

[Fresno Bee column, Sat., Aug. 18, 2012:](#)

Diesel truckers should pay for bad air

By Bill McEwen

It's a shared Fresno experience.

You're returning from Los Angeles, Pismo Beach, Lake Tahoe or even our local Sierra. Hanging above the great Valley floor is a woven blanket of ozone and particulates, and you think, "I breathe that filthy stuff."

Yes, we do.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has been with us 26 years. Businesses have spent \$40 billion meeting regulations and buying emissions credits since its formation.

More of us use electric lawn mowers and ride bikes. More of us drive hybrids or new, clean-burning gas vehicles. We pay an extra \$12 a year to register a car to help pay for pollution-cutting technology.

Despite these efforts, we'll be under an Air Alert tomorrow and Tuesday -- maybe longer, depending on the weather. Parents are being asked to car-pool kids to school. All of us are being asked to stay out of the drive-through lanes at fast-food joints and banks.

So what gives?

Why are we having an Air Alert and rescheduling football practices -- especially when air district billboards and commercials brag about how much better the air is?

The truth: A hodgepodge of regulatory bodies and laws combined with the Valley's bowl shape and largely absent wind has us in a no-win situation.

Allow me to explain.

There has been a 75% reduction in oxides of nitrogen (NOx) emissions by businesses, manufacturers, growers and dairies, according to Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director. Passenger cars and light trucks, meanwhile, account for only 15% of the Valley's NOx emissions.

The culprit is diesel emissions from trucks and locomotives, which the air district doesn't regulate. Think about all the diesel trucks rumbling through the Valley on Highway 99 and Interstate 5, contributing little to our economy except the driver buying a hamburger somewhere.

One solution would be to charge a toll for diesel vehicles using those two major highways, with the money going to help reduce pollution from other sources. But the air district doesn't have the power to impose a toll. Nor does the state Air Resources Board or the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We've talked about a toll many times," Sadredin says. "Basically, it would take an act of Congress."

Are you listening, Congressmen Jim Costa, Devin Nunes and Jeff Denham?

Are you paying attention, U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer?

Valley families are paying most of the \$29 million a year federal penalty for violating the one-hour ozone standard. Meanwhile, diesel trucks are leaving their exhaust behind, and we're filtering it with our lungs.

Honorable congressmen and senators, how about a real tool to clean up the Valley? How about legislation that lets us remove that brown shag carpet hanging over us and sending folks to early graves? How about turning the two big highways into diesel toll roads?

Here's the deal. Right now, a lot of folks around here are stepping up. They want healthy air, and they want the penalty -- another anchor on our struggling economy -- to go away.

More and more, this whole air pollution effort is looking like a battle rigged for failure.

The feds set the standards. The feds impose the penalties. They hold much of the power.

But rarely do they lift a hand.

If not a diesel toll road, I'd love to hear some ideas from the congressmen and senators on how we get to clean air in a basin encompassing 25,000 square miles.

What have here is incremental progress, and we're about to collide into the wall of diminishing returns.

Air Alert on for Monday, Tuesday

Staff reports

The Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Aug. 18, 2012

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is ushering in the back-to-school season with an air alert effective Monday and Tuesday.

Air alerts aim to remind residents to curb pollution, said Jaime Holt, chief communications officer for the district. The goal is to avoid violations of the Environmental Protection Agency's one-hour ozone standard, which measures ozone levels in one-hour snapshots at monitors throughout the valley.

If levels are above 125 parts per billion, that's a violation and more than three violations at the same monitor in one year means a big fine, Holt said.

In 2010, the valley failed to meet the one-hour standard and was given a \$29 million penalty, part of which is paid for by a \$12 per vehicle registration fee. The valley must have three clean years in a row to avoid the penalty, Holt said.

"We need for 2012 to be a clean year in order for it to be considered year one," she said.

High temperatures, stagnant weather and the upswing in traffic due to school starting creates a perfect storm for violations of the one-hour standard, Holt said.

The air district offered the following tips to reduce pollution:

- * Don't idle while dropping off or picking up kids at school.
- * Carpool or use other transportation.
- * Don't use drive-throughs.

For businesses, the district recommends shifting operations like lawn care to early morning or late evening, promoting carools and offering flexible work schedules.

To find out more about air alerts, call 1-800 SMOG-INFO (766-4463) or visit www.valleyair.org.

Cool is coming to Valley, just not today

By BoNhia Lee, staff writer

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Aug. 19, 2012

Today was supposed to bring an end to two weeks of triple-digit temperatures in the Valley -- but that might not happen after all.

Don't lose heart, forecasters say: Relief really is in sight.

Fresno was forecast to hit 97 degrees today, but it could hit the century mark instead and still remain hot on Tuesday, said David Spector, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

By Wednesday, though, a cooling trend is expected to begin.

"It will be the end to triple-digits," Spector said.

Don't expect it to last long, however. The heat could make a return next weekend.

"That's still up in the air" because it's too far out to know what the weather could be like, Spector said.

Sunday's high temperature hit 101, giving Fresno its 15th straight day of triple-digit heat.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecast moderate air quality for Fresno and Tulare counties today. Madera and Kings counties are expected to have good air quality.

Still, the Valley's air district has called an air alert for today and Tuesday because of the potential build-up of smog levels from hot, stagnant air and vehicle traffic from the return to school for many Valley students. Fresno Unified and Clovis Unified both are starting school today.

The air district is asking drivers to refrain from leaving their cars idling while dropping their children off at school.

The district hopes the alert will prevent the Valley from exceeding the federal one-hour ozone health standard.

Valley bad-air alert declared for Monday, Tuesday

By Ezra Romero, staff writer

Fresno Bee, Friday, Aug. 18, 2012

If you were hoping for a cooldown this weekend, think again.

Triple-digit temperatures are expected to stick around the central San Joaquin Valley through the weekend and into early next week -- along with a Valley-wide air alert -- before temperatures are forecast to dip into the low 90s, the National Weather Service in Hanford said Friday.

"We are going to have a more dramatic cooling because there will be a trough coming in Tuesday, cooling the area by several degrees," said David Spector a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

New equipment at the NWS in Hanford will give the Valley more accurate weather and storm readings, allowing for better preparation for weather year-round.

An air alert for the Valley has been called for Monday and Tuesday because of expected smog buildup from high temperatures and stagnant air, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

The alert -- called when an area is in danger of exceeding a federal standard for ozone -- could possibly be extended, air officials said.

With some school districts opening Monday, parents are asked to refrain from idling their vehicle when dropping off or picking up students.

Carpooling and alternate transportation are encouraged. Motorists also are asked to refrain from using drive-through services.

The air alert is in effect for the counties of Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin and the Valley air basin portion of Kern County.

The weather service's San Joaquin Valley Forecast Office has upgraded to new radar technology that will more accurately track weather in the region, according to a federal announcement this week.

The new radar technology -- called dual polarization -- includes new software and a hardware attachment to the radar dish allowing it to send and receive both horizontal and vertical pulses, providing a two-dimensional picture of the size and shape of the objects detected.

Alert! Help cut pollution in San Joaquin Valley

The year's first Air Alert, which urges residents to cut down on pollution, will start Monday.

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Aug. 18, 2012

The alert, which will run at least through Tuesday, is aimed at ending an annual \$29 million federal fine in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The alerts, introduced last year, are issued when poor air quality is expected because of emissions, hot weather and other factors.

The district is trying to reduce ozone, a component of smog that triggers the fine if it exceeds federal standards.

The fine is paid via a \$12 surcharge on motor vehicle registrations and levies on businesses that do not have the "best available" emission controls.

Ozone can exacerbate asthma and other lung illnesses, particularly for children and people with breathing problems.

Residents can help by:

- Car-pooling to school or work
- Taking a bus or riding a bike
- Walking children to and from school
- Linking trips — doing all errands at once — or postponing errands
- Avoiding yard work with gasoline-powered equipment

- Refraining from using drive-through services
- Avoiding vehicle idling, especially at schools

The district is emphasizing the idling advice this month, as children head back to classes.

It notes that the average California car idles for 30 hours over the course of a year, consuming enough fuel to travel 900 miles. Drivers should turn off their engines if they will be stopped for more than 10 seconds.

Businesses and local governments can reduce emissions by:

- Shifting operations to early morning or late evening (such as lawn care)
- Offering flexible work schedules
- Promoting car pools and van pools for employees
- Becoming a Healthy Air Living partner

For more tips, go to www.valleyair.org and www.healthyairliving.com. To receive Air Alerts, call (800) 766-4463 or go to www.valleyair.org.

Officials issue air warning for Valley

By Alex Breitler, staff writer

Stockton Record, Saturday, Aug. 18, 2012

Worried that back-to-school traffic and hot temperatures will create a brew of toxic pollution over the San Joaquin Valley, air quality officials have called an "Air Alert" for Monday and Tuesday.

It's already too late to eliminate a \$29 million air pollution penalty after 2013, as officials had hoped.

But keeping ozone levels down the rest of this summer and over the next two years could end the penalty after 2014, said Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the Valley Air Pollution Control District. Air Alert

An "Air Alert" has been called for Monday and Tuesday. Residents are asked to avoid idling their cars when dropping off or picking up schoolchildren, avoid drive-through restaurants and services, and consider carpooling or using alternate transportation. Businesses are asked to shift operations to early morning or late evening, offer flexible work schedules and promote carpooling.

To learn more, visit valleyair.org.

"We keep getting closer," he said Friday.

The Air Alert system started last summer, when the Valley came close to meeting - for the first time - a 1979 standard for short-term ozone pollution. The goal of the alerts was to persuade people to reduce pollution, primarily from their vehicles.

Both public health and private dollars are at stake.

Business and residents alike are paying the \$29 million fine each year and will continue to do so until the old standard is met. Drivers up and down the Valley are paying an extra \$12 per year on their DMV registration.

Avoiding violations the rest of this summer would be a first step toward meeting the standard, Presto said.

Violations tend to be clustered in the Fresno area. Stockton hasn't violated the standard since 1999, but as part of the Valley air district, drivers and businesses here are subject to the penalty.

"All the emissions we create in the north drift south and contribute to the ozone Valley-wide," Presto said.

He said Air Alerts were a success last year, although unusually mild temperatures also played a part in keeping down ozone pollution.

A Fresno-based health advocacy group, the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, says the threshold for declaring an Air Alert is too high. The alerts should be issued more often, said Kevin Hall, the coalition's director.

"The reason they don't want to do it is people will then ask, 'Why isn't the air getting clean? Who's failing here?' " Hall said. "That brings people back to the politicians who serve on the Valley air board. They engage in public relations, not public information or education as they should."

District officials have said that if they issued too many Air Alerts, the public would be less likely to pay attention to them. Real-time air quality data is available on the district's website whether an Air Alert is in effect or not.

San Joaquin Valley's first air alert begins Monday

Central Valley Business Times, Friday, Aug. 17, 2012

The San Joaquin Valley air basin's first seasonal "air alert" will begin Monday, Aug. 20 and continue through Tuesday, Aug. 21, with the possibility of being extended, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says.

This includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley air basin portion of Kern.

Air alerts are called when the Valley experiences conditions such as increased emissions, high temperatures and stagnant air flow that lead to ozone formation. High ozone levels put the Valley at risk for exceeding the one-hour health-based ozone standard that, in turn, triggers an annual \$29 million federal penalty.

This penalty is paid by Valley businesses failing to use the best available emissions control technology and Valley drivers via a \$12 addition to their DMV registration.

These episodes have been correlated with back-to-school traffic, the district says.