

Driving on borrowed time: Nonprofits deal with new emission standards

By Anna Burleson, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wed., July 18, 2012

New Beginnings Christian Church's 1979 Peterbilt only has a couple of years to live. Whether it will be sold for parts or left to rot in a junkyard isn't yet known, but one thing is certain: In 2015, the big shiny semi won't be on the road anymore.

Most people don't think twice about the trucks used to haul goods, but nonprofit organizations in Bakersfield are coming to terms with the fact that come 2015, they may no longer be able to use the vehicles they have depended on for years.

The California Air Resources Board adopted the Truck and Bus Regulation in 2008, which aimed to limit diesel emissions after discovering they were tied to cancer. In 2010, the regulation was amended to extend compliance dates, but in the coming years, people are going to have to find a way to comply.

Air Resources Board Information Officer Karen Caesar said the regulation was an important step toward improving air quality and that the agency wanted to make sure business owners had significant time to comply.

But two years have gone by and now some nonprofits just need a new truck.

A used semi can cost about \$70,000 and a brand-new one can cost about \$120,000.

Kern Unit Chairman for the California Trucking Association Mike Munoz said some private truckers and nonprofits are just not going to be able to afford that expense.

"Nonprofits can apply for funding, but if you apply for any grants, you still get taxed on that money they give you," he said. "It's not worth it to go through all the headache."

But Cesar said truckers were not singled out: the ARB has also imposed stricter emission standards on buses, marine vessels and cargo handling equipment.

Regardless of how people are going to deal with the regulation, those who believe the climate change theory argue that change is necessary whether it's through AB 32, a law that aims to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, or the Truck and Bus Regulation.

Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Control District, said fewer emissions of any kind could potentially improve air quality over time.

The central San Joaquin Valley has the worst air quality in the country, but today, the air is about 80 percent cleaner than it was 20 years ago.

"We're still a long ways from being able to say mission accomplished," Sadredin said. "That's essentially why in this area we have the toughest regulations when it comes to air quality."

Bakersfield church New Beginnings has used a Peterbilt semi to transport about 15 million pounds of food in the last 15 years to the poor in Southern California, as well as parts of Arizona and Nevada.

Pastor Troy Morris said the church plans to apply for a \$20,000 grant to go toward a new truck, but he doesn't know if church members and outside donors will be able to raise the rest of the money by 2015.

"We're going to have to do some fundraising," he said.

A filter is available to put on the truck and lower emission rates to a legal level, but the filter alone costs about \$15,000, which is more than the old truck is worth.

The other option is to trade in an old truck for a newer one, but Munoz, who also buys and sells big-rigs, said he can't pay for a semi that isn't going to be legal on the road in a mere two years.

"I can't take them because I can't sell them," Munoz said.

But not everybody needs a semi -- smaller rigs are also affected.

Community Action Partnership of Kern Food Bank uses a fleet of four, 24-foot trucks to cart donations to 117 sites in Kern County.

Ian Anderson, program manager for the food bank, said it will have to start replacing one truck every two years beginning in 2015.

"We're planning for it," he said. "It's going to be tough on us."

Goodwill Industries of South Central California leases larger vehicles to carry unsold merchandise from stores to their warehouse.

Vice President of Marketing and Development Ken Beurmann said that while the organization won't have to purchase new rigs, the cost of leasing ones that comply with the law could get more expensive when those companies are forced to buy new trucks.

"It's just tough to say," he said, referring to what the future will hold.

Some nonprofits don't think the law will cause any problems.

Tim Calahan of Bakersfield Rescue Mission said he does not foresee having any financial difficulties replacing or making sure their one mid-range, U-Haul-style truck would comply with the law.

"I don't think it would disrupt our services," he said.

EPA to hold hearing on soot regulations today in Sacramento

By Richard Chang, staff writer

The Modesto Bee, Thursday, July 19, 2012

A national fight over clean air standards is coming to Sacramento today. The federal Environmental Protection Agency will hold a hearing today in Sacramento – one of two in the nation – on proposed revisions to its air quality rules.

"The question in front of the EPA is what level of air pollution makes people sick," said Janice Nolen, assistant vice president of national policy and advocacy for the American Lung Association in Washington, D.C.

At issue is the annual standard for fine particulate matter, or soot. Current regulations allow 15 micrograms per cubic meter, but the EPA's newest proposal calls for 12 or 13 micrograms, a figure that both environmentalists and oil companies oppose. But that's where the agreement ends.

Environmental and clean air groups are calling for tighter standards, while the oil industry believes no changes are necessary. Federal law requires the EPA to review air quality standards every five years.

"The science is solid," Nolen said, citing multiple studies with data over a 15- to 18-year period. "We could avoid 35,000 premature deaths a year if we change the standard to 11 (micrograms per cubic meter) instead."

The American Petroleum Institute, an oil and natural gas trade association with more than 500 members, has questioned the need for the EPA to change its standards. API's director of regulatory and scientific affairs, Howard Feldman, calls the data "gray," at best.

"There's a whole host of conflicting data," Feldman said. "If there was compelling data, we would agree to the changes."

Despite the uproar from environmental groups and the oil industry, the EPA is standing by its proposed revisions.

"The proposed changes are based on an extensive body of scientific evidence that includes thousands of studies – including many large studies which show negative health impacts at lower levels than previously understood," EPA spokeswoman Niloufar Glosson said in a statement.

API's Feldman also cites the cost of meeting the new standard as another factor for his organization's opposition, but Nolen doesn't buy that.

"Every time we do this review, the oil companies always say it's going to cost too much," Nolen said. "Cleaning up pollution saves money because we're keeping people out of the hospital."

Soot comes from a variety of places, with diesel trucks and wood-burning – from both home and commercial sources – the biggest polluters, Nolen said. She said the small particles can bypass the body's natural defense systems and lodge in the lungs, causing premature death, asthma and heart attacks, among other diseases.

Bonnie Holmes-Gen, executive director for air quality and health at the American Lung Association in California, said Sacramento has a "serious particle pollution problem."

"There were 29 days last winter when the air district issued an air quality alert so people couldn't burn wood," Holmes-Gen said.

Sacramento was ranked the ninth-worst particle-polluted city in the nation by the American Lung Association in 2011. The city moved to No. 21 in 2012.

"There's been a dramatic improvement, but much more needs to be done," Holmes-Gen said of Sacramento's air quality.

The Sacramento hearing at the California Air Resources Board at 10th and I streets is the second in which the public was invited to comment on the proposed revisions. The first was held Tuesday in Philadelphia. The EPA will release final standards Dec. 14.

Central Valley's ecological state studied

By Nan Austin, Modesto Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, July 19, 2012

Central Valley leaders need to plan better and work together on land and water use to improve the quality of life here, a study of California's ag-centered interior concludes.

For "The State of the Great Central Valley" report on the environment, released Wednesday, changes over five years were analyzed by researchers at the Great Valley Center, based in Modesto, and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute at UC Merced.

Writers found modest improvements in several areas, but changes beyond Valley control got much of the credit. State-mandated fuel efficiency standards helped improve air quality. The economic bust slowed the paving of farmland.

"We need to do more. There's no silver bullet. There's a variety of little pieces," study contributor Roger Bales said Wednesday. Bales is a professor of engineering at UC Merced and director of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute.

Water storage -- by snow, dam or underground -- will be key, he said. "If I was going to do one thing, it'd be to add more resiliency to our water system," said Bales, referring to predictions of longer droughts and less snow in the Sierra.

But some of the report's strongest recommendations go against the Valley's cultural grain, such as increasing regulation in several areas and curbing subdivision sprawl. Such decisions take political will, which Bales hopes better information will help create.

The report examines five areas:

Air: Stanislaus and Merced counties have higher than average numbers of children with asthma and far more than average numbers of unhealthy air days. This section of the Valley exceeded state standards 150 days in 2011, nearly double that of the Sacramento area -- but not nearly as bad as Fresno area counties. Blame less-efficient diesel engines for much of the ozone and toxic substances in the air, the report says.

Water: The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta supplies more than two-thirds of the state's water. Of concern are rising nitrate levels in Valley drinking water, in part because of nitrogen-based fertilizers and nitrogen-fixing cover crops. As for quantity, overall drier conditions have contributed to a surge in wildfire danger.

Land: More dense housing is urged to save farmland. Stanislaus County has 120 homes per square mile, and Merced County has 43. By comparison, Sacramento County has 576. In the boom years, 2006-08, about 4,000 acres were developed in the Northern San Joaquin Valley, nearly half of it prime farmland.

Species and habitat: The Valley is home to 588 rare and endangered species. While steelhead trout and salmon are coming back in small numbers in rivers, Swainson's hawks have not done as well. A lot of wetland habitat has been restored, but only recently have monitoring efforts started to see if it has been effective.

Resources and energy: Valley energy use remained static from 2006 to 2010, despite more people. The region has optimal conditions for solar panels and wind farms, and dairy farms offer great potential for methane "cow power."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Great Valley Center in Modesto and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute at UC Merced released on Wednesday the latest "State of the Great Central Valley of California" report, focusing on quality of air, water, land, endangered species, waste disposal and energy. Report recommendations:

- Save the air: Raise air quality standards across the region. Use more fuel-efficient diesel trucks to lower ozone and pave rural roads to reduce dust.
- Manage water: Invest in water management and infrastructure to protect and restore the Valley's diminishing supply, including better irrigation technologies and infrastructure.
- Don't waste water: Increase water recycling, use of aquifers and urban efficiency.
- Contain growth: Take a more careful approach to urbanization of prime soils, increasing density of urban areas and transportation choices. These need to be brought into city and county general plans.
- Go greener: Embrace renewable energy technologies, and take advantage of a climate and landscape ideal for solar, wind and biomass energy farms.
- Save energy: Raise standards for energy-efficient building construction.
- Watch the big picture: Put a higher priority on planning and data gathering to assess environmental health and restore biological diversity.

Report: Central Valley makes some environmental improvements -- but

- **But ozone levels still violate air quality standards**
- **'We are impacted every day'**

Central Valley Business Times, Wed., July 18, 2012

California's Central Valley environment is getting healthier, but not fast enough, with its air quality still among the worst in the nation, according to a report released Wednesday.

There has been a reduction in the level of a number of key air quality indicators, a recharge of watersheds to near normal levels, a slowing in the loss of prime agricultural land to urbanization and an increased restoration of wetland habitats, according to the report from the Sierra Nevada Research Institute at the University of California, Merced, and the Great Valley Center of Modesto.

And the Central Valley's depressed economy has dramatically slowed the use of prime land for new homes and commercial space, the report notes. It has also given local and regional

governments time to prepare and begin using blueprints to improve urban housing density and transportation choices.

However, the Central Valley has many red flags when it comes to the environment, the report says.

There has been an overall increase in the number of days ozone levels were above state and federal air quality standards since 2005, and almost all counties in the region are not meeting the one-hour and eight-hour air quality standards for many days each year, the research says.

The percentage of the Valley's population at risk for respiratory problems because of poor air quality outpaces other California regions, it says.

Other unresolved or worsening problems include:

- The level of nitrates in drinking water has increased because farmers are using nitrogen-based fertilizers and planting nitrogen-fixing cover crops, the report says.
- Poor soil drainage has caused damage to fragile ecosystems.
- A great deal of energy is being used to move waste materials to landfills, presenting an opportunity for more recycling. Many counties have not reduced their waste production or energy consumption. In some cases, the numbers have increased beyond the proportional rise in population.

"We are impacted every day by the air we breathe, the water we drink, and how we use and develop Central Valley land," says Great Valley Center Program Manager Linda Hoile. "

Gathering the data for this year's report was challenging because of state and local budget cuts that limited the collection of information and the monitoring of air, water, species diversity, habitat conservation and resource management, the researchers say.