

Bill extends various fees to fund air programs

By Laura Olson, Associated Press
San Jose Mercury News, Saturday, June 30, 2013

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—The Assembly on Thursday advanced a bill extending a series of fees to pay for programs aimed at improving air quality.

Democratic Assemblyman Henry Perea of Fresno said his legislation is needed to continue reducing air pollution. He says more than 90 percent of Californians live in counties with unhealthy air during some parts of the year.

"While great progress has been made in improving air quality, California has two of the most polluted regions in the nation: the South Coast Air Basin and the San Joaquin Valley," Perea said.

Fees to be extended under AB8 include ones on new tires and vehicle and boat registrations. It also extends a smog abatement charge on newer cars and an assessment on special identification plates for construction equipment.

Those fees are scheduled to expire by 2016 but would be extended until 2024 under Perea's bill.

Some of the funds would be directed toward creating a network of fueling stations for hydrogen-powered vehicles.

Republicans said the legislation would cost taxpayers more than \$2 billion over the next eight years. They said that would encourage people to leave the state.

"We can't keep going back to the tax well over and over again," said Assemblyman Don Wagner. "At some point we'll have the cleanest air in the world because we'll have driven everyone out."

The bill passed the Assembly on a 55-19 vote. It now awaits consideration in the Senate.

Valley swelters in potentially historic heat wave

Traditionally torrid July poses dangers, but there are steps to protect yourself and others from being overcome by dangerous heat.

By Mark Grossi, staff writer
The Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Sat., June 29, 2013

The last time Fresno flirted with several days of 110 degree-plus weather, heat played a role in killing 14 people. Now at the doorstep of July, Fresno is flirting again.

After triple digits on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the temperature could range up to 108 today and 110 on Monday in Fresno. The forecast for Tuesday is 109.

You know the drill if you have lived a few years in the San Joaquin Valley. The region turns into an oven, you avoid the outdoors and pray the power doesn't go out.

A monster dome of high pressure has formed over a big part of the West, heating up the usual places around California. Death Valley's forecast is 129 today and Monday. That's five degrees shy of the highest temperature ever recorded on the planet. The 134-degree reading was in Death Valley on July 10, 1913.

And in a few days, fireworks on the Fourth of July will produce plumes of metals that can cause serious respiratory problems. July, the hottest month of the year in California, can be downright dangerous.

"It's the time of year when people need to be careful," said meteorologist Gary Sanger of the National Weather Service in Hanford.

One of the biggest worries is the potentially fatal mistake of leaving a child or pet in the car, Sanger said.

"If it's 109 degrees outside, the inside of a car could be 30 to 40 degrees hotter," he said.

Heat can kill

An infant boy died earlier this month when he was unintentionally left in a vehicle in southwest Fresno. The outside temperature was 101 degrees.

Similar tragedies happened in 2006 during Fresno's most memorable heat siege in more than six decades. For five days in late July, the temperature climbed to 112 degrees or higher. On three of those days, the high was 113. Fresno's all-time record of 115 remained untouched, but there were fatalities.

In addition to the 14 who died in Fresno County, three dozen others died from exposure in the widespread heat wave in California.

One victim was a man who was found collapsed in Madera County. He had a body temperature of 106.5 degrees and a blood alcohol level of 0.26, three times the legal threshold for driving, authorities said.

"The No. 1 killer in heat is dehydration," said Dr. Praveen Buddiga, a Fresno physician who specializes in allergies, asthma and sinus disease. "Alcohol will actually dehydrate you."

Buddiga said people need to be smart about living in this kind of heat. Take care of outdoor chores early, wear a broad-brimmed hat and stay in an air-conditioned building in the afternoon.

What if your power goes out? Pacific Gas & Electric Co. is prepared to quickly take care of outages, said spokesman Denny Boyles. PG&E approaches heat waves the same way as storms, he said.

If you lose power or you don't have a good air conditioner, you could visit city cooling centers, shop at enclosed malls or go to a movie. It's especially important for people with health problems to stay out of the heat, Buddiga said.

"People with respiratory or cardiovascular issues — really, all people who are frail — should stay indoors during heat waves," he said. "Drink fluids and avoid getting outside in the air."

Air quality gets worse

Air pollution has not been a problem over the last two weeks of June on the Valley floor, but that's expected to change quickly.

Surrounded by mountains, the Valley is a perfect incubator for summer ozone, which forms on hot, sunny, mostly windless days. Oxides of nitrogen from vehicles bake together with volatile organic compounds from gasoline vapors and dairies to create corrosive ozone.

The gas, which attacks the skin, eyes and lungs, can sometimes remain trapped for days in the Valley, building into an air-quality crisis.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District urges people to follow its real-time pollution reports online. Anyone can sign up for email and text messages, which are issued hourly for areas throughout the Valley as air-quality changes.

The system is called Real-Time Air Advisory Network, or RAAN, said spokeswoman Jaime Holt. She said the district has spent the last few years telling the Valley about it.

"We encourage coaches and parents to check with RAAN when sporting events are going on for children," said Holt. "Sometimes games will be shifted into the early evening, depending on air-quality in the afternoon."

Another big air-quality concern is wildfires. After two dry winters, the Valley's grasslands and the Sierra Nevada's forests are primed for a smoky fire season. Fires also create ozone-making gases.

A more immediate concern might be the Fourth of July. In the past, air monitors have recorded mammoth spikes in particle pollution as fireworks displays shower neighborhoods with smoke and microscopic bits of metal.

"We're suggesting that people might go to one of the fireworks events, rather than have their own fireworks at home," Holt said. "We're also hoping we see a little break in the heat by then."

Sunsets of state's clean air and clean fuel incentives might be delayed

Central Valley Business Times, Thursday, June 27, 2013

A bill that would extend the "sunset" dates for three state programs to improve air quality and ensure investment in clean transportation technology has been approved by the California Assembly.

A "sunset" date is the specific date when a state law expires unless renewed by the Legislature. Most laws do not carry sunset dates.

Assembly Bill 8, the 2013 Clean Fuels Reauthorization Act, introduced by Assemblyman Henry Perea, D-Fresno, and Assembly Rules Chairman Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley, if now passed by the Senate and signed by the governor, would:

- Extend to January 2024, the Carl Moyer Program, which provides grants to fund the cost of retrofitting cleaner engines on heavy duty trucks, school buses, and agricultural equipment such as irrigation pumps;
- The local diesel emission reduction programs under AB 923, which provides funding for local programs that reduce air pollution, and,
- The Alternative and Renewable Fuel and Vehicle Technology Program under AB 118, which provides grants for clean fuel vehicle technology and air quality improvement projects.

"These are successful incentive programs that help California meet air quality standards while creating thousands of California-based jobs," says Mr. Perea. "Reauthorization of these programs is critical to continue our pollution reduction efforts and promoting healthier communities in the Central Valley."

"AB 8 accelerates the availability of new and advanced vehicle technologies, technologies that will move California closer to our climate protection and greenhouse gas reduction goals," adds Ms. Skinner.

According to the California Energy Commission, the Carl Moyer Program has cleaned up 55,000 engines and supported 9,000 jobs.

The AB 118 programs have deployed 29,000 advanced clean and alternative fueled vehicles and equipment while creating more than 7,600 jobs, the commission says.

Without the reauthorization of these incentive programs, it will be extremely difficult for California to meet its clean air, clean vehicle deployment, and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, Mr. Perea adds.