regions that have not had to worry about reducing air pollution could face penalties under tough new clean-air standards.

Should the Environmental Protection Agency adopt the strictest measures, the new rules would go beyond California's own tough smog standards causing nearly three-quarters of the state's 58 counties to be in violation.

This would include less-populated areas known for their natural beauty or crisp coastal air such as Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo.

The new rules would also push parts of the state already defined by smog—including Southern California, the smoggiest region of the U.S.—to find additional ozone emission reductions.

"Here in Los Angeles it's not going to be a radical change, but we're going to have to look at adopting additional measures," said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the state's South Coast Air Quality Management District, which regulates Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange and San Bernardino counties. "We're going to have to go back to the well."

EPA estimates meeting the new requirements will cost industry and motorists from \$19 billion to as much as \$90 billion a year by 2020. The Bush administration had put the cost of meeting its threshold at \$7.6 billion to \$8.5 billion a year.

Some industries reiterated their opposition to a stronger smog standard.

"We probably won't know for a couple of years just what utilities and other emissions sources will be required to do in response to a tighter ozone standard," said John Kinsman, a senior director at the Edison Electric Institute, an industry trade group. "Utilities already have made substantial reductions in ozone-related emissions."

Smog is a respiratory irritant that has been linked to asthma attacks and other illnesses. Global warming is expected to make it worse, since smog is created when emissions from cars, power and chemical plants, refineries and other factories mix in sunlight and heat.

Environmentalists endorsed the new plan.

"The fact is every time a standard is set, it appears difficult," said Martin Schlageter, interim executive director for the Coalition for Clean Air. "Until you're on that path it just seems scary ... but then we get on the path and start doing it and pretty soon we're nearing our goal."

EPA's tougher proposed smog rules will affect California

By Matt Weiser and Renee Schoof, Sacramento Bee
In the Fresno Bee, Friday, Jan 8, 2010

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed tougher controls on smog that are expected, over time, to improve air quality.

One result is that many parts of California will violate smog limits, even if their air quality is not any worse. Those areas could be required to tighten emission limits on some industries and impose new regulations on others.

"It means that a number of coastal and inland counties in California will fail to meet federal health standards for the first time," said Leo Kay, spokesman for the California Air Resources Board. "It also means we would have to collectively roll up our sleeves to find additional smog reduction projects."

The proposed regulation will cut emissions from industries and power plants that burn fossil fuels, vehicles, refineries and chemical plants.

The most common form of air pollution, smog is another name for ground-level ozone, created by chemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight.

Studies have linked smog to higher death rates.

Smoggy air can reduce lung function and inflame airways, causing shortness of breath, chest pain, coughing and wheezing. When smog levels are high, asthma attacks and other lung problems increase.

California does not impose its own ozone standard but does require vehicles to meet stricter emissions limits than federal standards.

The state will continue pressing hard for new diesel emission controls for vehicles, the air board's Kay said. California also plans tighter regulations in 2011 on farm harvesters, tractors and pumps.

Larry Greene, executive director of the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, declined to speculate on what new regulations the region will need to meet tighter ozone standards.

The Sacramento region falls short of existing ozone standards. Last year, it was tentatively granted an extension until 2018 to comply. Greene said the region will likely get an additional extension to meet the new standard, and new smog controls will be needed.

"It's certainly fair to say we have more work to do to reach this new standard," Greene said. "We are a health agency. If the federal government says public health is impacted, our obligation is to work hard to meet that standard."

The Bush administration strengthened the smog standard in 2008, but scientists, including an EPA advisory board, said that change was not enough.

An exact threshold is expected to be set by August, but the EPA's proposal now matches the advisory board's standard for health. It also adds a new standard that protects agriculture and forests.

The proposed "secondary standard" for forests is intended to address environmental effects caused by smog in places like Yosemite and Sequoia national parks, where ozone is killing or weakening trees.

"This is really the first time they've set a very different secondary standard," said Karen Magliano, chief of California's air quality data branch. "We don't know yet whether the regulations we've employed to meet the health standard would also address the secondary standard."

The EPA contemplates a health standard of 60 to 70 parts per billion of ozone measured over eight hours. The current standard is 75 parts per billion.

The American Lung Association and other organizations took the EPA to court, arguing that the 2008 smog level was inadequate. The Obama administration's EPA said in September that it would reconsider the standard.

Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, a nonpartisan environmental-watchdog group, called the announcement "a breath of fresh air from the government."

The American Petroleum Institute said there were no scientific grounds for toughening the standard and it "could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses, and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security."

John Kinsman, environment director at the Edison Electric Institute, an association of electric power companies, said in a statement: "We probably won't know for a couple of years just what utilities and other emissions sources will be required to do in response to a tighter ozone standard."

The EPA will hold a 60-day comment period and issue final standards by Aug. 31. States would be required to meet the new health standard by 2014 to 2031, depending on the severity of their pollution.

EPA smog proposal would put L.A. even more in the gray Pollution: City could be even bigger violator of new rules.

By Troy Anderson, Staff Writer
L.A. Daily News, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed the strictest limits ever on smog, a move that experts said could save up to 9,900 lives a year nationwide and cost businesses billions of dollars.

The new standards could put hundreds of counties nationwide in violation of federal air quality standards and would require many communities to find new, greener ways to reduce smog or potentially face the loss of federal revenues.

The Los Angeles region already frequently violates the current federal standards for smog. In 2008, the South Coast Air Quality Management District - representing Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties - had 116 days that violated the current standard.

"The AQMD strongly supports the more stringent ozone standard proposed by the federal EPA," AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood said. "The current ozone health standard is not protective enough of the health of the 16 million Southern Californians and that is particularly true for residents who have lung disease, asthma, heart disease, or are elderly or very young."

The violations have not resulted in the loss of federal revenues.

Smog, also known as ground-level ozone, forms when emissions from factories, power plants, landfills and vehicles react in the sun.

If approved, the new standard is expected to cost automakers, utilities, factories and landfills \$19 billion to \$90 billion to reduce emissions.

But, depending on what level the standard is finally set at, the proposal is expected to save \$13 billion to \$100 billion in health care costs.

Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch in Washington, D.C., said the proposed standards over time will lead to very significant improvements in air quality.

"Even though the air has improved in Southern California over the years because we've taken aggressive actions to reduce pollution, it's obviously still too high and this will help drive further progress over time," O'Donnell said.

In a prepared statement, the American Petroleum Institute said the action lacks scientific justification and "there is absolutely no basis for EPA to propose changing the ozone standards."

"To do so is an obvious politicization of the air quality standard setting process that could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security," the API said.

"Since 1990, the oil and gas industry has invested more than \$175 billion towards improving the environmental performance of its products, facilities and operations, and many of the investments in cleaner fuels will continue to improve air quality in the years ahead."

The EPA is proposing to replace the standard set by the Bush administration - 75 parts per billion measured over eight hours - with 60 to 70 parts per billion. From 1997 to 2008, the rule was 84 parts per billion.

By reducing the standard to 60 ppb, the EPA estimates the number of cases of chronic bronchitis, asthma and respiratory symptoms would drop by more than 140,000.

In making the recommendation, the EPA reviewed the materials that led to the decision in 2008 to set the standard at 75 ppb, including more than 1,700 scientific studies.

John Kinsman, a senior director at the Edison Electric Institute, a national association of investor-owned electric companies, representing about 70 percent of the U.S. power sector, said the association won't know for a couple of years what utilities and other emissions sources will be required to do in response to a tighter ozone standard.

"States will have to cast a very wide net when targeting sources for emissions cuts, in part because utilities already have made substantial reductions in ozone-related emissions," Kinsman said.

Smog is linked to many health problems, such as aggravation of asthma and the increased risk of premature death among those with heart or lung disease. Children are at the greatest risk from ozone, because their lungs are still developing and they are more likely than adults to have asthma.

On an annual basis, the California Air Resources Board estimates air pollution leads to 19,000 premature deaths and 280,000 cases of asthma and respiratory problems.

"Here in Southern California, 5,800 people die prematurely every year because of air pollution," said Martin Schlageter, interim executive director of the Coalition for Clean Air in Los Angeles. "We have the dirtiest air in the country. We've made a lot of progress in recent years, but that's because we started from such a dire problem."

Some of the possible ways to achieve the higher standards would include encouraging people to drive less by boosting the public transportation system, forcing factories to run cleaner, and requiring automakers to manufacture more efficient cars, Schlageter said.

The EPA will take public comment for 60 days on the proposed rule.

Government agencies will have up to 20 years to meet the new limits, depending on how far out of compliance they are currently.

Once the new limit is set, Atwood said, the AQMD and air districts throughout the state will revise their air quality plans.

"In terms of how much more we'll have to reduce, and what specific sources we'll have to reduce, that will have to be determined and developed in our next air quality plan," Atwood said.

Companies balk at EPA's smog-limit recommendations

By Brian Winter

USA Today, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

Utility companies, refineries and factories may have to spend up to \$90 billion to meet new smog standards proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday, a cost they say is too high in the current economy.

The EPA said those costs will be offset by up to \$100 billion in savings in health care as people breathe cleaner air, resulting in fewer cases of asthma, bronchitis and other smog-related symptoms.

"EPA is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face. Smog in the air we breathe poses a very serious health threat, especially to children," EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said in a statement. Smog "dirties our air, clouds our cities and drives up our health care costs across the country."

The EPA proposal would lower the permitted concentration of ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, to a level of between 60 parts per billion to 70 parts per billion. The exact level will be decided by the Obama administration later this year after hearings.

The previous standard, adopted in 2008 by President George W. Bush's administration, put the limit at 75 parts per billion.

Parts of Texas, California and the northeast coast have historically struggled most with heavy smog. However, an EPA statement showed that counties in states as diverse as Indiana, Oregon and Utah would be in violation of the tougher limits if they went into effect today.

Counties and states will have up to 20 years to meet the limits or face government sanctions, most likely the loss of federal highway dollars. That could force power plants, oil producers and others to find new ways to cut emissions.

The American Petroleum Institute, which represents energy companies, said there was "no basis" for the EPA decision. In a statement, it said the change "could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security."

The "proposal, if finalized, will keep unemployment high and put another Washington-based regulation in the way of economic recovery," Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., said in a statement.

Frank O'Donnell, president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch, said the EPA decision has "no impact on today's recession" because companies will have so much time to meet the new standards.

"Cleaning up pollution creates jobs rather than taking them away," O'Donnell said.

He also said the new rules would result in fewer premature deaths and missed days of work that can be caused by high smog levels.

"It's pretty easy to argue there's a net economic benefit to cleaning up the air," O'Donnell said.

Stricter new smog limit would hit rural areas, too

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of communities far from congested highways and belching smokestacks could soon join big cities and industrial corridors in violation of stricter limits on lung-damaging smog proposed Thursday by the Obama administration.

Costs of compliance could be in the tens of billions of dollars, but the government said the rules would save other billions - as well as lives - in the long run.

More than 300 counties - mainly in southern California, the Northeast and Gulf Coast - already violate the current, looser requirements adopted two years ago by the Bush administration and will find it even harder to reduce smog-forming pollution enough to comply with the law.

The new limits being considered by the Environmental Protection Agency could more than double the number of counties in violation and reach places like California's wine country in Napa Valley and rural Trego County, Kan., and its 3,000 residents.

For the first time, counties in Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, the Dakotas, Kansas, Minnesota and Iowa might be forced to find ways to clamp down on smog-forming emissions from industry and automobiles, or face government sanctions, most likely the loss of federal highway dollars.

The tighter standards, though costly to implement, will ultimately save billions in avoided emergency room visits, premature deaths, and missed work and school days, the EPA said.

"EPA is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face," said agency administrator Lisa Jackson. "Using the best science to strengthen these standards is long overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier."

The proposal presents a range for the allowable concentration of ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, from 60 parts per billion to 70 parts, as recommended by scientists during the Bush administration. That's equivalent to a single tennis ball in an Olympic-sized swimming pool full of tennis balls.

EPA plans to select a specific figure within that range by August. Counties and states will then have up to 20 years to meet the new limits, depending on how severely they are out of compliance. They will have to submit plans for meeting the new limits by end of 2013 or early 2014.

Former President George W. Bush personally intervened in the issue after hearing complaints from electric utilities and other affected industries. His EPA set a standard of 75 parts per billion, stricter than one adopted in 1997 but not as strict as what scientist said was needed to protect public health.

Some of those same industries reiterated their opposition Thursday to a stronger smog standard.

"We probably won't know for a couple of years just what utilities and other emissions sources will be required to do in response to a tighter ozone standard," said John Kinsman, a senior director at the Edison Electric Institute, an industry trade group. "Utilities already have made substantial reductions in ozone-related emissions."

Parts of the country that have already spent decades and millions of dollars fighting smog and are still struggling to meet existing thresholds questioned what more they could do. They've already cut pollution from the easier sources, by increasing monitoring and enforcement and requiring car emissions tests.

"This EPA decision provides the illusion of greater protectiveness, but with no regard for cost, in terms of dollars or in terms of the freedoms that Americans are accustomed to," said Bryan W. Shaw, chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Texas, with its heavy industry, is home to Houston, one of the smoggiest cities in the nation.

Environmentalists endorsed the new plan. "If EPA follows through, it will mean significantly cleaner air and better health protection," said Frank O'Donnell, president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch.

EPA estimates meeting the new requirements will cost industry and motorists from \$19 billion to as much as \$90 billion a year by 2020. The Bush administration had put the cost of meeting its threshold at \$7.6 billion to \$8.5 billion a year.

The new regulations would mean more controls on large industrial facilities, plus regulating smaller facilities and sources. New federal regulations in the works to improve car and truck fuel economy and curb global warming pollution at large factories will also help communities meet any new standards, the EPA said.

Smog is a respiratory irritant that has been linked to asthma attacks and other illnesses. Global warming is expected to make it worse, since smog is created when emissions from cars, power and chemical plants, refineries and other factories mix in sunlight and heat.

But some parts of the country that could be found in violation of the proposed standards have very few cars and little industry. In places like these, smog-forming pollution is being blown in from hundreds of miles away.

Charlene Neish, director of Trego County Economic Development, moved to the rural county in western Kansas a decade ago from Phoenix to escape big city problems like traffic and air pollution. Neish was shocked that her county, which has about nine people per square mile and virtually no industry, made the list.

"There is absolutely nothing in Trego County," Neish said. "We have wide open spaces and fresh air."

In Utah, six more counties would join the three in violation of the Bush standard.

Cheryl Heying, director of Utah's Division of Air Quality, said the change will not only require additional reductions in vehicle and industrial emissions, but a regional focus on other contributors such as wildfire smoke and offshore shipping.

"That doesn't mean we're just going to point our finger at everyone else, but if we don't cooperate, we're never going to get it done," Heying said.

EPA replacing Bush smog limit with stricter rule

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, O.C. Register and other papers, Thursday, January 7, 2010

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed stricter health standards for smog, replacing a Bush-era limit that ran counter to scientific recommendations.

The new limits - which are presented as a range - will likely put hundreds more counties nationwide in violation, a designation that will require them to find additional ways to clamp down on pollution or face government sanctions, most likely the loss of federal highway dollars.

The tighter standards will cost tens of billions of dollars to implement, but will ultimately save billions in avoided emergency room visits, premature deaths, and missed work and school days, the EPA said.

The proposed range was what scientists had recommended during the Bush administration. However, former President George W. Bush personally intervened and set the standard above what was advised after protests from electric utilities and other industries. The Bush standard was still stricter than the previous smog standard set in 1997.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said in a statement Thursday that science, this time around, had been followed.

"EPA is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face," Jackson said. "Using the best science to strengthen these standards is long overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier."

The Obama administration last year had indicated it planned to scrap the Bush smog limits, when it asked a federal judge to stay a lawsuit challenging the March 2008 standards brought by 11 states and environmental groups.

Smog is a respiratory irritant that has been linked to asthma attacks and other respiratory illnesses. It is formed when emissions from burning gasoline, power and chemical plants, refineries and other factories mix in sunlight.

While smog has been a long-term problem in parts of Texas, California, and along the northeast Coast, the new standards could affect counties in Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, the Dakotas, Kansas, Minnesota and Iowa for the first time based on EPA data.

Environmentalists immediately endorsed the decision. "If EPA follows through, it will mean significantly cleaner air and better health protection," said Frank O'Donnell, president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch.

Representatives of the oil and gas industry, which said they have already invested \$175 billion toward environmental improvements, were quick to say the proposal lacked "scientific justification."

"There is absolutely no basis for EPA to propose changing the ozone standards promulgated by the EPA Administrator in 2008," the American Petroleum Institute said in a statement. "To do so is an obvious politicization of the air quality standard setting process that could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security."

The EPA proposal presents a range for the allowable concentration of ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, from 60 parts per billion to 70 parts per billion. That's equivalent to a single tennis ball in an Olympic-sized swimming pool full of tennis balls. EPA will select a specific figure within that range later this year.

The Bush standard adopted in 2008 was 75 parts per billion. Since 1997, it had been 84 parts per billion.

The stricter limit comes with additional costs, from \$19 billion up to \$90 billion a year by 2020, according to EPA. The Bush administration had put the cost to industry and drivers to meet its standard at between \$7.6 billion to \$8.5 billion a year.

Counties and states will have up to 20 years to meet the new limits, depending on how severely they are out of compliance. They will have to submit plans for meeting the new limits by end of 2013 or early 2014.

EPA proposes nation's strictest smog limits ever

It wants to toughen the ozone limit adopted in 2008 by cracking down further on vehicles, power plants, factories and landfills. Much of the U.S. could then be in violation of federal regulations.

By Jim Tankersley and Margot Roosevelt, staff writers
L.A. Times, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

Reporting from Los Angeles and Washington - The Environmental Protection Agency proposed the nation's strictest-ever smog limits Thursday, a move that could put large parts of California and other states in violation of federal air quality regulations.

The EPA proposed allowing a ground-level ozone concentration of between 60 and 70 parts per billion, down from the 75-ppb standard adopted under President George W. Bush in 2008.

That means cracking down further on the emissions from cars, trucks, power plants, factories and landfills. The emissions bake in sunlight and form smog.

"All Californians should applaud the crackdown, given overwhelming scientific evidence of the lung damage and premature deaths linked to ozone," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, a spokeswoman for the American Lung Assn. in California.

Obama administration officials and environmental groups say the new standard aligns with the level scientists say is needed to safeguard against increased respiratory diseases, particularly in children and the elderly.

Though complying with the standards could cost up to \$90 billion nationwide, according to the EPA, it could also save \$100 billion in health costs over time.

A 65-ppb standard -- the middle of the proposed acceptable range -- would avert 1,700 to 5,100 premature deaths nationwide in 2020 compared with the 75-ppb standard, the EPA estimates. The agency projects the stricter standard would also prevent an additional 26,000 cases of aggravated asthma compared with the Bush-era standard, and more than a million cases of missed work or school.

In California, which harbors some of the nation's dirtiest air, an estimated 19,000 people die prematurely each year as a result of pollution from ozone and particulates. Of those, about 6,500 are in the Los Angeles area.

No urban area of California meets even the 1997 federal standard of 80 parts per billion. If states fail to meet federal standards, the government can withhold highway funding. Although such punishment is rare, "it's the hammer that drives planning at the state level," Holmes-Gen said.

Besides ratcheting up pressure on highly polluted parts of Southern California and the Central Valley, the revised standard would require several new areas to take measures to slash air pollution, including parts of the northern Sacramento Valley and the Central Coast that have been in compliance under the previous standards.

Unlike Eastern and Midwestern states, where much of the pollution comes from coal-fired power plants, three-quarters of California's ozone-forming emissions are from mobile sources such as cars, trucks, trains, ships, planes and construction equipment.

In the last three years, the state has adopted the nation's strictest rules to control pollution from diesel engines in trucks and construction equipment, which emit nitrogen oxides, a precursor to smog.

The EPA's new standard could force the state to crack down further on vehicle pollution, on refineries and power plants, and even on volatile organic compounds coming from consumer products such as hair spray. Air districts also would be likely to increase efforts to control sprawl and force more concentrated land development. Statewide, the number of car trips has been growing faster than the population.

"This is going to require us to look for new solutions," said Leo Kay, a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board. "On the ground we will be looking for where we can tighten the screws."

As for how exactly that will be done, he acknowledged, "We don't have all the answers yet."

The EPA also proposed setting a "secondary standard" to protect plants and trees from repeated smog exposure during growing season, a move environmentalists said would help national parks, forests and sensitive ecosystems. Trees and other vegetation absorb heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, making them an important check against global warming.

In announcing the proposals, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said the agency was "stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face. . . . Using the best science to strengthen these standards is a long-overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier."

Environmentalists praised the agency for proposing regulations that match the unanimous recommendations of an EPA science advisory committee.

"We applaud EPA for listening to health professionals and scientists and proposing a rule that provides real protection for millions of people," said Bruce Nilles, director of the Sierra Club's

Beyond Coal campaign, adding, "This rule will help ensure that all major sources of pollution get cleaned up."

Industry groups warned that the regulations would increase business costs.

The new standard "lacks scientific justification," the American Petroleum Institute charged, calling it "an obvious politicization of the air-quality-standard-setting process that could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security."

The proposal now enters a public comment phase, which will include open hearings next month in Arlington, Va., Houston and Sacramento before the EPA makes its final decision.

E.P.A. Seeks Stricter Rules to Curb Smog

By John M. Broder, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Thursday, Jan. 7, 2010

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed a stricter standard for smog-causing pollutants that would bring substantial health benefits to millions of Americans while imposing large costs on industry and local governments.

The standard would replace one set by the Bush administration in March 2008, which has been challenged in court by state officials and environmental advocates as too weak to adequately protect human health and the environment.

The Obama administration's proposal sets a primary standard for ground-level ozone of no more than 0.060 to 0.070 parts per million, to be phased in over two decades. Regions with the worst smog pollution, including much of the Northeast, Southern and Central California and the Chicago and Houston areas, would have more time than other areas to come into compliance.

The new rule would replace the standard of 0.075 parts per million imposed by the Bush administration over the objection of an E.P.A. scientific panel, which wanted a tighter limit. The previous standard of 0.084 parts per million was set in 1997 by the Clinton administration.

The Obama administration is also proposing a secondary smog standard that would vary with the seasons to protect plants and trees from repeated exposure.

The agency estimated that complying with the new standard would cost \$19 billion to \$90 billion a year by 2020, to be largely borne by manufacturers, oil refiners and utilities. But the agency said that those costs would be offset by the benefits to human health, which it valued at \$13 billion to \$100 billion a year in the same period.

The new standard would force hundreds of counties that meet the current law to take costly steps to get back into compliance. Under the current standard of 0.075 parts per million, 322 counties of the 675 that monitor ozone levels are out of compliance. If the 0.070 limit is adopted, 515 counties would be out of compliance. Only 15 of the 675 monitored counties now meet the 0.060 standard.

In areas that do not meet the new standards, state and local governments will have to impose regulations to reduce the pollutants that produce smog, using technologies that have already cut such emissions from smokestacks, tailpipes and manufacturing plants, or new technology as yet uninvented. The nearly 40-year history of the Clean Air Act has shown that science — and the threat of costly penalties — have given industry the tools and incentive to find ways to cut ozone-producing gases.

Penalties for noncompliance include fines and loss of federal highway financing.

Agency analysts project that if the stricter standard is adopted, as many as 12,000 premature deaths per year from heart or lung diseases could be avoided, along with thousands of cases of bronchitis, asthma and nonfatal heart attacks.

"E.P.A. is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face," Lisa P. Jackson, the agency's administrator, said in a statement. "Smog in the air we breathe poses a very serious health threat, especially to children and individuals suffering from asthma and lung disease. It dirties our air, clouds our cities and drives up our health care costs across the country."

Smog or ground-level ozone is not emitted by a single source, but is, according to the E.P.A., formed by a reaction of nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide and methane in the presence of sunlight. The main sources of these pollutants are power plants and factories, fumes from volatile solvents, vehicles emissions and gasoline vapors. Smog is worse in the summer because of heat and sunlight, and can travel hundreds of miles from its source and affect small towns, rural communities and wilderness areas.

The leader of an association of air-quality enforcement agencies welcomed the proposal.

"This is exactly what states and localities have advocated for 30 years," said S. William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies. "This will not be easy to achieve, whichever number the E.P.A. ultimately chooses, but it's a decision that will ensure that public health is protected with an adequate margin of safety."

Mr. Becker also said that the projected costs of compliance were likely to be lower than the agency's estimate. "And the benefits will likely trump the costs many times over," he said.

The American Petroleum Institute, the oil companies' chief lobby, criticized the proposal as costly and likely to be ineffective. The group said there was no new scientific basis for changing the standard set at the end of the Bush administration.

"To do so is an obvious politicization of the air-quality standard-setting process that could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security," the group said in a statement issued minutes after the agency's announcement.

The trade association for electric utilities, the Edison Electric Institute, reacted warily.

"We probably won't know for a couple of years just what utilities and other emissions sources will be required to do in response to a tighter ozone standard," said John Kinsman, the institute's senior director for the environment. "States will have to cast a very wide net when targeting sources for emissions cuts, in part because utilities already have made substantial reductions in ozone-related emissions."

The E.P.A. will take public comment on the proposal for 60 days and expects to issue a final rule in August with a single standard between 0.060 and 0.070 parts per million. By the end of 2013, states must submit plans showing how areas that do not attain the new standard will be brought into compliance. The new rules would be phased in between 2014 and 2031, with deadlines depending on how dirty the air is in a given region.

Frank O'Donnell of Clean Air Watch, an advocacy group, said that the ozone rule was the most significant environmental action the Obama administration was likely to take this year.

"This will ultimately mean cleaner air all across America," Mr. O'Donnell said. "This is going to drive pollution control into the next decade and beyond."

Perry, TCEQ rip proposed smog limits

By John McFarland, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

DALLAS—Gov. Rick Perry and state environmental regulators on Thursday ripped a federal proposal to cut down on smog, saying it could kill jobs and force Texans to limit such everyday activities as mowing lawns or using drive-throughs.

While environmental groups were cheering the proposal as long overdue in the state with some of the most polluted air in the nation, Perry and the leaders of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality were quick to criticize it.

The EPA proposed the new standard Thursday, replacing a Bush-era limit that ran counter to scientific recommendations. While the standard would be expensive to implement, the EPA said it would save billions in costs related to smog-related illnesses and deaths.

Perry, a longtime critic of the Environmental Protection Agency who's backed by industry groups, said the Obama administration is relying on "bad science" while endangering Texas jobs with no guarantee public health will be protected.

"The EPA's only consistent target has been the target on the backs of Texas workers and taxpayers," Perry said in a statement.

Environmental Protection Agency spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said Perry would have a chance to discuss his opposition during a public hearing in Houston on Feb. 2.

"Ground level ozone is a severe problem in many communities in Texas, leading to more deaths, emergency room visits and lost work and school days," Gilfillan said in a written statement.

TCEQ Chairman Bryan Shaw said the reduction would slam Texas' heavy industries and could force them to flee the state. He also said the standard would force Texas to look for drastic ways to cut pollution, such as limiting drive-throughs, idling of cars and daytime baseball games.

"We've been very active in getting all the low-hanging fruit," Shaw said. "We're really running into a brick wall."

The limits would put dozens of Texas counties in violation of the Clean Air Act.

The Houston and Dallas areas—which have never met the requirements for ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog—will have a tougher time complying. Other metro areas will also find themselves out of compliance, too, including San Antonio, Austin, El Paso and Tyler. Counties that don't get into compliance could face sanctions such as cuts to highway funding.

Environmentalists were excited about the idea of cleaning up the air in Texas, which they say has been polluted during years of lax oversight by the TCEQ.

"This is the way the Clean Air Act is designed," said Neil Carman, an air specialist with the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club. "As we get more scientific evidence, we have to improve the standards."

Texas has more coal-fired power plants, oil refineries and chemical plants than any other state, and there's also a rapidly growing population that means many more cars on the road. Power plants are the biggest industrial source of ozone-forming pollutants, and a dozen or so new ones are proposed or under construction in Texas.

"It's going to be expensive, but we're going to have to make those modifications and meet those standards," said John Fainter, president of the Association of Electric Companies of Texas. "Ultimately, the consumer's going to have to bear the burden of that."

Tom "Smitty" Smith, director of Public Citizen's Texas office, said TCEQ had been threatening to implement measures to curb air pollution for years, but had never done it.

"Industry is not going to leave Texas and go to any other state because the same rules will apply around the country," Smith told the AP.

The EPA proposal presents a range for the allowable concentration of ozone from 60 parts per billion to 70 parts, as recommended by scientists during the Bush administration. The current limit is 75 parts per billion. EPA plans to select a specific figure by August.

Prius No. 1 in Japan sales as green interest grows

By YURI KAGEYAMA - AP Business Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, January 8, 2010

TOKYO -- The Toyota Prius is so sought after in Japan it is the first gasoline-electric hybrid vehicle to top annual sales, with buyers willing to wait six months for deliveries of the curvaceous "green" car

The Prius has caught on in the U.S. and other parts of the world as well, although not with quite the same passionate intensity as it has in Japan, Toyota Motor Corp.'s home market.

Its success underlines the shift among consumers to embrace green auto technology that appears to go beyond a simple moneysaving response to the ups and downs of gasoline prices.

But Toyota can also expect competition to heat up this year, with rivals readying fuel-efficient models, including the Chevrolet Volt electric vehicle from Detroit-based General Motors Co.

The Japan Automobile Dealers Association said Friday that Toyota Motor Corp.'s Prius was No. 1 in its ranking of sales by vehicle models - with 208,876 Prius cars sold in 2009, nearly three times the numbers sold the previous year.

Ritsuko Murosaki is one proud owner.

"I was a bit worried about its power but once I got used to it, it is so quiet and it drives great," said the 45-year-old secretary who drives to work in central Tokyo from the suburb of Yokohama. "When you stop at a traffic light, you can experience zero CO2 emissions because there's no idling."

Globally, Prius sales last year rose 41 percent to about 404,000 vehicles from the previous year, according to Toyota. Prius sales in North America fell 12 percent to 144,300 last year, but that was amid a big overall auto slump, and sales are expected to recover this year.

In Japan, the Prius easily outsold the No. 2 hybrid, the Honda Insight, at 93,283 for the year, and ranking fifth in overall Japan sales. Coming in second for overall car sales was Honda Motor Co.'s Fit, followed by the Toyota Vitz. Neither are hybrids but both are small and fuel efficient models.

Green models have gotten a huge lift this year in Japan from a government cash-for-clunkers program and tax breaks, aimed at boosting sales during a slowdown that has seriously hurt Japanese automakers.

The Prius has been the biggest beneficiary of the policy.

Hybrid sales got a perk from the cash-for-clunkers program in the U.S., but that only lasted about a month. The program in Japan is being extended by a half-year through September.

"The Prius is just the talk of the town," said Hiroyuki Naito, a Tokyo Toyota dealer, who could barely control his glee over a fresh flurry of orders after the incentives were extended. "The model appeals to a wide range of people. Some are switching from import models, while others are switching from luxury models."

Hybrid sales already make up about 10 percent of new vehicle sales in Japan. Green Car Congress, which researches and compiles reports on green technology, said hybrids had a 2.8 percent share of new vehicle sales in the U.S. last year.

"The Prius is proving to be the solitary runaway winner," said Mamoru Katou, auto analyst with Tokai Tokyo Research.

A model that sells 20,000 a month in Japan is rare, said Katou, adding that he expects the Prius to sell in even bigger numbers in 2010 in Japan.

Pricing has been a big reason for its success, according to Katou. That value-for-the money perception is unlikely to be threatened until the arrival of Honda's hybrid Fit in Japan expected later this year, he said.

Honda has not yet disclosed overseas sales plans for the hybrid Fit.

In an effort to ride out the competition of rivals, especially the Insight, Toyota has kept prices down on the Prius - starting at \$22,000, unchanged from the base price for the 2009 model, and a more basic U.S. model starting at \$21,000. In Japan, the Prius starts at 2.05 million yen, or about \$22,000.

Over the longer term, automakers are planning green models for markets like China and India, attracted by the prospect of burgeoning middle classes in these emerging economic superpowers.

Toyota already makes the Prius in China, the only other nation besides Japan where it manufactures the Prius. And earlier this week, it announced it will start selling the Prius in India this year.

The Prius was the top-selling model in Japan for every month from May last year - the month when an upgraded version hit showrooms.

The Prius, now in its third generation since its 1997 introduction, is the best-selling gas-electric hybrid in the world, racking up a cumulative 1.6 million units sold so far, according to Toyota.

Hybrids, by going back and forth between a gasoline engine and electric motor, tend to offer better mileage in slow-speed and stop-and-go driving that's common in crowded cities.

The new Prius gets a combined 50 miles per gallon, compared with 46 mpg for the 2009 model, according to Toyota. It does even better under Japanese government testing standards, at 38 kilometers per liter, which converts to 90 miles per gallon.

Japan's auto market has been stagnant for decades, and the perk from hybrid sales is a rare bright spot. Auto sales in Japan declined to their lowest level in 38 years last year, slipping 9 percent to 2.9 million vehicles.

Toyota has been hammered by the global slump, and reported a 437 billion yen loss, its worst ever in its seven-decade history, for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2009. It expects to stay in the red for the fiscal year through March 2010, projecting a 200 billion yen (\$2.2 billion) loss, but wants to avoid three straight years of losses.

And so the Prius success is a godsend.

"The numbers speak for themselves," said Toyota spokesman Paul Nolasco in Tokyo. "The Prius represents the ideal package people in Japan are looking for in terms of environmental and driving performance."

Shell clears another offshore drilling hurdle

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—Shell oil company has cleared another hurdle in its quest to explore for oil off Alaska's northwest coast.

Alaska Sen. Mark Begich said Thursday that the Environmental Protection Agency approved Shell's air quality permit for exploration in the Chukchi Sea. The permit is one of the last administrative steps needed before final approval for drilling in the Chukchi is granted.

Shell plans to have up to three exploratory wells operating there next summer.

A public comment period on the matter ends Feb. 17.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010:](#)

Burning on holidays

I couldn't agree more with Bill Rogers Jan. 1 letter regarding the wood-burning restrictions on Christmas. I'd also add Thanksgiving and New Year's Day to the list.

Wouldn't it be a great way for air district leaders to build public support of wood-burning restrictions if they would exempt Christmas and Thanksgiving, and even New Years, except for extreme air quality conditions. More people would accept the other days where a warm, cozy and inviting family fire is prohibited. I'd even be OK with the district trading during the season a burn day for a non-burn day if that's what's necessary. But on the three days mentioned above, for 2009, the air quality was good.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010:](#)

A Push for Cleaner Air

Between them, the Obama administration and the federal courts have reversed most of the Bush administration's wrongheaded environmental regulations. But a few bad rules linger on the books, among them an inadequate health standard governing harmful ozone, which most people call smog.

Mr. Obama's Environmental Protection Agency is now proposing to get rid of this rule and replace it with a stronger standard. This would result in cleaner air and better health for millions of Americans.

Ozone is a photochemical reaction that occurs when sunlight mixes with nitrogen oxides and other pollutants from power plants, vehicles, refineries and industrial facilities. It poses a serious health threat, especially in children and people suffering from asthma and lung disease, and is responsible for respiratory-related emergency room visits, hospitalizations and premature deaths.

Apart from their health advantages, the new rules proposed reflect the administration's effort to restore science, as opposed to politics, to its rightful place in environmental rule-making. In 2008, the E.P.A.'s independent board of scientific advisers unanimously recommended that the ozone standards be set at somewhere between 0.060 and 0.070 parts per million.

Responding, in part, to industry pressure, the Bush administration imposed a less exacting and less protective standard of 0.075 parts per million. The new proposal, to be issued after a 60-day comment period, is expected to be somewhere in the range originally proposed by the scientific panel.

Some big polluters, including the oil companies, are likely to resist since the new standards would require investments in stronger pollution controls on power plants, refineries and chemical plants. The standards could also provide the impetus for cleaner vehicles.

Lisa Jackson, the E.P.A.'s administrator, should stick to her guns. When Carol Browner, then the administrator, first tightened health standards for smog and other pollutants like soot in 1997, industry groups rose up as one, predicting bankruptcy. But technology almost always catches up. In the end, costs are a fraction of the original claims, and the air is a lot cleaner.

[O.C. Register blog, Thursday, Jan. 7, 2010:](#)

Local regulators back tightened EPA smog standards

posted by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed a tightening of standards Thursday for ground-level ozone, the main component of smog, and regional smog regulators say they support the effort. Read Associated Press story.

The standards would be more stringent than under the Bush administration, but are in line with what scientists recommended at the time.

The proposed new standard for ozone would be 60-70 parts per billion in the air we breathe. The standard adopted by Bush in 2008 was 75 parts per billion.

Such a standard would likely require increased smog regulation in coastal Southern California, including Orange County, said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District — especially pollution from autos and other "mobile sources."

"AQMD strongly supports EPA's proposal for a more stringent and health-protective ozone standard," Atwood wrote in an e-mail Thursday. "The best science clearly demonstrates that the current ozone standard does not adequately protect Southland residents from the harmful effects of smog."

At 88 parts per billion, Orange County's ozone level is in violation of both the existing standard and the one proposed by EPA.

[Letters to the Oakland Tribune, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010:](#)

Clean up trucks

I was shocked to read that the state has allowed truckers to be in noncompliance with a state law.

It's not as if this law came up overnight. The cleanup started on buses 20 years ago, and the trucking industry should have known it would eventually be applied to them.

Truckers had at least two years to get their act together from when the recent law was passed. Why should the asthmatic children and adults of West Oakland continue to be subjected to particulates that legally they should now be protected from?

This decision is another example of how the U.S. is stalling on global warming and why this country is no longer a leader. If we are to cut air pollution, it's not only the trucks that must work cleaner, much trade should also be reduced.

Americans' rampant consumerism and waste has not brought us a higher living standard but left us with problems that need immediate attention. Saving the planet will not just require Band-Aids on problems, but a whole shift in consciousness and understanding of how precious life is and how our society must develop values which support air, water and a sustainable food source.

Caroline Kim, Oakland

Finding money

This is regarding the Jan. 5 article, "Truckers scramble to get piece of new grant:"

My family has been in the trucking business in the Bay Area for 65 years. We do not service the port or intermodal yards because of the abuse and poor pay that these drivers are given by the steamship companies and the railroads.

We, as an industry, support each other because all of us are impacted by the new California Air Resources Board regulations and certainly in the Bay Area, the proposed toll increases proposed by the MTC.

What is hard to believe is that in the article it is stated that an "extra \$11 million has been found" to help truckers buy retrofit units.

How does one just find \$11 million? Was it in the bottom of someone's desk drawer? Was it in someone's coat pocket?

In today's environment with people losing jobs, businesses closing down and more impending tax increases, how much confidence can the populace have in government agencies when it takes Mayor Ron Dellums to "help" them find an extra \$11 million?

The state will have a \$21 billion budget shortfall over the next 18 months, Arnold goes on "60 Minutes" to say it will take \$40 billion to fix the water system in the Delta when the state doesn't have the money — yet, either the Bay Area Air Quality Management District or some other government agency finds \$11 million.

We should be embarrassed by the way our government officials are handling today's economic crisis and the burden they are putting on the public; so with the trucking industry and ever other business in this state, we will continue to mire in economic chaos.

John Yandell, Oakland

[Letter to the Valley Times, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010:](#)

'Militia' district

My wife thought perhaps I was the only one complaining. My thanks to writers Gino Scolari and Dave Newbry on the topic of the Bay Area Air Quality "Militia" District. Spare the Air days this year haven't been about clean air (in my opinion), but rather control and behavior modification. No matter what has been published as "science" on this topic to believe that on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day these two days presented more air hazards than the preceding or succeeding days is absolutely absurd.

On Thanksgiving Day, I told my family that the "Air Gestapo" would in fact declare a nonburning day on Christmas. And it did. What is worse is that California society is retrogressing to Germany 1930s and '40s with the more than 200 calls by neighbors turning in neighbors. What I would like to know is what right do this nonelected people have in governing and controlling our lives and who (I sure didn't) gave them those rights?

It is time for California to come back to some sanity. The draconian environmental edicts and regulations coming from nonelected bureaucracies are making our state almost impossible to live and thrive in.

Larry M. Geiger, Danville