

SJ Valley air is cleaner but . . .

Districts says EPA standards impossible to meet

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

The Manteca Bulletin, Mon., May 13, 2013

There's something in the air.

That's a given since the San Joaquin Valley is among the worst polluted air basins in the nation often coming in at either the worst or runner-up spot depending upon the particulate being measured.

However, the valley's notorious air quality reputation often masks the good news.

- Exceedances of the one-hour ozone standard continue to decline, from more than 50 in 2002 to just two in 2012.

- Ozone (smog) exceedances for the 1997 and 2008 8-hour standard have dropped by 55 percent and 34 percent, respectively, since 1992.

Those are just two of the points made in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's annual Report to the Community issued last week.

The district - formed in 1992 - acknowledges there is more work that needs to be done. At the same time, though, the annual report stressed a need to "see common-sense changes to the Federal Clean Air act.

"Our experience shows that many well-intentioned provisions are leading to unintended adverse consequences," the report states. "The antiquated provisions of the Clean Air act are now leading to confusion, and lack of an updated congressional directive has rendered courts as policy makers."

The district staff and governing board have reached a point where the failure of Washington, D.C., to take administrative and legislative action to update the Clean Air act is leading to the following:

- Chaotic and confusing transition to new standards.
- Standards and deadlines that are impossible to meet.
- Costly litigation leading to delays and confusion.
- Enormous administrative costs to state and local governments without any corresponding benefit to air quality.
- Enormous red-tape costs to businesses and individuals without any corresponding benefit to air quality.

One example of how standards are impossible to to meet centers around nitrogen oxides.

The valley averages 625 tons of nitrogen oxides being released in the air on any given day. The new standard is to get it to 80 tons a day or less.

Heavy duty trucks account for about 250 tons daily. Passenger vehicles and off-road equipment each account for about 80 tons while off-road equipment is about another 70 tons. Other off-road sources such as trains account for around 30 tons. The balances - or nearly 120 tons - are from stationary and area sources that the district has control over establishing rules. Mobile sources generate 500 tons a day and are under state and federal regulations.

In short, you could stop all truck and vehicle traffic, suspend all train service, and idle all off-road and farm equipment and still not meet Environmental Protection Agency mandates.

Potential sanctions for failing to meet new federal air standards include banning new businesses from opening and preventing the expansion of existing businesses, losing all federal highway and federal takeover of the air quality control district.

Population in the valley has almost doubled since 1980 while emissions have been slashed by more than 50 percent.

The San Joaquin Valley during the past 10 years has:

- reduced emission from stationary sources by 83 percent.
- scored an 83 percent reduction in unhealthy days.
- recorded the cleanest winter on record in 2010 with only two unhealthy days.
- is enjoyed the cleanest summer on record with over a 50 percent reduction in the number of times ozone levels exceeded standards by 8 hours or more.

The District in 2012 awarded about \$100 million in grants and incentives to every sector of the Valley.

The 2012-13 Annual Report to the Community also contains updates and information on public health campaigns such as Healthy Air Living Schools; the introduction of smart-phone applications for immediate data access; new air-pollution research and its implications for the Valley; and District operations statistics.

The report is available online at <http://www.valleyair.org/2012-13AnnualReport.pdf>. To request a hard copy, call a District office at 559-230-6000 (Fresno), 209-557-6400 (Modesto) or 661-392-5500 (Bakersfield), or email public.education@valleyair.org.

To contact Dennis Wyatt, e-mail dwyatt@mantecabulletin.com

Do Your Part: Pick non-polluting lawn equipment

By Terri Bennett, McClatchy-Tribune News Service
Sacramento Bee, Mon., May 13, 2013

The sounds of spring are most definitely here. You know, the loud buzz of the lawn mowers, the piercing sound of leaf blowers, the incessant whir of the trimmers. Not only is there the noise pollution to contend with, there is also the air, land, and water pollution that comes with gas powered lawn equipment. This summer, Do Your Part to pick smarter equipment that will not only cut down pollution but will cut down on your lawn maintenance costs.

Let's start with what really gets under my skin. The loud noise of gas powered lawn equipment. The National Pollution Clearinghouse contends that an ordinary gas fueled lawn mower can actually be heard at least a quarter mile away. Then, there are the other pollution concerns. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 17 million gallons of fuel and oil are accidentally spilled while servicing all this lawn equipment. That's right - 17 million gallons! And, here's another startling statistic for you; gas powered lawn equipment produces roughly five percent of the air pollution generated in America. The exhaust from the gas-powered equipment sends tiny particles into the air, quickly creating unhealthy conditions. The fumes from the engines also add to the creation of ground level ozone and smog. To help put those numbers into perspective, think of it this way. A gas-powered lawn mower emits as much pollution each hour as 11 cars on the road.

The good news is that there are better (and quieter) options out there. The cleanest option is to use human powered equipment. Reel mowers are ideal for small lawns. There are many different styles too

including some which have an attachment to catch grass clippings. You can also do what I do, which is to go electric.

Electric mowers win hands down when it comes to convenience. They start with the push of a button and you never need to fill up the gas tank or replace the oil. The electric mower is lighter than its gas-powered alternative and it's much quieter too! Now, electric mowers do generate pollution but at drastically lower levels and not in your backyard. They are also more expensive than their gas-powered cousins but they are a lot less expensive to operate and maintain. An electric mower will cost you about \$5 a year to operate, which is the cost of electricity to power or charge the mower. If you opt for the more convenient cordless electric mower then you should know that the rechargeable battery contains lead and should never end up in a landfill. Fortunately, there are many resources available for recycling rechargeable batteries of all shapes and sizes. You can also find electric blowers, trimmers, tillers and more. Some states offer incentives for purchasing electric equipment so be sure to check.

When it comes picking out your next piece of lawn equipment, Do Your Part and make an economical and eco-friendly choice. It's a whole lot better for you, your neighbors, and the planet.