

New air standards require public's help, says supervisor

By Alex Cantatore, Civic Desk

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Despite posting the cleanest winter and summer on record, for the Valley to meet proposed federal air standards every citizen will have to pitch in, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District told Stanislaus County Supervisors Tuesday morning.

New Environmental Protection Agency standards could require an additional 80-90 percent reduction in ozone levels – a level approaching the Valley's natural background ozone levels.

"We could eliminate all the industry in the Valley, and we still could not meet the new air standards that are coming out," said Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson.

About 80 percent of Valley pollution is produced by vehicles. That pollution is then trapped in the great valley by an inversion layer, without enough wind current to blow the dirty air out.

A new Air District campaign asks average residents to "Make One Change to Improve Summer Air Quality." It suggests drivers fill up their cars at night – which reduces emissions – ride bikes on short trips instead of driving, refrain from idling cars, carpool to work or school, and replace gasoline-powered lawnmowers. Those lawnmowers can produce 40 times more pollutants than an average automobile.

While other, industry-level air quality measures are ongoing – including the construction of energy efficient homes, the replacement of dirty diesel trucks, and replacement of antiquated farming engines – meeting the new EPA requirements will require every citizen's efforts, said Stanislaus County Supervisor Bill O'Brien.

"We've gotten as much pollution as we can out," O'Brien said. "It's time that we engage the public and change their habits to clean the air."