

Air district funnels \$1.4M for UPS electric trucks

By Ben Keller, Business Journal Staff
Business Journal Fri., June 17, 2011

Fifty new electric vehicles will be put on the road thanks to \$1.4 million in funding approved by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The funding is part of the California Air Resources Board's Hybrid Truck and Bus Voucher Program (HVIP) launched in 2009 to help businesses replace fleets with low carbon emitting hybrid vehicles.

Using the \$1.4 million as matching funds, the United Parcel Service (UPS) will deploy 50 locally manufactured electric trucks at various locations within the San Joaquin Valley.

At a price of around \$183,000, each vehicle will be purchased using \$28,000 in District funding and state incentives of \$50,000. The move is expected to yield emission reductions of 16 tons of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and 800 pounds of particulate matter each year while reducing fuel consumption by 160,000 gallons per year.

The delivery company is also in negotiations with the South Coast Air Quality Management District for another 50 clean operating vehicles in Southern California.

As fewer than 40 of the 650 vouchers under the program have been for fleets in the San Joaquin Valley, the District is working hard to get more of their share of the funds that will provide matching support when companies buy electric or hybrid vehicles.

The California Energy Commission recently committed an additional \$4 million to the HVIP fund while promising greater incentive for vehicles assembled in California. Fleets are limited to 100 vouchers and must operate in California for three years before being approved.

\$500 vouchers offered for auto emissions fixes in Merced

Merced Sun-Star, Tues., June 21, 2011

Vouchers worth \$500 in repairs for emission problems in cars are being made available to Merced residents at an event Saturday, July 9, at the Merced County Fairgrounds. The Tune In & Tune Up event, offered through a partnership between the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and Valley Clean Air Now, provides free emissions and diagnostic tests for vehicles. The first 525 cars that fail the emission tests and are found to be repairable will receive \$500 vouchers toward the cost of repairs.

The tests will be available July 9 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Merced County Fairgrounds' 11th Street parking lot.

Hot weather prompts Spare the Air alert

The Associated Press
In the Hanford Sentinel, Tues., June 21, 2011

A wave of hot weather has prompted San Francisco Bay Area air regulators to declare the season's first Spare the Air Day.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District on Monday issued a Spare the Air alert for Tuesday, the first day of summer.

Officials are asking Bay Area residents to limit driving, barbecuing outdoors, using gas-powered garden tools and other pollution-causing activities

The National Weather Service forecasts hot weather in the Bay Area through Wednesday before cooler temperatures return later in the week.

EPA budget cuts put states in bind

By Juliet Eilperin, staff writer

The Washington Post, Mon., June 20, 2011

When congressional Republicans cut the Environmental Protection Agency's budget 16 percent as part of a deal with President Obama in April to keep the government running, they hailed it as a blow to a federal bureaucracy that had overreached in its size and ambition.

But now that the agency has detailed how it is making the \$1.6 billion cut for fiscal 2011, the reality is somewhat different. Because the EPA passes the vast majority of its money through to the states, it has meant that these governments — not Washington — are taking the biggest hits. Already constrained financially at home, state officials have millions of dollars less to enforce the nation's air- and water-quality laws, fund critical capital improvements and help communities comply with new, more stringent pollution controls imposed by the federal government.

Indian Head, Md., won't get the nearly \$1 million it has requested to improve sewer lines and rehabilitate manhole covers. Wyandotte County, Kan., has suspended its hazardous-waste public awareness programs. And Virginia will scale back the studies it is conducting to evaluate nitrogen runoff into the Chesapeake Bay.

"The federal government and state grants are both shrinking while our demands are increasing exponentially," said Andrew Ginsburg, air quality division administrator at Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality. "We're definitely feeling the crunch here."

The EPA was a central target for Republicans during the spring budget battle, as they tried to curtail its authority to curb greenhouse gases, mercury and other pollutants. Although lawmakers failed to secure those provisions, they limited the agency's activities through budget cuts.

But as lawmakers and local officials assess the impact of those cuts, few seem pleased with the outcome.

"We made some tough choices in there," EPA Deputy Administrator Robert Perciasepe said in an interview. "We're very close to the edge where you start to erode the capacity of the agency."

S. William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, said lawmakers didn't realize that targeting EPA's budget meant "that they're cutting jobs at the state and local level. If they knew that, maybe Congress might have acted differently."

Key Republicans say the cuts have failed to reshape the agency the way they had envisioned.

"By stepping into the process in the middle of the year, we weren't able to provide the kind of details you can when you're doing an appropriations bill from the outset," said Rep. Bob Goodlatte (Va.), vice chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and a frequent EPA critic. "The EPA made a lot more decisions in how they made the cut, and I certainly don't agree with how they made the cut or spent the money."

In fact, many of the funding decisions the EPA made this year were based on a mandatory formula, since \$1 billion of the overall reduction affected just two programs helping underwrite clean-water and drinking-water projects.

"This is one of the problems with cutting EPA's budget. You look at a lot of their programs and they are pass-through programs," said House Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Mike Simpson (R-Idaho), referring to programs whose funds flow directly from the agency to the states. "When you're reducing the budget, those programs are going to go down substantially."

Supreme Court rejects states' suit over emissions

By Adam Liptak, New York Times

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tues., June 21, 2011

Washington -- The Supreme Court on Monday unanimously rejected a lawsuit that had sought to force major electric utilities to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions without waiting for federal regulators to act.

The suit was originally brought by California and seven other states, along with conservation groups. Its central contention was that carbon-dioxide emissions from power plants belonging to four private companies and the Tennessee Valley Authority amounted to a public nuisance. The suit asked a federal court in New York to order the defendants to reduce their emissions.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the court, said the plaintiffs were making their case in the wrong forum. Under the Clean Air Act, she wrote, the matter must be addressed by the Environmental Protection Agency rather than by the courts.

The lawsuit was filed in 2004 against a different regulatory backdrop. In those days, the Bush administration argued that the Clean Air Act did not permit the agency to issue regulations addressing climate change and that it would be unwise to do so in any event. But in 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that the law did authorize federal regulation of greenhouse-gas emissions and that the agency was required to issue regulations unless it had a scientific basis for not doing so.

After that decision and the change in administrations, the agency has begun to issue greenhouse-gas regulations, starting with rules covering automobiles.. It is working on more, including one that would set limits on power plants that burn fossil fuels like coal or natural gas.

It followed, Ginsburg wrote, that the agency rather than the courts should take the leading role in considering limits on power-plant emissions, although the agency's action or inaction would remain subject to judicial review.

California, Connecticut, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin filed the suit, but New Jersey and Wisconsin dropped out this year after Republicans replaced Democrats in their governor's offices.

Lynda Gledhill, a spokeswoman for California Attorney General Kamala Harris, said the state would carefully monitor the EPA's efforts. The ruling "reaffirms the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's responsibility to regulate dangerous carbon pollution," she said.

The case is American Electric Power Co. vs. Connecticut, 10-174.

Chronicle staff writer Marisa Lagos and the Associated Press contributed to this report.