

EPA strengthens Valley smog regs

By Eiji Yamashita, staff writer

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, April 15, 2010

Federal officials took a major step toward tougher reductions in emissions from industrial sources Tuesday by giving the Valley air regulator a green light to impose tighter requirements that could become the model for combating pollution linked to smog.

The U.S. EPA granted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's longstanding request for a waiver to allow it to pursue more stringent air pollution rules than required by federal government.

Tuesday's action cleared the way to implement a September 2006 Valley district law requiring industrial polluters emitting more than 10 tons of ozone precursors each year to undergo a permit process and comply with pollution offset requirements. Currently, only those emitting more than 25 tons per year of pollutants trigger those requirements.

"Air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is consistently among the worst in the nation," said Deborah Jordan, director of the air division for the EPA's Pacific Southwest region, in a statement. "New and modified facilities will now be subject to the most stringent requirements, which will contribute to the health of our communities."

Breathing ozone-polluted air can cause lung damage and aggravate asthma or other respiratory conditions.

EPA officials say the tightening of the rule will affect about 350 businesses in the Valley, but Valley air officials said it's nothing new to area businesses.

The action is part of an ongoing effort to improve air quality in the Valley, which is designated as an extreme nonattainment area for ozone or smog. The Valley air district has already been implementing stricter air emission rules over the last several years, including tough rules on dairies and farming operations.

"What the EPA really did was approve a rule that we adopted back in 2006. Many of those requirements have already been in place since then ...," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the Valley air district. "This is not so much a new requirement for Valley businesses, but the EPA's action now incorporates our local rule into the Federal Register, so that makes it enforceable by the federal government and by private citizens."

The rule change will take effect 30 days after the publication in the Federal Register.

Tuesday's EPA action comes two weeks after the agency proposed reversing Bush administration policy changes to allow permit streamlining. The "aggregation" policy Bush adopted just before his departure from the Oval Office for the EPA's pre-construction permitting program directed polluters and regulators to combine emissions from construction projects only if they are substantially related.

The Obama EPA is concerned such a policy change would make the agency's permitting process less effective, allowing facilities to increase emissions without a thorough review.

The EPA is taking public comments for another two weeks on abandoning the Bush changes.

Hay fire believed to be cause of stink in Bakersfield

By Jason Kotowski, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, April 15, 2010

Rotten eggs? Natural gas? Even, is it possible, marijuana?

No, the stench that pervaded Bakersfield Wednesday morning was apparently nothing more than the smell of burning hay. At least, that's the only explanation air regulators and firefighters had.

Kern County Fire Department spokesman Sean Collins said there was a hay fire on East Panama Lane and South Fairfax Road on Monday. It's possible that smoke from the fire was slowly spreading through Bakersfield, he said.

Firefighters were sent back to the site Wednesday morning to check it out, and the owner of the property was taking care of it, Collins said.

Brenda Turner, outreach and communications representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said they had received numerous calls regarding the smell. She said Wednesday morning that an inspector had been at the dairy where the fire happened and the hay was continuing to smolder.

Turner said the dairy owner apparently put some wet manure on the hay. She said there are no health risks she's aware of, but if people are concerned the best thing to do is stay indoors.

Local residents mostly said the stink reminded them of marijuana.

Justin Faulkenberry, 20, said he was driving downtown around noon and was convinced he was smelling pot. He was surprised there was such a strong smell of what he was sure was marijuana because there's a strong police presence downtown.

Bakersfield College student Nicole Lee, 20, was in a BC parking lot when she got a strong whiff of what she thought was marijuana.

"A skunk doesn't even smell that strong," Lee said.

David Balderas said the stench was so strong he thought a marijuana field must be burning.

There was one man, however, who said he didn't notice a marijuana smell. Louis Orchard thought he smelled sewage, but he said that's nothing new.

"It always smells like a sewer downtown," he said.

'I think I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree'

Turlock celebrates Arbor Day

Turlock Journal Wed., April 14, 2010

Trees play an important role in the community. From the shade they provide to their role in making the Valley's air cleaner, trees are an essential element of local landscape and this is why the City of Turlock celebrates National Arbor Day in a big way.

For the past 19 years, the City of Turlock has been planting trees around town as part of Arbor Day, while fulfilling a requirement to be named a Tree City U.S.A.

To be given the title as Tree City U.S.A., a city must have an active tree department through municipal services, have a tree care ordinance, provide a community-wide forestry program, as well as have an annual Arbor Day celebration.

For this year's Arbor Day celebration, 48 trees will be planted in the storm basin behind Walnut Elementary School off of Walnut Road and Christoffersen Parkway. There will be four 4th grade classes from Walnut Elementary School that will help plant the 48 trees at 10 a.m. on April 30. Turlock Mayor John Lazar will also attend the annual celebration.

The trees that the City of Turlock are planting are part of the Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation grant provided by the Department of Transportation. The grant sponsors over 362 trees, 312 of which are already planted in the storm basin behind Walnut Elementary.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Wed., April 14, 2010:](#)

Three ozone standards – still no clean air

By Mark Grossi

Ozone season is just around the corner, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to set a tougher standard by late August.

Like most bureaucracy connected to air quality, it is just plain confusing. I'm talking about three numbers -- the health thresholds set in 1997, 2008 and now 2010.

They are all somehow in play at the same time this summer. In case you're wondering, the Valley is far from attaining even the oldest and most lenient of the three.

The oldest is the '97 standard -- 85 parts per billion. It's the one that the San Joaquin Valley must meet by 2024. The clock is ticking on this one, and expensive sanctions await if the air isn't cleaned up.

The '08 standard is 75 parts per billion. It will be far more difficult to achieve. The Valley will have until 2031 to meet that one, but there is no plan yet for that one.

It won't be due for a few years, but they're counting violations for this one. The Valley had 98 last year.

Meantime, the Environmental Protection Agency has decided to make the standard even tougher, mostly because EPA went against its own science advisers in setting the '08 standard too high.

EPA is expected this summer opt for a threshold between 60 and 70 parts per billion. This one will replace the '08 version, so the deadline of 2031 will remain the same.