

[Modesto Bee commentary, Friday, July 27, 2012:](#)

## **Bee Healthy: Good news on valley asthma, air pollution**

By Wallace Caroll

Today, fear and negativity are often used to motivate us ... fear between the races, economic fears, fears about violence. Although we may be moved to do something out of fear, it isn't the motivation that encouragement is.

When it comes to asthma and the Central Valley's air pollution, we hear a lot of negative, fearful things: the pollution of our air is worsening; asthma is becoming more prevalent. At times, it seems there is no stopping the inevitable advancement of either problem.

The truth is that both air pollution and asthma here in Modesto ARE improving. The standards for air pollution have been elevated in recent years. That is to say, they have been made more strict. As it turns out, we have been working hard as a community to improve the quality of our air with success.

Asthma is common in the Central Valley. Approximately 12 of every 100 children have asthma. However, if you look at Modesto's rate of admissions to emergency rooms for asthma, an interesting fact emerges. When compared with the rest of the Central Valley, we have fewer admissions than other counties. In fact, our emergency room visit rate is better than California in general.

By what means have we improved? Education of health care workers, asthmatics and their families is an important way to effect change. The Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition (SCAC) has worked hard over the last 10 years to educate all of these important groups. Hospitals have introduced teaching policies that prevent asthmatic patients from needing to return repeatedly to the emergency room with asthma flares. Respiratory therapists teach patients about asthma prevention and treatment more than ever before.

The (San Joaquin Valley) Air Pollution Control District board has worked hard to steadily improve the quality of our air.

Together, and as individuals, we can do much to improve asthma in our community and THAT is Good News.

*Wallace Caroll is a doctor, an allergist and chair for the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition.*

[Merced Sun-Star editorial, Saturday, July 28, 2012](#)

## **Our View: Hold state agency accountable**

Californians, understandably, have considerable angst about establishing a cap-and-trade program as a response to state law requiring a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

The Legislative Analyst's Office has called the program, an offshoot of the passage of Assembly Bill 32, "one of the most wide-ranging and complex regulatory efforts in the history of the state." That's why public oversight is essential as the state attempts to build a regional market. No one wants a repeat of California's experience with energy deregulation, which set the stage for corporate misconduct and the ensuing electricity crisis of 2000-01.

Unfortunately, lawmakers at the end of last session passed a trailer bill (Senate Bill 1018) that does little to fortify public trust. The bill purports to "establish new oversight and transparency" of cap-and-trade, but falls far short of what's needed.

A viable cap-and-trade program would allow power plants, refineries and other major producers of greenhouse gases to purchase and trade permits for carbon emissions. Companies that reduce emissions below their allotment (the cap) could sell them (the trade) on the open market, presumably at a profit.

A robust regional market gives businesses more options than a California-alone market. So far, California has only two Canadian provinces as partners, but over time hopes to draw numerous neighboring states.

In creating its program, California plans to build on the model of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, an agreement among nine Northeastern and mid-Atlantic states that is successfully reducing emissions

from power plants. In November, based on what the Northeastern entity did, the California Air Resources Board and its Canadian partners created a nonprofit -- Western Climate Initiative Inc. -- to provide technical services in running the auctions for carbon emissions permits. The nonprofit has no regulatory or enforcement functions.

Some have raised questions about the air board's decision to incorporate the Western Climate Initiative nonprofit in Delaware (where corporate taxes are low) instead of California, which it is a legitimate concern. More worrisome, however, is language in last session's trailer bill that allows this nonprofit to operate with little public accountability. For example, the bill specifically says that the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act does not apply to Western Climate Initiative Inc.

The air board, through its communications director Stanley Young, says that Bagley-Keene does not provide a "good fit" because Western Climate Initiative deals with other states and countries.

We disagree.

When California creates a nonprofit entity to act on behalf of the state and its residents, it has an obligation to make sure that entity follows the same requirements for transparency as any state agency.

There is a precedent for this. In 2002, the Legislature passed a bill requiring the California Independent System Operator, the nonprofit that manages the state's competitive energy market and wholesale transmission grid, to hold open meetings and provide records "consistent with the general policies" of the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act and the California Public Records Act, with only limited exceptions.

To its credit, SB 1018 requires the California Air Resources Board to notify the Joint Legislative Budget Committee of any funds over \$150,000 provided to Western Climate Initiative and to report every six months on "any actions" proposed by the nonprofit that "affect California state government or entities located within the state." And the nonprofit corporation voluntarily posts meeting minutes and documents (certificate of incorporation, bylaws, contracts, funding agreements) on its website.

That's a start, but not enough to ensure accountability and add to the credibility of cap-and-trade. When the Legislature returns in August, it should require Western Climate Initiative to meet the same requirements as the energy grid manager.