

Ash and smoke have residents in a chokehold

By Andrew Bridges

Associated Press (in the Fresno Bee)

(Published Tuesday, October 28, 2003, 5:37 AM)

LOS ANGELES -- The fires burning across Southern California have left millions with a scratching in their throats and a burning in their eyes -- telltale signs of the significant health risks the smoke and soot clouding the entire region can pose, officials said Monday.

The same Santa Ana winds that have whipped up the frenzy of firestorms pushed smoke toward the populous coast, casting a gritty pall over the Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan regions.

"You can see the ash and stuff on the ground, and just think all that is in the air, getting in your eyes and nose and mouth," said Vicki Dawes, 59, as she looked toward an ash-filled area of her San Bernardino neighborhood where fires destroyed 200 homes.

Health officials have issued repeated smoke advisories for much of Southern California in recent days, warning that the gritty soot that chokes the sky has reached unhealthful levels in the areas closest to the fires.

Literally anyone who can see, taste or smell smoke should curtail outdoor activity, officials warned.

"We recommend a common-sense approach: Avoid it if you can," said Jean Ospital, health effects officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the air pollution agency that oversees the greater Los Angeles area.

The Santa Anas began to diminish Monday, but spotty gusts were expected through today. By then, winds were expected to begin blowing onshore, which may recirculate the vast amount of smoke already in the Los Angeles basin, district spokesman Sam Atwood said.

People suffering from heart disease, lung disease or asthma should avoid the outdoors entirely, as should children and the elderly, said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, public health officer for Los Angeles County.

Schools were being asked to limit outdoor sports, Fielding said.

"It's good advice for everybody today not to do too much outdoor vigorous activity," Fielding said.

Smoke contains literally hundreds of chemicals, including formaldehyde, and gases such as carbon monoxide. It's also packed with vast quantities of microscopic particles that are easily inhaled into the lungs, where they can become permanently lodged. Prolonged exposure to particulate pollution has been linked to retarded lung growth.

Levels of the particles, one-seventh the diameter of human hair or smaller, have spiked in areas closest to the fires.

In the San Bernardino area, where fire has burned more than 75,000 acres of brush, sending towering plumes of smoke into the air, particulate levels were forecast to hit 300 micrograms per cubic meter of air Monday.

Farther south, in Escondido, particulate levels were at 90 micrograms. Levels between 40 and 65 are considered unhealthy for the area, San Diego County Supervisor Greg Cox said.

"So you can see the magnitude of what we are talking about," Cox said.

At San Diego's airport, Lindbergh Field, workers wore masks to protect from the rain of ash.

"I don't like it. You can't breathe," said Livia Guerrero, a security guard, whose home east of San Diego was caked with ash from nearby fires.

"I'll probably try to spend most of the day inside. I really wanted to stay home," Guerrero said. "I'm kind of worried about my house."

St. Bernardine Medical Center in San Bernardino reported no immediate increase in patients complaining of smoke-related problems, spokeswoman Kimberly Vandenbosch said.

"We just haven't seen the big increase yet," Vandenbosch said.

Associated Press writers Ryan Pearson and Larry Ryckman contributed to this report.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Oct. 28, 2003:](#)

Quality of life

By Robert Cook
Fresno

(Published Tuesday, October 28, 2003, 5:40 AM)

I want to commend The Bee and the Great Valley Center for their thought provoking Vision supplement. I can't help but feel pessimistic right now. Local elections are dominated by the tyranny of the minority, i.e., the very small numbers that actually vote. The fuss over water meters is an example.

The apathy of the public and local politicians is inexcusable. We have unchecked urban sprawl without any regional planning or transportation. We are stuck in a negative-feedback loop where the cost for city services always exceeds the revenues. Health costs associated with our air pollution are troublesome.

So which paradigm will it be? Either way we have to pay for our choices in this community. Despite the recent rhetoric from our president or the new governor, we can't count on any help from Washington or Sacramento.

I'd rather be proactive and pay up front to benefit the quality of life for all of the citizens in this community than stay reactive and deal with budget deficits on an annual basis. To do so is to embrace mediocrity.

13 States Target New Clean Air Act Rules

From Associated Press, published in the Los Angeles Times, October 28, 2003

WASHINGTON - Lawsuits filed Monday by 13 states and more than 20 cities, which seek to block changes to the Clean Air Act, contend new rules from the Bush administration would weaken protections for the environment and public health.

The Environmental Protection Agency regulations would make it easier to upgrade utilities, refineries and other industrial facilities without installing additional pollution controls.

The rules, proposed in December and signed by the EPA's administrator in August, were made final Monday. They take effect in two months, and states have up to three years to comply.

The agency said in a statement it does not believe the rules will result in significant changes in emissions, and it "preserves the public health protections" under law.

Attorneys general for 12 states - New York, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin - and legal officers for New York City, Washington, San Francisco, as well as New Haven and a host of other cities in Connecticut, complained that the regulations will weaken protections for the environment and public health that Congress put into the law.

Illinois filed a separate but similar claim, and other states, including California, are considering legal action.

The suits argue that only Congress can make sweeping changes to such a bedrock law.

"We are not going to sit by quietly and allow the energy interests in this country to receive special treatment while so many of our children and elderly are needlessly suffering from respiratory problems that are, in essence, brought on by bad environmental policy," Massachusetts Atty. Gen. Tom Reilly said.

The rules broaden the EPA's interpretation of routine maintenance for older plants. Before the rule change, operators who did anything more than routine maintenance were required to add more pollution-cutting devices. Under the new rules, industrial facilities avoid paying for emissions-cutting devices if the cost of improvements totals less than 20% of the plant's value.

New York Atty. Gen. Eliot Spitzer called the change an attack on the Clean Air Act. "The president is taking the nation in the wrong direction on environmental policy," Spitzer said.

Scott Segal, director of the Electric Reliability Coordinating Council, a group of power companies that supports the change, argued that the change would clarify regulations and that "no litigation from the Northeast attorneys general can produce anything but confusion."

Developer settles with Sierra Club

By James Burger, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian

Monday October 27, 2003, 10:15:17 PM

Local Sierra Club officials claimed a second success Monday in their campaign to make developers responsible for air pollution and traffic congestion in Bakersfield.

Gordon Nipp of the Sierra Club said the organization and Lucas Development have settled a lawsuit brought by the environmental group.

Nipp said Lucas has agreed to pay a \$1,200 "air quality mitigation" fee on every home it builds, provide \$20,000 to buy habitat for the blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and offer solar-power panels as an option on their homes.

The money raised by the mitigation fee will be handled by a five-member committee made up of representatives from the development community, the Sierra Club, the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment, the city of Bakersfield and the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

"The Sierra Club does not get any of this money," Nipp said.

Calls to Lucas Development were not returned Monday.

The Sierra Club has sued developers of two other projects in northeast Bakersfield. Both sit near the Lucas project at the corner of Alfred Harrell Highway and Highway 178.

Local developers Tom Carosella and Craig Carver, who are handling one of those two projects, settled a Sierra Club lawsuit against them in mid-June.

They agreed to many of the same terms that are in the Lucas settlement.

The other project is a wedge of land being developed by Sage Community Group of Newport Beach along the south side of Highway 178 west of Miramonte Drive.

It still has a Sierra Club lawsuit pending against it.

The Sierra Club has appealed two other northeast projects to the Bakersfield City Council -- Sage Community's River's Edge project on Alfred Harrell Highway and another tract of homes at Paladino and Morning drives.

Nipp said the Sierra Club is trying to push the city of Bakersfield and the county of Kern to be much more strict about approving new development projects.

"We would prefer not to have to file a lawsuit," Nipp said. "We ought to clean our air and we ought to use the sun to generate power."

The organization's lawsuits charge that the city and developers are breaking state environmental laws that require the review of the cumulative impact of multiple housing tracts on the environment

"We don't feel they are within the legal bounds," Nipp said. "They're violating the law and we're taking them to court over this."

But Bakersfield Development Services Director Jack Hardisty said the city does address impacts of smog and traffic from nearby projects when it reviews and approves an individual neighborhood.

"We're sure we're abiding by the guidelines that have to do with cumulative impacts," he said. "We feel we're operating on a firm environmental basis."

Hardisty said the city, and state law, does not expect a development to completely eliminate all of the pollution that it puts into the area.

"It's like you're buying a car," he said. "Your car is meeting air quality standards but it is still contributing to the smog."

But Nipp said all the new housing projects in Bakersfield will, together, put a large amount of pollution into the city's air and cars onto its roadways.

The Sierra Club, he said, doesn't have the power to hold all those projects accountable through lawsuits.

"There's no way that a private, non-profit organization with no staff like the Sierra Club can deal with all this," he said.

He is hoping that the city and county will be convinced to change their ways and be more critical of the development industry's impact on the environment.

Ruling delays Tejon project

By AMY HILVERS, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian

Friday October 24, 2003, 09:55:11 PM

A Kern County judge ruled Friday that portions of environmental impact reports were not adequate, delaying the massive Tejon Ranch Industrial development project for at least a few months.

Judge Kenneth Twisselman II ruled that Kern County supervisors did not have enough information on some of the environmental impacts of the Tejon Industrial Complex project when they approved plans to add 15 million square feet to the current 5 million square foot project in January.

These impacts need to be addressed and analyzed more thoroughly before the project can go forward, Twisselman ruled.

But the setback isn't much and amounts to a "fix-it ticket" that can be taken care of in two to four months, according to attorneys for Tejon.

"It's not the end of the project by any means, it's just a delay," Tejon attorney Robert McMurry said.

Robert Stine, president and CEO of Tejon Ranch Company, also considered the ruling a small setback. Further studies will be done to comply with the judge's ruling, he said.

"It was a good day," he said. "It will delay us some and raise costs of the project some."

Attorneys for the environmentalist groups that filed the lawsuit think it will take a lot longer for proper analysis on the air quality issues.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, the Kern Audubon Society and the Sierra Club are parties in the suit.

They felt the ruling was a much-needed victory because the project will contribute a significant amount of pollution to Kern County's already dirty air.

"The EIR was deeply flawed," said Julie Teel, an attorney for the Center for the Biological Diversity. "We'll be watching the county and Tejon very closely for future action."

Tejon hasn't been the only company targeted by environmental groups. The proposed Delano prison, and almost all new proposed dairies have been taken to court by environmental groups in the last few years.

Tejon's main asset is the largest privately owned piece of land in the state, with 270,000 acres in Kern and Los Angeles counties.

The ranch focused on just that, ranching, for most of the last century, but in the mid-1990s announced it would turn away from ranching and focus on developing its real estate holdings.

Most of Judge Twisselman's rulings Friday were based on what he ruled was an inadequate report on the project's impact on air quality. He ruled the EIR needed to discuss impacts of certain pollutants, and how cumulative impacts of the project will effect air quality.

Judge Twisselman also ruled that the impacts on two endangered animals were not adequately addressed, and the report needed to be revised to include them. The animals are the coast horned lizard and Swainson's hawk.

One environmentalist thought there were other issues that needed to be addressed.

"I'm disappointed Judge Twisselman only cited the air quality impact and biological (impacts)" said Mary Griffin, conservation chairwoman of the Kern Audubon Society.

Griffin said the environmental groups brought up other issues regarding water quality and traffic impacts they felt were important.

Mary Ann Lockhart said she believed the ruling will set a precedent for projects that are inadequately reviewed.

But supporters of the project felt the setback will be bad for business and the community.

Tim Guinn, vice president of Guinn Construction Company, attended the hearing to show his support for the project. He said the project will bring needed jobs to the county.

Pat Collins, president of the Kern Economic Development Corp., said delaying the project sends a negative message to companies around the world that may want to build there.

"It's a huge deterrent for companies (when projects are delayed)," he said.

Crews contain refinery's petroleum product spill

By ERIN WALDNER, Californian staff writer

e-mail: ewaldner@bakersfield.com

The Bakersfield Californian

Friday October 24, 2003, 09:55:10 PM

Six barrels of a petroleum product spilled at the Shell Bakersfield Refinery Friday afternoon, attracting emergency crews but causing no injuries, a company spokesman said.

Six barrels equals 252 gallons.

There were no injuries or fire, Shell spokesman Alan Spencer said from the Rosedale Highway refinery in northwest Bakersfield. He said emissions monitoring revealed no impact on the surrounding community.

The product that spilled, a gasoline blending material, was quickly contained, Spencer said.

The spill occurred about 1:30 p.m.; an all-clear sounded at 2:30 p.m..

Spencer said the cause of the spill hadn't been determined Friday afternoon. He said Shell will investigate the incident and clean up the mess.

The company did not have to shut the refinery down.

Emergency crews responded to the incident along with two inspectors from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The inspectors are investigating the matter.

The refinery could or could not be fined for the incident, said Kelly Malay, a spokeswoman for the district. She said it largely depends on the cause of the spill.

Amtrak reports increased number of passengers

Local digest

The Bakersfield Californian

Friday October 24, 2003, 10:30:17 PM

Ridership on Amtrak's San Joaquins route grew 6.6 percent for the fiscal year just ended, reflecting the growing popularity of train travel and pricing incentives.

A total of 782,778 passengers rode the San Joaquins in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. The route makes four daily round trips between Bakersfield and Oakland, and two between Bakersfield and Sacramento.

Amtrak simplified its pricing structure in January and also offered a number of fare discounts throughout the year. Ridership may also have benefited from high gasoline prices that encouraged drivers to seek alternatives. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District also promoted train travel as an alternative to driving, and partnered with valley schools to encourage train travel for field trips.

Other Amtrak routes in California also saw increases. The Pacific Surfliner route, between San Luis Obispo and San Diego, grew by 26 percent. The Capitol Corridor route, between Sacramento and San Jose, grew 5.5 percent.

States and cities challenge EPA air pollution rules

By Devlin Barrett, Associated Press Writer

Published in The Bakersfield Californian

Monday October 27, 2003, 07:45:16 PM

WASHINGTON (AP) - Thirteen states and more than 20 cities including San Francisco on Monday filed a lawsuit that seeks to block changes to the Clean Air Act, contending that new rules from the Bush administration would weaken protections for the environment and public health.

The Environmental Protection Agency regulation makes it easier to upgrade utilities, refineries and other industrial facilities without installing additional pollution controls.

The rule, proposed in December and signed by EPA's administrator in August, was made final Monday. It will take effect in two months, and states have up to three years to comply. The agency said in a statement it does not believe the rule will result in significant changes in emissions, and it "preserves the public health protections" under law.

The lawsuit was filed by attorneys general for 12 states - New York, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin - and legal officers for New York City, Washington, San Francisco, New Haven and a host of other cities in Connecticut. They contend the new rules will weaken protections for the environment and public health that Congress put into the law.

Illinois filed a separate but similar claim, and other states, including California, are considering legal action. Their filings could be consolidated later with the 12-state suit.

They argued only Congress can make sweeping changes to such a bedrock law.

"We are not going to sit by quietly and allow the energy interests in this country to receive special treatment while so many of our children and elderly are needlessly suffering from respiratory problems that are, in essence, brought on by bad environmental policy," Massachusetts Attorney General Tom Reilly said.

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Under the new rule, industrial facilities avoid paying for expensive emissions-cutting devices if the cost of improvements totals less than 20 percent of the plant's value.

New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer called the rule an attack on the Clean Air Act.

"The president is taking the nation in the wrong direction on environmental policy," Spitzer said.

Scott Segal, director of the Electric Reliability Coordinating Council, a group of power companies that support the rule change, argued it would clarify regulations, and "no litigation from the Northeast attorneys general can produce anything but confusion."

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. A similar group of states also filed suit in that court to challenge a previous batch of the administration's related changes to the Clean Air Act.

On the Net:

EPA: <http://www.epa.gov/nsr>

Court of Appeals: <http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/>

Soot, ash and smoke from wildfires spark health concerns

By Andrew Bridges, AP Science Writer

Published in The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday October 28, 2003, 03:25:09 AM

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The fires burning across Southern California have left millions with a scratching in their throats and a burning in their eyes - telltale signs of the significant health risks the smoke and soot clouding the entire region can pose.

The same Santa Ana winds that have whipped up the frenzy of firestorms also pushed smoke from those fires all across Southern California this week, casting a gritty pall over the Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan regions.

"You can see the ash and stuff on the ground and just think all that is in the air, getting in your eyes and nose and mouth," said Vicki Dawes, 59, as she looked toward an ash-filled area of her San Bernardino neighborhood where fires destroyed 200 homes. Health officials have issued repeated smoke advisories for

much of Southern California in recent days, warning that the gritty soot that chokes the sky has reached unhealthy levels in the areas closest to the fires.

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"We recommend a common sense approach: Avoid it if you can," said Jean Ospital, health effects officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the air pollution agency that oversees the greater Los Angeles area.

The Santa Anas began to diminish Monday, but spotty gusts were expected through Tuesday. By then, winds were expected to begin blowing onshore, which may re-circulate the vast amount of smoke already in the Los Angeles basin, AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood said.

People suffering from heart disease, lung disease or asthma should avoid the outdoors entirely, as should children and the elderly, said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, public health officer for Los Angeles County.

Schools were being asked to limit outdoor sports, Fielding said.

"It's good advice for everybody today not to do too much outdoor vigorous activity," Fielding said.

Smoke contains literally hundreds of chemicals, including formaldehyde, and gases like carbon monoxide. It's also packed with vast quantities of microscopic particles that are easily inhaled into the lungs, where they can become permanently lodged. Prolonged exposure to particulate pollution has been linked to retarded lung growth.

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"So you can see the magnitude of what we are talking about," Cox said.

At San Diego's airport, Lindbergh Field, workers wore masks to protect from the rain of ash.

"I don't like it. You can't breathe," said Livia Guerrero, a security guard, whose home east of San Diego was caked with ash from nearby fires.

"I'll probably try to spend most of the day inside. I really wanted to stay home," Guerrero said. "I'm kind of worried about my house."

St. Bernardine Medical Center in San Bernardino reported no immediate increase in patients complaining of smoke-related problems, spokeswoman Kimberly Vandebosch said.

"We just haven't seen the big increase yet," Vandenbosch said.

Health officials were uncertain about the long-term effects of the smoke. It was also unclear whether it would contribute to a short-term uptick in deaths, Fielding said.

"We'll look to see if there's any spike associated with this period. My hope and expectation is there won't be - unless this goes significantly longer," Fielding said.

Associated Press Writers Ryan Pearson and Larry Ryckman contributed to this report.

Group seeks pollution grants

Bob Brownne , Tracy Press

Oct. 28, 2003

Members of a community group overseeing an air-pollution reduction program are hoping additional grants will enable them to double their efforts.

The result could be a new compressed natural gas fueling station for Tracy Unified School District, and if certain grant funding falls in place, four new CNG vehicles for the district.

The idea is to build on momentum the district already achieved in switching to cleaner-running vehicles, and CNG buses will go a long way toward making that happen.

"We have one bus already and one bus on order, and if we work out our funding on the fueling station, we'll be able to purchase more vehicles," said Susan Sarvey, a member of the Tracy Peaker Plant Oversight Committee and an active participant in finding additional grant funding for pollution reduction efforts.

The committee was formed as an advisory board for a \$600,000 foundation formed by GWF Energy when it opened the Tracy Peaker Plant. The program is about halfway through spending the money, but the committee has also been successful in gaining additional funding.

For example, \$250,000 originally earmarked for retrofitting diesel school buses with emission reduction devices ended up coming from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District after Sarvey and Mark Kehoe, environmental and safety director for GWF, help the district obtain a grant earlier this year.

"That allows the committee to fund the CNG fueling station or the CNG vehicles," Kehoe said. Now the school district has a grant application in with the air pollution control district to fund \$350,000 toward a fueling station that could handle four or five vehicles every day, compared with today's station, which can fuel only one vehicle in a day.

John Heerema, transportation director for Tracy Unified School District, said the district will soon start retrofitting its diesel buses with catalytic converters, which reduce nitrogen oxides and particulate matter coming out of the tailpipes.

In the meantime, he said he's awaiting word from the air quality district on the application for funding for the CNG station.

“We need to make sure that gets awarded first,” he said. “Once that’s done, we can order new buses.”

The committee still has \$210,000 in its budget to help pay for a fueling station at the district’s service yard.

“They’re going to get a new station one way or another,” said James Miner, chairman of the oversight committee. “If the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District pays for the station, we can buy the buses.”

Todd DeYoung, senior air quality planner with the district, said he has reviewed the school district’s grant application and expects the air quality district will make a decision on the application by the end of the year.

He said the difference in emissions comes mostly in reduced levels of nitrogen oxides, which combine in the atmosphere with volatile organic compounds to form ozone, a component of smog deemed responsible for respiratory ailments. He said alternative fuel vehicles tend to have about three-quarters of the nitrogen oxide emissions as the current standard for diesel engines. He said particulate matter, which can be any variety of chemical components contained in smoke or dust, is also reduced. While particulate matter from diesel exhaust is classified as toxic, DeYoung said, experts still haven’t agreed if particulate matter from CNG emissions is any safer.

Kehoe said just the retrofit of the exhaust systems on today’s diesel buses will make a big difference in air quality. He said he expects that program will begin soon.

“With the particulate traps, that will reduce particulate emissions by 85 percent, depending on the bus and the way the bus operates,” he said. He added that carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions would also be cut in half, with nitrogen oxide emissions cut by about 15 percent.

In addition to the \$210,000 the committee has set aside for the fueling station or buses, about \$103,000 could go to other air quality programs, including reducing fireplace emissions, city tree replacement or another round of lawn mower exchanges.

The committee has already spent \$152,000 on lawn mower replacements, which provided people with an opportunity to bring gas-powered lawn mowers to The Home Depot in exchange for big discounts on new electric lawn mowers. The program traded out 575 new lawn mowers in one morning.

Another \$34,000 went toward particulate matter monitors to be installed at Tracy Municipal Airport. Kehoe said the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will install and operate those devices.

GWF has also retrofitted two diesel-powered front-end loaders at the Tracy Biomass Plant at a cost of \$30,000.

It also spent \$39,000 on landscaping around the Tracy Peaker Plant, and committed \$32,000 toward buying a CNG bus to transport Mountain House high school students to Tracy.

Monday musings

Merced Sun-Star

Monday, October 27, 2003

(excerpt from a longer article)

Another addition to the weather package will be an air quality advisory letting readers know on which nights they can and can't have wood fires in stoves and fireplaces. The listing is from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Look for the changes around Nov. 15.