

CSUF study documents health consequences of Valley air pollution

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FRESNO — An air pollution study by a California State University, Fresno institute indicates that as ozone and fine particulates in central San Joaquin Valley air increase, so do rates of children's asthma emergency-room visits and hospitalizations.

The study by the Central Valley Health Policy Institute at Fresno State provides new regional evidence for the public health consequences of air pollution.

It offers the first local evidence of short-term population-level health effects associated with elevations in fine particulates and ozone for the Valley. Data are presented on air pollution impacts on emergency room and hospital use for respiratory and cardio-vascular conditions in the region's most populous urban centers: Fresno/Clovis, Bakersfield and Modesto.

An estimated 1,830 additional asthma emergency room visits per year for children were associated with ozone and fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). Children also experienced increased use of hospital emergency rooms for pneumonia, and adults were more likely to be hospitalized for asthma and acute myocardial infarctions as levels of PM 2.5 increased.

The study, "The Impacts of Short-Term Changes in Air Quality on Emergency Room and Hospital Use in California's San Joaquin Valley," was conducted by the Fresno State institute for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Funding was made possible by the District and the California Wellness Foundation.

The Health Policy Institute, founded in 2002 to engage residents and decision makers on regional health policy issues, is housed under the Central California Center for Health and Human Services and Fresno State's College of Health and Human Services.

Food processors slam new emissions law

By John Ellis, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Wed., Oct. 19, 2011

Valley food processors say they will be hurt economically by California's landmark global warming law, which will go into effect Jan. 1.

The legislation – known as AB 32 – sets a statewide limit on greenhouse gas emissions. The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

On Tuesday, however, three prominent San Joaquin Valley food processors told a state legislative caucus in Fresno that the law is forcing them to spend millions on equipment that will reduce emissions by only a small percentage.

For instance, Ben Curti – a Tulare County board member of dairy processor Land O' Lakes – said the company spent more than \$4 million to buy an ultra-low emission boiler, but it only reduced the carbon footprint by 5%.

These purchases, they said, will drive up their costs, and they can't pass on those costs to consumers because competitors outside of California don't have to make similar purchases.

Instead, local processors might be forced to cut back production, which they say will have a devastating trickle-down effect on all of California agriculture.

"AB 32 will raise the cost of doing business in California, which will force jobs out of our state and discourage long term investment," said Assembly Member David Valadao, a Hanford Republican who is also a dairy farmer.

Valadao and fellow Republican Assembly Members Shannon Grove of Bakersfield and Linda Halderman of Fresno are all members of the Legislative Rural Caucus. Halderman, the group's chairwoman, called the meeting to listen to the concerns of local food-processing officials.

But Dorene D'Adamo, a California Air Resources Board member, told the group that a warming climate can hurt farming through drought and by bringing new pests and crop diseases to the state.

"Climate change is a serious environmental threat," she said.

She also said that the air is bad in the Valley and contributes to its high asthma rates. Bad air also might stop a business from locating here because of quality of life concerns.

Lawmakers and producers said they're concerned the Air Resources Board put food processors in the "medium" category for job loss. The determination is based partly on the ability to pass on costs, but also on trade pressures, both domestic and international.

The processors feel they should be in the "high" category, and 16 legislators – Assembly and state Senate members, Republicans and Democrats – signed a letter to Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols seeking that change.

Being in the high category instead of medium has added advantages for dealing with AB 32's cap and trade program, which limits the amount of carbon emitted by the state's biggest polluters and creates allowances that can be bought and sold on an open market.

Whether the change happens is unknown.

"It's an open question of whether we reclassify," D'Adamo said at the meeting. She did, however, say the Air Resources Board would study the request.

Calif poised to finalize 'cap-and-trade' plan

The Associated Press

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California is poised to formally adopt the nation's most comprehensive so-called "cap-and-trade" system, designed to provide a financial incentive for polluters to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

State officials hope other states and Washington D.C. will follow suit with similar plans.

"When Washington considers how to address climate change, as I think it will, California's climate plan will serve as a role model for the national program," said Stanley Young, the air board's spokesman.

The California Air Resources Board on Thursday is expected to approve the final draft of its plan, a key part of the state's landmark 2006 global warming law, AB 32, which seeks to reduce the emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Some businesses regulated under the program argue it will hurt job creation by raising the cost of doing business in the state, and increase the price of electricity for consumers. But the program's supporters expect cap and trade to spur economic recovery and innovation, by pushing business to invest in clean technologies.

Starting in 2013, the plan places emissions allowances on power plants and other of the worst polluting facilities, with others joining in 2015. In total, the plan will cover 85 percent of California's emissions.

In general, the program will require pollution producers like refineries and cement manufacturers to buy permits, called allowances, from the state. Each permit allows for a specified amount of greenhouse gases each year, and will decline over time.

The permits can then be sold in a marketplace by companies who cut emissions and have extra allowances; or bought by greenhouse gas emitters who need to purchase more allowances because they failed to cut emissions.

Polluters could even turn a profit if the marketplace sets a price above the initial cost of the permit.

Also, a company can meet up to 8 percent of its emissions reduction obligations by purchasing carbon "offsets," or investments in forestry or other projects that reduce greenhouse gases.

To help companies prepare for the program, 90 percent of the allowances would be free in the first years, providing time for equipment upgrades.

Some of the regulated industries see the 10 percent they will have to buy at first as a new tax, and oppose the board's current plan.

"We are very concerned about the negative impacts the policy may have on the state's economy, jobs picture and energy costs," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, president of the Western State Petroleum Association, in a statement.

"This policy, if adopted, will amount to a new tax on refiners and other energy intensive industries that could total billions of dollars over several years."

Any electricity price increases would have to be pre-approved by the state.

The cap-and-trade plan has seen a number of changes since it was first adopted with fanfare in Sacramento last year. Work was briefly halted by a judge after environmental justice groups sued, arguing that cap and trade's market would allow polluters to buy the right to pollute more by purchasing more allowances. This, they argued, would affect mostly low-income neighborhoods located near governed facilities.

The California Supreme Court in September ruled to allow work to continue on the regulations.

In response to the concerns about localized pollution increases, the board will vote Thursday on whether to adopt a new management plan, under which the air quality near power plants and other regulated facilities will be monitored by the board to see if any more pollution results from cap-and-trade.

"If so, we will take action to respond to those changes," Young said.