

Grinchy weather conditions dash hopes for Yule logs

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Thurs., Dec. 22, 2011

It wasn't a white Christmas, nor a bright Christmas.

Last year's holiday was rainy and gray - in fact, Christmas 2010 remains Stockton's wettest single day in almost two years.

There will be no repeat Sunday.

Expect a cold and foggy Christmas morning followed by blue skies later in the day with relatively warm temperatures, officials said Wednesday.

"It's about as good as it's going to get for this time of year," said Johnnie Powell, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

However, stagnant conditions could result in a ban on fireplace burning Christmas Eve and Christmas Day up and down the San Joaquin Valley.

That won't be decided for certain until each preceding day, said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. But with Valleywide bans already in place earlier in the week, it's possible that, come Christmas, the only legally lit Yule log will be the one on your TV.

"We're not sure what the odds are right now," Turner said. "Unless we see some change there probably won't be a significant difference (in the wood-burning forecast). ... We've just not had good conditions in December."

People might be yearning for a fire, with low temperatures this weekend in the low 30s or even the upper 20s.

But it should be pleasant in the daytime, with highs in the upper 50s.

Morning fog could be hazardous for travelers, Powell said. Each of the past three mornings, visibility in Stockton has dropped below a quarter-mile.

"Leave after 10 a.m. if you can, and try to get there before it gets dark," Powell said. "Enjoy your Christmas, and don't worry about the rain - it'll come soon enough."

BEFORE YOU BURN

Wood burning may be banned Christmas Eve and Christmas in the San Joaquin Valley because of stagnant conditions favorable to air pollution.

Those who light up during a ban can be fined.

The decision whether to allow burning should be made by 5 p.m. Friday for Christmas Eve and 5 p.m. Saturday for Christmas. Check valleyair.org (under "Quick Links") or call (800) 766-4463.

New research fuels ethanol debate

Valley Voice, Thurs., Dec. 22, 2011

The burning of sugarcane fields prior to harvest for ethanol production can create air pollution that detracts from the biofuel's overall sustainability, according to a team of researchers led by scientists at the University of California, Merced. UC Merced graduate student Chi-Chung Tsao was the lead author on the paper, which was published online this week in the Nature Climate Change journal and focused on Brazil, the world's top producer of sugarcane ethanol and a possible source for U.S. imports of the alternative fuel. "There is a big strategic decision our country and others are making, in whether to develop a domestic biofuels industry or import relatively inexpensive biofuels from developing countries," Campbell said. "Our study shows that importing biofuels could result in human health and environmental problems in the regions where they are cultivated."

New ozone standard OK'd

Valley Voice, Thurs., Dec. 22, 2011

Air pollution control officials in the Valley hailed the approval by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week of the so-called "8-hour ozone air quality plan" for the eight-county region. Approval is expected to lead to achieving the Clean Air Act's 1997 8-hour ozone standard of 0.08 parts per million by 2024, the EPA says, noting improvements in air quality over the previous decades with the worst air quality locations in the Valley improving for ozone by 6 percent and with other locations having even greater air quality improvements. "Much work remains in order to protect the millions of people who live and work in these areas," says Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "These plans will spur development of new technologies and will cut NOx emissions by almost 700 tons per day over the next twelve years and help reduce the number of cases of asthma and other respiratory ailments."

District Funds Nearly \$3 Million In New Technology Projects Technology Advancement Program Stimulates Creativity For Reducing Emissions

The Taft Independent, Thurs., Dec. 22, 2011

The Valley Air District's Governing Board granted \$2,947,694 to 11 projects targeted at reducing the Valley's air quality emissions through new technology. The board also authorized an additional \$3 million for an additional round of funding to bring more technology-advancement entrepreneurs in the Valley. The latest competitive request for proposals to the Technology Advancement Program resulted in submissions ranging from an all-electric agricultural sprayer to a natural gas conversion kit for locomotive engines, an emission-reducing raisin tray burning system to a cleaner composting system. District staff carefully evaluated the proposals for a variety of criteria, including relevance to attainment plans, co-benefits, cost-effectiveness, funding requested and leveraging, and project readiness. Funding was recommended for 11. "We are encouraged by the response we received to this funding availability," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's executive director and air pollution control officer. "This is an important component The TAP program's primary goal is to advance technology and accelerate deployment of innovative clean-air technologies that can bring about emission reductions as rapidly as practicable. The newly funded projects and amounts are:

- o \$350,000 for Pure Power Technologies' proposal to demonstrate a non-urea NOx reduction retrofit system for diesel trucks;
- o \$300,000 for California Bioenergy's proposal to demonstrate advanced two-stage controls to a biogas engine system to achieve near-zero NOx;
- o \$258,000 for U.S. Hybrid Corp.'s proposal to demonstrate a plug-in hybrid wheel loader in a dairy application, and \$292,830 for their demonstration of a plug-in hybrid propane/electric work truck;
- o \$75,580 for Energy Conversions Inc.'s proposal to demonstrate a natural gas conversion kit for two-stroke diesel locomotive engines;
- o \$370,534 for Electricore Inc.'s proposal to demonstrate a fully autonomous agricultural sprayer based on a zero-emission, all-electric vehicle platform;
- o \$28,250 for Sun-Maid Growers of California's proposal to demonstrate an emission-reducing raisin tray burning system;
- o \$300,000 for Thermata's proposal to demonstrate a concentrating solar steam system to offset boiler fuel consumption and emissions;
- o \$250,000 for Leva Energy Inc.'s proposal to demonstrate a power-generating burner that recovers wasted energy through a microturbine;

- o \$242,500 for the City of Manteca's proposal to demonstrate a serial hybrid hydraulic refuse truck;
- o \$230,000 for the Association of Compost Producer's proposal to demonstrate a positively aerated static compost pile system;
- o \$350,000 for PG&E Fleet Engineering's proposal to demonstrate an extended range electric drive Class 6 bucket truck with electric worksite operation capacity.

"Not only are these new projects innovations that will help clean up the Valley, but they are also vital to supporting the Valley's technology development community and economic vitality," Sadredin said.

A new request for proposals will be released by the District in 2012 For more information about the Technology Advancement Program or to subscribe to a free mailing list for notification of program developments, visit http://www.valleyair.org/Grant_Programs/TAP/tap_idx.htm.

Obama faces battle on new clean-air rules

In a shift for the administration, the EPA adopts tough limits on mercury and other toxic emissions from power plants. Industry groups say the rules are too costly and could affect the nation's electrical grid.

By Neela Banerjee, Washington Bureau
L.A. Times, Wed., Dec. 21, 2011

Reporting from Washington — The Obama administration has adopted tough new limits on mercury and other toxic emissions from power plants, winning praise from environmentalists and public health advocates but sparking warnings from industry groups that contend the new regulations are too expensive and will place dangerous pressure on the nation's electrical grid.

The update to the Clean Air Act comes after a relentless 20-year battle in Washington. It marks the first time the Environmental Protection Agency has curbed power plant emissions of mercury, a known neurotoxin that can be profoundly harmful to children and pregnant women. The administration said cutting mercury in the air could prevent as many as 11,000 premature deaths a year.

The announcement marks a strategic shift for the Obama administration, which had labored to mute industry and Republican complaints that environmental rules kill jobs, culminating in a decision this summer to halt standards to cut smog. Since then, the administration has moved to reassure its voter base of its commitment to the environment, most notably by delaying a decision on a controversial oil pipeline from Canada to the Gulf Coast.

The Keystone XL pipeline decision and now the mercury rule are political gambles for President Obama, since Republican challengers could push the jobs argument in crucial coal-reliant states like Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania.

Obama put himself squarely behind the mercury decision, releasing a short video in which he underscored the fact that President George H.W. Bush had signed the "bold and necessary" law authorizing the EPA to reduce toxic substances in the air in 1990.

"Over the years, the law was never fully implemented. Special-interest groups kept delaying the process," Obama said. "Today my administration is saying, 'Enough.' We are announcing new, common-sense, cost-effective standards to dramatically reduce harmful air pollution."

Industry lobbyists and congressional Republicans, who have fought vigorously to halt new clean-air rules, warned of rolling blackouts and massive layoffs in the energy sector if the regulations were implemented. Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) vowed to introduce legislation to halt the mercury rule when Congress returns after the holiday break.

"This rule isn't about public health. It is a thinly veiled electricity tax that continues the Obama administration's war on affordable energy and is the latest in an unprecedented barrage of regulations that make up EPA's job-killing regulatory agenda," Inhofe said in an emailed

statement. "I am determined to apply the brakes to President Obama's runaway regulatory agenda before it wrecks our economy."

Inhofe's measure is not likely to progress through the Democratic-controlled Senate, and if it were to get through Congress, Obama almost certainly would veto it.

Environmentalists praised the new standard as a historic leap in efforts to curtail air pollution.

"We can breathe easier today," said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council, in an emailed statement. "Dirty coal-fired power plants will have to clean up the toxic soup of emissions that is polluting our air and making people sick, especially children."

Under the new rule, power plants can emit 1.2 pounds of mercury per million BTUs of energy produced. The industry had sought a higher limit, 1.4 pounds. But the EPA arrived at its figure based on a formula set out under the Clean Air Act, and analysts said the agency could not deviate from it. The rule would remove 90% of the mercury spewing into the air, the EPA said.

Companies would have three years to clean up their emissions of mercury, arsenic, acid gases and nearly 70 other toxic substances, and utilities could appeal for at least one more year while they installed the necessary equipment. Much of the industry has argued that the timetable is too tight and could lead to power outages.

The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service found in an August 2011 report, however, that industry had overstated the effects of the mercury rule and others on electricity reliability, noting that many of the inefficient, 50-year-old coal plants were already being replaced.

The industry itself is divided about the costs and benefits of the mercury rule. Most of the utility sector agrees with Scott Segal, director of the lobbying group Electric Reliability Coordinating Council, in his assertion that the mercury rule is the most far-reaching and potentially devastating federal intervention into the power industry to date.

"It will increase the cost of power, undermining the international competitiveness of almost two dozen manufacturing industries, and it will reduce employment upstream in the mining sectors," he wrote in an email. "All told, it is anticipated that the rule will result in the loss of some 1.44 million jobs by 2020."

But about a dozen states have already adopted mercury rules and, according to the EPA, more than half of the country's coal-fired plants already use the pollution-control technology needed to cut mercury.

Some utilities that comply with their states' standards contend that those that don't are trying to stall the inevitable, given how harmful mercury, arsenic and other emissions are. Ralph Izzo, chief executive of Newark-based Public Service Enterprise Group, said industry warnings about reliability were overstated and the time had come to limit mercury.

From 2006 to 2010, his company retrofitted its coal-fired plants, creating local jobs without disrupting reliability, Izzo said.

"Let's hire the engineers and construction crews to get this done," Izzo said, "rather than spending the next two years hiring lawyers" to fight the rule.

[Bakersfield Californian Editorial, Thurs., Dec. 22, 2011:](#)

Grand jury needs do-over on air district proposal

The Kern County grand jury recently issued a report calling for the western and eastern portions of Kern County to be combined into one air district. With all due respect to grand jury members, we think a do-over is in order.

In reading the report, it appears jury members weren't aware that western Kern County (often called the valley portion of Kern County) falls under the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which covers the entire San Joaquin Valley, from San Joaquin County in

the north to Kern County in the south. It is one of the largest air basins in the country, and one of the dirtiest.

Eastern Kern County constitutes its own air basin and it doesn't face nearly the same challenges as the San Joaquin Valley. It would be utterly foolish to combine the two separate areas of the county under one county air district authority.

The grand jury should rescind its recent recommendation and do a more thorough job of researching this topic.

[Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Thurs., Dec. 22, 2011:](#)

Enforcement of the air quality rules at Oceano Dunes based on sound science

By Eric Moore

Lois Henry's Dec. 18 column, "A test of science in a dune playground," is chock-full of faulty logic and misinformation, which results in several erroneous conclusions.

Henry asserts that a government agency is now attempting to regulate the wind when, in fact, it is only attempting to regulate a stationary source of air pollution. There is no new regulation here, only the Federal Clean Air Act and the California Clean Air Act, both of which have existed for decades. The Oceano Dunes State Vehicle Recreation Area (ODSVRA) has been found to be the source of air pollution levels that exceed the limits established by existing laws. There is also no drama here either, just a local agency, the San Luis Obispo Air Pollution Control District, asking that the California State Parks' off-highway division comply with the same laws that apply to all other businesses located within the county.

The SLO air district, whose job it is to identify, measure, and reduce air pollution sources within the county to levels below legal limits, doesn't have the option of deciding whether they like or dislike the pollution levels as asserted by Henry. They are required by law to bring these levels down to legal limits, period.

According to the California Coastal Commission's "California Coastal Resource Guide," there are 27 coastal dunes complexes in California. Only one of these coastal dunes complexes produces pollution levels that exceed the legal standards. There's no mangled science here and no explanation from the writer as to why the only coastal dune complex in the state of California that emits excessive pollution happens to be the only coastal dune complex that allows off-road recreation.

Henry's column states that the study failed to consider salt as a component of the particulate matter pollution. This is not true; the report breaks out sea salt, vanadium, silicon, iron, and calcium as components of the air pollution plume and quantifies each. In reality, the air quality is much worse in areas downwind of the riding areas than the studies suggest. Ongoing hourly air monitoring shows that the air pollution levels often spike to dangerous levels during the peak hours when people are at work and school. The levels drop back down at night when fewer people are likely to be exposed and this skews the 24-hour averages downward.

This study was not, as Henry states, intended to determine "how much sand the vehicles were supposedly flinging into the wind." The Phase Two study was the second comprehensive independent scientific study and helped eliminate farm activities and the nearby ConocoPhillips refinery as significant sources of the high levels of airborne particulate matter. Combined, the two studies concluded that OHV activity is a major contributing factor to the high PM levels.

When the California Coastal Commission approved an application to amend the operating permit for the OSDVRA on Feb. 14, 2001, the existence and importance of the dune crust was an established fact and the permit identified similar dune complexes -- not dry lakebeds as posited in Henry's column. The destruction of the dune crust by OHV activity was also identified in the permit as a potential problem for the OSDVRA operators, including losses of adjacent protective vegetation and an increase in wind erosion. The most recent air pollution study even includes a photograph of the crust at nearby undisturbed dunes.

Henry's comment that "some sources (of PM 10) don't seem to be as toxic" is disingenuous, since we know that silica, a component of the ODSVRA-sourced air pollution, is a known carcinogen and is one of the worst possible types of particulate matter. The ODSVRA operators warn park users about riptides, drunken driving, speeding and other hazards, yet fail to warn parents of the hazardous levels of PM that riders and their family members are being exposed to in the name of recreation. As valley residents know, these small particles are particularly harmful to children. What are they trying to hide?

The folks at the ODSVRA don't seem to be protecting their own employees from this hazard either. Perhaps the ODSVRA feels that Cal-OSHA regulations don't apply to them.

The science is sound and the debate is not about "OHV haters" as suggested by Henry, but instead is about clean air lovers and the application of California Clean Air standards to all enterprises within the state of California -- including our own state agencies.

Eric Moore of Pismo Beach has been living and breathing in San Luis Obispo County for more than 10 years. Another View is a critical response to a Californian editorial, column or news story.

