

## **New Tactic in California for Paying Pollution Bill**

By FELICITY BARRINGER

The New York Times, Sunday, October 17, 2010

STOCKTON, Calif. — Officials who have tried and failed to clean the air in California's smog-filled San Joaquin Valley have seized on a new strategy: getting millions of drivers to shoulder more of the cost.

Faced with a fine of at least \$29 million for exceeding federal ozone limits, the San Joaquin Valley's air quality regulators are proposing an annual surcharge of \$10 to \$24 on registration fees for the region's 2.7 million cars and trucks beginning next year. A decision is expected when the governing board meets on Thursday.

Although the surcharge is not expected to change how much people drive or what cars or trucks they buy, air pollution experts say it is a harbinger of the future. After decades of forcing industry to clean its smokestacks, retool car and truck engines and fine-tune gasoline, regulators are exploring what they can do to force consumers to face up to the pollution they cause.

"We, the people, are the ones whom we need to point the finger at," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which administers federal and state pollution laws here.

While it already uses registration fees to support part of its budget, it is extremely unusual, if not unprecedented, for such an agency to make a point of penalizing drivers for the smog they create.

"I think it's fair to say that this is the first time that a strategy has been directly targeted at the consumer, not at the manufacturer of the car or the manufacturer of the engine or of all the other pieces," said Susana M. Hildebrand, the chief engineer for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

A provision of the Clean Air Act that sets fines for exceeding pollution limits originally required industrial companies to pay them; in fact, the provision, which was added to the law in 1990, was specifically devised "as a hammer to get them to do more," as Mr. Sadredin put it.

Today, vehicles are responsible for four-fifths of the region's smog-forming pollution.

This year, regulators here and around the country got the Environmental Protection Agency's approval to try alternative approaches like the surcharge. The California Legislature had already given the San Joaquin district the authority to impose fees up to \$24 after regulators argued that local industries had done everything technologically feasible to control their emissions.

"We're saying that for the privilege of driving in the valley, paying an extra \$1 a month is preferable to charging industry \$29 million," Mr. Sadredin said.

Proceeds from the fees, he said, will be used to invest in pollution control. The executive director of the regional air agency for the traffic-clogged Los Angeles area, which is also in line for a multimillion-dollar fine, signaled in a recent interview that he hoped to follow the Central Valley's lead.

The agency is likely to add a \$3 surcharge to vehicle registration fees for the area's 12 million vehicles if it gets a waiver from the Legislature.

"This is a prelude of things to come," said Barry Wallerstein, the executive director of the agency, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which covers the four counties around Los Angeles. Consumer product choices in motor vehicles are "now the dominant source of our ozone problem," he said.

Mr. Sadredin said that the San Joaquin region had recorded record lows for ozone pollution at various points in recent years. But as in many other places, levels continue to spike in late summer, largely because of the heat and back-to-school traffic.

The local surcharge plan comes as the Environmental Protection Agency prepares to announce tighter standards for ozone pollution. Those new rules are likely to put many regions of the country that are currently in compliance in the same position as Central and Southern California — facing big fines for pollution that is largely a product of truck and automobile exhaust.

Robert Wyman, a Los Angeles lawyer who has frequently represented industrial clients, predicted that more local regulators would follow Mr. Sadredin's lead. "The problems that L.A. and the San Joaquin Valley have been struggling with for a decade or more will be problems most metro areas will have to grapple with," he said.

Ms. Hildebrand of the Texas commission said, "It will be interesting to see how it plays out politically, because people don't like it when government does that sort of thing."

Indeed, this approach is not likely to go down well in Fresno, Merced or Stockton, where unemployment rates remain well above 15 percent.

"We're already in crisis," said Kojo Amonoo, 55, a Stockton resident who said he drives his pickup truck about 10 miles a day. "There are people who are hurting. Whether you have a job or not, you drive. When you don't have a job, you need the vehicle to go around and look for jobs."

Standing in the line outside the Department of Motor Vehicles office in Stockton on one recent afternoon was Amber Chamizo, a 27-year-old nursing student from the nearby city of Lodi who drives a Subaru Impreza. She said she had no problem with the extra fee.

"If vehicles are 80 percent of the problem, then it's fair," said Ms. Chamizo, who compared a possible \$12 fee to a few drinks at Starbucks.

But Dennis Ruitenbeck, 57, a technical manager who drives a small sport utility vehicle, lamented that the Clean Air Act did not give the government discretion to waive the fine.

"While the San Joaquin area is so depressed, it's going to be an undue hardship," he said. "Why put an extra burden on people who are suffering?"

## **What Does a Bucket Brigade Need Most?**

### **Air Quality Monitoring Grant Explained on Friday, Oct. 15**

By Patric Hedlund

The Mountain Enterprise, Fri., Oct. 15, 2010

Do you want to know how to find out what you and your children are breathing, and if there is a link between pollution and health problems? What can you do about it?

A \$25,000 grant won by the TriCounty Watchdogs will buy equipment and consulting, but your interest and volunteer efforts are needed to answer those important questions.

All this will be explained Friday, Oct. 15 at 7 p.m. at Cuddy Hall in Lake of the Woods. The "Bucket Brigade" is a simple tool that dozens of communities are using to learn for themselves what chemicals are in their air. Armed with their own data and information about the health effects of chemicals and particulate matter in the air, communities are winning reduction of pollution.

The "Bucket" is an easy-to-use air sampling device housed inside a 5 gallon plastic bucket.

It was developed by an environmental engineering firm to simplify and reduce the costs of testing toxic gases in the air. There is now a version to test for tiny particulate matter generated in diesel truck and factory emissions. Research is now linking this PM2.5 to heart attacks, diabetes, asthma, bronchitis and circulatory problems.

The Friday, 7 p.m. session will be followed by a daytime training session on Saturday, Oct. 16 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. to train "Brigadeers" who can be citizen scientists to help make scientifically useful samples for analysis by labs. The Global Community Monitor (GCM) project has been operating since 2002.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, Oct. 15, 2010:](#)

## **Yes, it is a little warm this October**

By Mark Grossi

Listening to the air conditioning units blasting away, I wondered if this warm spell was a little unusual for October. It is.

The National Weather Service archive shows seven 90-degree days in October since 2004 -- that's a six-year total, not just one or two years worth.

If Friday's high temperature hits 90, Fresno will have seven 90-plus days this month. You can see the stats by following this link and searching the Web site.

I looked all the way back to 2000 and did not find an October with more than five 90-degree days in Fresno.

In addition, the average temperature for October is running four degrees above normal for Fresno.

Besides the extra electricity for air conditioning, what does it mean? We've had five consecutive bad ozone days this month. And a sixth is on the way today.