

Air quality improves for Merced area

By Mike North, staff writer

Merced Sun-Star, late Friday, Aug. 5, 2011

Despite some of the cleanest air on record last year, more stringent regulations may be on the way that'll cut down on more pollution in the Central Valley.

Last year's summer and winter seasons were the cleanest on record, according to a presentation by John Cadrett, a compliance manager for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The air district has control over pollutants from stationary sources, such as power plants, gas stations and painting shops, Cadrett said Tuesday. What the air district doesn't have any control over are cars and trucks traveling through the Valley.

Since the early '90s, emissions from stationary sources have been reduced by 80 percent, he said.

The number of unhealthy days is down since 2000, according to the 2010 annual report from the district.

The influx of cleaner air can be attributed to the reduction in emissions from stationary sources and to favorable weather patterns, Cadrett said.

While emissions from industries have been lowered, more pollution from vehicles resulting from growing populations puts some of that pollution back in the air, he said.

Heavy-duty trucks are the main cause of pollution in the Valley. About 12 percent of the pollution in Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties is blown in from the Bay Area.

All the know-how that goes into finding practical ways to cut down on pollution has made local officials resources for other regions, Cadrett said.

"It used to be, at one point in time, we looked at other areas for ways of reducing pollution, and now other areas are looking to us for our experience and our guidance on how they can reduce air pollution," he said.

The federal government is looking at proposing new standards for air pollution levels that would reduce emissions by an additional 80 percent to 90 percent, which could make it tough for the Central Valley to reach those goals, Cadrett said.

Failing to meet pollution standards can lead to federal mandates and sanctions.

Stricter emission regulations may be good for the air, but could be bad for business.

Supervisor Hub Walsh, who is on the air district's governing board, said tighter air pollution standards would have an impact across the board, including the economy.

Standards for the region are already tough to reach, and some are questioning whether stricter levels could ever be attainable in the Central Valley, he said.

"It'll have significant impacts on us if they're able to impose it," Walsh said, adding that he hopes there will be flexibility with any new standards.

There is some legislation in the works that could push back the stricter regulations for the area.

SJV air district asks residents to practice 'Air-Friendly Fridays'

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, late Friday, Aug. 5, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is asking the community and its businesses to help clean the air by practicing Air-Friendly Fridays.

Air-Friendly Fridays is the newest outreach program by the district encouraging businesses and employees to engage in healthy air living activities by making "One Change. On One Day. Every Week."

Air-Friendly Fridays provides the opportunity for employees to share a meal, share a ride and possibly share a story every Friday. Alternatives to workplace-centered activities that create emissions include carpooling, bringing a lunch, bicycling or walking to lunch and linking trips. Anything that encourages driving less with the benefit of improving the air is validation as an active participant of the district's Air-Friendly Fridays, according to a news release.

To encourage participation, more than 8,000 businesses are receiving information from the Air District on how they can get participate in Air-Friendly Fridays and how to become a Healthy Air Living partner.

For more information about Air-Friendly Fridays and how to become a Healthy Air Living Business Partner, please visit www.healthyliving.com.

Tougher air rules possible for valley **Some question whether stricter standards viable**

By Mike North, staff writer

The Modesto Bee, Friday, August 5, 2011

MERCED -- Despite some of the cleanest air on record last year, more stringent regulations may be on the way that will cut down on more pollution in the Central Valley.

Last year's summer and winter seasons were the cleanest on record, according to a presentation by John Cadrett, a compliance manager for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The air district has control over pollutants from stationary sources, such as power plants, gas stations and painting shops, Cadrett said Tuesday. What the air district doesn't have any control over are cars and trucks traveling through the Central Valley.

Since the early 1990s, emissions from stationary sources have been reduced by 80 percent, he said.

The number of unhealthy days is down since 2000, according to the 2010 annual report from the district.

The influx of cleaner air can be attributed to the reduction in emissions from stationary sources and to favorable weather patterns, Cadrett said.

While emissions from industries have been lowered, more pollution from vehicles resulting from growing populations puts some of that pollution back in the air, he said.

Heavy-duty trucks are the main cause of pollution in the valley. About 12 percent of the pollution in Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties is blown in from the Bay Area.

All the know-how that goes into finding practical ways to cut down on pollution has made local officials resources for other regions, Cadrett said.

"It used to be, at one point in time, we looked at other areas for ways of reducing pollution, and now other areas are looking to us for our experience and our guidance on how they can reduce air pollution," he said.

The federal government is looking at proposing new standards for air pollution levels that would reduce emissions by an additional 80 percent to 90 percent, which could make it tough for the Central Valley to reach those goals, Cadrett said.

Failing to meet pollution standards can lead to federal mandates and sanctions.

Stricter emission regulations may be good for the air, but could be bad for business.

Merced County Supervisor Hub Walsh, who is on the air district's governing board, said tighter air pollution standards would have an impact across the board, including the economy.

Standards for the region are already tough to reach, and some are questioning whether stricter levels could ever be attainable in the Central Valley, he said.

"It'll have significant impacts on us if they're able to impose it," Walsh said, adding that he hopes there will be flexibility with any new standards.

There is some legislation in the works that could push back the stricter regulations for the area.

Council to discuss 'ransom' RDA payment to state

By Alex Cantatore, staff writer

Turlock Journal, late Friday, Aug. 5, 2011

The Turlock City Council on Tuesday will consider formally appealing the "ransom payment" requested to keep its Redevelopment Agency operational.

As part of the state budget process, the Legislature gave cities statewide an ultimatum: either close redevelopment agencies, or else make a large "voluntary payment" to the state.

Statewide, the "voluntary payments" tally \$1.7 billion— plus an additional \$400 million annually. Those funds would be redirected to local public schools, in lieu of the state's obligation.

Turlock expects to face a \$3.2 million payment, plus \$450,000 annually. Turlock cannot afford that payment, given the amount of funding spent on projects like the Public Safety Facility, Carnegie Arts Center, and Joe DeBely Stadium renovation in the past few years.

Under the state law, Turlock can appeal the assessment amount. The Turlock City Council will consider doing just that on Tuesday.

Turlock has already signed on to a lawsuit protesting the move to eliminate redevelopment agencies, arguing the act equates to a taking of city funds, illegal under Proposition 22.

Should Turlock be forced to eliminate its RDA, the move would curtail or halt graffiti abatement and code enforcement activities, which are currently funded by RDA dollars. As many as seven positions across Turlock could be eliminated, and as much as \$225,000 in costs could be shifted to Turlock's cash-strapped general fund budget.

On Tuesday, the Turlock City Council is also expected to:

- Oppose State Senate redistricting plans, which would currently see Turlock subsumed into the "Foothill" district alongside cities like Rancho Cordova, Sonoma, Jackson, Clovis and Oakdale. City staff believes Turlock is better suited to the "Merced" district, which includes Ceres, Patterson, Madera and Salinas.

The opposition is based on differing common interests – agriculture versus tourism and national parks – the California State University, Stanislaus service area, existing transportation corridors such as Highway 9 and State Route 165, and Turlock's membership in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which does not manage foothill towns.

- Update the city's water code, in part increasing the delinquency charge for late water payments from \$10 to \$25.

The code changes will also discourage water theft, make installation of water connections more business-friendly, allow "flow through" fire sprinkler systems at residences, and require Turlock to purchase well sites large enough to accommodate wellhead treatment systems.

- Recommend hiring an Instrumentation Technician within the Utilities Division, filling a vacancy resulting from the 2009 hiring freeze. The position, which Turlock will attempt to recruit for internally before engaging in open recruitment, will pay \$56,304 salary, with \$37,608 in benefits.

Per the staff report, the additional employee is needed to meet the demands of maintaining water and sewer related infrastructure.

- Receive a report on the Turlock Certified Farmers' Market from market manager Brandon Follett. Vice Mayor Amy Bublak requested the presentation in hopes of learning more about the economic impacts of the market.

- Consider altering a council policy which forbids council members from teleconferencing at city council meetings unless an emergency situation exists. Revisiting the issue was requested by Councilman Bill DeHart.
- Issue a proclamation in honor of the Ansel Adams Exhibit, which will serve as the first exhibition at the reconstructed Carnegie Arts Center.
- Receive a presentation from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on the Healthy Air Living Outreach Campaign.
- Receive staff updates on the state of redevelopment, and on a 9/11 memorial.

The Turlock City Council will meet at 7 p.m. in the Yosemite Room of Turlock City Hall, located at 156 S. Broadway.