

Valley enjoys 'historic' August air readings

By Kellie Schmitt, staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

The valley survived the smoggy month of August without violating the federal ozone standard, an accomplishment air officials are calling "historic."

If the region makes it through the rest of this year and the next two years without violating that EPA standard, the current \$29 million noncompliance fee will be lifted.

"It's a tremendous accomplishment, just being able to say we've had no violation during August," said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

This marks the first time in recorded history that the basin didn't exceed 125 parts per billion during a one-hour period in August.

"We're still not out of the woods yet," Turner said, adding that September can also have high temperatures that contribute to ozone formation.

Officials say last week's air alert, which encouraged residents and businesses to minimize their car use and idling, among other steps, played a role in this year's success.

In previous years, violations of the one-hour standard typically occurred around the start of the school year. Last year, the first violation coincided with the first week of school. And in 1996, ozone levels crossed the limit 18 times in August.

But not everyone is celebrating the news. The Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a regional group concerned with valley air pollution issues, says the one-hour standard is too weak of a gauge. The valley should instead be focusing on the newer, tougher standards that look at ozone levels over eight-hour periods.

"We need to stay focused on the public health crisis in the valley," said Kevin Hall, the coalition's director. "Public health is still at great risk. They're trying to massage the reality."

Seyed Sadredin, the valley air district's executive director and air pollution control officer, stressed the importance of all of the money and efforts people and businesses have taken to fall below the one-hour standard.

"There is no question that the district has not raised a mission accomplished sign yet, but we need to acknowledge what the general public and businesses are doing," he said. "To disregard all the effort that has gone into it doesn't sound right. Why not take credit for good work?"

Meanwhile, Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, is still working on legislation that would remove the \$29 million penalty entirely. The congressman is working with the House Energy and Commerce Committee on that effort, according to a spokeswoman.

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.

In August, the valley edged close to the one-hour ozone limit in several air-monitoring locations, including Ash Mountain, Clovis, Fresno-Drummond and Edison. Edison came the closest to the 125 limit with a 116 ppb reading on Aug. 24.

Valley air sets cleanliness mark in August

Reason for good month is debatable, however.

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee staff writer
In the Fresno Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Sept. 2, 2011

For the first time ever, the Valley had no violations of a decades-old air standard in August – a big step toward wiping out a \$29 million annual pollution fine.

A new blitz of warnings about bad-air days might have made the difference, air officials said, especially last week when pollution nearly eclipsed the one-hour federal ozone standard. Residents were credited with cutting down on driving during the busy back-to-school week.

Critics, however, said lower readings had more to do with the state closing the San Joaquin Valley's worst air monitor in Arvin.

In August 2010, the monitor had the highest ozone reading in the Valley. The new monitor in Arvin, two miles from the old one, shows lower pollution levels, which officials have not yet been able to explain.

But air officials said the old Arvin monitor was not usually the worst offender of the one-hour standard over the last 20 years. They added that August violations in 2010 also were recorded in Fresno and Parlier.

If the Valley continues to avoid violating the one-hour standard over the next three years, the federal government will lift the \$29 million penalty, which will continue until the standard is achieved. The penalty adds \$12 to vehicle registration fees for Valley motorists.

There could be more air warnings this month if ozone problems develop, said executive director Seyed Sadredin of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. There were five one-hour ozone violations in September last year.

"September can be just about as bad as August," he said.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that forms on hot days when vehicle exhaust combines with fumes from gasoline, dairies and solvents. District officials say cutting back on driving during the worst days may prevent many violations.

But ozone should not be a big problem over the weekend as lower temperatures arrive, officials said. Forecasts hint at cooler weather next week as well.

In August, district officials began the new campaign of air alerts, asking people to find other ways to get to work or school besides driving. The alerts, which coincided with the start of school in the Valley, were carried on Twitter, Facebook, broadcast media, newspapers and its website.

The one-hour ozone standard was revoked several years ago and replaced with the eight-hour standard that's more protective of health. But federal law requires air districts to achieve the one-hour standard anyway.

The \$29 million fine was triggered last year when the Valley missed its last deadline for meeting the standard.

Members of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, which includes 70 environment, community and health groups, were critical of the district's announcement Thursday about the August achievement.

Aside from noting the closing of the Arvin monitor, they said the district should not be celebrating. The Valley is years late in meeting the one-hour standard, they said.

"The only clean air record earned by our air district is for delay," said Kevin Hall, director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition. "We missed the deadline 12 years ago."

Valley air basin records first-ever August within ozone standards

Sun-Star staff

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials credit public participation for reducing emissions in August that kept the air basin within a critical health-based standard for ozone.

It is the first time in recorded history that the air basin did not incur an exceedance for the standard in August, the district said in a news release.

“This is a historic accomplishment, for which the Valley’s residents and businesses can take credit,” said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District’s executive director and air pollution control officer. “They used the information provided by Air Alerts to accomplish the objective of keeping ozone levels below this important threshold.”

Valley’s first Air Alert notification began Aug. 23 and extended through Aug. 29. Air Alert episodes are declared when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding health-based ozone standards. There are steps residents and businesses can take to prevent this. Reducing vehicle use is an important way to reduce these emissions.

Typically, exceedances of the 1-hour ozone standard – which is set at 125 parts per billion – coincide with the start of the school year and increased vehicle traffic. In fact, in August 2010, the first exceedance occurred during the first week of school. Ozone is formed when pollutants combine in heat and sunlight. Temperatures during the Air Alert episode were five degrees above normal, and with added pollution associated with back to school traffic, the ozone concentration rose again; however, this year, with the Valley’s first Air Alert campaign, ozone levels for the first time in history stayed below the threshold in August.

“The air basin has gone from 18 exceedances in August 1996 to two last year, to none this year. It is truly a remarkable accomplishment,” Sadredin said.

Exceeding the 1-hour ozone standard triggers federal monetary penalties. Because of a handful of exceedances in 2010, the air basin was assessed a \$29 million penalty, which will be paid through fees on Valley businesses and residents.

Meanwhile, the Air District continues its efforts to have the penalty repealed.

“This penalty does not recognize the incredible improvements we have made across the board in our air quality,” Sadredin said.

Air Alert episodes will be declared during summer when conditions are conducive for ozone formation. When that occurs, the Air District urges residents and businesses to put air-friendly practices into place that may avert an exceedance.

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.

San Joaquin Valley's August ozone under the limit But valley air pollution district's figures disputed

By John Holland, staff writer
Modesto Bee, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley just completed its first August without a violation of a key air pollution standard, officials said Thursday.

The announcement drew protest from air activists, who said another measure shows the worst August since 2006.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced that last month had no violations of the limit for ozone, a component of smog, as measured by the hour.

Officials credited the new Air Alert campaign, which urges residents and businesses to cut down on driving and take other steps when the ozone risk is high.

"This is a historic accomplishment, for which the valley's residents and businesses can take credit," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, in a news release. "They used the information provided by Air Alerts to accomplish the objective of keeping ozone levels below this important threshold."

Ozone can trigger asthma and other lung illnesses, particularly for children and people with breathing problems.

Kevin Hall, director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition in Fresno, said the valley last month exceeded the stricter standard for ozone measured over eight hours.

Monitoring stations around the region exceeded the eight-hour limit 87 times last month, the most since the 92 five years earlier, the coalition said.

"Before we break out the champagne, there is no such 'clean-air record,' and the district's PR machine and executive director are guilty of deliberately hiding ongoing health risks from a public that is endangered and already suffering at epidemic levels," Hall said in a news release.

Coalition steering board member Tom Frantz of Wasco in Kern County added that the district this year removed a monitoring station near Arvin that had long shown high levels of ozone.

The one-hour standard limits ozone to 125 parts per billion in each air sample. The valley generally stayed below 100 for the first three weeks of August, then rose to about 115 on Aug. 24 before dropping back down.

"The air basin has gone from 18 exceedances in August 1996 to two last year to none this year," Sadredin said. "It is truly a remarkable accomplishment."

Past violations have brought a \$29 million annual penalty from the federal government, part of which will be paid by a \$12-a-year increase in vehicle registration fees in the valley.

The penalty will be revoked if the region stays within the standard for three years.

San Joaquin Valley sets clean-air record

Central Valley News.com, Thursday, Sept. 1, 2011

For the first time in recorded history, the San Joaquin Valley air basin did not exceed federal ozone level standards in the month of August, the air pollution control district says Thursday.

Officials credit public participation for reducing emissions in August that kept the air basin within a critical health-based standard for ozone.

"This is a historic accomplishment, for which the Valley's residents and businesses can take credit," says Seyed Sadredin, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District executive director and air pollution control officer. "

The Valley's first Air Alert notification began Aug. 23 and extended through Aug. 29. Air Alert episodes are declared when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding health-based ozone standards.

Typically, exceeding the one-hour ozone standard – which is set at 125 parts per billion – happens with the start of the school year and increased vehicle traffic. In August 2010, the first time the level was exceeded occurred during the first week of school.

Ozone is formed when pollutants combine in heat and sunlight. Temperatures during the Air Alert episode were five degrees above normal, and with added pollution associated with back to school traffic, the ozone concentration rose again; however, this year, with the Valley's first Air Alert campaign, ozone levels for the first time in history stayed below the threshold in August, air pollution control officials say.

"The air basin has gone from 18 'exceedances' in August 1996 to two last year, to none this year. It is truly a remarkable accomplishment," says Mr. Sadredin.

Exceeding the one-hour ozone standard triggers federal monetary penalties. Exceeding the levels last year resulted in a \$29 million penalty, which will be paid through fees on Valley businesses and residents, the air district says.

Meanwhile, the Air District continues its efforts to have the penalty repealed.

"This penalty does not recognize the incredible improvements we have made across the board in our air quality," says Mr. Sadredin.

Obama decides against change in ozone standards

By Richard Wolf, staff writer

USA Today, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

President Obama decided Friday morning not to raise ozone standards for air pollution favored by environmentalists but decried by business groups and Republicans.

In his decision, relayed to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, Obama cited the need to remove uncertainty for businesses that would be affected.

"I have continued to underscore the importance of reducing regulatory burdens and regulatory uncertainty, particularly as our economy continues to recover," Obama said. "Ultimately, I did not support asking state and local governments to begin implementing a new standard that will soon be reconsidered."

Complying with the new regulation could have cost from \$20 billion to \$90 billion annually, making it by far the most expensive new rule on the federal books. It topped the list of proposed regulations that could cost more than \$1 billion demanded recently by House Speaker John Boehner.

"We're glad that the White House responded to the speaker's letter and recognized the job-killing impact of this particular regulation," said Boehner spokesman Michael Steel. "But it is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to stopping Washington Democrats' agenda of tax hikes, more government 'stimulus' spending, and increased regulations, which are all making it harder to create more American jobs."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, congressional Republicans and others had complained that raising ozone standards for air pollution would cost billions of dollars and result in lost jobs. A study last year by the Manufacturing Alliance predicted as many as 7.3 million jobs could be lost by 2020.

The issue of excessive federal regulations is gaining steam in Washington. Obama has ordered agencies to roll back old, redundant rules that are no longer needed. House Republicans are putting together a fall agenda focused on easing the regulatory burden on business.

The administration already had missed several deadlines to change the standard for smog from the level set by the Bush administration in 2008.

More than 175 business organizations sent a letter to Obama last month asking that the pending standard, which would set a tougher air pollution standard for industries to meet, be delayed at least until 2013.

"The president's decision is good news for the economy and Americans looking for work," said Jack Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute. "EPA's proposal would have prevented the very job creation that President Obama has identified as his top priority."

The decision came in the wake of another bad monthly jobs report that showed no jobs added in August on a net basis.

It was relayed to the EPA by Cass Sunstein, administration of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. He wrote that Obama "has made it clear that he does not support" raising the ozone standards now.

"Finalizing a new standard now is not mandatory and could produce needless uncertainty," Sunstein wrote, noting that current ozone standards must be reviewed by 2013 anyway.

Environmental groups quickly blasted Obama's decision.

"The Obama administration is caving to big polluters at the expense of protecting the air we breathe," said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters. "This is a huge win for corporate polluters and huge loss for public health."

Slow-walking is no way to govern when it comes to protecting the health of all Americans, especially children and the elderly, the most vulnerable among us," said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Our public officials, including those in the White House, are there to protect us from harm. They need to get on with doing their jobs."

But Republicans in Congress heralded it as the right medicine for an ailing economy.

"Job creators scored a major victory today in the fight against Washington's red tape," said Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., leader of Senate Republicans' effort on regulations. "After months of

discussions, the White House finally admitted that its ozone rule was completely unnecessary and bad for our economy."

Others, however, have argued that tougher ozone standards would save money currently lost when Americans get sick from air pollution.

"Those rules will generate billions of economic benefits in excess of compliance costs," said Michael Livermore, executive director of the Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law. "With each year of delay, that means additional costs imposed on the public, included lost productivity, hospital bills, more asthma cases, and untimely deaths."

Here's the president's statement:

Over the last two and half years, my administration, under the leadership of EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, has taken some of the strongest actions since the enactment of the Clean Air Act four decades ago to protect our environment and the health of our families from air pollution. From reducing mercury and other toxic air pollution from outdated power plants to doubling the fuel efficiency of our cars and trucks, the historic steps we've taken will save tens of thousands of lives each year, remove over a billion tons of pollution from our air, and produce hundreds of billions of dollars in benefits for the American people.

At the same time, I have continued to underscore the importance of reducing regulatory burdens and regulatory uncertainty, particularly as our economy continues to recover. With that in mind, and after careful consideration, I have requested that Administrator Jackson withdraw the draft Ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards at this time. Work is already underway to update a 2006 review of the science that will result in the reconsideration of the ozone standard in 2013. Ultimately, I did not support asking state and local governments to begin implementing a new standard that will soon be reconsidered.

I want to be clear: my commitment and the commitment of my administration to protecting public health and the environment is unwavering. I will continue to stand with the hardworking men and women at the EPA as they strive every day to hold polluters accountable and protect our families from harmful pollution. And my administration will continue to vigorously oppose efforts to weaken EPA's authority under the Clean Air Act or dismantle the progress we have made.

Obama halts controversial EPA regulation

By Julie Pace and Dina Cappiello – The Associated Press
In the Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama is sacking a controversial proposed regulation tightening government smog standards, bowing to the demands of congressional Republicans and some business leaders.

In a statement Friday, Obama said he had ordered Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa Jackson to withdraw the proposal, in part because of the importance of reducing regulatory burdens and uncertainty for businesses at a time of rampant uncertainty about an unsteady economy.

The announcement came shortly after a new government report on private sector employment report showed that businesses essentially added no new jobs last month - and that the jobless rate remained stuck at a historically high 9.1 percent.

The withdrawal of the proposed EPA rule comes two days after the White House identified seven such regulations that it said would cost private business at least \$1 billion each. The proposed smog standard was estimated to cost anywhere between \$19 billion and \$90 billion, depending on how strict it would be.

The smog standard was among the Obama administration regulations that House Republicans said this week they would try to block this fall.

The move is sure to raise the ire of environmentalists, a core Obama constituency. In his statement, Obama said he was still committed to protecting public health and the environment.

"I will continue to stand with the hardworking men and women at the EPA as they strive every day to hold polluters accountable and protect our families from harmful pollution," he said.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011:](#)

Schools and air quality

It's back to school time. Did you know that school activities cause our pollution levels to spike? It's true.

In an effort to improve our air pollution problem, the local Air Board has launched a new Air Alert Program, which alerts our community when the air pollution spikes to unhealthy levels.

As a retired pediatrician who has practiced in the Valley for 40 years, this alert is vitally important. Things like carpooling, biking/walking to work or school, as well as taking public transportation and just plain driving less will help reduce our pollution and improve everyone's health. This means fewer heart attacks, asthma attacks and missed school/work time.

Here is how you can help:

- * Refrain from idling when dropping off or picking up your kids at school.
- * Carpool, vanpool or use alternative transportation.
- * Refrain from using drive-through services.

Let's all do as much as we can and become part of the solution and not the problem, if not for you, then for future generations.

*Helen Rotous Rockas, M.D.
Fresno-Madera Medical Society*