

## Alternative vehicles get a test drive in Bakersfield

By Antonie Boessenkool, Californian staff writer  
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In the San Joaquin Valley, 80 percent of smog-component nitrogen oxide comes from mobile sources -- trucks, farm equipment, passenger cars and trains. And the heavy-duty diesel trucks, used for things like moving goods from ports in Los Angeles upstate, are the biggest contributor.

And the San Joaquin Valley and South Coast air basins have some of the highest air pollution levels in the country.

Yet of the roughly 1 million trucks and buses on the road in California, only about 1,000 are hybrid and alternative-energy vehicles, according to officials at a conference on clean truck technologies Wednesday.

With the goal of changing that, several government groups covering air quality hosted a conference at the Padre Hotel, inviting manufacturers of hybrid and clean fuel vehicles, and their current and potential customers: representatives from school districts, city government and private businesses like Coca-Cola and FedEx.

"We know what the problems are," said Jared Blumenfeld, regional administrator for the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Region 9. "The numbers are pretty startling. Of the million trucks and buses that are on the road ... those are really driving the numbers of non-attainment (of federal air pollution standards). ... We need to switch a considerable number of those to much less polluting vehicles.

"Clearly, the technologies are there," Blumenfeld said. "The existing technologies need to be deployed, and EPA is really committed to making sure we do that."

Several speakers outlined state and federal incentives, and tax credits that they said are key for mass-market adoption of cleaner fuel technology. Those incentives need to be continued, speakers said.

About a half-dozen hybrid and electric vehicles were parked in the lot behind the hotel, and the star of the show was a bright, yellow electric school bus, the only one in the country, organizers said. Participants were given rides around the block.

That bus, and a hybrid diesel and electric school bus, also parked in the lot are set to be used in the Kings Canyon Unified School District in Fresno County.

Another vehicle on display was an electric cargo van from Azure Dynamics and Ford called the Transit Connect Electric.

Already, Southern California Edison is using 22 of the vehicles in the Los Angeles area for meter installation, according to Chris Abarca of Azure Dynamics. Each costs about \$58,000, but buyers can get up to about \$22,500 in incentives and tax credits if they buy it, he said.

The vehicle has a range of 60 to 80 miles before needing a recharge. Jim Burke Ford in Bakersfield is representing the vehicle locally, and Abarca said Azure is hoping to generate some interest from local companies, water districts, school districts and the city in buying it.

"We believe, obviously, with the price of fuel that that's going to drive more interest to electrify where they can," he said. "We really have to make sure that the vehicle meets the work environment (requirements) that needs to be done."

The types of customers manufacturers are hoping to attract include Bud Bankston, transportation director for the Kern High School District.

"We're big into alternative fuels. We've done a lot of natural gas," Bankston said. He said 55 of the district's 216 buses run on natural gas.

"By listening to all the experiences that all these different companies have, it helps us in determining what direction that we need to go," he said. "Obviously, grant funds helps drive the purchase of these types of vehicles."

"It's interesting. Quiet, very quiet," Bankston said of the electric school bus he'd just taken a ride on. "Range is one of the issues of it. We've got a lot of rural areas."

Bakersfield and nearby towns like Arvin have the worst air quality in the valley, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The good news is that the valley also has seen a 10-fold increase in government funding, to about \$150 million a year now, to get clean truck technologies off the ground and adopted, according to Sadredin.

However, there are also challenges, he acknowledged.

"This is going to require a major change in how you do business, to be able to adapt to these new technologies, both in terms of the training of your staff and also sometimes changing your operations," he said.

Plus, questions of how much weight an electric vehicle can carry or how far it can go are considerations for adopting electric or hybrid vehicles on a large scale, he said.

"In our area, more than any other region, we have long-distance vehicle and truck travel," usually going from ports in Los Angeles upstate and vice versa, Sadredin said.

"You have to travel 250 miles. That's one of the additional challenges. Some of the technologies that can work in short-range cannot work in the long-range applications that we have in the valley."

The conference was hosted by the EPA, California Air Resources Board, California Energy Commission, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and South Coast Air Quality Management District.

## **Season of restricted fireplace use ends**

Merced Sun-Star, Thurs., March 1, 2012

Check Before You Burn runs from November through February each year and restricts the use of residential wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates, to prevent the buildup of fine particulate matter.

While the two previous winters were the cleanest on record for the eight-county Valley air basin, this winter was a different story because of historically dry, stagnant conditions that resulted in strings of unbroken curtailments during December and January.

During winter, wood-burning is the largest single source of fine particulate matter, which is a harmful form of pollution that's been linked to chronic lung disease, respiratory illness, heart attacks and premature death. Residential wood-burning can pump as much as 17 tons a day of the pollutant into the air basin.

## **Valley air district blames dry winter for spike in air pollution**

By Steven Mayer, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thurs., March 1, 2012

The valley air district's wintertime fireplace restriction program ended for the season Wednesday, but not before communities up and down the region experienced the worst particle air pollution increases in recent years.

Officials say dry weather patterns are largely to blame.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's program, known as Check Before You Burn, runs from November through February each winter. It restricts the use of fireplaces and other residential wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates.

Residents with no natural gas service or any other form of heat are exempt from the rule.

While the two previous winters were touted by the eight-county air district as the cleanest on record, this winter turned out to be a different story.

The number of days when wood burning was restricted increased in every county in the air basin, even quadrupling in San Joaquin County, hundreds of miles to the north.

In the valley portion of Kern County, the number of days burning restrictions were put in place increased 40 percent this winter over last, according to air district records. Last winter, the valley portion of Kern experienced 40 no-burn days. This winter, Kern saw 56 days when burning was curtailed.

Only Fresno County experienced more curtailments, jumping from 44 no-burn days last winter to 68 this season, a 55 percent increase.

Yes, extremely dry weather patterns are to blame for the poor showing, district officials said. But the air would have been much worse, they said, had the restrictions not been in place.

"We can only imagine how bad it would have been," said Janelle Schneider, a spokeswoman for the district.

Seyed Sadredin, the air district's air pollution control officer and executive director, said the willingness of residents to refrain from wood burning prevented even more dangerous air quality conditions from forming.

During winter, wood burning is the largest single source of PM2.5, which is a harmful form of pollution that has been linked to chronic lung disease, respiratory illness, heart attacks and premature death, according to the district. Residential wood burning can pump as much as 17 tons per day of this soot into the air basin.

Particulate pollution is distinct from smog-producing ozone, which is a summer problem.

"Considering the abnormal conditions this winter that dealt not only us but air districts statewide one blow after another in terms of air quality," Sadredin said in a news release, "this rule was especially critical in minimizing, to the extent possible, this dangerous form of pollution."

But is the district taking credit for improvements in good air years and blaming unhelpful weather conditions in bad?

Last year when asked whether higher rainfall levels and more inclement weather over the previous few winters were responsible for the impressive improvements in winter air quality, the air district said no, citing a report released by the district in 2010, which found that controls limiting wood burning were largely responsible for lower concentrations of particulate pollution.

But it seems clear this winter's calm, dry conditions played a significant role in the valley's spikes in particle pollution.

"The rain per se is not really going to be preventing particulates from building up," Schneider said. But, "meteorology is a factor -- it's a factor year-round."

And it was a factor outside of the district, in cities such as Sacramento and elsewhere, Schneider said, where air quality also suffered.

Despite the setbacks this winter, air officials are adamant that the program has been a key factor in dramatically reducing winter particulate pollution throughout the district.

"Despite this winter's experience, we need to remember that the past two winters were the cleanest on record for the valley. That is what is possible," Sadredin said.

## **EPA's San Joaquin Valley smog actions challenged**

Central Valley Business Times.com, Wed., Feb. 29, 2012

A Fresno-based health group and environmental advocates are asking the 9th U.S. Court of Appeals to force the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to come up with a tougher plan to scour the smog from the San Joaquin Valley's air.

Federal law set a limit on the amount of ozone emissions allowed during a one-hour period and required that the Valley attain the standard by November 2010. If the Valley failed to attain the standard, EPA and the local air district were supposed to develop a new plan to achieve prompt compliance with the one-hour ozone standard.

Although the deadline was missed, it took the EPA until Dec. 30, 2011, to determine that the Valley had failed to attain the ozone standard.

In its decision, however, EPA refused to recognize the Clean Air Act's mandate to develop a new 1-hour ozone plan for the Valley, say attorneys for Earthjustice, who are representing Medical Advocates for Healthy Air of Fresno and the Sierra Club in a petition to the appellate court.

"The result is that Valley residents are unlikely to see improvements in air quality for decades to come," Earthjustice says.

The petition for review asks the court to reject EPA's decision as a violation of the Clean Air Act.

"EPA's delay in addressing the San Joaquin Valley's ozone pollution problem is unconscionable," says Earthjustice attorney Erin Tobin. "This court has already sent back one bad air pollution plan and will not look kindly on another round of word games by the EPA."

In January, the Ninth Circuit rejected EPA's approval of the Valley's one-hour ozone plan, calling it "arbitrary and capricious." Earthjustice represented the Sierra Club and Medical Advocates in that case.

"As our health crisis drags on, the EPA drags its feet. Instead looking for loopholes in the law they should be looking for ways to clean up our air," says Kevin Hamilton, a registered respiratory therapist and founder of Medical Advocates for Healthy Air.

"The residents of the Central Valley suffer from some of the worst pollution in the country; we know it and the EPA knows it," says Gary Lasky, vice chairman of the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club. "We will not let the EPA turn its back on its responsibility to protect the people of the San Joaquin Valley."