

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Commentary, Saturday, Sept. 17, 2011:](#)
Multiple tasks help clean air

Air quality is a vital issue in the San Joaquin Valley. Businesses and residents are working hard and investing billions of dollars in strategies to improve air quality.

Many residents might not be aware of the efforts being undertaken in the cause of cleaner air nor familiar with the issues connected with air pollution in our Valley.

Viewpoint asked Seyed Sadredin, executive director and air pollution control officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, to comment on some issues regarding air quality in the San Joaquin Valley:

Viewpoint: What upcoming programs can Valley residents expect in which they can participate to reduce air pollution?

Sadredin: There are several extremely popular programs tailored for Valley residents that reduce emissions and the costs associated with making clean-air changes.

Tune In & Tune Up is a great example of a program that addresses vehicle emissions and greatly reduces, or eliminates, the cost of making critical auto repairs. In addition to improving the Valley's air quality, this program eases financial stress. Tune In & Tune Up provides free emissions checks and, if repairs are needed, a voucher for \$500 toward repairs. The next Tune In & Tune Up event in Visalia will be 9 a.m. Oct. 8 at College of the Sequoias.

The Burn Cleaner wood-stove and fireplace change-out voucher program offers residents hundreds of dollars off the purchase of cleaner residential wood-burning units (up to \$1,500 for low-income residents). This program relates to the Check Before You Burn fireplace curtailment program in that the fewer emissions from residential wood-burning, the less likely we are to have these curtailments.

On March 21, the district is also hosting a lawn-care conference that addresses cleaner technology for lawn mowers, leaf blowers and other yard-care equipment. The Clean Green Yard Machines electric lawn mower trade-in program is a good example of tools that make clean-air yard care feasible and affordable.

Viewpoint: What are the prospects for complying with federal air quality standards and avoiding fines for non-compliance?

Sadredin: The Valley has seen great progress in attaining a variety of federal clean-air standards. However, failure to attain these by predetermined deadlines can result in onerous penalties, which the Valley can ill afford.

Let's talk about the one-hour ozone penalty, which is reflected in recently increased DMV registration fees. In order to make this federally imposed, \$29 million annual penalty go away, the air basin needs to demonstrate three "clean" years. A three-year "clean" period is defined as a period during which no single air-monitoring station has more than three instances of violating the standard. This year, we have had no exceedances of the one-hour standard thus far, so we're off to a good start. The recently initiated Air Alert notification program helped Valley residents and businesses successfully avert a potential violation so far this year. In fact, this is the longest we've ever gone in a year without having a violation, and the public and businesses deserve a great deal of credit for this historical achievement.

If we continue to have no exceedances of this standard for the rest of the year, we may well see this penalty disappear soon.

The Valley has already met standards for carbon monoxide and PM10 (particulate matter 10 microns and smaller) and is on the verge of meeting the standard for one-hour ozone.

The deadline for meeting standards for PM2.5 is 2015 and for eight-hour ozone 2024. Given the monumental progress we have made, the prospects are good for these additional challenges.

Viewpoint: Some Valley residents say that our air quality problems are actually created in the Bay Area and airborne into the Valley. How much is air pollution from other areas a problem for the Valley?

Sadredin: The issue of air pollution "transport" — pollution from other areas — is to be taken seriously, and it is one we must remain vigilant about. However, it is not as simple as some would characterize it.

The Valley creates enough pollution on its own to violate the standards. Mobile sources such as trucks, passenger vehicles and off-road engines are the largest sources of air pollution in the Valley. As we make progress toward attaining these goals, we may find that transport, even at the relatively small levels that we have identified, may become the determinant factor in our ability as a region to attain the federal standards.

Our studies show that for ozone, during the worst summer days, as much as 30 percent in the north Valley (San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties) may be attributable to transport; 10 percent in the central region (Madera, Fresno and Kings counties); and 6 percent in the south Valley (Tulare County and portions of Kern County).

But the most important thing to take away from this discussion is that we cannot simply point our fingers at the Bay Area. We have more than enough work to do in our own backyard while doing everything we can to make sure our neighboring regions do their part.

Viewpoint: What is the economic impact of poor air quality in the Valley, both in terms of the costs connected with poor air quality and the benefits from better air quality?

Sadredin: Valley businesses have invested \$40 billion in cleaner technology and modernization, which have resulted in better air quality. This is an astronomical amount of money and our businesses should be commended for their investment and sacrifice. But the consequences of poor air quality affect everyone and include absenteeism from work and school, lost work days, higher health care costs, and costs associated with desirability for business and industry location. Health costs alone associated with poor air quality are estimated as high as \$6 billion per year. In addition to these very real hard costs that would be drastically reduced by improved air quality, the perception of the Valley among non-Valley people would be greatly improved, with tangible and intangible benefits. What price can you put on a better quality of life? Nonetheless, the Valley's unique challenges require creativity and innovation, and we cannot simply follow the one-size-fits-all solutions that will not work best for the Valley.

Viewpoint: What kinds of things indicate that our air quality is improving?

Sadredin: There are two fundamental milestones that the Valley has reached that tell us that our air quality is significantly better today than it was 20, or even 10, years ago: the quantity of emissions reduced and how that translates in reduced concentrations of air pollution. Emissions from stationary sources — the area of the air district's regulatory jurisdiction — have declined 80 percent since the early 1990s, and the total emissions — including mobile sources such as vehicles — have declined 50 percent. This has been while the Valley's population has doubled.

But in addition to our enormous population growth, the Valley is also faced with natural characteristics that make emission reduction extremely challenging, including the bowl shape of the Valley (surrounded by mountains), weather patterns (hot, sunny summers and cold, stagnant winters) and a reduced "carrying capacity," that is, the ability of the air basin to clean itself of pollution.

Due to these unique circumstances over which we have no control, improvements in the Valley's air quality are often not commensurate with the significant reductions in emissions that have been achieved.

Despite these aspects of the Valley that we do not have control over, we have seen the number of violations of standards decrease markedly. The number of "unhealthy" air days has declined from dozens just 10 years ago to fewer than a handful today. And the number of "healthy" air days has increased just as much.

Viewpoint: What are the simplest things that Valley residents can do to improve air quality?

Sadredin: As vehicles account for about 80 percent of our air pollution problems in the Valley, the single most effective thing that residents can do is drive less. More and more businesses are encouraging carpooling, vanpooling and alternative transportation, and some offer incentives for their employees to do so. These workplace-based, emission-reduction strategies really work, and we hear from businesses that they are also great for morale. (I can personally attest to that. At the air district, we have a very high percentage of employees, including myself, who carpool or bike to work.) Even things that people can do that are not workplace-centered are extremely effective, for example, what we call "trip linking," which simply means organizing your vehicle trips for efficiency. The bottom line there is reduce the miles we travel by car.

Other steps that residents can put into practice are simple lifestyle changes such as bringing your lunch to work, postponing lawn mowing or even trading in a gas mower for an electric model.

The air district has developed a program for businesses, municipalities and community organizations called Healthy Air Living Partners, which provides free resources and tools, as well as networking opportunities with other Valley businesses in brainstorming emission-reduction strategies for the workplace. Additionally, this offers credit for businesses that are eligible for eTRIP (Employer-based Trip Reduction Program), which seeks to reduce workplace-based emissions such as commuting.

The analogy we use at the air district for the seemingly small changes that people can make for clean air is the drop of water in a bucket: By itself, it doesn't seem like much.

But they all add up.

Valley air district grants and incentive programs

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District distributes millions of dollars each year in grants and incentive funding. Here is a listing of the projects that the air district funds, who is eligible for them and current funding status:

Clean Green Yard Machines

» What: Vouchers provided to Valley air basin residents to retire their old gas lawn mowers in favor of nonpolluting, electric lawn mowers. Voucher is equal to \$225 toward purchase of an eligible unit. Resulting cost share for resident is \$50 for a 14-inch mower and \$100 for a 19-inch mower.

» When: Funding is available in Tulare, Kings and Kern counties. Application may be submitted by calling any air district office.

Burn Cleaner Program

» What: Funds available to replace wood-burning devices with cleaner, gas devices; clean-burning pellet devices; or cleaner-burning EPA Phase II-certified wood-burning devices.

» When: Funding is currently available from \$100 to \$500. Low-income residents may qualify for up to \$1,500. Applications available at www.valleyair.org or by calling program staff.

Remove II

A. Vanpool Voucher Incentive Program: Encourages vanpooling among frequent long-distance (greater than 20 miles) riders in the San Joaquin Valley. Riders must reside within the Valley air basin; the vanpool route must originate in the air basin and must travel no less than 20 miles one-way; the destination may be outside the district. Applications are submitted to the district by vanpool riders. Applicants must use a district-approved, participating vanpool agency. Voucher is \$30/month for one year. Riders may apply a maximum of three years.

B. Light & medium-duty vehicle component

C. E-mobility component

D. Bicycle infrastructure component

E. Public transportation and park-and-ride lot component

F. Alternative fuel vehicle mechanic training component

» When: Funding is currently available for all components. Incentive amounts for the components vary depending on the type and scope.

PASS

» What: The PASS component offers a free car emissions test and diagnostic inspection at Tune In & Tune Up events held on weekends throughout the Valley. Vehicles that don't pass this free test and are found to be repairable will receive a \$500 voucher for repairs at a participating Gold Shield-certified smog shop.

» When: Tulare County event 9 a.m. Oct. 8, College of the Sequoias.

» Who: Consumers who purchased gasoline in California between Jan. 1, 1995, and Aug. 11, 2005.

Public Benefit Grant

» What: The program has been designed to meet the needs and challenges faced by Valley public institutions and provides a variety of clean-air, public-benefit projects that will directly benefit Valley residents. Program options include:

» New Alternative Fuel Vehicle Purchase: Maximum funding of \$20,000 per vehicle with a limit of

\$100,000 per agency.

- » New Electric Vehicle Infra- structure: Not currently open.
- » Alternative Fuel Infrastructure: Not currently open.
- » Advanced Transportation and Transit (including light-synchronization projects): Not currently open.
- » When: Applications are available on the website.

Lower Emission School Bus Technology Advancement Program

- » What: This provides incentive funds for the replacement of 1986 and older school buses and for the retrofit of 1987 and newer school buses with an ARB Level 3 Plus verified emission-control device. Eligible buses are owned and operated by public school districts.
- » When: Not currently accepting applications; anticipated to reopen next summer.

Technology Advancement Program (TAP)

- » What: TAP encourages innovation and development of new emission-reduction technologies. TAP consists of an ongoing review of new technology concepts, interagency partnerships, funding for technology advancement programs and collaborations to build and expand local capacity for research and development in the San Joaquin Valley. Technology focus areas are:
Renewable energy — Projects that overcome barriers to utilizing renewable energy, such as remote solar energy/storage, vehicle-to-grid, wind energy or peak shaving systems
Waste solutions — Waste systems or technologies to minimize or eliminate emissions from existing waste-management systems and processes, including waste-to-fuel systems (such as dairy digesters).
Mobile sources — Retrofit technologies for reducing particulate and/or NOX emissions from heavy-duty trucks, clean alternative fuels, vehicle hybridization and efficiency improvements to on- or off-road equipment.
- » When: Fund opportunities will be released as Requests for Proposals (RFPs). There is currently none open.

Proposition 1B – Goods Movement Emission Reduction Program

- » What: Funding provided for truck replacement, engine repower and diesel particulate filters (exhaust filters).
- » Who: Owners with heavy-duty Class 7 on-road diesel trucks with gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) 26,001 to 33,000 pounds) and heavy-duty Class 8 on-road diesel trucks (GVWR 33,001 or more pounds) used to move goods in California. Any truck subject to the state Air Resources Board's public and utility fleet rule, solid waste collection rule or diesel cargo handling equipment rule is ineligible to participate.

Legislation leaders to appear in Stockton

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Sunday, Sept. 18, 2011

The conversation about smart growth continues this week as two leading players in landmark environmental legislation visit Stockton on Friday for a public forum.

Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board and a former assistant administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, is responsible for implementing Assembly Bill 32 – the law requiring California to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

As Nichols' board plans to meet that goal, it has come under criticism for proposing new regulations in a struggling economy. Those regulations include, for example, a rule requiring truckers to replace or retrofit old, dirty diesel engines.

If you go

The latest community forum on sustainability will take place from 8 a.m. to noon Friday at the San Joaquin Council of Governments, 555 E. Weber Ave. in Stockton.

Speakers will include California Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols and California Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg.

The event is open to the public.

For those interested in the more specific topic of infill development, the San Joaquin Council of Governments will hold a separate workshop at 2:30 p.m. Thursday at the San Joaquin Regional Transit

District board room, 421 E. Weber Ave. The council is looking for places where growth could occur in areas that are already developed.

Joining Nichols will be California Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, author of Senate Bill 375, a more specific law that requires metropolitan areas, including Stockton, to write "sustainable communities strategies" to fight sprawl.

This will be the last installment this year in a series of sustainability forums co-hosted by what once would have been considered a strange coalition of groups - the Sierra Club, Campaign for Common Ground, the A.G. Spanos Cos., the Stockton City Council and the San Joaquin Council of Governments.

Representatives of those groups began the forums last year, saying it was time to join together for a rational debate about the future of the region.

A number of meetings followed. This week's forum will likely be the highest-profile event the group has hosted, given the attendance of Nichols and Steinberg.

Eric Parfrey, with the Campaign for Common Ground, said organizers are hoping for a mix of policymakers and the general public.

"We're looking for just plain civilians who have enough interest in new smart-growth laws to know how it could affect their lives locally," he said.

The strategies mandated by Steinberg's legislation are expected to promote dense development near mass transit and to address the kind of jobs/housing imbalance that is such a problem in San Joaquin County.

The end result, in theory, will be shorter commutes, fewer greenhouse gas emissions and preservation of farmland.

Andrew Chesley, head of the Council of Governments, said the council has agreed to finish this region's sustainable community strategy by the end of 2013. He, too, will speak at Friday's forum.

Valley growers make most of studies of benefits of walnuts, almonds

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Sept. 17, 2011

Almond and walnut growers have cleared the air about a vital topic: Their products really do seem to be good for you.

They have cleared the air in a literal way, too, by harvesting the nuts without as much dust as in decades past.

"The biggest concern is our environment, trying to keep the valley clean," said Robert Longstreth, a grower and custom harvester, while working an orchard northeast of Escalon on Friday.

Late summer brings the start of the almond and walnut harvests, a crucial part of the Northern San Joaquin Valley economy.

The federal government projects a record California almond crop of 1.95 billion pounds. The walnut harvest is estimated at 970 million pounds, down 4 percent from last year's record crop.

Almonds brought \$834 million in gross income to the region's growers last year, according to county crop reports. Walnuts brought \$342 million.

Several thousand people work most of the year in plants where the nuts are processed. Many businesses provide trucking, fertilizer, pest control, loans and other goods and services needed by the growers and handlers.

California produces about 80 percent of the world's almonds and 40 percent of the walnuts. They end up in snack bags; in packages for home cooks; and in candy, cereal, baked goods and countless other products.

"On top of that, the health benefit of nuts in general has been a big push," Longstreth said.

The latest study, released last week, found that walnuts slowed the development of breast cancer tumors in mice. The California Walnut Commission cited it in urging people to consume the product.

"We think now that diet can prevent 30 to 60 percent of all cancers," said the research leader, Elaine Hardman of Marshall University in West Virginia, in a news release. "The healthy diet that we should be eating is what we know is healthy — a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and nuts."

Research backs nuts

A study released in June reinforced the belief that almonds can help people manage their weight. Other research in recent years has found nuts helpful against heart disease, dementia and other ills.

Nut producers also have reduced the risk of the bodily harm that can happen when cars crash on dust-clouded roads. They have added dust controls to the machines that sweep up the crop after other machines have shaken it from the trees.

Still, drivers should take care when passing a harvest.

"It's kind of like fog," said officer Eric Parsons of the California Highway Patrol. "If you get in a reduced-visibility situation, you need to reduce your speed."

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, Sept. 16, 2011:](#)

That \$12 fee on your DMV registration might go away sooner

By Mark Grossi

Valley drivers may not have to pay an annual \$12 dirty-air penalty for very long, air district officials say. Maybe only one year, not the three that I mentioned last week.

I have dreaded writing this explanation for years. It's not pretty, but stay with me because we're talking about a penalty you are paying.

Last week, I wrote that the San Joaquin Valley would have to pay a \$29 million penalty for at least three years. It's for missing the cleanup deadline on the federal one-hour ozone standard. Drivers will begin paying the \$12 registration fee late this year or early next year.

All that is true, but it could change, as the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District points out. The U.S. Clean Air Act would allow the region to wiggle off the hook by the end of next year and stop paying the penalty.

The law does not simply say: No violations allowed, and that's how you achieve the standard. Too bad. We could all understand that.

Instead, here's the drill: The Valley needs to have no more than three violations at any one monitor over three years. The fourth violation at any monitor pushes the Valley out of compliance, and the three-year clock must start over.

So, even though there were violations in 2010, there weren't more than three violations at any one monitor, according to air district officials.

All the Valley needs is to make it through this summer and next without tripping off violations at a few key monitors. And there haven't been any one-hour violations at any monitors yet this year.

One of the key monitors is Clovis, where three violations were recorded last year. One more violation in Clovis this year or next, and you'll be paying the extra registration fee for another three years.

But if next summer goes like this one, you might have to pay higher registration fees only once. That's why air officials are making a lot more noise about cutting back on driving during bad-ozone days.

