

Tougher air rules coming, air district says

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday (afternoon edition), April 21, 2011

Imagine a ban on leaf blowers. Or no new businesses allowed. Or even a restriction on all fossil fuel burning in the San Joaquin Valley.

Those are some of the restrictions that could kick in if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adopts tough new pollution controls this summer, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"If you think that things are difficult now, you haven't seen anything yet," said Sadredin, speaking Tuesday at the Kings County Board of Supervisors' meeting.

Sadredin said it was part of an eight-county, 59-city tour the district kicked off earlier this year, in part to explain the rationale behind a \$12 vehicle license fee increase the district implemented last year. The fee increase was imposed to pay a \$29 million fine EPA levied on the district for violating ozone and small-particle pollution standards. The district remains out of compliance in those categories.

Supervisors were mostly silent. Supervisor Doug Verboon suggested that leaf blowers might be a bigger air pollution culprit than farm tractors. In an interview after the presentation, Verboon said that as a farmer he's fought with the air district over regulation, but added, "I also like the fresh air we have."

Most of the air district's regulations have in the past fallen on businesses. But there is little more that can be squeezed out of them, Sadredin said. That means more focus on the district's chief targets: motor vehicle use and fireplace burning. The district implemented a "Check before you burn" program a few years ago, a program that generated heated opposition.

The program asks for voluntary compliance on some days. On other days, the fireplace ban is in effect for anybody who has propane or electric heating. Violators can be fined, though it's difficult to enforce.

Thirty percent of wintertime fine-particle pollution – the most dangerous kind – comes from fireplace burning, Sadredin said.

Verboon said he didn't realize fireplaces were "that big a deal."

"We don't want to punish agriculture for what our citizens are doing," he said.

Agricultural burning has been reduced by 80 percent because of regulations, Sadredin said.

But motor vehicles remain the main culprits, Sadredin maintained. More money is needed from the state and the federal government to help clean up diesel trucks and other vehicles, he said.

The California high-speed rail project, which is slated to come through Kings County, could reduce air pollution if Valley drivers use it instead of taking their vehicles on Interstate 5, Sadredin said.

But none of that will matter if the new standards are as tough as expected, he said. The only way to achieve them, he said, would be to ban all fossil fuel burning – something he doesn't believe would ever happen.

"These standards, if they are adopted, will be nearly impossible for the San Joaquin Valley to meet," Sadredin said.

Supervisor Tony Barba, who sits on the district's governing board, said in an interview later that he doesn't "expect EPA to do anything that's going to help us."

"We can't comply with [the standards]," Barba said. "This is why we've got problems."

The air district is working with the EPA to try to get some flexibility built into the new rules, Sadredin said. For example, Sadredin suggested targeting specific pollutants that might be more harmful to health. Tops on that list is diesel pollution from trucks and off-road equipment.

Some environmental organizations say the majority of Valley smog comes from diesel engines. Air pollution from dairies is a much smaller contributor to bad Valley air than motor vehicle exhaust, Sadredin said.

The \$12 vehicle license fee has been a "great educator" for the general public, according to Sadredin, because it forces them to think about the fact that, up until now, businesses have borne the brunt of regulation.

People are going to have to get more involved in the process, he said.

"We're certainly going to have to get more creative," he said.

See someone polluting?

Call the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District Report A Complaint line at (800) 870-1037.

Electric mowers still available

Modesto Bee, Sunday, April 24, 2011

Air quality officials have trimmed the cost of switching from gasoline-powered lawn mowers to cleaner electric models. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is offering a limited number of vouchers that enable residents to pay just \$50 for a cordless electric mower with a 14-inch blade or \$100 for a 19-inch version. The Clean, Green Yard Machine program will continue while the funding lasts. More information for people in Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties is at (209) 557-6485 or www.valleyair.org.

Fuel cells to power WinCo gear in Ceres

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Sunday, April 24, 2011

WinCo Foods plans to install fuel cells, an alternative to batteries, to power equipment at its Ceres distribution center.

The 184 cells, which create electrical currents by splitting hydrogen molecules, could be in use by October if the city grants the needed permits, said WinCo spokesman Michael Read.

They would replace the lead-acid batteries used with the forklift-type equipment at the 800,000-square-foot center on Crows Landing Road. The batteries are charged via utility lines.

"The benefit is reduced electricity consumption and an increase in productivity because you're not having to swap out these lead-acid batteries," said Reid Hislop, vice president of marketing and investor relations at Plug Power Inc.

The company, based in Latham, N.Y., is making the cells for an undisclosed price.

The distribution center handles dry goods, produce and other merchandise for 29 WinCo stores around California and in Reno.

Fuel cells are an old technology that advocates see as a solution to problems caused by fossil fuels, including pollution and global warming.

In a common type of cell, hydrogen from a storage tank reacts with oxygen to split off the electrons that produce the current. The only byproduct is water.

Hydrogen fuel cells as they exist today are not nonpolluting. The hydrogen usually is obtained from natural gas through a heating process that releases emissions. Hydrogen can be produced with solar or other renewable energy, but it costs more.

Read said the savings on utility bills likely will be secondary to the labor savings, as it takes less time to fill a fuel cell with hydrogen than to swap out a battery for recharging.

Cardoza reintroduces solar-power bill

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, April 21, 2011

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In recognition of Earth Day (April 22nd), Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-Merced) said he has re-introduced legislation that protects the rights of homeowners to generate their own clean, renewable electricity through solar power.

The Solar Opportunity and Local Access Rights (SOLAR) Act would cut through the bureaucratic red tape currently preventing many homeowners from producing their own solar power, giving them greater energy independence and potentially significantly reducing their utility bills, according to a news release from the congressman's office.

Specifically, the SOLAR Act (H.R. 1598) would mandate the ability of residential solar customers to sell excess electricity back to the grid, reduce barriers to solar power infrastructure implementation, and create a Center for Advanced Solar Research to develop solar technology and help create new green energy jobs, the release said

"The SOLAR Act is a win for Valley homeowners who want to save on their utility bills, while also doing their part for healthier air by generating clean, renewable energy," said Cardoza said in the release. "My bill is also a cost-saver for traditional utility consumers, since the extra midday power sent back to the grid by home solar systems would reduce the need for utility companies to make expensive peak-hour electricity purchases to meet demand. The SOLAR Act would lower energy costs, create jobs, and pave the way to greater energy independence for our nation, and I urge support for this legislation as we celebrate Earth Day 2011."

The SOLAR Act would provide for net metering of energy generated from residential and commercial solar energy installations. Net metering allows homeowners the opportunity to produce their own power through solar panels and other renewable sources and then sell any excess electricity back to the utility grid, the release said. When homeowners produce excess power, they sell it to the utility company over the power grid. When they need additional power, they buy it from the utility company off the grid. Net metering tracks the production and purchase and calculates the difference, so homeowners are credited for the energy they contribute to the grid.

While 43 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia have adopted a net metering policy, there is no national guidance. Varying state regulations make it hard for companies to develop efficient, uniform practices for handling customer-sited solar power generation, according to the news release.

Further, the SOLAR Act would prohibit practices that discourage or prevent the use of solar technology. It would remove barriers to solar energy usage and streamline the installation process by preventing local and state governments from charging exorbitant permitting fees for solar energy installations. The bill would also prohibit homeowners associations from denying residential access to solar energy systems.

Cardoza originally introduced the SOLAR Act in 2007 during the 110th Congress. Significant portions of the bill were included in the American Clean Energy and Security Act (H.R. 2454), comprehensive renewable energy legislation passed by the House of Representatives in 2009. The Senate failed to pass H.R. 2454 before the end of the 111th Congress, so Cardoza is renewing his push in the 112th Congress to pass the SOLAR Act, the news release concluded.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, April 21, 2011:](#)

Smog season is almost here – and we're the culprits, too

By Mark Grossi

Take a look back 10 years ago in the San Joaquin Valley's ozone records and see how bad it was: 162 violations in summer 2001. Ouch.

So, flash forward to last year and note there were only 93. Improvement, yes. You can see it when you look at the chart of violations.

But the Valley still has major ozone problems. The months of July and August are still an assault on the lungs. And most of us are culprits.

Schools continue to open their doors for the fall semester right in the middle of the onslaught, making the problem worse with added traffic.

Last year, we drove more than 100 million miles per day. That number is increasing every year. Our cars and light trucks are more than 10% of the problem when it comes to nitrogen oxide emissions.

Heavy-duty diesel trucks are 70% of the nitrogen oxide problem. I know. It's the elephant in the room. But I'm not talking about trucking, dairies, boilers or controlled burns in forests. Those subjects will be worth discussing later this summer.

Yes, May was far better in 2010 than it was in 2001. And the concentrations of ozone are not consistently as bad as they were then.

Lifestyle changes will be important to making the violations drop much more. Try linking trips, ride-sharing, using a bicycle, walking and finding other ways to keep the use of internal combustion engines at a minimum.

I'm sure the price of gasoline will change my habits this summer. Anyone else have ideas?

[Merced Sun-Star, Guest Commentary, Friday, April 22, 2011](#)

Peter Gallo: Sustainability is a way of life for dairy farmers

As a proud member of a California dairy family, caring for the environment is important to me – not only on Earth Day, but every day.

Sustainability is a new word for an age-old philosophy that has been a way of life for generations of farmers. Sustainable agriculture means we must replenish rather than exhaust our natural resources to preserve our natural heritage for generations to come. With innovations and dedication, we've proved that a large dairy operation can be sustainable and profitable and that wildlife and agriculture form a vital partnership.

At Joseph Gallo Farms in Merced County, our cows are never treated with any artificial hormones because they provide the grade A milk used to make our Monterey jack, mozzarella, cheddar and other delicious all-natural cheese.

But our cows also play a key role in keeping our family's cheese plant running on green, renewable energy, thanks to the manure digester we installed in 2004. Manure is collected and stored in a covered retention pond. Natural organisms "digest" the manure, giving off biogas that is then used to fuel two generators.

Cheese plant waste water is also used in the digestion, thereby conserving water and improving water quality. This system provides as much as 100 percent of the electricity required to operate the Joseph Farms Cheese Plant, which produces 40 million pounds of cheese each year.

Biogas is mostly methane, like natural gas, but there's an important difference: biogas is a renewable green fuel, not a fossil fuel. Not only are we reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality, we're also offsetting our use of fossil fuels.

In 2009 and 2010, the California Environmental Protection Agency presented Joseph Gallo Farms with its Waste Reduction Awards Program award, recognizing our innovative, environmentally friendly solid-waste recycling programs.

One of my proudest moments came in June 2004, when my father, Michael, was recognized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for developing a unique conservation easement that restored 2,130 acres of wetland habitat. We also

have committed 8,000 acres to wildlife-compatible farming. Together they provide critical habitat for countless species, including several thousand nesting geese and other migratory birds.

Because of efforts such as these, California dairy farmers have been paving the way in sustainability, and California milk is one of the most sustainable food products you can buy. In fact, because of innovation and efficiencies, the overall carbon footprint of a glass of milk has shrunk by 63 percent over 65 years.

I hope you'll support me and other local dairy producers by celebrating Earth Day – today and every day – with a tall, cold glass of real California milk or a piece of real California cheese, such as Joseph Farms cheese.

Peter Gallo is with Joseph Gallo Farms in Atwater.

