

[Bakersfield Californian Blog, Friday, Nov. 18, 2011:](#)

## **Bakersfield Observed: A blog about life, media, politics and people**

By Richard Beene, Californian CEO and President

POLLUTION: Bakersfield ranked No. 1 on another list of dubious distinction, this time winning the title of the American city with the dirtiest air. In fairness to us, the Forbes story noted that our air is actually cleaner than it has been in years, but we're still stuck with the title of the dirtiest city in the country. Following Bakersfield were Los Angeles, Visalia, Fresno, Pittsburgh, Penn., Modesto, Birmingham, Ala., Phoenix, Ariz., San Diego and Sacramento. Forbes had this to say about Bakersfield: "Hot, dusty, adjacent to California's biggest oil fields, Bakersfield has 60 days a year of unhealthy air, 10 times a level considered acceptable. Its ozone levels are better than at any time in the past 15 years, but still unhealthy for 100 days out of the year."

[Mountain Enterprise commentary, Sat., Nov. 18, 2011:](#)

## **We Need to Monitor Air Quality At El Tejon School**

By Linda MacKay, TriCounty Watchdogs

USC's Keck School of Medicine and other researchers are warning that tiny air pollution particles can be inhaled deep into the respiratory system. Studies show they are a danger to children with growing lungs. The particles accumulate to cause asthma and heart problems. The impact on children who live near freeways (or whose schools are adjacent to freeways) are a concern.

The TriCounty Watchdogs received a \$25,000 grant from the Kern County Air Quality Mitigation fund to do air quality monitoring in the Mountain Communities. We are especially concerned about emissions from the thousands of vehicles that travel Interstate 5 across the Grapevine beside El Tejon School each day.

As president of the Watchdogs, I made a presentation to the El Tejon Unified School District board November 9.

I asked the trustees to allow my organization to monitor air quality on the El Tejon Middle School grounds. This is not the first time we have made this request. The board must approve monitoring on campus. So far we have not received the board's approval.

In the spring of this year the TriCounty Watchdogs took approximately 20 samples to measure particulate matter 2.5 micrometers in diameter (PM 2.5—one seventh the width of a human hair) near El Tejon School. We measured over a 24 hour period every 6 days for approximately 3 months. The good news is that results from those tests for PM 2.5 in the spring came back within a healthy range.

But PM 2.5 can pose a different risk in winter weather. The winter tule fog of the San Joaquin Valley captures PM 2.5. This pollutant measures dangerously high in places like Bakersfield during winter. The Watchdogs plan to measure PM 2.5 again during the winter months to see if the toxic fog of the valley reaches the area near El Tejon School.

This year the Watchdogs also did three separate tests to measure diesel soot near the school. The results from these tests showed unusually high levels of diesel pollution. Freeway emissions are hard to see, unlike obvious emissions bellowing from factory smoke stacks, but we've been told by our expert that freeway diesel could pose a cardiovascular health risk to those who are exposed.

Since three tests is a small sample, we plan to complete more diesel tests to see if the same level of diesel pollution is evident over different times of the year. We'd like to see exactly what the children and staff are exposed to where they work and play. We'd like to take air samples near the playground, ball fields and in the classrooms.

The TriCounty Watchdogs believe it is better to know than not to know if there is a problem.

There are measures that can be taken to protect the children and staff who work at the school if a problem with air quality is found at this site.

As parents and concerned community members, we would like to see the school board allow air monitoring on school grounds.

### **FACT CHECK: GOP senator gasps for facts on asthma**

By Dina Capiello, The Associated Press

In the Hanford Sentinel and Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, Nov. 18, 2011

It was a startling claim: Air pollution has no connection to asthma, Kentucky GOP Sen. Rand Paul said on the Senate floor.

But Paul, and a chart he used to make his case against the health benefits of a new federal air pollution rule, relied on some creative sourcing and pseudoscience.

Paul's chart was a graph showing air pollution declining in California as the number of people diagnosed with asthma rose. The chart attributed the data to a May 2003 paper by what was then called the California Department of Health Services. But the department never plotted the relationship between those two factors.

In fact, the department said asthma attacks "can be triggered by exposures and conditions such as respiratory infections, house dust mites, animal dander, mold, pollen, exercise, tobacco smoke, and indoor and outdoor air pollutants."

Paul's real source was a 2006 paper "Facts Not Fear on Air Pollution" from the National Center for Policy Analysis, a conservative think tank. That paper, by independent consultant Joel Schwartz, contends that most information on air pollution from environmentalists, regulators, scientists and journalists is exaggerated or wrong. The paper was not subjected to the normal peer-review process demanded for most published science.

Paul, an ophthalmologist and eye surgeon, cited Schwartz in his Nov. 10 remarks, saying: "We have decreased pollution and rising incidence of asthma. Either they are inversely proportional or they are not related at all."

At best, the chart suggests that air pollution alone cannot explain the rise in asthma, a chronic lung disease that inflicts approximately 34 million Americans and whose exact cause is unknown.

The chart certainly can't be used to say that air pollution plays no role in causing asthma.

"They may think there is a pattern there, but in fact it has no basis," said Dr. Richard Kreutzer, head of environmental and occupational disease control at what is now California's Department of Public Health, the agency cited on Paul's chart. Kreutzer said there is evidence that some pollutants can cause asthma and even more research showing that air pollution aggravates asthma in those who have the disease.

The National Institutes of Health said last year that "recent findings have conclusively demonstrated a link between asthma and air pollution, especially ground-level ozone."

But Schwartz, who now works for Blue Sky Consulting Group, discounts even studies linking pollution to asthma attacks, saying "they are probably not related."

In an interview with The Associated Press, Schwartz defended his work. "The fact that they move in opposite directions shows that air pollution is not a large factor in the cause," he said.

Dan Greenbaum, the president of the nonprofit Health Effects Institute, said such arguments "miss the point." The institute receives funding from both the Environmental Protection Agency and the auto industry.

"No pulmonary doctor has said that the primary reason for the increase in asthma is air pollution. That is not the concern with air pollution and asthma," Greenbaum said. "The concern is that if you have asthma, we have very strong evidence that you are sensitive to air pollution."