

Some plants in S.J. not so green

By Alex Breitler

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Power plants and landfills are the largest single sources of greenhouse gas emissions in San Joaquin County, recently released data shows.

The new information allows the public to learn, for the first time, which local facilities are having the greatest impact on global climate change.

For years, the Environmental Protection Agency has publicly identified facilities that create traditional pollution in cities across the nation.

On the Web

You can use interactive maps and charts to search for local greenhouse gas emission sources. Visit ghgdata.epa.gov.

This is different.

Greenhouse gas emissions do not immediately threaten the health of people living nearby. But they do contribute to climate change, a less direct but more widespread health problem that could, for example, increase the risk of heat-related illness and death, EPA says.

Now communities and government agencies can track local greenhouse gas emissions, and businesses have a "critical tool" to make comparisons and find ways to cut those emissions, EPA Assistant Administrator Gina McCarthy said in a statement.

"Americans have the right to know about pollution in their air," said Peter Zalzal, an attorney with the environmentalist group Environmental Defense Fund. "This greenhouse gas emissions data promotes transparency and provides a strong foundation for Americans to work together in deploying smart climate policies."

The data shows more than half of San Joaquin County's 2010 emissions came from power plants, which create greenhouse gas emissions by burning fossil fuels in the process of generating electricity. More than a quarter of the local emissions came from landfills, which produce methane - a far more potent climate-changing gas - as garbage decomposes.

The Stockton CoGen power plant on Zephyr Street was the largest local source of greenhouse gas emissions in 2010. A manager there referred an inquiry to the plant's owner, Pennsylvania-based Air Products Manufacturing Co., which did not respond to a request for comment.

The Stockton plant emitted 419,455 metric tons of greenhouse gases, mostly carbon dioxide. That's comparable with annual emissions from more than 82,000 passenger cars.

Change is coming, however. Earlier this month, officials announced that Stockton CoGen is closing and will be converted to a biomass power plant, burning wood products instead of coal. The decision was apparently related to the state's shunning of older, dirtier power in favor of cleaner sources of energy.

CoGen's closure will likely mean a decrease in the county's future carbon footprint.

But there are much larger polluters in California as a whole. Even CoGen's emissions were far less - about 10 times less - than some of the state's largest greenhouse gas belchers, such as Chevron's Richmond oil refinery, which pumped out 4.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2010.

The new data does not reflect emissions from small businesses, homes, farming operations and vehicle tailpipes. Some larger factories are not listed, either, because while they may use large amounts of energy, it is the power plants producing that energy that actually release the gases into the environment.

Because this is the first time that greenhouse gases have been reported, there is no way yet to compare local trends over time. Overall, however, U.S. emissions have declined in recent years

in large part because of the poor economy. We have purchased fewer goods and products, decreasing the amount of energy needed to create them and transport them to their destinations.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, April 9, 2012:](#)

Celebrate Earth Day

Earth Day, the world's largest secular holiday and the only event celebrated by more than a half-billion people of all backgrounds, faiths and nationalities, is sponsored by many national and international organizations with outreach programs showcasing the positive contributions that environmental science makes to improve the health of our planet and its citizens.

In her official proclamation, Mayor Ashley Swearengin cited the following reasons for declaring April 22 Earth Day in Fresno:

"Earth Day, begun as an annual event on April 22, 1970, focused public attention on pollution and environmental concerns and made the hitherto esoteric term 'ecology' a household word. Many national organizations are celebrating it with outreach programs showcasing the positive contributions that environmental science makes to improve the health of our planet and its citizens; Earth Day community-sponsored events promoting environmental awareness and education are held to communicate with a wide audience in the San Joaquin Valley; and improving the Valley's air and water quality is an urgent necessity."

To view events taking place locally, visit www.fresnoearthday.org. For details of dates, hours, and contact persons see <http://fresnoalliance.com/wordpress/?p=4639>

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