

Tulare County responds to Grand Jury report

By David Castellon

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Sept. 12, 2011

Tulare County supervisors will recommend consolidating office space used by county agencies and seek alternative funding if they want to try to preserve short-term rail lines and improved traffic markers around a rural school. These are some of the responses they have to recommendations made by the Tulare County Grand Jury in a series of reports issued earlier this year.

On Tuesday, the board is expected to approve formal responses to some of the Grand Jury's reports on the following topics:

- The Tulare County Association of Government's proposal to use \$3 million in money raised through the Measure R sales tax to preserve the East Side Rail Line.
- A review of the county Resource Management Agency's practices.
- The safety of roadways and intersections near rural schools in the county.
- Possible financial waste by the county leasing office and storage space.
- A look at Tulare County jails and detention facilities.

The Grand Jury reviews the activities of county and city agencies, along with special districts, based on suggestions or requests for investigations from the public. Its members — all volunteers — also can initiate the reviews.

Those agencies reviewed can formally respond to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury. Here are some of the county's responses:

- The Grand Jury suggested that some high-yield crops raised by county jail inmates be traded for other high-yield crops raised by jail farming programs in other counties. County officials said that they haven't found similar programs with which to trade. Still, the supervisors say they'll review the matter.
- Tulare County should negotiate more favorable leases on office space and consolidate agencies to use less office space and reduce costs.

The county already negotiates lease prices based on the median price for comparable properties, the supervisors respond.

In addition, they state that they have a long-term goal to consolidate and they've set guidelines that agencies receiving county general fund money should be in county-owned buildings

If a decision is made to preserve short-rail lines, the Tulare County Association of Governments and its members agencies should obtain funding other than Measure R dollars to purchase and repair those lines, the Grand Jury suggested.

Representatives from the county and TCAG are working with [the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#), rail companies, shippers, and federal and state government agencies to seek such funding, the supervisors respond.

The supervisors will not follow the Grand Jury's recommendation to separate the county's code compliance division from its zoning and building inspection division.

"The RMA [Resource Management Agency] maintains and continues to recommend that a separate code compliance division is not practical due to current economic conditions," according to the board's response.

Board members also will not follow the Grand Jury's suggestion to form an independent task force with the county chief administrative officer to monitor RMA's performance. A task force isn't warranted, they say, because RMA's director provides regular updates on his department's performance.

School crossings where "SLOW SCHOOL CROSSING" painted on the pavement and crosswalk lines are fading and hard to see by drivers will be repainted within the next six months.

RMA also will review unmarked crossings to see if pavement markers should be added and check around rural schools to determine if school pedestrian signs are missing.

Environmentalists find few victories this year in Sacramento

By Paul Rogers

The Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2011

The environmental movement bumped into a bad economy in Sacramento this year, and there's little doubt who came up on the short end.

"For the environment, this is probably the least productive year in a decade," said Warner Chabot, executive director of the California League of Conservation Voters.

With unemployment at 12 percent, the state facing continued deficits and a national climate hostile to many new government regulations, the political will in Sacramento -- even among Democrats -- for broad new conservation measures was largely drowned out this year.

As California's 2011 legislative session wound down at midnight Friday, environmentalists who had hoped a year ago that the election of Democrat Jerry Brown as governor might bring a wave of new green laws were instead left to consider a few small victories, and plenty of disappointment.

Among the modest results: A ban on shark fin soup. A penny per-barrel increase on the fee oil companies pay to fund California's oil spill programs. And a prohibition on a controversial chemical used in baby bottles.

"The economy has eliminated doing almost anything that involves money," Chabot said, "and there is a sensitivity to new regulations."

Sacramento's experience is part of a wider trend. On the national stage, regulation has become an even dirtier word. With job creation taking center stage in the 2012 campaign, Republican presidential contenders are questioning the now well-established science behind global warming, and even President Barack Obama irked environmentalists last week when he failed to beef up national smog standards.

Winners and losers

Now, all eyes are on Brown, who has 30 days to sign or veto the bills the Legislature sent him.

Among the main environmental bills on his desk are:

- Shark fin soup. AB 376 by Assemblyman Paul Fong, D-Mountain View, would ban the sale of shark fins in California. Every year, up to 73 million sharks are killed worldwide to make shark fin soup. Supporters, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Humane Society and basketball star Yao Ming, say the bill is needed to end the practice of catching sharks, cutting off their fins and throwing them back in the ocean to slowly bleed to death. Opponents, including Chinese restaurants, state Sen. Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, and Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, D-San Francisco, say shark fin soup is an important part of Chinese culture and that the bill is culturally insensitive.
- Oil spill funding. AB 1112 by Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, would increase the fee that oil companies pay to import oil into California from 5 cents per barrel to 6.5 cents. Without the bill, which had been opposed by British Petroleum and the Western States Petroleum Association, California's oil spill response programs will run a \$5.6 million deficit by 2013, requiring layoffs. Because of strong opposition, Huffman inserted a three-year expiration in the bill to win enough votes, so the battle will be back in 2015.
- Chemicals. AB 1319, by Assemblywoman Betsy Butler, D-El Segundo, would ban the use of the chemical bisphenol A in baby bottles and sippy cups. The chemical has been linked to breast cancer and developmental problems in laboratory rats. The chemical and grocery industries staunchly opposed the bill, saying the levels that humans are exposed to are so minuscule that they are safe.

- Other bills to allow nonprofit groups to keep state parks open (AB 42), extend property tax breaks for open space (AB 703), and adjust funds ratepayers pay to fund solar initiatives (SB 585) also made it to Brown's desk.

For every victory, however, there were many more losses for environmentalists:

- **Plastics.** On Friday, a closely watched bill to ban the use of food containers made of polystyrene plastic like Styrofoam failed to advance in the Assembly. The grocery, chemical and plastics industry said it would place unfair burdens on business.
- **Renewable energy.** Late Friday, lawmakers killed an effort to extend until 2020 the "public goods charge," a 1.5 percent tax on utility bills put in place in 1996 by former state Sen. Byron Sher, D-Palo Alto, that raises roughly \$400 million a year for renewable energy projects and research grants for solar, wind and other new technologies. The measure, AB 724, needed a two-thirds vote, but was opposed by anti-tax advocate Grover Norquist. No Republican voted for it.
- **Batteries.** In May, a bill stalled that would have required battery producers to set up and finance programs to recycle old batteries. It was opposed by grocers, technology companies and other industry groups who said it imposed costly new regulations.
- **Water meters.** Apartment owners would have been required to put individual water meters on each unit in new construction under a bill by Assemblyman Fong. Supported by the Sierra Club and others as a way to conserve water, it was opposed by the California Apartment Association, California Building Industry Association and other industry groups, who said it was a costly mandate in a rough real estate market.
- Lawmakers also killed or tabled until next year environmental bills to restrict a controversial oil and gas practice called hydraulic fracking, a bill to tightly regulate the catch of "forage species" of fish like sardines, herring or market squid; and an effort to abolish the California Air Resources Board. Significantly, they also approved a bill supported by labor unions, but opposed by environmental groups, to fast-track legal challenges to new construction projects larger than \$100 million, such as sports stadiums, until 2015.

GOP opposition

Business groups say it is only right that eco-measures were kept in check this year.

"The key for employers is certainty, and over-regulation is the single biggest cause of uncertainty in the California business climate," said Loren Kaye, president of the California Foundation for Commerce and Education, an arm of the California Chamber of Commerce.

Republicans almost universally voted this year against new environmental laws, as they have for much of the past decade.

Huffman, who is chairman of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, said that newly drawn districts and term limits, along with the tight economy, had many lawmakers particularly cautious of doing anything this year that might come back and be used in next November's elections.

"Everybody is looking over their shoulder left and right and not wanting to do things that upset industry supporters," he said.

Many environmental groups said the biggest victory of the year came in April when the governor signed SB 2X, a measure by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, to require the state's utilities to produce 33 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020.

That bill passed in a special session on jobs.

"I was in some ways fortunate that the issue got teed up earlier in the year and didn't get caught up in the larger push and shove that always happens at the end of the year," Simitian said.

San Joaquin Valley at brink of ozone violation

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, San Francisco Chronicle and other papers, Friday, Sept. 9, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. -- As Fresno sits on the brink of breaking federal air quality laws, officials warn that dangerous conditions will exist through Friday.

A combination of triple-digit temperatures and stagnant air are combining to push the region over the one-hour ozone limit. If it goes any higher late Thursday, a three-year \$29 million federal fine for violations of the Clean Air Act would be extended for an additional year.

Officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said that around midday Wednesday the ozone reading was just under the government's maximum limit.

Health officials say high ozone levels make the air unhealthy for everyone, not just sensitive groups.

People in the area are being urged to limit outdoor activities, and authorities are asking residents to curb driving.

San Joaquin Valley air pollution nears critical threshold

Central Valley News.com, Late Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

Ozone levels approached critical levels Wednesday in parts of the San Joaquin Valley, lingering near the so-called "one-hour threshold" over which air pollution would exceed federal levels.

Exceeding the levels can result in financial penalties, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says.

Since ozone-formation conditions remain threatening, an air alert is being extended through Friday.

The highest preliminary reading Wednesday was in Fresno at 124 ppb. The standard is exceeded at 125 ppb or higher.

"Whether we hit that 'exceedance' threshold could well depend on whether people continue to minimize emissions through alternative transportation, for example," says Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer. "During the last episode, we stayed below the threshold because of the Valley's concerted efforts."

Air Alerts are declared Valley-wide and include all of the counties in the air basin: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

About 80 percent of the Valley's ozone-forming emissions are produced by vehicle use. Residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by refraining from idling when dropping off or picking up students, carpooling or vanpooling, and refraining from using drive-through services, the district says.

Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by shifting operations to early morning or late evening, as in lawn care; offering flexible work schedules, and encouraging carpools and vanpools for employees.

High smog levels lead to one-day extension of SJV air alert

Sun-Star staff

Merced Sun-Star, Late Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District said ozone levels approached critical levels Wednesday, lingering "precariously near" the one-hour threshold for an exceedance and requiring Valley Air District officials to extend the current Air Alert another day.

Valley residents were saved a potential additional \$12 penalty by avoiding an exceedance Wednesday and also so far this year, the district said in a news release. The latest and second episode of the summer was originally anticipated to end today, but ozone-formation conditions

remain threatening, so the episode is being extended through Friday, Sept. 9. The highest preliminary reading Wednesday was in Fresno at 124 parts per billion (ppb). The one-hour ozone standard is exceeded at 125 ppb or higher.

Officials urged Valley residents and businesses to continue emission-minimizing practices.

Air Alerts are called when conditions may lead to ozone (smog) formation that results in exceeding the health-based standard of 125 ppb and triggering substantial federal monetary penalties.

Air Alerts are declared Valley-wide and include all of the counties in the air basin: Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

About 80 percent of the Valley's ozone-forming emissions are produced by vehicle use. Residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by refraining from idling when dropping off or picking up students, carpooling or vanpooling, and refraining from using drive-through services.

Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by shifting operations to early morning or late evening, as in lawn care; offering flexible work schedules, and encouraging carpools and vanpools for employees. Businesses can also enroll at no cost in the Healthy Air Living Partner program.

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

To sign up for a free subscription to the Air Alert email notification system:

<http://www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm>.

To receive information about becoming a Healthy Air Living Partner: www.healthyliving.com.

Air Alert continues through today

Porterville Recorder, Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

The Valley air basin continues to be in an Air Alert episode through today, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported. The alert includes Tulare County.

Pollution levels spiked on Tuesday at 119 ppb in the Fresno area. A reading of 125 ppb is considered a violation of the federal 1-hour ozone standard. High temperature, ozone build-up and lack of atmospheric mixing have brought about an extremely high risk for a possible exceedance on Wednesday, Sept. 7. The Valley Air District is urging all Valley residents to take action to reduce emissions during this critical time.

Air Alert episodes are called 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 a major way to reduce these emissions.

Valley air alert called off for today

The Fresno Bee, Friday, September 9, 2011

An air alert for the Valley will not be extended to today because of lower temperatures and an increased chance for thunderstorms this weekend that could bring rain to the Valley floor.

"All that will help move out the pollution that has been forming in the Valley," said Jaime Holt, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The alert -- called when the area is in danger of exceeding a federal standard for ozone -- started Monday and ended Friday.

The Valley did not exceed the one-hour threshold for ozone violations this week but came close Wednesday, Holt said.

Scattered showers fell in Valley locations on Friday, and a tenth of an inch of rain is expected in some places between this afternoon and Sunday morning. The chances of rain on Sunday are

better because the atmosphere will have increased moisture, weather service meteorologist Kevin Durfee said.

Fresno's highs this weekend will decrease from 95 today to 90 on Sunday. Temperatures will be in the lower 60s at night.

Free tune-up event Saturday

Stockton Record, Friday, Sept. 9, 2011

STOCKTON — Motorists can get a free vehicle emissions test and, if needed, \$500 vouchers for repairs at a "Tune In & Tune Up" event planned for Saturday.

The free event takes place from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at San Joaquin Delta College in the Shima 2 parking lot.

Technicians will screen cars for excessive emissions, although this is not a formal smog check and no certificates will be offered.

The first 525 vehicle owners who don't pass the test will receive \$500 vouchers for repairs at a smog shop.

Expect as long as a two-hour wait while the cars are processed, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and Valley Clean Air Now, the organizations hosting the event.

For more information, call (800) 806-2004 or visit www.valley-can.org.

Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions Air Alerts. For more information, contact Maricela Velasquez at (559) 230-5849.

Empeora calidad del aire

El Sol

Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

El Distrito del Control de la Polución del Aire del Valle de San Joaquín dió a conocer un reporte en el cual advierte que la calidad del aire del la región durante la semana pasada fue mala debido a los altos niveles de ozono. Al parecer, durante esta época del año esta es la tendencia general, por lo que se pide al público mantenerse alerta.

Alertas del Aire son declaradas cuando las condiciones son óptimas para la creación de ozono que puedan causar una violación del estándar de ozono. Hay pasos que los residentes y negocios pueden hacer para prevenir esto.

Reducir el uso del vehículo para reducir estas emisiones.

Evitar dejar el vehículo estacionado con el motor encendido

Comparta sus viajes en su vehículo

Evitar usar los servicios por ventanilla

Los negocios y municipios pueden reducir sus emisiones de la siguiente manera:

Cambiando las horas de operación al amanecer o al oscurecer

Ofreciendo horarios de trabajo flexibles

Promoviendo el compartir el viaje "carpool" con los empleados

Para recibir información acerca de las Alertas del Aire llame al 1-800-766-4463; o visite www.airelimpiovidasana.com; o suscribese gratis a una lista de correos electrónicos (<http://valleyair.org/lists/list.htm>).