

Air quality officials warn that strong winds are likely to kick up clouds of dust across Valley

Stockton Record, Tuesday, April 22, 2014

Air quality officials warned this morning that strong winds are likely to kick up clouds of dust across the San Joaquin Valley for the rest of the day, resulting in high levels of harmful particle pollution.

Exposure to dust can aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and bronchitis, and increase the risk of respiratory infections, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

Sick or elderly people and children might need to avoid exerting themselves and exposing themselves to the dust for prolonged periods of time, officials said.

The health warning extends through tonight.

Gusty winds prompt health caution

Blowing dust poses potential health concern throughout Valley

Turlock Journal and Porterville Recorder, Tuesday, April 22, 2014

Blowing dust as a result of gusty winds has prompted local air-pollution officials to issue a health cautionary statement through this evening throughout the eight-county air basin: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern counties.

Winds may produce areas of localized blowing dust, which can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller (PM10). Exposure to particulate pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on their local conditions.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call the District office in Modesto at 209-557-6400.

Health alert

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, April 22, 2014

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health alert for Kings and surrounding counties:

Winds may produce areas of localized blowing dust, which can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller (PM10). Exposure to particulate pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on their local conditions.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a District office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).

New map could refocus state's pollution battles

After being criticized for assessing environmental hazards only by the state's 1,800 ZIP Codes, Cal/EPA issues scores for its 8,000 census tracts.

By Tony Barboza

Los Angeles Times, Tuesday, April 22, 2014

The California Environmental Protection Agency has released a statewide list of census tracts most burdened by pollution, providing a first-of-its-kind ranking certain to pressure regulators to clean up neighborhoods with long-standing health risks.

Many of the worst pollution pockets identified and mapped by state officials are in the San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles County and the Inland Empire. Their residents are largely low-income Latinos who have had little power to force improvements in their communities.

By providing the public with an objective accounting of conditions in areas as small as a few thousand residents, Cal/EPA has created a powerful tool to spur regulators to act in highly polluted neighborhoods, state officials and environmental activists say.

"It is a major breakthrough that will give us a better opportunity to direct or redirect precious resources to the communities that need it the most," said state Sen. Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles).

De León wrote a 2012 law that requires the state to spend 25% of the auction proceeds from California's greenhouse gas-cutting cap-and-trade program to benefit disadvantaged communities that face disproportionate effects from pollution and climate change.

The screening tool, called CalEnviroScreen, was developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, a branch of Cal/EPA, to pinpoint the communities with the highest exposure and vulnerability to multiple environmental hazards, including polluted air and water, waste facilities and contaminated soil.

The rankings, however, are not based only on measures of environmental exposure. They also take into account socioeconomic characteristics and health data on residents to assess the overall vulnerability of communities. Those factors include poverty, education, unemployment, rates of asthma and low-birth-weight infants.

Putting all 19 criteria together, state officials say, gives the best indication of the environmental risks faced by California's most vulnerable populations. Government agencies could address those risks through a variety of measures, including environmental enforcement, cleanups and economic remedies, such as creating sustainable development projects to provide jobs.

Teresa DeAnda, who lives in a house with a view of rows of almond trees in Earlimart, a small agricultural town along Highway 99 in Tulare County, looked up the ranking of her neighborhood online and learned it scored among the worst 10% in the state for fine particle air pollution, contaminated drinking water and pesticide use.

"I was startled but not surprised," said DeAnda, director of the Committee for the Well Being of Earlimart, a community group formed some 15 years ago to fight pesticides that drift through the air and into the community from surrounding farms. "I wish that they would take the next step and try to make it safer for us and remediate all the pollution that we're bombarded with here."

Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed budget for 2014-15 would set aside \$225 million of \$850 million in cap-and-trade proceeds for disadvantaged communities.

Budget documents say projects could include energy-efficiency upgrades for homes in low-income areas, improvements to bus and rail systems, urban forestry projects and programs to fund cleaner trucks and equipment near ports, rail yards and distribution centers.

The environmental health assessment, published in draft form this week, was a major update to an initiative that includes an interactive online map and is being refined over time by Cal/EPA. The state's first such report last year assessed the state by ZIP Code and yielded broadly similar results, showing that Latinos and African Americans make up a disproportionately high percentage of the population in areas most affected by pollution.

But the previous list was criticized by environmental justice groups and researchers who complained that ZIP Codes were too large and arbitrary to reveal much.

California has about 8,000 census tracts compared with about 1,800 ZIP Codes. "This scale of analysis represents a finer level of resolution for many parts of the state," the Cal/EPA report says.

Manuel Pastor, director of the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, who developed a precursor to the state's screening tool, agreed.

"This will be an extraordinarily useful tool because it lets us look at the state neighborhood by neighborhood," he said.

Some of the worst-scoring neighborhoods sit next to busy ports, rail yards and freeways in places such as Boyle Heights, Long Beach, San Bernardino and San Jose, where residents are exposed to higher levels of air pollution from vehicle exhaust.

Topping the list is a tract in Fresno crisscrossed by freeways, where more than 3,000 people live with the some of the state's highest levels of toxic air releases and asthma rates.

A pocket of homes west of the LA/Ontario International Airport is high on the list because it has some of the state's worst smog, diesel soot and a high number of cleanup sites and hazardous waste facilities.

[Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Wednesday, April 23, 2014:](#)

Science behind air regs more sketchy all the time

By Lois Henry

The more I learn about how certain air regulations were concocted, the more ludicrous it all seems. Tomorrow the California Air Resources Board will debate whether to extend the deadline for small trucking firms to comply with rules on PM2.5. (That's tiny bits of fine particulate matter contained in soot, dust and diesel exhaust.)

Truckers will be fighting truckers over table scraps.

What should happen is the whole silly rule should be chucked. And CARB should pay the poor saps who already retrofitted their rigs with filters that, by numerous reports, are a constant source of engine trouble. And I'm not even talking about the CARB-approved brand that caused a huge fire in Washington state a couple years ago and had to be recalled.

Seriously, when I think about how badly CARB has fumbled this entire rule (including fraud by one of its main scientists!), it's hard to get to my main point without going off on a tangent at every step.

OK, the main point is this: the federal EPA now admits it doesn't have the underlying data for studies it used back in the late 1990s to deem PM2.5 a killer.

Not only that, but admitted EPA con artist and thief John Beale was the driving force behind these air quality standards as a means to aggrandize himself and boost his salary. (More on him in a bit.)

I swear, you can't make this stuff up.

Follow along.

In the late 1990s the EPA, at the urging of Beale, set national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) for ozone and PM2.5.

CARB, in turn, piggy backed on the EPA's zeal, deciding that diesel PM2.5 is a highly toxic subset of overall PM2.5. Hence the draconian "truck and bus" rule, which was birthed in 2008 and will be debated, again, tomorrow.

The start of it all, however, goes back to studies known as the Harvard "Six Cities" Study and American Cancer Society's "Cancer Prevention Study II."

Those studies used population data sets tracking where people lived, worked, their lifestyles and the manner of their deaths.

The studies found a weak correlation (please note: correlation does not equal cause) between exposure to PM2.5 and total mortality.

The studies were controversial even at the outset as miscalculations were discovered that drove the estimated deaths in one study down from 40,000 a year to 15,000, or, 1,000, per one researcher. And they relied on data primarily from the 1980s, which was a decade old.

Despite the many noted problems with the studies, EPA made a "policy call" to use the studies as the basis for its 1997 NAAQS, according to a report released last month by the minority staff (that means Republicans) of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Interestingly, CARB chairwoman Mary Nichols was right in the mix in the EPA Office of Air and Radiation.

She testified to Congress that she deferred to her then deputy, Beale, on the merits of the "Six Cities" and "CPS II" studies as she "didn't have as much detailed knowledge" as Beale.

Fascinating.

In 2009, Nichols had to admit publicly that she knew another scientist in her employ had lied about his credentials as the lead author on a key health effects study used as the basis of the truck and bus rule. But she kept that information to herself while the CARB board voted in 2008 to approve the rule, because she "knew the science" behind the supposedly fatal effects of diesel PM2.5.

Now it turns out she may not have read the core studies that first proclaimed a connection between death and PM2.5. That, or she simply doesn't care what the science really says because she's more interested in a political agenda.

In any event, numerous researchers have been asking for the underlying data sets of the "Six Cities" and "CPS II" studies to see if the results could be reproduced.

With the exception of one Canadian research team headed by Daniel Krewski, no one has ever been granted a peek at the data behind the curtain.

In 2000, under the auspices of the Health Effects Institute, Krewski's team did a reanalysis of both studies using the original data and the exact same methodology as the original authors of these studies.

Surprise, he got the same results.

A true reanalysis should look at the data using several different methodologies to see if the results still hold up.

So, the quest for data continued with the EPA stonewalling the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology to the point the committee subpoenaed the data from EPA on Aug. 1, 2013.

The EPA finally admitted in March that it could not provide the committee the data required for a proper reanalysis.

Their quest for data at a standstill, several members of the committee launched H.R. 4012 to prohibit the EPA from ginning up regulations based on scientific information that isn't open to the public.

It's hard to fathom an argument against that approach. OK, so back to Beale.

This is the dude who claimed he was a spy for the CIA and missed 2-1/2 years at his job at the EPA over the last decade claiming he was on "missions." He was sentenced to 32 months in prison for defrauding the government out of nearly \$900,000 in unearned pay and bonuses.

Beale was hired at a high level with the EPA in 1987, despite having no legislative or environmental policy experience, by his best friend Robert Brenner, according to the Senate minority report.

The two bureaucrats, accountable to no one, pushed the air standards despite serious scientific uncertainties and warnings from economists that the rules would do more harm than good. Worse, it appears the buddies fudged numbers on purpose.

"EPA's analytic errors (were) not inadvertent," economists in the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs wrote about the 1997 fracas over national air standards, according to the Senate minority report. "They were the result of efforts to convince the public that the rule was reasonable when the facts indicated otherwise."

And remember who Beale was working for at the time -- CARB's very own Nichols.

Rickety science pushed by unaccountable bureaucrats, secrecy, manipulation, fraud and outright lies.

That's quite a legacy Beale has left for us.