

Record Funding for San Joaquin Valley Lawn Mower Program

San Joaquin Valley air quality officials are setting aside a record amount of money to encourage people to trade in their old gas lawn mowers for new electric ones.

By Marianne Russ

Capital Public Radio, Wed., June 05, 2013

In the past, the Clean Green Yard Machines program has offered several hundred thousand dollars in incentives. Anthony Presto with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says the agency is making one million dollars available this year:

Presto: "We hope that it'll go longer than the usual push that only lasts about a week because this program is so popular and people get really excited as soon as they hear about it."

The San Joaquin Valley has some of the worst air in the nation, and Presto says people often don't realize how dirty gas mowers are. He says unlike cars, mower emissions haven't improved much over the years.

Presto: "When you're using one gas lawnmower, it's about equivalent to driving 40 newer cars for the same amount of time and that's why we have this program, because lawn mowers – gas lawn mowers - are a significant source of air pollution."

He says replacing polluting gas-powered mowers with cleaner electric ones is one way local people can help:

Presto: "It makes an immediate difference in neighborhoods where these mowers are being used because you're no longer breathing in those emissions."

To get a rebate of up to 250 dollars, local residents must buy a qualifying electric mower and recycle their gas one.

Despite more people and more cars, California's smog is in retreat

By Julie Cart, staff writer

Los Angeles Times, Wed., June 5, 2013

Despite a three-fold increase in people and cars in the last 50 years, California's strict vehicle emissions standards have managed to significantly clear the state's air, according to new research.

The study also found that Southern California's air chemistry has changed for the better. The amount of organic nitrates in the atmosphere — which cause smog's eye-stinging irritation — has drastically fallen off, according to federal researchers.

Ozone and other pollutants have been monitored in the state since the 1960s. Since then the population in Southern California has tripled, as has the number of cars on the road. Nevertheless, tailpipe emissions have decreased.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado led the research, which analyzed decades of data and collected air samples from overflights in 2010.

The researchers credited the state's stringent emissions standards with bringing about the pollution reductions, although they note that automobiles remain the dominant emissions source in Los Angeles.

As mercury rises to near-record highs, so do concerns about safety

By Shawn Jansen, staff writer

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, June 6, 2013

Avoiding the heat will be challenging for Merced County residents for the next few days as temperatures are expected to surge beyond the century mark Friday and Saturday — possibly breaking records.

The good news is that the extreme heat isn't expected to last beyond that.

According to Jim Andersen, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, Friday's high is expected to be 104 degrees, with Saturday's climbing to 107.

The average temperatures for this time of year is 89 to 90 degrees, according to Andersen.

"Temperatures are going to be well above normal on Friday and Saturday," Andersen said. "The record for June 8 is 107 degrees. That's what we're expecting, and we stand a chance of breaking that.

"The good news is we're going to peak for two days and then we'll do down to about 97 degrees on Sunday and then cool down into next week. The golden lining here is it's going to be short-lived."

The record high for Merced on June 7 and 8 is 107. The June 7 record was set in 1903 and the June 8 record was established in 1935.

The best way to beat the extreme heat is to stay inside.

"Obviously, you're going to want to hydrate," said Merced City Fire Chief Mike McLaughlin. "Drink plenty of water because by the time you're thirsty, you're already dehydrated. If you have things you need to do outside, you want to do them early in the day.

"Stay out of the sun. Plan your work around the heat. You don't want to plan on pouring concrete on Saturday afternoon. Stay out of the heat. Stay indoors as much as possible."

The city of Merced will open its cooling center on Saturday to help residents deal with the heat. The center will be open from 3 to 8 p.m. at the Merced Civic Center, 678 W. 18th St.

According to the American Red Cross, some safety tips for dealing with extreme heat include:

- Never leave children or pets alone in enclosed vehicles.
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing. Avoid dark colors because they absorb the sun's rays.
- Slow down, stay indoors and avoid strenuous exercise during the hottest part of the day.
- Take frequent breaks if you must work outdoors.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Check on your animals frequently to ensure that they are not suffering from the heat.

As the heat rises, air quality is also a concern.

"We saw some of our levels go up last weekend with the rise in temperatures," said Heather Heinks, who is an outreach communication supervisor for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"As heat rises, we encourage people to change their behavior all summer long. It's best if people reduce idling (in cars), park at restaurants and go inside, use public transportation, anything you can do to help reduce the emissions that go into the environment is helpful."

For people with asthma and other respiratory issues, Heinks encourages them to get familiar with the Realtime Air Advisory Network that can be found online at www.valleyair.org.

"People can check the air quality at the hour from their computer or iPhone," Heinks said. "They can see what level it is at and that will help frame their decision whether to take that walk now or wait for later."

For people trying to beat the heat by swimming in local lakes, rivers or other bodies of water, McLaughlin urges people take the necessary precautions.

"Water safety is always huge," he said. "The irrigation canals and Bear Creek are dangerous waterways. There are buried obstructions that could truly be dangerous. People should stay out of canals because they are moving water and it's moving faster than it appears.

"It doesn't take long for something bad to happen," he said. "You want to keep children within sight at all times. If the child is not a strong swimmer, than you want to use a flotation device, lifejackets, at all times to be safe."

