

Valley avoids summer ozone spike for first time

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

In the Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2013

For the first time on record, summer passed here without a dangerous peak in dirty air. Could it finally be time to celebrate a historic moment -- the San Joaquin Valley no longer in violation of the federal one-hour ozone standard?

It's not a done deal yet.

Air-quality activists say the local air district still must explain a sudden improvement in the notorious smog trap of Arvin after an air monitor was moved.

"You can't just move a monitor and claim you cleaned up the air," said Tom Franz, the Kern County leader of the activist group Association of Irrigated Residents.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is working on an explanation and will submit it to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which will review it.

The district did a lot of extra monitoring over the summer around Arvin. Officials say the preliminary data shows the air has cleaned up, even next to the site of the old monitor.

If the analysis holds up and ozone doesn't spike in October, the valley appears to have achieved the one-hour federal standard.

An exceedance at this point in the year seems unlikely, experts say, since the air is much cleaner now than it was a dozen years ago -- the last time ozone breached the one-hour threshold in October.

But why all the fuss over the one-hour standard? It was abolished in 2005 and replaced by the more health-protective eight-hour standard. Federal law still required the valley to make the old standard by 2010.

Like every other ozone cleanup deadline in the past, the valley missed it. A \$29 million annual penalty was triggered.

The penalty, paid mostly by valley residents in vehicle registrations, will go away if the standard is achieved. And the valley's public-relations nightmare might be at a turning point after years of headlines describing this region as one of the dirtiest air basins in the country.

In fact, this 25,000-square-mile geologic bowl has long been one of the two most polluted places in the country, the other being the South Coast Air Basin in Southern California.

The bowl shape and hot, stagnant summers allow pollution to build up for days. In stifling 1996, the valley exceeded the one-hour standard 56 times. Ozone remained above the health threshold for more than 280 hours.

This would be the first year that the valley puts up zeroes for those numbers.

"I know it seemed hopeless years ago," said district Executive Director Seyed Sadredin. "But businesses have invested billions of dollars in technology. Residents are paying attention to our air alerts. And we have many of the most advanced rules in the country."

Nobody is saying the air-quality fight is over, least of all health advocates and air-quality activists. It may take another decade to make the tougher eight-hour standard, which this region has exceeded more than 80 times this year.

Health advocates say ozone remains a real problem here. It's a corrosive gas that attacks the lungs, triggering asthma, bronchitis and heart problems. The gas is particularly harmful to people with sensitive lungs as well as children and the elderly.

Air-quality activists say the district should not be taking bows for air advances. The toughest rules are often started by environmental lawsuits that force the EPA and the district to take action, they say. Farm pollution rules are among the examples they cite.

Air-quality lawsuits have been filed almost continuously over the last 12 years, including a challenge to the valley's attainment of the PM-10 standard, aimed at coarse particles such as dust.

Activists lost the PM-10 challenge, but they forced regulators to defend decisions that waived high readings due to unusual wind events.

No one has talked yet about suing over attainment of the one-hour federal ozone standard. One possible issue is the Arvin monitor.

At times, the old monitor showed Arvin was the valley's ozone hot spot -- sometimes it was the nation's ozone hot spot.

The monitor was moved after the California Air Resources Board lost its lease in a squabble over a different air-quality issue with the landowner, Arvin-Edison Water Storage District.

The farmers on the district's board were not pleased with new diesel engine rules, which require expensive filters and truck replacement. State air board officials came before the board to answer questions about the science involved, but board members were unmoved.

"The answers were not satisfying," said general manager Steve Collup at the time. "So board members decided they didn't want to be part of this monitoring anymore."

State officials moved the site two miles away near a school. They took readings from both old and new monitors in 2010, as they prepared to shut down the old site.

Ozone concentrations were 11 percent lower at the new site, and it showed no exceedances of the one-hour standard that year. At the old site, however, the one-hour threshold was breached twice.

"It's an outrage to pretend there's nothing wrong with this picture," Franz said.

The district this summer placed more than 20 temporary monitors all through the area east of Bakersfield and in Arvin, including a spot across the street from the notorious monitor.

District leader Sadredin says a preliminary look at the data shows the whole area has cleaned up. One of the temporary monitors was set up across the street from the Arvin-Edison district site. Sadredin said its readings actually were lower than the ones from the new monitoring site.

The EPA would make the ruling on the valley achieving the ozone standard. The agency will study the district's analysis, said Kerry Drake, an associate director in the agency's regional air division in San Francisco.

"You can't make a standard by moving a monitor," he said in answer to a question. "We will look closely at the report."

American Lung Association in California Commends Governor Brown For Extending Critical Clean Air Incentives

By American Lung Assoc., California

In the Sacramento Bee, Mon., Sep. 30, 2013

SACRAMENTO -- The American Lung Association in California commends Governor Brown for signing Assembly Bill 8 (Perea and Skinner), critical clean air legislation that will save lives and reduce lung illness. A co-sponsor of the bill along with the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association and CALSTART, the American Lung Association in California worked hard to pass AB 8 to protect communities around the state from harmful air pollution. "Air pollution leads to thousands of public health emergencies every year including asthma attacks, hospital and emergency room visits for respiratory illness and even heart attacks and strokes," said Marsha Ramos, Chair, American Lung Association in California Board of Directors. "The American Lung Association in California applauds Assemblyman Perea's leadership on AB 8 because clean air incentive dollars will cut toxic pollution and help children and families breathe easier." The Lung Association also commends co-author Nancy Skinner and principal co-author Senator Fran Pavley for their dedication to this bill.

Supported by health and medical organizations throughout the state, AB 8 will provide over \$2 billion in funds over the next decade to reduce diesel emissions and support clean alternative fuels and technologies including electric and fuel cell vehicles and infrastructure. This infusion of clean air funding is exactly what is needed to help California meet federal clean air targets and the state's public health, climate and green energy goals.

California has the worst air quality in the country due in large part to transportation sources, and air pollution leads to thousands of public health emergencies every year including asthma attacks, hospital admissions for respiratory and cardiac illnesses, emergency room visits, heart attacks, strokes and even stunted lung development in children. The Carl Moyer Diesel Emissions Reduction Program and the AB 118 Clean Transportation Investment Program extended by AB 8 will cut health risks from toxic diesel soot and support emerging, advanced transportation technologies and fuels that cut pollution and move California beyond dirty energy sources.

The Carl Moyer Program has cleaned up more than 48,000 dirty diesel engines and removed 146,000 tons of smog-forming emissions from California's air since its inception. The AB 118 program has deployed 23,000 advanced clean and alternative fueled vehicles since 2007. Clean air projects funded under these programs include upgrades and replacements of trucks, buses, locomotives, agricultural and marine engines and deployment of infrastructure and vehicles that run on electricity, hydrogen and other cleaner fuels.

Air quality incentive programs like those included in AB 8 that support and enhance regulatory solutions have become a key part of the state's clean air and health strategy.