

Central Valley truck voucher program offered

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, April 18, 2012

A new grant program from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is designed to offset the costs of buying a new heavy-duty truck.

Applications will be taken starting this week.

Twenty-five percent of the purchase price of a new truck will be provided, up to \$40,000, if the truck meets 2007 emission standards.

Up to 35 percent of the truck will be funded, a maximum of \$50,000, if it meets 2010 emissions standards and up to \$10,000 for a retrofit.

Through the Heavy Duty Truck Voucher program, the district will contract with truck dealers to administer the program.

Dealers will also be responsible for delivering old vehicles to dismantlers.

Eligible trucks must be model year 2002 or older for replacement and 2000-06 for retrofits and meet additional criteria, including California registration requirements and minimum mileage thresholds for the past two years.

"This program addresses a significant number of trucking operations in the Valley that, because of their size, were unable to be funded through other programs," said Samir Sheikh, the air district's grants program director. "We are very pleased to offer this community much-needed assistance."

To be eligible for the program, applicants must:

- Be based in the Valley air basin
- Be a small business, as defined by the state of California
- Agree to operate the new truck at least 75 percent within California and 50 percent within district boundaries for three years.

For more information or to apply, contact the district's grants program at 230-6000 or visit www.valleyair.org/Grant_Programs/GrantPrograms.htm.

Air officials try to counter bad report card

By Kellie Schmitt, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 18, 2012

No one likes getting a bad grade, even if it's for air quality.

Next week, the American Lung Association plans to release its annual State of the Air report, which issues letter grades to counties nationwide.

So on Tuesday, a group of California air pollution officials sent out its own annual evaluation that details efforts made to clean the air in the state's 35 air quality management districts.

Representatives from the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association were clear that they timed the release to counter the negative press that may come with the Lung Association's report.

That report "doesn't give the detail that goes into individual readings to understand the complexity," said Jaime Holt, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "It doesn't give as much acknowledgement of the progress made."

Air officials also criticized the Lung Association's report for its lack of complexity. Last year, for example, it gave "pristine Santa Barbara" the same failing grade as many counties in the notoriously polluted San Joaquin Valley.

"We're not grading on a curve," answered Bonnie Holmes-Gen, executive director for air quality and health for the California ALA. "If it's an unhealthful exposure, then we're going to give an F grade to that area."

The grading system is based on a compilation of government data on the number of days the air exceeds federal ozone and particulate matter standards. It also tallies up the number of violations so consumers can see that not all Fs are created equal.

The Lung Association also supplies trend charts, which can show progress over time, such as an overall reduction in the number of unhealthy days.

"Some of the air district officials are very focused on the specific grade they're given," she said. "This isn't a grade of the air pollution control district's effort in that county; it's a grade for the air."

In CAPCOA's own report, officials said they tried to capture the complex nature of the state's air.

The section on the San Joaquin Valley points to "unusual climate conditions" that resulted in this past winter's "historically poor air quality conditions." The region violated federal air quality standards for particulate matter 62 times this winter compared to 47 during the 2010-11 season.

Still, the report pointed out some successes. Even during this season's stagnant weather, particulates peaked in the 70 micrograms per cubic meter range, compared to regularly exceeding the 100 benchmark during the 1999-2000 winter season. And, ozone levels have declined significantly over the past decade; violations of the 2008 ozone standard have been reduced by 42 percent, according to the report.

To separate the effects of weather, good or bad, the air board does a meteorological analysis, said Errol Villegas, program manager for the San Joaquin Valley air district. That analysis lets the agency pull out the effect of stagnant air or lots of rain to see what the actual emission levels are.

"When we look at this season and we pull out the stagnant weather, it's also showing that emissions are going down, there's an overall decrease in particulate matter and better air quality."

But will all that translate into a better report card for Kern? Unlikely, said Holmes-Gen.

"We haven't issued it yet," she said. "But it's pretty clear that since it's gotten an F every other year, that it will this year, too."