

EPA plan keeps Valley front, center

Officials praise money, attention agency providing

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Wed., Jan. 25, 2012

Promising to focus on environmental problems which disproportionately plague the San Joaquin Valley, the Environmental Protection Agency came to Stockton on Tuesday to announce funding and a new Valley-wide strategic plan.

The money - \$5 million to pay for clean locomotives, including one that will operate between the Port of Stockton and Lodi - isn't much in the big picture.

About \$3 billion is needed over the next 10 to 15 years to meet clean air goals.

But officials said this was a good first step, and praised the EPA for its attention to an often-neglected area. The agency says it has never before prepared a Valley plan containing specific goals.

"They are going to be a player in this, as opposed to just an oversight big brother that doesn't have a stake in what's going on here," Seyed Sadredin, director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said of the EPA. "I'm really encouraged by their interest in doing this."

Tuesday's announcement at the Central California Traction Rail Co. on Cherokee Road focused mostly on the money.

The new strategic plan, however, is much broader. It lays out a number of specific goals not only about air quality but also about water, farming and communities, and it emphasizes the need to consider environmental justice - that is, the well-being of the Valley's poorest, most vulnerable residents - in making future decisions.

The need is obvious. Two months ago, researchers at the University of California, Davis, found that almost one-third of the Valley's 4 million residents are at high risk for shortened life spans and health problems because of environmental and social hazards.

"Four times more people die in the San Joaquin Valley from air pollution than they do from traffic fatalities," said EPA Regional Administrator Jared Blumenfeld, who leads the agency's San Francisco office. "If we had a tornado that swept through the Valley and 200 people died, it would be a huge national crisis. We have literally thousands of people dying from air pollution, but it's invisible. You just don't see those people."

The EPA's new plan - still under development - focuses primarily on the south Valley, where the air is worst and where some water systems that serve small communities are out of compliance with federal and state drinking water standards.

But the plan does contain elements relevant to north Valley residents, including:

- » Reducing the amount of tiny particle pollution 7 percent each year. When inhaled, the particles are embedded in the lungs, worsening asthma or other respiratory problems.
- » Updating regulations to reduce the amount of toxic selenium in the Delta. The natural metal leaches off irrigated farmland in the south San Joaquin Valley and enters the San Joaquin River, poisoning the Delta and San Francisco Bay.
- » Reducing the number of agricultural workers sickened in large-scale pesticide exposure incidents by 10 percent this year compared with 2009.

Blumenfeld said the agency decided over the past several years to focus on the Valley.

"When the Clean Air Act was signed over 40 years ago, the goal was to make sure every single American could breathe the same air," he said. "That promise has still never been realized in the San Joaquin Valley."

"Today, we are announcing a plan within EPA to really focus on the Valley, to say, 'How do we make this a better place?' ... I think this is an enormous undertaking, but it's a positive undertaking."

Kevin Hall, head of the watchdog Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, said the plan appeared to be thin on details, and said the groups he represents had not been consulted.

But he credited Blumenfeld for emphasizing the Valley's needs.

"He's been more visible in the San Joaquin Valley than any of his predecessors," Hall said. "He's made more efforts to meet with advocates than anyone we've seen before."

EPA gives millions to clean valley's air

By Yesenia Amaro

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Wed., Jan. 25, 2012

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday announced a \$5 million investment in the San Joaquin Valley to try to solve some of the most pressing issues in what is one of the most polluted regions in the country.

An additional \$16 million in grants also was announced to help curb diesel emissions and to improve air quality and public health throughout California.

EPA Regional Administrator Jared Blumenfeld, who began a tour of the valley on Tuesday, made stops in Stockton and Modesto, and at UC Merced. He noted that the valley has some of the nation's worst air quality.

"EPA's job is to help protect people's health," he said. "Those people (in the valley) deserve the same air quality of every other single American, so EPA is working with many stakeholders to improve the air quality."

The EPA's goal is to bring together such federal agencies as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation to examine the issues facing the valley and come up with funding to address some of the problems the Valley has been trying to solve for many years, he said.

Blumenfeld said the majority of the funding will go to retrofit locomotives. The \$5 million will help pay for cleaner train engines throughout the valley, and for a state-of-the-art locomotive that will operate between the Port of Stockton and Lodi. The train, unveiled Tuesday morning in Stockton, is designed to reduce the emission of nitrogen oxides by about 90 percent and increase fuel efficiency by about 50 percent.

Pollution from diesel engines remains one of the most significant health risks in California, according to a news release from the EPA. The California Air Resources Board estimates that about 9,000 people die prematurely each year as a result of exposure to fine particle pollution such as diesel exhaust, the release said.

The EPA also launched a new blueprint for the valley. "The strategic focus is saying that the Central Valley is an important region for EPA and we want to highlight the needs to the people in Washington, D.C., and really bring together all the parties to try to help meet those challenges," Blumenfeld said.

As for his tour of the valley, he said it's amazing that people don't know all the important activities going on in the region. "There's amazing research happening at places like UC Merced," he said.

He said there are worthwhile opportunities in the area of sustainability in Central Valley cities, such as Merced, Fresno and Bakersfield. But it's also important to bring together various stakeholders. For example, "there's an exciting partnership between the city of Merced and UC Merced on issues of sustainability that really move the agenda quicker."

He said the university needs real-life problems to solve and the city needs a research lab to help solve those problems.

Earlier Tuesday, Blumenfeld was at the Central California Traction Co. Rail Yard in Stockton and at an almond processing facility in Modesto.

Millions being given out to clean the air in San Joaquin Valley

Central Valley Business Times.com, Tues., Jan. 24, 2012

With a bright red locomotive as the background, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator Jared Blumenfeld on Tuesday in Stockton announced \$5 million in funding that will pay for cleaner locomotives throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

The Central California Traction Rail Company, a 107-year-old short line in Stockton, is getting EPA money to refurbish its locomotives that operate at the Port of Stockton and between Stockton and Lodi.

In addition, approximately \$16 million in grants was announced to slash diesel emissions, advance air quality and improve public health throughout the state of California.

"EPA's goal is to reduce the public health impact of diesel emissions from the trucks and trains moving goods through the San Joaquin Valley," says Mr. Blumenfeld. "This funding will reduce particulate matter emissions by 210 tons statewide for the lifetime of these projects — the equivalent of removing 1,000 heavy-duty trucks off the road."

The state of the art locomotive unveiled in Stockton uses significantly less fuel than its 1953 model year predecessor and emits 90 percent less particulate matter and 92 percent less nitrogen oxides into the environment. It also uses a regenerative braking system, much like a hybrid car in which energy otherwise lost as the train slows down is captured and reused.

These EPA clean diesel grant funds will eliminate approximately 210 tons of particulate matter, 4,500 tons of nitrogen oxides and 130,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions for the lifetime of the projects.

"The challenges we face in the Valley are unmatched by any other region in the nation, and we highly value our partnership with the EPA in our joint efforts to reach our clean air goals," says Seyed Sadredin, Executive Director and Air Pollution Control Officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air District.

He says the air direct wants to partner with businesses in the Valley to reduce air pollution:

Pollution from dirty diesel engines remains one of the most significant health risks in California. The California Air Resources Board estimates that approximately 9,000 people in California die prematurely each year as a result of exposure to fine particle pollution like diesel exhaust.

The \$21 million in funds will go to new projects throughout the state and existing locomotives in San Joaquin Valley including:

- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District: \$2,000,000 to repower two older locomotives with newer, cleaner engines.
- California Air Resources Board: \$14 million to replace 18 older locomotives with ultra-low emitting genset locomotives in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California and install a selective catalytic reduction system with a diesel oxidation catalyst capable of meeting Tier 4 emission levels on a line haul locomotive.
- Bay Area Air Quality Management District: \$1,557,987 to replace 43 heavy-duty drayage trucks that operate at ports around the San Francisco Bay Area.
- Sacramento Air Quality Management District: \$1,097,032 to establish a voucher program to replace 200 existing diesel agricultural irrigation pump engines with new electric agricultural pump motors to power agricultural irrigation pumps.

In addition to the funding announcement, EPA today launched its strategic plan for the Valley which suffers from some of the most pressing issues in the region.

EPA will continue to work with the California Air Resources Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and will aim to reduce particulate matter 2.5 concentrations by 7 percent in 2012. To improve water quality, EPA will work closely with other federal agencies to invest in 11 public water systems that need infrastructure improvements and treatment to meet drinking water standards.

Under President Obama's Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative, EPA has also contributed two full-time federal employees to lead a multi-agency team that will partner with the city of Fresno and local stakeholders to implement a redevelopment vision. As part of the strategic plan, EPA is also dedicated to tracking and reducing environmental hazards, recycling pesticide containers and helping to spur dairy digester projects in the Valley. EPA welcomes public comment on the San Joaquin Strategic Plan. The plan will be finalized in the coming months.

Diesel Emission Reduction Act grants are funded through the West Coast Collaborative, a public-private partnership between leaders from federal, state, and local government, the private sector, and environmental groups committed to reduce diesel emissions throughout western North America. The Collaborative has provided more than \$97.5 million of grant funds, with an additional \$119 million of leveraged money by its partners since 2008. This translates to emission reductions of approximately 1,725 tons of particulate matter and 38,895 tons of nitrogen oxide for the lifetime of these grant projects.

"I am glad that these funds have been awarded to California, and that good work will be done right here in San Joaquin County. Applying new technologies will improve our air quality, something that is desperately needed in our region," says Rep. Jerry McNerney, whose congressional district includes Stockton.

"We need to remain committed to keeping the Valley healthy, and as the administration develops plans for the Valley, I will remain vigilant in working to make sure our region fully benefits," Mr. McNerney says

EPA announces \$21M to fund Valley clean air project

By Ben Keller

The Business Journal, Tues., Jan. 24, 2012

The Environmental Protection Agency awarded a total of \$21 million in grants to the San Joaquin Valley today that will fund projects to slash both diesel and locomotive emissions.

Announcing the grants at the Central California Traction Rail Company in Stockton, EPA Regional Administrator Jared Blumenfeld said \$5 million will pay for cleaner locomotives throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

Part of that will go toward the purchase of a state-of-the-art locomotive operating between the Port of Stockton and Lodi that emits 90 percent less particulate matter and 92 percent less nitrogen than its 1953 predecessor.

The train further cuts down on emissions used in energy production by relying on a regenerative braking system that recaptures some of the energy that's otherwise lost as the train slows down.

Another \$16 million will be used for projects that cut down on diesel emissions and improve air quality and public health throughout the state.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will use \$2 million of the total grants to repower two older locomotives with newer, cleaner-burning engines.

Using \$14 million of the grants, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) will replace 18 old locomotives with new ultra-low emitting genset locomotives in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California as well as to install a catalytic reduction system in a line haul locomotive that will meet the latest Tier 4 emission levels.

Altogether, the diesel grant funds are expected to eliminate around 210 tons of particulate matter, 4,500 tons of nitrogen oxides and 130,000 tons of carbon dioxide from the air, the equivalent of removing 1,000 heavy-duty trucks off the road.

Diesel Emission Reduction Act grants are funded through a public-private partnership of federal, state, and local government, private sector, and environmental group leaders known as the West Coast Collaborative.

Since 2008, the collaborative has provided more than \$96.5 million in grant funds, with an additional \$119 million of leveraged money by its partners.

Working together with CARB and the Air District, the EPA aims to reduce particulate matter 2.5 concentration by 7 percent in 2012.

Blumenfield with the EPA is currently on a two-day tour through the Valley, stopping Wednesday in Clovis to award Valley Chrome Plating for efforts to reduce the amount of harmful chemicals used at the chrome-plating plant.

EPA's new mileage standards win carmakers' support

By Peter Fimrite, staff writer

San Francisco Chronicle, Wed., Jan. 25, 2012

A parade of car manufacturers, environmentalists and consumer groups praised a proposal by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to drastically increase American fuel efficiency standards over the next 13 years.

The proposed rules, which would require vehicles in the United States to get 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, were laid out Tuesday during an EPA and U.S. Department of Transportation hearing in San Francisco. The regulations are an attempt to comply with President Obama's 2010 appeal to car manufacturers to "produce a new generation of clean vehicles."

The rules would encourage the production of hybrids, electric cars and vehicles that burn alternative fuels, a big boost to Palo Alto's Tesla Motors and other makers of zero-emission vehicles. It is being touted as the most ambitious attempt yet to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save money on gas, spur innovation and create what the president called "a clean energy economy."

"Our dangerous addiction to foreign oil is threatening our way of life," said Michael Brune, the national president of the Sierra Club. "For more than 20 years the Sierra Club has been pushing for cleaner fuel choices." These rules "are the single biggest step we've taken to move our country beyond oil."

The standards would require yearly gas mileage improvements for cars, SUVs and light trucks starting with a 36.6-mile-per-gallon standard for the model year 2017.

Thirteen auto manufacturers and the United Auto Workers union are in favor of the plan, including Chrysler, Hyundai and the Ford Motor Company, representatives of which expressed their support during the hearing at the Hyatt hotel in Fisherman's Wharf.

"The challenge of meeting the EPA standards should not be underestimated," but "Chrysler supports the goals of the program," Reginald Modlin, the auto company's director of regulatory affairs, told the panel.

"This proposal brings us a step closer to our goal of a long-term single national program," said John Cabaniss, a spokesman for Global Automakers, an industry policy group, who nevertheless said he would like to see more flexibility in the rules.

The support among automobile companies is significant, considering that the regulations were modeled after a 2002 California law that provoked a fierce fight with the auto industry, which sued and eventually persuaded the Bush administration to block it.

Petroleum companies and some automobile dealers are still opposed to the rules, which they insist would lead to more costly regulation that will drive up energy costs and strangle the economy.

Forrest McConnel, of the National Association of Automobile Dealers, said the regulations would drive up the cost of a new car by \$3,200, pricing out of the market 7 million licensed drivers.

"How can a regulation that prices the most affordable cars out of the market be pro consumer?" McConnel asked.

Passenger cars account for 29 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, while SUVs, pickups and minivans account for 33 percent, according to the EPA. The proposed standards, which are expected to be adopted in July, would save about 4 billion barrels of oil and cut emissions by 2 billion metric tons over the lifetimes of the vehicles sold between 2017 and 2025, according to the EPA.

Those fuel savings would far outpace the higher vehicle costs, saving car buyers an average of between \$3,000 and \$4,400 over the length of the car's life, assuming gasoline prices remain the same, EPA officials said.

[Fresno Bee column, Tues., Jan. 24, 2012:](#)

EPA's \$21m won't fix Valley's toxic air

By Bill McEwen

The Environmental Protection Agency this morning will announce that it's sending \$21 million to help clean the air in the smoggy San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere in California.

In addition, the federal agency will roll out its plan for protecting the health of Valley residents with an emphasis on air and water quality, enforcement of public health standards and environmental justice.

Better late than never, I suppose.

Scientists were predicting back in the 1980s that the Valley, with its unique topography and an inert layer of air often overhead, would become the worst air pollution basin in the country.

The smart guys were right due in part to the EPA's reluctance to work with local and state officials on a plan strong enough to accommodate population growth and the realities of how goods and people move through the Valley. The EPA also failed to spend sufficient money aiding cleanup and research.

This \$21 million, while welcome, is a drop in the bucket of what's needed in a region notorious for high asthma rates and premature deaths linked to air pollution.

Putting the challenge and the new funding into perspective: Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, estimates the cleanup effort will require \$3 billion over the next 15 years -- \$200 million annually.

Vehicle owners in the district already are contributing about \$29 million a year through higher registration fees. In all, the district is spending about \$100 million a year on the fight, or about half of what is needed, Sadredin says.

Complicating the situation is that some of this funding will expire over the next couple of years. And there's the reality that Republican presidential candidates are talking about scaling back the EPA's funding and regulatory power.

Meanwhile, despite recent rain that helped produce beautiful views of the snow-dusted Sierra, we are suffering through a terrible air winter. The nation's worst soot problem forces people to choose between exercising outdoors or suffering lung-searing consequences.

The bottom line is that despite the addition of 500 regulations and a \$40 billion investment by Valley businesses in air improvement since the early 1990s, we aren't close to where we need to be to extend lives and cut down on the percentage of folks on inhalers.

To get there, we need a coordinated plan involving the EPA, state and local air pollution officials and health activists. We need everyone to be realistic about funding, as well as about harming a sputtering Valley economy wracked by double-digit employment. This said, we also must follow the direction that medical science leads us.

This will require tough decisions about priorities. For example, Sadredin says that a slice of the Valley air pollution pie comes from diesel locomotives. But the railroads, with powerful friends in Congress, haven't cut emissions. The state Air Resources Board is seeking voluntary reductions from railroads. But shouldn't EPA be requiring railroads, which can afford it, to use cleaner-burning engines on California routes?

The EPA says that it's serious about helping the Valley's air pollution problem.

It will take more than \$21 million and a news conference this morning in Stockton to convince me -- especially with President Barack Obama in a tough re-election bid.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Mon., Jan. 23, 2012:](#)

EPA visit to Stockton not without ozone irony

By Mark Grossi

Activists probably see the irony in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's visit to Stockton to talk about \$21 million in diesel pollution reduction funds for California.

In their eyes, the EPA takes some blame for a \$29 million penalty that San Joaquin Valley residents now pay for missing the federal one-hour ozone standard in 2010.

The EPA approved a 2004 Valley ozone cleanup plan in early 2010 -- just eight months before the Valley missed the cleanup deadline. In the process, EPA ignored a 40% increase in ozone-making gases, attributable to an adjustment in the way the emissions were estimated.

EPA last week lost a lawsuit over the plan and its approval. The federal court sent the Valley's plan back to EPA to get it right.

I wonder if EPA will be appealing that ruling. The agency has made no announcement yet. Perhaps that question will be asked Tuesday in Stockton.