

EPA approves “New Source Review” rule

The Valley Voice, Thurs., April 22, 2010

The Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday approved a revised “New Source Review” (NSR) rule that requires new or modified facilities in the San Joaquin Valley to comply with federal permitting control and emissions offset requirements. The rule will affect approximately 350 facilities in the area emitting more than 10 tons per year of ozone-producing pollutants rather than the current threshold of 25 tons per year, according to EPA sources.

Growers worry about looming ban on burning agricultural waste

By Courtenay Edelhart, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, April 22, 2010

Growers who occasionally need to burn prunings or entire orchards or vineyards are worried about a state program to phase out burning that's meant to clear the valley's polluted air.

SB 705, sponsored by state Sen. Dean Florez, outlawed the practice of burning agricultural waste in open fields seven years ago, but it is being implemented gradually for different crops. Shortly before the newest restrictions on vineyards and various nuts were to take effect in May 2007, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District voted to allow burning in orchards of 20 acres or less until 2010. That was to give small farms more time to identify cost-effective alternatives.

But industry groups say even with the added time, implementing the law would create a severe financial hardship for growers already struggling to overcome a drought and a weak economy.

"Unfortunately, we still don't have any other economically viable alternatives to burning," said Camron King, program director of the California Association of Wine Grape Growers.

Florez, in an e-mail, wrote: "What are the alternatives for the children whose lungs and health will be affected by continuing open field burning? What are the cost-effective alternatives for their health and well-being?"

The Air Pollution Control District will hold a hearing on the issue at 9 a.m. May 20, and could either hold firm to its June 1 deadline or give growers another extension. Locals who would like to participate in the hearing can offer testimony via video feed at the Bakersfield district office, 34946 Flyover Court.

The state had been encouraging growers to take agricultural waste to a biomass plant where it can be burned in a controlled, less polluting environment and converted to energy.

But despite state incentives to operate such plants, there are only 10 of them in California. For many growers, it is inconvenient and expensive to chip waste and truck it to a biomass plant, and in any case plants don't have enough capacity to handle the volume of material generated by California agriculture, growers say.

Some orchards and vineyards have to be completely replaced after so many years because yields often diminish over time. It's also common to burn diseased vines and trees to keep illness from infecting healthy plants. Weeds are sometimes burned, too, to cut down on the use of pesticides.

Mark Hall, president of Grapevine Vineyards Inc. in Arvin, said he has prepared for the worst by burning while he still can.

"There are two sides to everything," he said. "We all want clean air, but I'm thinking some day it's going to be more expensive to pull a vineyard out than to plant it."

Arvin-based Kirschenman Enterprises, which grows both table and wine grapes, is worried, too.

Disposing of a vineyard or its trimmings isn't as easy as it sounds, said manager Rick Deckard. If you have metal trellises or wires, the vines must be removed from them before they are delivered to a biomass plant because the metal damages plant machinery.

"It's a lot of labor, and you still have the cost of hauling it," Deckard said.

The staff recommendation to the Air Pollution Control District board is to continue to allow smaller farms to burn certain crops because of the cost of the alternative, and to consider requests from larger farms on a case by case basis, said executive director Seyed Sadredin.

"We understand there is substantial cost involved, and even the alternatives produce emissions," he said. "The diesel fuel for a chipper, and trucking (material) to a plant, both pollute the air, and we don't want to create hot spots of pollution where these plants are located."

Preventative burning to create a fire break would still be allowed under the new rules.

The valley's smoke management program will continue either way, as well, Sadredin said. That program divides the valley's eight counties into 103 geographic zones, and burn permits are granted in each zone based on weather conditions and other factors that affect smoke dispersal in a specific area.

Earth Day: No more burning rivers, but new threats

By Seth Borenstein, AP Science Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, April 22, 2010

WASHINGTON—Pollution before the first Earth Day was not only visible, it was in your face: Cleveland's Cuyahoga River caught fire. An oil spill fouled 30 miles of Southern California beaches. And thick smog choked many cities' skies.

Not anymore.

On Thursday, 40 years after that first Earth Day in 1970, smog levels nationwide have dropped by about a quarter, and lead levels in the air are down more than 90 percent. Formerly fetid lakes and burning rivers are now open to swimmers.

The challenges to the planet today are largely invisible—and therefore tougher to tackle.

"To suggest that we've made progress is not to say the problem is over," said William Ruckelshaus, who in 1970 became the first head of the Environmental Protection Agency. "What we've done is shift from the very visible kinds of issues to those that are a lot more subtle today."

Issues such as climate change are less obvious to the naked eye. Since the first Earth Day, carbon dioxide levels in the air have increased by 19 percent, pushing the average annual world temperature up about 1 degree Fahrenheit, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"We've cleaned up what you can see and left everything else in limbo," said Kathleen Rogers, president of the Earth Day Network.

Improvements took shape in the form of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and changes in the way businesses treat the environment, said Denis Hayes. Those reforms, he added, grew out of the first Earth Day, an event Hayes helped coordinate.

"It is the most powerful, sweeping, society-wide change America has had since the New Deal," Hayes said. "The air is cleaner despite the fact that we have twice as many vehicles traveling twice as many miles."

Nancy Sutley, head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, said progress in the past 40 years is about more than just laws. It's also about innovation that made cleaner cars. And that innovation, Sutley said, "is going to be the answer for tackling climate change."

No place illustrates progress more than the Cuyahoga River.

Cleveland's main river used to periodically catch fire. On June 22, 1969, trash and an oil slick ignited. The river burned for half an hour, drawing national attention to water pollution nationwide.

People didn't swim in the river at the time, and anyone who fell in needed to be checked by a doctor.

"The river bubbled like a cauldron. There were all kinds of chemicals in there, and that was what was bubbling at the bottom," said Wayne Bratton, a boat captain then and now, and the first president of the Cleveland Harbor Conservation Committee.

On Tuesday, Wayne Bratton was aboard his boat, The Holiday. He looked over the starboard side at Collision Bend and described by telephone what he saw: "I'm looking at a lot of gulls, there's a loon, a lot of black heron."

People now fish in the river, which holds 60 species. There's a spiffy amphitheater on the river bank, which never would have been built when the water had a dreadful stench, Bratton said.

It's not just the Cuyahoga. In 1957, the Public Health Service declared the Potomac River unsafe for swimming. Now Rogers lets her children swim in it.

"I don't even wash them off any more," she said.

In Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, the joke was that if you moved in during the summer you wouldn't notice the nearby mountains until the winter. Now peak smog levels are only one-third as high as 40 years ago, he said.

"Unfortunately, it leads some people to think that we don't have a problem any more," said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

The region still has 6,000 yearly premature deaths linked to unseen tiny particles in the air that cause heart and lung problems, Atwood said.

In 1970, Ruckelshaus said, about 85 percent of pollution was from places like factories or power plants that the government could regulate. Now such sites account for only 15 percent, with most pollution coming from sources like farms that are harder to control.

That makes fixing the remaining problems politically difficult, said Russell Train, chief environmental adviser in 1970 to President Richard Nixon.

"Back in the '70s, people felt the threat of environmental mistakes and misbehavior," Train said. "There was a real threat to your health and people knew that. Today, people will accept that as a general principal, but don't feel any immediate threat from climate change or indirect source pollution from farmers."

Last month was the hottest March on record worldwide. It was 1.4 degrees warmer than March 1970, according to NOAA.

The average temperatures for the last 40 years are higher than the rest of the 130 years of record-keeping, said Deke Arndt, head of climate monitoring at NOAA's National Climate Data Center.

And, this week, German scientists published an analysis in the scientific journal Nature that says the greenhouse gas agreement reached by some international leaders last December in Copenhagen would lead to a 10 to 20 percent increase in carbon dioxide levels in 2020.

That puts "in dire peril" chances for limiting the effects of warming, the researchers said.

Still, the White House's Sutley is optimistic.

"The Cuyahoga River is not on fire anymore, and air quality in Los Angeles is not as bad as it was 40 years ago. I think people get those connections," Sutley said. "People get that something is changing about our climate."

You can plug into savings

By The Record
Wednesday, April 21, 2010

Time to pull the plug on that avocado-green refrigerator.

Starting Thursday Californians can receive a \$200 rebate if they purchase a new energy-efficient fridge, \$100 for a new clothes washer and \$50 for a new room air conditioner.

About \$35 million is available for the one-time program, nicknamed Cash for Appliances (a la last year's Cash for Clunkers, which encouraged people to ditch old polluting cars).

The money may not last long.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Thursday, April 22, 2010](#)

What are you doing to help our

On this 40th anniversary of Earth Day, there are huge political debates under way over how and whether government should force us to change our habits in the use of energy, water and other resources. There are strong arguments on both sides of the federal cap-and-trade proposal, for example, and, closer to home, the calls to suspend implementation of Assembly Bill 32, California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

We'd like to set all those heated arguments aside for a moment and suggest that we should not be focused so much on what government can and should do for — or to — us, and instead ask whether we, as individuals, are doing enough to show respect for the environment.

A representative of the Covanta Stanislaus, operator of the waste-to-energy plant in western Stanislaus County put it well in a letter to the editor that appeared in Wednesday's Bee. She said her company is urging individuals and businesses to add one environmentally friendly activity a day to their routine.

We believe a whole lot of that is happening. Modestans are putting paper products of all kinds in their green totes, so they end up at the city's composting facility.

In Turlock, the school district has finally gone paperless with its entire board agenda. As of this week's meeting, trustees were not flipping through thick paper agendas but scrolling on computers which, by the way, were donated.

On Earth Day 2010, there's an added plus to recycling, reusing and doing without. These habits can save money.

Environmental friendliness takes many forms, including helping to keep neighborhoods and the community clean. Modesto is signing up volunteers for the next "Takin' It To the Streets" event June 5. It will focus on cleaning up trails. The first such event, in late March, resulted in the collection of 30 tons of trash and brush and covering up more than 25,000 square feet of graffiti. Volunteers also shoveled tons of sand and bark into park playgrounds. To sign up for the June 5 cleanup, go to www.modestogov.com/prnd or call 577-5445.

For more ideas on recycling, go to www.ci.modesto.ca.us/prnd/recycling.

We hope you can find just one small way to observe Earth Day.