

California air agency considers grill restaurant regulation

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FRESNO, Calif. -San Joaquin Valley air quality officials are considering regulating smoke from barbecue grill restaurants.

The Fresno Bee reports (<http://bit.ly/1kmbuvN>) that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is looking for restaurants willing to participate in a pilot program to test new pollution-reducing technologies.

The emissions from such restaurants are a small part of the Valley's particle pollution. But Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman Jaime Holt said the Valley's huge air quality challenge has the district determined to leave no stone unturned.

The pilot program would determine whether the technologies work and are worth the cost.

Air quality not just idle talk

By Alex Breitler

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School parking lots might be deserted now, but by early January they'll be jammed once more during the morning and afternoon rush.

And air quality officials hope to make the experience a little healthier, if not a little less hectic.

Children — partly because of their short stature, and partly because of their developing lungs — are especially vulnerable to the exhaust belching from vehicle tailpipes. That's why the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is renewing its push to enroll local schools in a program that includes, among other things, signs pleading with parents not to idle their cars.

The "Healthy Air Living Schools" program also includes access to real-time air quality information so that schools can make good decisions about whether students should take part in outdoor activities. In the past, some schools hoisted color-coded flags to indicate how clean or how dangerous the air might be on any given day, but computers and smart phones can now give them better, more up-to-the-minute information.

Of the 1,700 public schools across the San Joaquin Valley, about 700 have signed up so far for the program. That includes about 85 schools in San Joaquin County, within the Stockton and Tracy unified school districts, said Destiny Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for the Central California Asthma Collaborative, which helps the Valley air district implement the program.

The goal is to enroll every single school.

"That's something that's going to take some time," Rodriguez said. "But we are making progress. We're just trying to generate interest around the issue so that other schools can follow suit."

The signs are provided for free in English and Spanish. So, too, are brochures and learning materials. The air district also gives out \$250 "mini-grants" for classrooms to pursue air quality projects of their own — maybe posters or art projects for elementary school students or a scientific analysis of air quality data for high school students, as two examples.

The technology allows schools to receive email or text message alerts as conditions outside deteriorate or improve. The Valley's air has improved, but the region still fails to meet most air quality standards, even standards that are considered old and out of date.

"We believe this program can help with monitoring asthmatic children," Rodriguez said. "We do believe in it."