

Clean air lifestyles sought out for video contest

By Ben Keller, Business Journal Staff
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The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is calling on students and teachers in the Valley to send in videos demonstrating how small lifestyle changes can make a big difference in air quality.

Everything from carpooling and riding bikes to using cleaner-burning gas lawn mowers are prime subject matter for the "What's Your Change?" theme of The Air District's third annual Reel Video Contest.

The winner, to be announced June 10, will receive an iPad and will have their video showcased at www.healthyairliving.com.

Participants must be students or teachers at a school, college or university in the San Joaquin Valley. Videos should be no more than 30 seconds long and should demonstrate one behavioral choice that leads to cleaner air in the region.

Submissions will only be accepted in DVD format by May 27 to the Air District's central region office at 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno.

More information about the contest can be found at www.healthyairliving.com or by calling the district's outreach and communications office at (559) 230-6000.

EPA to limit coal-fired power plants' toxic emissions

By Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers
Modesto Bee, Thursday, March 17, 2011

WASHINGTON -- Toxic air pollutants such as mercury, which can lower the IQ of children who get high doses early in life, will be reduced from coal-fired power plants under a major air pollution regulation that the Environmental Protection Agency unveiled Wednesday.

The proposed rule also would reduce other forms of air pollution that cause heart attacks, asthma attacks and other serious health conditions. The EPA estimates that 17,000 lives would be saved by the new rule every year, and thousands of people would avoid missing work and visiting an emergency room.

The nation has never had a national limit on the 386,000 tons of hazardous air pollutants that coal-fired plants put out each year. Vast parts of the country and millions of Americans are affected, because more than 400 coal-fired plants are scattered across 46 states, and their emissions spread over hundreds of miles.

The same equipment that cuts the toxic pollutants such as mercury also captures fine particle pollution. That dirty air, or soot, causes premature death, heart attacks and lung diseases. The EPA estimates that the additional reduction of particle pollution would prevent 11,000 heart attacks and 120,000 childhood asthma attacks annually.

The Electric Reliability Coordinating Council, the leading electric-power industry trade group, issued a statement opposing the rule. It said the new regulation on toxic pollution is too expensive and that there are no health benefits from reducing hazardous pollutants other than mercury.

"Such controls are extraordinarily costly with profound impacts on electricity supply and price, and job creation," the group said.

The EPA, however, said that other toxic metals emitted from the plants, including arsenic, chromium and nickel, can cause cancer.

"Today we're taking an important step forward in EPA's efforts to safeguard the health of millions of Americans," EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said in a packed auditorium at her agency's headquarters, where the audience included a class of second graders from a Washington school.

American Academy of Pediatrics President O. Marion Burton spoke to them.

"I think you already know that this rule is about you and for you," he said. "Dirty air makes children sick. That's the long and the short of it."

Burton said he expected industry criticism about the costs the rule would impose on them, but argued that inaction costs society more. "If you think it's an expensive process to put a scrubber on a smokestack," he said, "you should see how much it takes over a lifetime to treat a child with a preventable birth defect."

About half the nation's electricity comes from plants that burn coal. According to EPA data, 44 percent of such plants have no advanced pollution-control equipment. Some other plants already meet at least part of the proposed standards, because they've had to meet state regulations.

Congress ordered the toxic-emissions reductions 20 years ago. The EPA reduced mercury emissions from all other big sources except power plants. A court threw out a mercury reduction plan for power plants that was proposed, but not put into practice, under President George W. Bush.

"Our nation has waited a long time for this day," said American Lung Association president and CEO Charles Connor. He said the EPA is closing "a toxic loophole."

The EPA plans to issue a final rule at the end of this year or early next year, Jackson said. In the meantime, it will take public comments on this proposal. The rule could be changed before it's finalized. The agency then will give utilities four years to add the pollution controls.

Coal-fired power plants emit more hazardous pollutants than any other industrial power source, the American Lung Association said in a report last week. The EPA said power plants that run on coal, plus a much smaller number that use oil, are the source of half the mercury, more than half of the acid gas emissions and 25 percent of toxic metals in U.S. air pollution.

The EPA estimated only the health benefits from the particle pollution reductions, and not from the elimination of mercury and other hazardous pollutants. It estimated that for every dollar spent on pollution controls, the public would gain \$5 to \$13 in health benefits.

Environmental groups cheered the proposal, as did one group of electric utilities, the Clean Energy Group, made up of Calpine Corp., Constellation Energy, Exelon Corp., PG&E Corp., Public Service Enterprise Group Inc. and Seattle City Light.

The group's president, Michael Bradley, said in an interview that some old coal plants might close rather than add the pollution controls. That would include plants more than 50 years old that are less efficient than new ones. Bradley said that natural gas plants that aren't operating at capacity would be able to fill the gap.

Companies have been planning ahead and anticipating the new regulations for a long time, Bradley said. He also said that industry and the EPA have been exchanging data and discussing the rule announced Wednesday for the past 18 months.

