

Feds asked to ignore some Valley air violations

By Russell Clemings, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Tues., Oct. 11, 2011

The Valley air district is asking the federal government to ignore a series of high air-pollution readings they attribute to this summer's Lion fire in Sequoia National Forest.

In a letter Tuesday to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the fire led to high ozone readings at two monitors in neighboring Sequoia National Park.

On 16 days, the only violations of the eight-hour ozone standard, which tracks daylong average levels of the pollutant, were at the two park monitors, the district's executive director, Seyed Sadredin, told EPA officials.

"Given their location and elevations," Sadredin said, "these sites are generally not representative of air quality" in the rest of the district. He said the monitors were installed by the National Park Service and not by the district or the state Air Resources Board, which oversees it.

The Lion fire began with a lightning strike July 8 and burned 20,500 acres by mid-August.

Regulators have granted the district similar exceptions in the past for violations caused by wildfires, said Kevin Hall, director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, an advocacy group.

But Hall noted that the exceptions may not make much difference on the whole because ozone levels at monitors on the Valley floor have exceeded the eight-hour standard dozens of times this year.

In fact, the district's data show that the eight-hour standard has been violated 62 times this year in Fresno County and 77 times in Tulare County, even if the 16 days attributed to the fire are not counted.

"They might be correct in requesting that but it doesn't do anything to address air pollution," Hall said.

Valley Air District wants exemption for ozone violation

Central Valley Business News.com, late Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wants a pass from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The district says the EPA should not count ozone violations last summer at two high-elevation monitors located in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park because the air was fouled by smoke from wildfires in Sequoia National Forest.

The district contends that abnormally elevated 8-hour ozone readings at the Ash Mountain and Lower Kaweah monitoring stations should not count against the Valley in demonstrating compliance with federal standards.

The request is filed under a federal law that provides for exclusion of violations that result from natural and exceptional events.

The event in question is the "Lion Fire" in Sequoia National Forest that scorched nearly 20,500 acres in close vicinity of the monitoring stations.

Under federal guidelines, natural events are occurrences outside the control of air quality management agencies that result in exceeding health-based standards. When this situation occurs, the air management

In 2011, there were 99 days during which the 8-hour ozone standard was exceeded somewhere in the eight counties under the jurisdiction of the air district. Of the total, there were 16 days when the Ash Mountain and Lower Kaweah stations were the only places in the Valley that violated the standard.

"The natural events exclusion in federal law exists exactly for incidents such as this," says Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer. "Valley residents and businesses should not be penalized for violations over which we have no control."

District officials also say that the Ash Mountain and Lower Kaweah monitoring stations, located at elevations of 1,800 feet and 6,400 feet respectively, are secondary stations and should not be used for assessing air quality conditions on the Valley floor. Unlike other air monitoring stations in the Valley that were sited in strict adherence to federal laws to ensure collection of data that is representative of the quality of air breathed by Valley residents, these stations were sited and installed by the national park for the primary purpose of measuring pollution levels at the park, which are primarily impacted by wildfires.

"These monitoring stations were not designed to measure air quality in population centers in the Valley and should not be used by the federal government to assess the Valley's attainment of the ambient air quality standards," says Mr. Sadredin.

District officials also announced that in order to prevent confusion and to provide more precise information to the public, future air quality forecasts and reports will distinguish between air quality data from the Sequoia National Park and those for the Valley.

Under the new system, air quality data for high elevations in the park will be based on readings from the Ash Mountain and Lower Kaweah monitoring stations, and the Valley monitors will be used to report air quality for population centers and rural areas on Valley floor.

Groups sue Obama for scrapping stricter smog limit

By Dina Cappiello – Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Hanford Sentinel and other papers, Tues., Oct. 11, 2011

WASHINGTON -- Environmental groups sued the Obama administration Tuesday for scrapping a stricter limit for smog-forming pollution, saying the decision violated the law and put politics ahead of protecting public health.

The lawsuit filed in the federal appeals court in Washington by four environmental and public health groups came after the White House last month said it would not support setting a new standard for ground-level ozone until 2013, outraging environmentalists.

Environmental Protection Agency chief Lisa Jackson had said in 2009 at the recommendation of scientific advisers that she wanted a more stringent standard to protect public health.

But President Barack Obama, facing a re-election race in 2012 and under pressure from business groups and Republicans, rejected the final proposal. The White House said setting a new standard would create "needless uncertainty" at a time when the economy was struggling.

The cost of complying was estimated at between \$19 billion and \$90 billion a year, making it one of the most expensive environmental regulations ever and earning it a spot on a list of rules targeted by House Republicans.

The Clean Air Act prohibits the EPA from considering compliance costs when setting a public health standard.

"EPA assured us repeatedly that they were going to finalize action on that proposal to strengthen the standard," said David Baron, managing attorney for Earthjustice, which sued on behalf of the American Lung Association, Environmental Defense Fund, Appalachian Mountain Club and Natural Resources Defense Council. "Then all of a sudden, the Obama administration abruptly reversed course and said they weren't going to strengthen the standards after all."

The new standard would have replaced one set in 2008 by President George W. Bush. Public health experts, the EPA's scientific advisory panel and Obama's top environmental official have said that standard fell short of fully protecting public health.

Ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, triggers asthma attacks, causes lung damage and increases the risk of dying from lung disease.

Documents released last week by the EPA show that the agency wanted to change the standard from 75 parts per billion measured over eight hours to 70 parts per billion. An advisory committee had recommended a range of 60 parts per billion to 70 parts per billion. It will now move forward with the level set by Bush, while laying the groundwork for a new standard.

The White House said the EPA's proposed regulation was based on outdated scientific evidence. It said other regulations imposed by the EPA would reduce smog in the meantime.

The administration's decision angered environmentalists to a degree unseen in Obama's presidency.

Frances Beinecke, the head of the council and a member of the president's commission on the Gulf oil spill, told the group's members that Obama had "dropped us like a hot potato."

The EPA said the administration had put in place "historic standards and safeguards for clean air," including a long-overdue proposal to cut mercury pollution from power plants.

But that rule is under attack in court as well. On Tuesday, 26 states sided with the utility industry and asked a federal judge to delay regulations to curb mercury and other toxic pollution from coal-fired power plants. That action followed a letter sent by 11 governors to the White House seeking a delay.

[Bakersfield Californian, Education Blog, Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2011:](#)

CSUB to celebrate new bike path today

California State University, Bakersfield is hosting a Ribbon Cutting and Campus Bike Ride at 3 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 11, in celebration of the new East-West Bike Path that was recently completed through campus. The bike path was funded by a \$66,350 grant from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the university's fines and forfeitures fund. It is part of a long-term project at CSUB to decrease vehicle traffic and air emissions on campus.

Tuesday's event will take place at the Student Recreation Center and includes a short inaugural bike ride and free Maui Wowi samples from the new smoothie bar on campus. There will also be information about CSUB's plans for a bike share program and public transit hub, part of a larger commitment to alternative transportation and sustainability at CSUB.

"CSUB is a commuter campus. With more than 8,000 students and 1,000 faculty and staff, driving to and from campus is a way of life," said Evelyn Young, executive assistant to the CSUB president and the president's liaison for environmental sustainability. "The university, however, has a growing culture of environmental responsibility and there is strong support for reducing single occupant vehicle travel to campus."

CSUB has partnered with Bike Bakersfield, PG&E, and local bicycle shops to develop CSUB Cycles, a campus-wide bike share program. Still in the planning stages, when complete the program will provide 50 bicycles in self-serve, electronic bike racks on the campus that students, staff and faculty can borrow to make short trips on and off campus.

The university is also working with Kern Council of Governments and Golden Empire Transit to expand the bike share program into the community and to increase public transit schedules to the university. GET's short-range transit plan, to be voted on at its December board of directors meeting, includes rapid routes and a new end-of-line terminal to be located on the CSUB campus with bus shelters, a bike storage facility, and an electric car charging station. The university also is enhancing its rideshare program

"The new bike path and bike share program will solve one of the most cited barriers to carpooling or taking the bus to campus – how those who use alternative transportation can make short distance trips once they are on campus," Young said. "Our goal is to make alternate transportation so attractive, convenient, safe, and enjoyable that vehicle use becomes a second or even third choice for transportation."

— *Cal State Bakersfield, News Release*