

Flags will fly at Sacramento elementary schools to indicate air quality

By Bill Lindelof

Sacramento Bee, Monday, May 3, 2010

Poor air quality is on the horizon with summer approaching, prompting three Sacramento schools this year to fly flags alerting students to smog levels.

The school-based Air Quality Flag program is designed to help protect children's lungs on days when dirty air poses a health threat.

Colored flags will be flown each day at three elementary schools: Fruit Ridge, 4625 44th St.; Ethel Phillips, 2930 21st Ave.; and Theodore Judah, 3919 McKinley Blvd.

The flags represent a different air quality category, ranging from green for good to purple for very unhealthy. Schools can choose not to have children play outside on bad air days.

The Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails clean air organization, which has been working with schools for three years to employ the color-coded flags, said that reducing exposure to harmful pollutants is important for those who suffer from asthma. Pollutants also increase susceptibility to illnesses such as bronchitis and interfere with lung growth.

Holding physical education classes indoors on bad air days can help minimize health risks. A color-coded chart, used along with the flag program, will be displayed in the school's lunch room.

The Sacramento Region has been ranked as one of the most polluted metropolitan areas in the country, the organization notes on its website.

U.S. dairies get high marks for emissions

By Reed Fujii, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Sunday, May 02, 2010

A new U.N. report says dairies in North America and Western Europe produce fewer greenhouse gases relative to the amount of milk than regions with less sophisticated agricultural technology.

While total emissions remain significant because of the large amounts of milk involved, a California industry group said the findings mean you can still drink your milk and reduce your impact on climate change.

"What's critical here is understanding that it's possible to reduce your emissions from dairies by pursuing efficiency," said J.P. Cativiela, program coordinator of Dairy Cares, a coalition of dairy groups dedicated to sustainability issues. "What this shows is how far our track record of success has taken us so far."

Indeed, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's report said North American dairies produce one-quarter of the greenhouse gases emitted by farms in South Asia per gallon of milk.

Put another way, North America accounted for roughly 8 percent of greenhouse gases from the world dairy industry while producing about 16 percent of the milk. South Asian dairies, in contrast, produced 22 percent of the industry's greenhouse gases but only 12 percent of the milk.

Still, efficiency is not everything. Western European dairies, while nearly as efficient as those in North America, accounted for 15 percent of dairy-related greenhouse gases because of their prodigious share - nearly 25 percent of world milk production.

Brent Newell, legal director of the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment in San Francisco and a frequent dairy industry critic, said total contributions to global climate change must be kept in mind.

He also questioned the validity of the U.N. report.

Based on its estimate that North American dairies produce roughly 1.3 tons of greenhouse gases per ton of milk, California dairies alone should produce about 23,000 metric tons of greenhouse

gases per year. But research by the California Energy Commission put the state's dairy emissions at nearly 20 million metric tons, or almost 1,000 times more.

"The California Energy Commission number is the most recent and most accurate estimate of which I am aware," he said. "It shows that California dairies are emitting far more greenhouse gases than what the U.N. report estimates."

The U.N. report also said:

» Overall in 2007, dairies worldwide emitted nearly 2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases, or about 4 percent of all emissions from human activities.

» On average worldwide, the dairy industry emitted 2.4 kilograms of greenhouse gases for every kilogram of milk produced. That ratio varied from 1.3 kilograms of greenhouse gases in North America to 7.5 kilograms in sub-Saharan Africa.

"It shows we've made tremendous progress reducing our carbon footprint while also pointing the way for developing nations to do a better job," said William C. Van Dam, chairman of Dairy Cares.

Newell cautioned that California, being the nation's leading dairy state, still accounts for significant emissions of greenhouse gases. And the discussion doesn't address other pollutants produced by the state's dairies, such as volatile organic compounds, which contribute to smog formation, he said.

EPA proposes rules to cut mercury emissions 50%

By Matthew Daly, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, May 1, 2010

Washington - -- The Obama administration says 5,000 deaths will be prevented each year under new rules announced Friday to limit the amount of mercury and other harmful pollutants released by industrial boilers and solid waste incinerators.

The planned rules would reduce mercury emissions more than 50 percent by requiring steep and costly cuts from companies operating about 200,000 industrial boilers, heaters and incinerators.

The Environmental Protection Agency proposed the rules Friday and must seek public comment before they are made final.

Industrial boilers and heaters are the second-largest source of mercury emissions in the United States, after coal-fired power plants. The boilers burn coal and other fuels to generate heat or electricity and are used by petroleum refiners, chemical and manufacturing plants, paper mills, municipal utilities, and even shopping malls and universities.

The incinerators burn waste to dispose of it, and some also turn it into energy.

The EPA said the new federal limits would save lives and prevent up to 36,000 asthma attacks each year by reducing air pollution.

Once airborne, mercury eventually settles in water, where it builds up in ocean and freshwater fish and can be highly toxic to people who eat them. Mercury can damage the brain and nervous system, especially in children and fetuses.

The estimated cost of installing and operating the required pollution controls total about \$3.6 billion per year, the EPA said.

Some lawmakers representing industrial states have protested placing the added burden on businesses when many are struggling because of the recession.

Sen. Robert Casey, D-Pa., wrote in a March 17 letter to the EPA that forcing companies to spend so much "will only result in plant closings and further loss of jobs."

The limits would take effect after a 45-day public comment period. A hearing is likely in June.