

Porterville air slightly cleaner than other areas

By Rick Elkins, editor

Porterville Recorder, Friday, April 20, 2012

For years people believed that smog along the southeast side of the Sierra mountains is a little cleaner than other areas of the Valley.

That is correct according to readings given The Recorder this week by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"Yes, I would say that," answered Janelle Schneider, spokesperson with the Valley Air District when asked if Porterville's air quality was slightly better than other areas of the Valley

Readings were given The Recorder for both ozone and particulate matter, two of the biggest health risk factors in the Valley. Readings were given for the month of September and December. September is one of the worst months for ozone and December the worst for particulate matter, explained Schneider.

In comparing Porterville to other areas of the Valley, its level of ozone was lower than Visalia all eight days when readings were given for 2010, but only one of eight days in 2011. Compared to Hanford, Porterville's ozone reading was lower seven of eight days in 2010, but only one of eight in 2011. Porterville fared much better when compared to Clovis, better all eight days in 2010 and four of eight days in 2011.

Ozone (O₃) is an extremely reactive gas molecule and tends to peak during the hot months of late summer. It is the primary ingredient of smog air pollution and is very harmful to breathe. Ozone attacks lung tissue by reacting chemically with it, according to the American Lung Association.

When comparing particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), Porterville had lower readings a majority of the time compared to all three cities, including five out of seven days when compared to Visalia. Porterville's readings for particulate matter were considerably lower than Clovis and Hanford.

According to the Lung Association, particulate pollution refers to a mix of very tiny solid and liquid particles that are in the air. The particles are different sizes, some as small as one-tenth the diameter of a strand of hair; many are even tinier.

"PM_{2.5} is invasive that can directly invade your blood stream," said Schneider. She said PM_{2.5} has been linked to strokes and heart attacks.

Ozone is connected to respiratory problems and lung damage, she said.

A report released this week by the Air District noted that unusual climate conditions resulted in historically poor air quality conditions in the Valley last year, a fact not lost on Tulare County Supervisor Steven Worthley who has served on the Air District board for eight years.

Valley counties experienced 15 unhealthy days as compared to two unhealthy days during the 2010-2011 winter season. There was also a substantial change in the number of exceedances of federal, health-based, air quality standards for PM_{2.5} this winter season relative to last season, stated the report. Last year, Valley counties had a total of 47 combined exceedances of the federal standard during the winter season, with this year's total at 62 combined exceedances.

Worthley said "with extreme weather conditions come extreme air conditions" and there were extreme weather conditions last year that affected air quality. That is true during the 100-degree days of summer and in the winter when the air inversion traps bad air in the Valley.

Worthley said had it not been for the fireplace ban on bad air days, the situation would have been worse. "We are continuing to have improvement," he said.

The report found that the Check Before You Burn program has resulted in some of the cleanest winters in Valley history since its adoption in 2003. For example, during the 1999-2000 winter season, the Valley's urban areas experienced peak PM_{2.5} levels one third higher than levels seen during this winter's stagnation episode. The daily 24-hour average PM_{2.5} levels across the Valley regularly exceeded 100 micrograms per cubic meter during the 1999-2000 winter season, with Fresno and Bakersfield well over that level at times. In contrast, daily average PM_{2.5} levels during this winter's extended stagnation episode have been peaking in the 70 micrograms per cubic meter range.

Porterville had lower readings than Clovis, Hanford, Visalia and Bakersfield on most days of December of 2010 and 2011.

Additionally, the 2011 summer ozone season continued the long-term trend toward attainment of the federal 1-hour and 8-hour ozone standards.

Schneider said a wind current called the Fresno Eddy generally moves air along the Valley's westside south, then that air circulates back up along the east side. She said that is one factor that tends to keep Porterville's air a little cleaner. Also, she and Worthley pointed out, larger metropolitan areas have higher levels of pollutions, especially ozone that comes from vehicle emissions.

She said besides the fireplace burning program, efforts to control agricultural dust have helped to lower particle matter.

"That has resulted in attainment of PM10," she said. "That's an outstanding achievement," she added.

Federal court gives green light to low-carbon fuel standard rules

By John Howard

Capitol Weekly, Tuesday, April 24, 2012

The crafting of regulations critical to California's landmark law curbing climate-changing carbon gas emissions will go forward temporarily while a federal appeals court decides whether they violate the commerce clause of the U.S. constitution.

The complex 2009 rule known as the Low Carbon Fuel Standard, which is intended to cut pollution by 10 percent over the next eight years from the production and use of transportation fuels, had been blocked in December by the U.S. District Court in Fresno.

In its decision, the lower court sided with petroleum, ethanol and trucker interests, among others, who contended the LCFS rule illegally restricted interstate commerce and was in conflict with a 2007 federal energy law that specifically exempted corn ethanol producers from greenhouse gas reporting requirements. The ruling came from U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence O'Neill.

But this week, a panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco removed the lower court's injunction, which allows the state's air pollution fighters at California's Air Resources Board to continue crafting the new regulations while the dispute is resolved on its merits in the courts.

There was no indication when the final judicial decision would be made, although it appears that the issue, in the end, will wind up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The procedural ruling captured little interest in the Capitol – or among the public, for that matter – but it was viewed with intense interest by environmentalists in the state and across the nation, who see the LCFS as crucial to California's attempt to cut greenhouse gases. For years, the political fight over LCFS was as intense as any environment-linked clash in the Capitol, pitting well-heeled special interests against environmentalists and, ultimately, state air pollution fighters.

The legal fight to preserve the LCFS was launched by the Environmental Defense Fund and several environmental groups, who argued that the rule was a "scientifically credible standard that was carefully designed to cut climate change pollution, protect and improve public health and drive innovation that delivers economic benefits."

"California has some of the worst air quality in the country. In addition to fighting climate change, the LCFS cuts pollution that poisons our air and water and results in respiratory ailments and diseases that cost us tens of billions of dollars a year in health care costs. By facilitating newer, less polluting transportation fuels, the LCFS can help California finally achieve attainment of federal health standards for air quality," the Environmental Defense Fund's climate change specialist Tim O'Connor noted in a blog posting.

But Michael Whatley of the Consumer Energy Alliance said he was "disappointed that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has chosen to allow, pending resolution of the appeal, a costly and destructive program to continue while placing countless American jobs and consumers at risk."

"At the end of the day," he added, the "LCFS will fail to reduce CO2 emissions, double gas prices, place thousands of jobs at risk, and will cost our economy billions of dollars."

Ranking is no reason to breathe easy; report highlights problem in Valley

By Yesenia Amaro

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Merced and the other seven counties in the San Joaquin Valley got failing grades for air quality.

The State of The Air 2012 report released today found a greater frequency of days when the Valley counties recorded unacceptable levels of ozone and particle pollution.

The report, which covers 2008-2010, shows that California overall still has some of the worst air in the country.

"Despite the challenge of our air quality, progress is being made," said Jane Warner, president and CEO of the American Lung Association in California. "That's truly the focus of this report. There's a number of F grades, but there has been progress.

"There are several of our regions that are reporting the best air quality in the 13 years of this report, but the battle continues, the fight continues," Warner said during a conference call.

Merced is ranked No. 10 for the most polluted areas in the nation for ozone, while the Fresno-Madera area ranked at No. 4.

Merced also holds the No. 10 spot on the list of the top ten areas in the nation for short-term -- or seasonal -- particle pollution. The Fresno-Madera area ranked No.2 on the same list and Modesto was No. 5.

In addition, four out of the five areas in California on the list of the top ten places in the nation for annual particle pollution are in the Central Valley: Bakersfield-Delano (No. 1), Hanford-Corcoran (No. 2), Fresno-Madera (No. 5) and Visalia-Porterville (No. 4.)

Bonnie Holmes-Gen, executive director for Air Quality and Health with the American Lung Association in California, said counties in the San Joaquin Valley have some of the worst air quality because of the unique weather and geography.

The hot weather, mountains bordering the Valley and stagnant air play a role in trapping the pollutants, she said.

Kari Nadeau, a Stanford University physician and researcher, said the report should remind people that what they breathe greatly affects their health.

Bad air quality leads to increased hospitalizations, asthma, lung cancer, diabetes, stroke and premature death, she continued. "The simple act of inhaling polluted air affects the health," she said.

Holmes-Gen said 37 out of the 58 counties in the state received at least one failing grade.

Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the report is a great tool because it brings to light the poor state of air quality, especially in the Central Valley.

But this year was the first time it highlighted some improvement, Presto said. "That hasn't been done in the past."

Businesses and industries in the Central Valley have spent billions of dollars shifting to less-polluting equipment to try to improve air quality, Presto said.

Motor vehicles are the largest source of emissions in the Central Valley, he said.

What officials need to do now is "really ask residents in the Valley to look at their daily activities and see how they can make one change," he said.

Bakersfield area near top for bad air rankings – again

By Kellie Schmitt, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 25, 2012

In a conference call detailing the American Lung Association's latest air quality report card, one city's name came up again and again: Bakersfield.

Bakersfield-Delano ranked worst in the nation for short-term particle pollution as well as annual particle pollution. The region ranked third worst for ozone pollution, behind the Los Angeles and Visalia areas.

That's actually a slight improvement from last year, when Bakersfield held the No. 2 spot for ozone.

Not surprisingly, the association awarded Kern County an "F" for ozone and particle air quality. Overall, California cities crowded the top polluters list.

"While we do have the most pollution in the country, we have to take heart," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, executive director for air quality and health for the ALA in California. "Progress has been made. We need to move forward and redouble efforts."

The report pointed out the San Joaquin Valley has shown improvement in reducing its ozone pollution, though there are fluctuations from year to year. This year's report uses air data from 2008 to 2010.

The annual State of the Air report is an opportunity to translate sometimes complex information into simple scores that make sense for families nationwide, according to the ALA. But some critics say its evaluations are too simplistic.

This year, for example, counties such as San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Santa Clara shared the same "F" grade for ozone pollution as the San Joaquin Valley counties even though they had far fewer bad air days.

Last week, local air pollution officers throughout California provided their own evaluation of the state's progress in an attempt to counter the negative press that would likely accompany the association's report. Those officials emphasized the complex geography and conditions that contribute to California's dismal rankings, and pointed out that progress has been made.

Janice Nolan, the ALA's assistant vice president, countered that failing is failing. She likened it to two elementary school students receiving a 30 percent and 50 percent on a math test.

"You're both going to fail," she said. "We give F's if you have too much air pollution."

ALA officials urged the use of moving from "dirty petroleum" to clean, zero-emission power sources; creating more walkable communities; and reducing vehicle trips.

THE 2012 RANKINGS

All eight of the counties assessed in the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin received an F for high ozone days and five valley cities were ranked among the 10 most ozone-polluted in America.

Cities with the most short-term particle pollution:

1. Bakersfield-Delano
2. Fresno-Madera
3. Hanford-Corcoran
4. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
5. Modesto

Cities with the most year-round particle pollution:

1. Bakersfield-Delano
2. Hanford-Corcoran
3. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
4. Visalia-Porterville
5. Fresno-Madera

Cities with the most ozone pollution:

1. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
2. Visalia-Porterville
3. Bakersfield-Delano
4. Fresno-Madera
5. Hanford-Corcoran

Fresno in top 5 most ozone-polluted cities in U.S.

Lung association rates local cities among most ozone polluted in U.S.

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, April 24, 2012

The 13th annual air quality report from the American Lung Association has good and bad news for the San Joaquin Valley -- but it's still mostly bad.

Visalia, Bakersfield, Fresno and Hanford are among the five most ozone-polluted cities in the country, the Lung Association will report today. Only the Los Angeles area is worse. The message has been consistent for years.

But the report also says this: Unhealthy ozone days in the Fresno area have dropped more than 60% in the last decade, according to the association's figures, which will be released today.

The report continues to place several Valley cities among the nation's worst 10 for both ozone and tiny debris called particulate matter pollution.

California is the worst place in the country for air pollution, said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, executive director, air quality and health, of the American Lung Association in California. There are lots of challenges ahead, she said.

Still, many cities had their cleanest showing ever in the lung association's rankings, Holmes-Gen said.

"Los Angeles, Visalia, Bakersfield, Sacramento, El Centro and San Diego had their lowest number of unhealthy days for ozone," she said.

At the same time, Fresno, Kings, Madera and Stanislaus counties had more bad ozone days than they did in the 2011 report.

The Lung Association looks at air data in three-year intervals. The 2012 report is based on monitor readings from 2008 through 2010, the latest official readings available.

The report mentions the big pollution sources for the Valley and California. They include diesel trucks, cars, ships, locomotives, oil refineries, agriculture and wood burning in fireplaces.

The pollution contributes to thousands of hospitalizations, emergency room visits and deaths each year, says Dr. Kari Nadeau, an immunology and allergy expert from Stanford University.

"Air pollution can stunt the lung development of children and cause health emergencies," she said.

"Cleaner air can save lives and can lead to better lives for our children."

Valley cities among smoggiest areas

1. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
2. Visalia-Porterville
3. Bakersfield-Delano
4. Fresno-Madera
5. Hanford-Corcoran
6. Sacramento-Arden- Arcade-Yuba City
7. San Diego-Carlsbad- San Marcos
8. Houston-Baytown- Huntsville, Texas
9. San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles
10. Merced

Source: American Lung Association

