

Report finds fewer unhealthy air days in California

By Bernice Yeung

California Watch, Friday, April 20, 2012

California air pollution reached unhealthy levels less often in 2011 than a decade ago, according to a report released this week by a state association of regional air district officers.

Compared with 2000, there were about 74 percent fewer days of "unhealthy air" statewide last year, data from the report showed. Air quality can range from "good" to "very unhealthy," and it is calculated based on local monitoring of four air pollutants regulated by the federal Clean Air Act.

The report found that ozone pollution has decreased statewide between 1980 and 2011; there have been smaller and more limited reductions in particulate matter emissions during the same time frame.

Dr. John Balmes, a professor of medicine at UC San Francisco, said California is "ahead of the pack with regard to air quality and greenhouse gas control." He said any reductions in ozone and particulate emissions could have positive effects on public health because these pollutants have been associated with cardiovascular or respiratory disease health risks.

The new report acknowledged that "despite significant improvements, air quality remains a major source of public health concern in large metropolitan areas throughout California," especially in the San Joaquin Valley and the southern coast area surrounding Los Angeles. California has 35 regional air districts, which regulate businesses and industrial facilities.

"We recognize that we have a long way to go in some of these air districts, but we have made a lot of progress," said Kenneth Koyama, executive director of the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association, which published the report. "Some districts have gone down to one unhealthy day in the past year for air-quality purposes, and others have actually had zero unhealthy days."

The report also outlines the local conditions that create air-quality problems and some ongoing efforts to address them. In the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District, for example, water diversion to Los Angeles from tributaries of the Owens and Mono lakes have resulted in exposed lake beds that contribute to particulate matter pollution in the region. The district is spending \$6.5 million on clean air projects.

Koyama said the air district association's report was issued in part as a counterpoint to the American Lung Association's State of the Air analysis, which has been published since 2000. In 2011, the American Lung Association gave 36 California counties an F grade for ozone exposure based on the number of unhealthy ozone days, and 19 California counties received an F for particulate pollution.

"Giving a grade of F suggests to me that whatever the air district has done has failed, and that's certainly not the case," Koyama said. "We've introduced programs that we believe have been very innovative to reduce emissions and improve air quality in the state. We believe we've done a lot to protect public health."

Bonnie Holmes-Gen, executive director for air quality and public health for the American Lung Association in California, said her organization's report offers a complex picture of the state's air quality.

"We think the grades provide a good snapshot as to what people are breathing, and the report also tracks trends over time for each region," she said. "California has shown tremendous progress in healthy air, which we attribute to California's groundbreaking regulations" related to vehicle emissions and clean fuels.

The 2012 State of the Air findings will be released Wednesday.

"After next week's report, we will have 13 years of data on unhealthy air days in California, and just as we've shown tremendous progress in most areas of the state over the past 12 years," Holmes-Gen said, the latest analysis will "show continued progress despite the serious challenges we still have."

Air officials scale back offer to replace fireworks with lasers

Stockton Record, Friday, April 20, 2012

San Joaquin Valley air quality officials on Thursday approved a scaled-back version of a plan to coax communities to drop fireworks displays in favor of nonpolluting laser-light shows this Fourth of July.

The original plan was to offer \$250,000 to communities willing to make the change.

But Valley Air Pollution Control District board members felt there wasn't enough information yet on how well the program would be received and what the health benefits would be from reducing fireworks pollution.

They voted to limit the incentive to \$30,000 for a total of three shows - one in the north Valley, one in the central Valley and one in the south Valley - and then to study the results for future years.

Board members said they liked the concept of the lasers, which in theory would reduce frequent spikes in pollution on the Fourth of July.

Communities interested in participating must already have a fireworks show in place and must agree to eliminate the pyrotechnics.

Kettleman City activists to hold Earth Day event

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, April 21, 2012

KETTLEMAN CITY — Local advocacy groups are working together to hold a community Earth Day celebration today at Kettleman City Park on General Petroleum Street.

The event will run from 1 to 6 p.m.

The free event will feature information on health, pollution and environmental issues as well as fun activities for kids, music, mural painting and a free food giveaway to Kettleman City residents.

The event is sponsored by El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio/ People for Clean Air and Water of Kettleman City, Kids Protecting Our Planet, Green Action and the Fresno Brown Berets.

It coincides and competes with a separate community cleanup event sponsored by Waste Management Kettleman Hills Facility and Kettleman City Elementary School.

These activist organizations openly oppose Waste Management's operations. Organizers said they want to keep residents informed by educating them about the health threats posed by toxic-waste landfill operations nearby, diesel pollution and other polluting industries around Kettleman through the celebration.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, April 19, 2012:](#)

Laser light show instead of fireworks on the Fourth?

By Mark Grossi

How about a laser light show instead of fireworks on the Fourth of July?

That's the latest brainstorm at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which worries about the dangerous shower of particle pollution that often accompanies fireworks on Independence Day.

The district today voted to make \$30,000 available to help stage three July Fourth celebrations in the Valley with a laser show instead of fireworks. It's a kind of pilot project. If it helps reduce pollution, the district might expand it next year.

This year, the district will pay for half of three established shows, up to \$10,000 apiece. The board wants to divide the money among the Valley's three regions -- north, central and south. The district will seek organizers of established shows to see if there is any interest.

Hanford is reportedly holding a laser show instead of fireworks this year because the cost of the fireworks show has become prohibitive.

The health risks on the Fourth of July have been well-documented, say air quality experts. Between 9 and 11 p.m., particle readings often bounce several times higher than the federal standard. The sky is showered with smoke and metals, such as magnesium, copper and barium.

The metals can cause a range of problems, including skin irritations, muscle weakness and even confusion in people with kidney problems.

[Bakersfield Californian, Opinion, Sunday, April 22, 2012:](#)

HIT: Air Report Card 2.0

Kern County's worst grades usually come from the American Lung Association's State of the Air Report, a yearly measure of air quality in the nation's largest cities. Bakersfield and Kern consistently get F's, as do many other California cities (including Santa Barbara last year). Tired of the bad press, the state's regional air regulators together issued their own report card this year detailing progress on cleaning up air pollution.

Air pollution is complex but it's undeniable that vast improvements have been made in recent years. The good deserves recognition along with the bad. It's still a long haul to better air but it's good to see progress.

