

Guest Commentary, Bakersfield Californian, Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011:

We can all help save Valley air

By Seyed Sadredin

As many of you know, despite significant improvements in our air quality, under an arcane provision of federal law, Valley residents and businesses are subject to a penalty of approximately \$29 million per year for failing to meet the federal one-hour standard for ozone. In 1996, the Valley air basin racked up 56 days where ozone levels exceeded federal health-based standards for one-hour ozone readings. Last year, there were only seven such days. If anything, Valley residents and businesses deserve a reward and not a penalty.

We were able to craft a creative approach that will prevent the federal government from taking this money and placing it in the federal treasury. Under the plan adopted by the air district, the penalty mandate will be satisfied by residents paying \$12 per year in DMV fees and businesses without the best available control technology paying a fee based on their emissions. Every penny collected then will be reinvested back in the Valley in projects that reduce air pollution and help our fragile economy. Nonetheless, we have to do everything we can to make this penalty go away.

We are pursuing legislation in Congress (H.R. 1582, Congressman McCarthy) to repeal the penalty. But given the current political stalemate in Washington, don't hold your breath. To make this unfair penalty go away, we're asking the public, businesses and municipalities to consider a range of voluntary actions that can reduce air pollution on a few days each year when we're at risk of going over the federal standard in question. If we're successful, not only we will experience health benefits from reduced air pollution, but we can also see a benefit in our pocketbooks by eliminating this penalty.

This is why the air district has developed a new Air Alert notification system. Recent trends indicate that these violations occur at the start of the school season with increased traffic combined with high temperatures and stagnant conditions. Air Alert episodes, which can last anywhere from a couple of days to a week, will be declared when meteorological conditions and emission trends indicate the likelihood of a violation if no adjustments are made. There are steps that Valley residents and businesses can take to avert an exceedance during an Air Alert. All of this is voluntary but highly encouraged.

Residents can:

- Refrain from idling when dropping off/picking up students
- Carpool, vanpool or use alternate transportation
- Refrain from using drive-through services

Businesses and municipalities can:

- Shift operations to early morning or late evening (lawn care)
- Offer flexible work schedules
- Promote carpools and vanpools for employees
- Implement telecommuting
- Become a Healthy Air Living Partner

Valley residents and businesses can sign up to receive Air Alerts through the Air District's automated email list at www.valleyair.org. Air Alerts will also be posted on the District's websites (valleyair.org and www.healthyairliving.com); social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter; available at the toll-free 1-800 SMOG INFO number (766-4463); and will be widely broadcast on Valley TV and radio stations.

The new Air Alert system is a critical tool to inform and educate Valley residents of the immediate consequences of emission-creating activities, and to urge alternatives that can help us avoid painful economic penalties and poor health outcomes that will affect everyone in the air basin.

For more information about Air Alerts and the Valley Air District, please contact one of our regional offices: in Fresno (230-6000), in Modesto (209-557-6400) or in Bakersfield (661-392-5500).

Seyed Sadredin is executive director and air pollution control officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

'Air alert' called due to heat, stagnant air

By Ross Farrow/News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi News Sentinel, Tuesday, August 23, 2011

Residents and business people from Lodi to Bakersfield will be asked to reduce their driving and carpooling because air has become stagnant enough to warrant an "air alert."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says the air alert will be in effect today through Sunday in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties, and portions of Kern County.

The air alert was called because the Central Valley is experiencing a higher emissions load due to high temperatures and stagnant air, according to a news release by the air pollution control district. High ozone levels put the Valley at risk for exceeding health-based ozone standards that, in turn, trigger federal monetary penalties.

Air pollution officials recommend that residents:

- Avoid idling when dropping off and picking up their children at school.
- Carpool.
- Refrain from using drive-through services.

The district encourages businesses and local government to:

- Shift operations, such as lawn care, to early morning or late evening.
- Offer flexible work schedules.
- Promote carpools and vanpools for employees
- Telecommute.

In Sacramento County, Monday's air pollution level was listed as "moderate," but it is scheduled to be unhealthy for sensitive groups today.

Valley Air District announces first Air Alert

Business Journal, Tues., Aug. 23, 2011

Businesses may take more steps to improve air quality with a new program that alerts the public when days may be a little more smoggy than usual.

The San Joaquin Valley air basin's first air alert day is in effect on Aug. 23 through Aug. 28 when residents and businesses are urged to take measures such as carpooling, mass transit, not using drive thrus and driving less during the middle of the day.

The Air Alerts are triggered whenever any of 25 monitoring stations within the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District detect danger of exceeding the 1-hour standard for ozone, or 125 parts per billion of ozone-causing chemicals in a one-hour period.

Last year, the air basin had 7 violations of the standard leading to a penalty of \$29 million that was passed off in part to motor vehicles drivers in the form of a \$12 registration fee that would help supplement incentive programs that help reduce harmful emissions from cars, trucks and other machines.

If the Valley succeeds in recording zero ozone violations for three years, the penalty and vehicle fee will go away.

Drivers will continue to pay \$19 million a year on the penalty until the Valley comes in compliance.

Now, the air district is letting drivers know when the Valley comes close to breaking the threshold through the radio, the web, email alerts and through their helpline at 1-800-SMOGINFO (766-4463).

The air district hopes that they will reach many to take it upon themselves contribute to good air quality and save the extra money.

Mobile sources make up around 80 percent of ozone-causing emission in the Valley, according to the air district. Officials stress, however, that air quality has improved greatly due to incentive and education programs. In 1996, for instance, the Valley reported 56 1-hour ozone violations while nitrogen oxide emissions have been reduced 75 percent since 1980.

Air pollution district introduces air quality alert system

By Juan Villa

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced Monday a new air-quality notification system that will alert Valley residents when the air reaches unhealthy levels and penalties could result.

During an Air Alert, which will be issued Valley-wide by the air district, residents and businesses are advised to reduce vehicle use in order to minimize smog-forming emissions.

The first Air Alert is scheduled to begin today and last until Sunday, the air district announced Monday at a news conference.

The alert was called because the Valley is experiencing increased emissions load combined with high temperatures and stagnant air flow, all of which lead to ozone formation.

"Ozone is a serious health problem in the Valley, and in addition, has enormous economic repercussions," air district executive director and air pollution control officer Seyed Sadredin said. "Air Alerts provide a critical window of opportunity for residents and businesses to take action that can prevent triggering an ozone episode that carries severe penalties."

For individuals, those actions include carpooling, limiting driving trips, refraining from extended periods of idling and combining car trips to reduce emissions; for businesses, it can be offering telecommuting work options, flexible scheduling and ordering lunch in for workers.

Penalties, fees

Last year, eight Valley counties were fined \$29 million by the Environmental Protection Agency for violating federal air-quality standards.

The Valley air basin includes the counties of Tulare, Fresno, Kings, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin and parts of Kern.

To pay the \$29 million-dollar fine, a \$12 fee will be added to car registrations in the Valley beginning in October and large industrial businesses that don't have the best available control technology will be charged.

Air district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said it's especially those that can still invest more in pollution-decreasing equipment.

She said registration fees will generate about \$19 million; the rest will come from the large industrial businesses.

Violations

The fines came because of the one-hour ozone standard being exceeded in 2010. The standard is the current indicator of air quality acceptability for ground-level ozone, the primary constituent of smog.

The ozone violation threshold is 125 parts per billion during a one-hour period.

Ash Mountain in Tulare County reached 112 ppb on July 3, the highest the county has seen in 2011.

Fresno reached 122 ppb on July 2 and July 4, the highest the Valley has seen in 2011.

In order for the EPA to lift the fine, Holt said there can't be an ozone standard violation in the next three years.

Air quality is monitored by the air district 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with 25 monitoring systems throughout the Valley.

Holt said back-to-school traffic and summertime heat could trigger ozone violations during this time of the year.

"This is when we're truly at risk," Holt said.

Ozone forecast triggers air alert

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011

Conditions fostering ozone formation have triggered the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's first "air alert," which will last from Tuesday to Sunday.

High temperatures, stagnant airflow and increased emissions are combining to drive the ozone level dangerously close to the EPA's limit, district officials said.

The district is trying to keep that level within the EPA standard -- or 125 parts per billion during a one-hour period -- for residents' health as well as their pocketbooks. If the district can go three years without an ozone violation, the EPA will lift the \$29 million fee the valley currently faces.

The air district plans to pay that fee by adding a \$12 charge to the DMV vehicle registration bills of valley residents and some businesses beginning this fall.

District officials are asking residents to stop idling their cars when dropping off and picking up students, carpool and refrain from using drive-through services. Businesses can do their part by shifting operations to early morning or late evening; offering flexible work schedules; promoting carpools; and implementing telecommuting, the district said.

For more information about Air Alerts, please visit http://www.valleyair.org/AirAlert/AirAlert_Landing.htm

Valley Air Board declares Air Alert

Taft Midway Driller, Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011

The Valley air basin is in an Air Alert episode from Tuesday, Aug. 23 to Sunday, Aug. 28. This includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

This Air Alert episode is being called because the Valley is experiencing conditions, such as increased emissions load, high temperatures and stagnant air flow, that lead to ozone formation. High ozone levels put the Valley at risk for exceeding health-based ozone standards that in turn trigger federal monetary penalties.

There are steps residents and businesses can take to prevent this. Reducing vehicle use is an important way to reduce these emissions.

Residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by:

- Refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students
- Carpooling, vanpooling or alternate transportation
- Refraining from using drive-through services

Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by:

- Shifting operations to early morning or late evening (lawn care)
- Offering flexible work schedules
- Promoting carpools and vanpools for employees
- Implementing telecommuting
- Becoming a Healthy Air Living Partner

For more information about Air Alerts, please visit http://www.valleyair.org/AirAlert/AirAlert_Landing.htm.

To sign up for a free subscription to the Air Alert email notification system please visit <http://www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm>.

To receive information about becoming a Healthy Air Living Partner, please visit www.healthyairliving.com.

Please call your local District office for more information.

S.J. Valley call first ever Air Alert

Stockton Record, Tuesday, August 23, 2011

San Joaquin Valley air-quality cops have called their first Air Alert this week, hoping to avoid spikes in ozone pollution and costly federal penalties.

The Air Alert begins today and ends Sunday.

Motorists are asked to not idle their cars and to carpool to work or school, among other actions.

Ozone typically peaks in late summer as temperatures rise and back-to-school traffic increases, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Starting next month, Valley drivers will face a \$12 vehicle registration fee, because the region has failed to meet the ozone standard.

The fee can be removed, but only if the Valley goes three years straight without any ozone violations.

That's the goal of the Air Alert program. To learn more, visit valleyair.org.

Air Alert For Valley District In Effect Alert Affects Stanislaus, San Joaquin counties

KCRA, Tuesday, August 23, 2011

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- An Air Alert is now in effect for the San Joaquin Valley air basin. The alert will span from Tuesday to Sunday.

The San Joaquin Valley Air District includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

The only Sacramento-area residents impacted would be those living in Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties.

The new air-quality notification would alert residents that the San Joaquin Valley is experiencing conditions that may exceed smog standards, according to a news release.

People are urged to reduce their driving and instead carpool, use alternative forms of transportation, avoid drive-through windows and refrain from idling in their vehicles. They are also asked to cut back on use of gasoline-powered landscape equipment and barbecues until the alert had expired.

Failure to comply would result in financial penalties to the Valley, affecting both businesses and residents.

Air Alerts are designed to keep pollution levels below federal limits and eliminate penalty fees now being imposed on car owners in the San Joaquin Valley.

Currently, an additional \$12 is added to the annual registration fee of every passenger car registered in the Valley. The money is a penalty for the area not being in compliance with federal pollution rules. In order to make that fee go away, air pollution in the valley must remain below the federal limits for three years.

Air Alerts are only expected to be called in late summer and early fall.

New valley air alert system begins today

Bee Staff Reports

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, August 23, 2011

The first Air Alert started today, advising San Joaquin Valley residents to cut down on driving and other engine use through the weekend.

The alerts are a new campaign by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to curtail smog when it might exceed limits set by the federal government.

The first alert covers the entire district, from San Joaquin County to the valley portion of Kern County.

Officials said high temperatures, stagnant air flow and increased emissions have combined to make this a risky week.

The district urges residents to:

- Walk, bicycle or use carpools, vanpools or public transit
- Refrain from idling when dropping off and picking up students at school
- Do several errands on one trip
- Refrain from using drive-through services

Businesses and local governments can help by:

- Shifting operations, such as lawn care, to early morning or late evening
- Offering flexible work schedules
- Promoting carpools and vanpools for employees
- Letting workers telecommute

The alerts are part of the effort to reduce ozone violations that have resulted in a \$29 million federal fine. Valley residents are paying it in part through a \$12 annual increase in vehicle registration fees.

The \$29 million will be used for measures such as diesel engine replacement in trucks and school buses.

Air board asks drivers to cut trips to avoid fine

By Tracie Cone, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee, and other papers, Tuesday, August 23, 2011

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- San Joaquin County officials are turning to local residents to try to save the region from again being fined for ozone pollution.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has asked drivers to reduce trips and avoid idling engines, as weather patterns create the possibility of another air violation this week.

Last year, the region became the nation's first air basin to be fined for failing to meet the federal deadline for reducing ozone pollution. Businesses from Stockton to Bakersfield will pay \$10 million toward the \$29 million fine. Drivers will make up the remainder through a \$12 annual license tag renewal fee.

There have been no violations yet in 2011.

'Bike kitchen' assembles bicycles for volunteers

By Steven Mayer, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011

Sixteen-year-old Dulce "Duck" Lozano doesn't mind getting her hands dirty.

In fact, she relishes it.

On Tuesday she was in the "bike kitchen" at Bike Bakersfield learning how to repair her bicycle.

"This is her transportation," said her mother, Suzan Lozano. "She's interested in learning how to do it, learning how to be self-sufficient."

Ducky said her dad no longer lives at home, so she doesn't have anyone around to teach her how to change the oil on the car or fix a bicycle tire.

"This guy just taught me how to replace the tubes on my bike," she enthused. "Now I can do it all by myself. This so means the world to me."

Founded more than five years ago by local civil engineer and cycling enthusiast Bob Smith, Bike Bakersfield is a nonprofit cooperative of sorts with one primary goal in mind.

"We wanted to get more people on bikes in Bakersfield," said Smith, who regularly commutes to work by bike and prefers the quiet, two-wheeled experience over the hermetically sealed environment of the modern automobile.

The benefits are obvious, he said. Cyclists save money on ever-rising fuel costs, reduce America's dependence on foreign oil and cut down on the valley's chronic air pollution problem.

The obesity epidemic in Kern is well-documented, he added, and cycling is a fun and practical way to burn calories and increase cardiovascular health.

The organization works with school districts through its Safe Routes to School program. Organizers hold bike safety presentations, give away helmets, promote bike rodeos and youth cycling teams and advocate for bike lanes and other infrastructure to help cyclists and motorists more safely coexist on Kern County's roads.

But the bike kitchen, located in the basement of the organization's headquarters at 1708 Chester Ave., may be Bike Bakersfield's most innovative effort yet.

Like a dismantling yard for bicycles, the workshop sports a dozen or more used bike frames hanging in the back room, along with tires, rims, handle bars, seats and other parts.

Brian De La Cerda, a Safe Routes To School coordinator at Bike Bakersfield, said the Recycle-a-Bike program is comprised of a bike mechanic, lots of volunteers and tons of donated resources.

The way it generally works is people in need of a bicycle can build their own bike with the help of a mechanic. It'll cost them 15 hours of volunteering at the shop and attending an orientation and safety class.

De La Cerda estimated at least 75 recycled bikes are being put on the street annually -- and the folks at Bike Bakersfield would like to see that number grow.

There are tons of people in and out of the United States who are jumping on this concept for reasons that are completely obvious, he said. And despite the inevitable "negativity and naysayers," organizers hope to repeat those successes here.

High school and college students in need of cheap transportation make up a good portion of Bike Bakersfield's client-volunteers. But you'll also find middle-aged and older people looking for a way to get from Point A to Point B and beyond.

One man living at a local homeless shelter used his newly built bicycle to get to job interviews. Others say the downturn in the economy has left them with fewer choices.

Bakersfield resident Robert Tubbs, 56, said he's worked all his life, but he's been unemployed for several months.

Last week he was in the bike kitchen volunteering his time in hopes of riding away some day with his own bike. His knowledge of bicycle mechanics was immediately evident.

"I'd like to work, but there's not a lot of work out there," Tubbs said. "This is a great thing."

On Thursday, 17-year-old Ridgeview High School student Danny Medina was in the shop learning how to work on brakes, gears and wheels. Bike mechanic Matthew Peterson walked him through the steps, hands-on, as they tuned up a blue mountain bike.

"I have a working bike," Medina said. "I'm doing this to become an Eagle Scout."

He figures the volunteer hours should count as community service, and as a bonus, he's learning how to be more self-sufficient.

After using a hand pump to air up her newly replaced tire tubes, Ducky Lozano said personal independence is the name of the game.

"I always wanted to learn how to do stuff like this," she said. "I get a real thrill out of it."

HOW TO HELP

Have a used bike you never use anymore? Feel like donating a few dollars to help promote safe cycling in the valley? Bike Bakersfield needs volunteers and support to keep its programs running. To learn more about how you can help, send an email with your name, phone number and area of interest to info@bikebakersfield.org, or call 321-9247.

Valley faces bad-air alert this week

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 22, 2011

A bad-air alert has been issued for today through Sunday in the Valley as temperatures are expected to hover around 100 degrees, creating conditions for dangerous ozone peaks.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the alert Monday to encourage residents and businesses to help minimize smog-forming emissions.

Air district officials advise people to carpool, run errands in one trip, use mass transit and avoid vehicle idling. Businesses are encouraged to order lunches in, offer schedule flexibility to reduce commute-time traffic and make telecommuting an option for employees.

If ozone violations are avoided, vehicle registration fees will go down a few years from now, air district officials said.

A fee hike of \$12 will appear soon on renewal notices for Valley vehicle registrations. The hike is part of a \$29 million annual penalty levied because the region still violates a defunct federal ozone standard – which must nonetheless be met.

The annual penalty will continue until there are no more one-hour violations over a span of at least three years.

There have been no one-hour violations this year. Because vehicles create much of the ozone problem in Valley cities, air officials said, less driving during bad-air episodes might help avoid violations completely this year.

One-hour violations often happen in August, although five of the seven violations last year occurred in September.

The Valley is ripe for ozone spikes in August and September because the weather often is hot and stagnant, allowing pollution to build up.

The alert applies to Fresno, Tulare, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties and parts of Kern County.

San Joaquin Valley Air District launches Air Alert pollution notification system

KXTV News 10, Late Monday, August 22, 2011

MODESTO, CA - The San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control District warned it was issuing the area's first Air Alert on Tuesday which could carry severe financial penalties for the San Joaquin Valley.

"Ozone is a serious health problem in the valley, and in addition, has enormous economic repercussions," said Seyyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer.

According to Sadredin, Air Alerts provide residents and businesses an opportunity to reduce ozone-emitting activities, and avoid further penalties.

A press release issued by the district noted, "80 percent of the valley's ozone problems stem from automobiles." Therefore, when an Air Alert is issued, residents and businesses are urged to carpool, use public transportation, abstain from drive-through services and refrain from idling in order to cut back on emissions.

Additionally, individuals and businesses alike are urged to move ozone-creating activities, such as lawn care, to early morning once the air alert has passed.

If issued, the Air Alert could extend to Sunday.

Air Alert notifications can be received via telephone at 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463), on the district's website and by free subscription to an automated email list.

For more information about Air Alerts, visit , www.healthyairliving.com or call a district office: in Fresno (559) 230-6000, in Bakersfield (661-392-5500) or in Modesto (209-557-6400).

Air alert declared today for San Joaquin Valley – tomorrow

Central Valley News.com, Monday, August 22, 2011

Exhibiting amazing prescience, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says it knows that as of tomorrow and for the subsequent six days, ozone pollution will be so bad that it is declaring an "air alert."

This includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

The Valley is experiencing conditions such as increased "emissions load, high temperatures and stagnant air flow" that lead to ozone formation, it says.

High ozone levels put the Valley at risk for exceeding health-based ozone standards that in turn trigger federal monetary penalties, the air pollution control district says.

It says that residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by:

- Refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students
- Carpooling, vanpooling or alternate transportation
- Refraining from using drive-through services

It says that businesses and municipalities could reduce emissions by:

- Shifting operations to early morning or late evening
- Offering flexible work schedules
- Promoting carpools and vanpools for employees
- Implementing telecommuting