

Farm pollution controls ready to take effect

By Russell Clemings

[Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2004](#)

The new year is bringing new air pollution controls -- and accompanying paperwork -- to thousands of San Joaquin Valley farms that for the most part have been exempt from such regulation.

By Friday, farms emitting more than 121/2 tons per year of nitrogen oxides or volatile organic chemicals must apply for permits from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

A large number of farms are required to file plans for controlling dust.

The new regulations and the 2003 legislation that prompted them both were fiercely debated. But district officials and farm advocates alike say their implementation is going smoothly.

"It's been very, very good, and I think the farmers are going to be able to show that they are doing their part to clean up the air," said Manuel Cunha, president of Nisei Farmers League. So far, 420 farms have applied for permits, said Rick McVaigh, the district's permit services manager. An additional 4,600 have filed dust control plans.

In general, McVaigh said, the permit requirement affects large dairies, where animal wastes can produce smog-forming chemicals, and farms that use diesel pumps on wells for irrigation.

Slightly more than half of the permit applications to date are from dairies, he said.

Dust control plans are required from dairies with more than 500 cows -- not that large by California standards -- and from farms with more than 100 acres in at least one location.

The plans contain lists of steps that the farms are taking to reduce dust from their operations -- everything from reduced tilling, to planting cover crops in orchards, to limiting speeds on unpaved roads.

For the district, the next step is crucial.

The dust control plans will be reviewed and their expected emission reductions tallied to determine whether they will be enough to keep the district on target for meeting federally mandated reductions in emissions of fine particles.

Those particles, known as PM10, consist of tiny bits of dust and soot measuring no more than 10 microns, about one-seventh the thickness of a human hair.

High levels of the particles in the air can cause lung damage, including cancer, and are especially hazardous for people with chronic respiratory ailments such as asthma.

Cunha credited numerous farm organizations and government agencies with helping farmers meet the deadlines by holding workshops on the new rules. Among the organizations involved were the Farm Bureau; groups representing grape, citrus and cotton growers; and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"We'd pick up 15 or 20 more growers at every one of our seminars," Cunha said.

Whether the plans will produce the hoped-for emissions reductions remains to be seen, however.

Environmental advocate Kevin Hall of the Sierra Club said the plans appear to allow farmers to take credit for dust control practices they already use.

If so, the resulting emissions reductions might exist only on paper.

"It's a numbers game," Hall said. "The only thing that we're getting here is a framework for future regulation."

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2004](#)

Breathe easier, valley -- dust reduction coming

PM-10 sounds like the name of an over-the-counter cough medicine; it's just the opposite.

PM-10 is shorthand for particulate matter that measures 10 microns or less. These microscopic particles hang in the air where they can combine with other particles to form noxious gases or, when closer to the ground, collect in our lungs. They contribute to asthma attacks and a host of respiratory problems.

Starting Friday, the valley's air regulators hope to have a prescription for reducing these hazardous particles in the air.

Emissions from cars, trucks, wood fires and factories create PM-10. So does dust kicked up by tractors, nut sweepers and other farm equipment. In all, 147 tons per day enter the valley's atmosphere.

Last year, Fresno Sen. Dean Florez pushed through legislation to remove agriculture's waiver under the Clean Air Act. With the waiver gone, farmers must become part of the PM-10 solution. Researchers say ag can remove 34 tons of PM-10 per day. Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties are ground zero in this fight because almond production accounts for substantially more PM-10 than any other crop.

Farmers must select at least one method of PM-10 reduction from each of five categories -- with their five-part plans due Friday. In all, there are around 150 "conservation management practices" from which to choose. Local air officials will then assess each plan for its PM-10 reduction. If all 6,400 plans total 34 tons per day, everyone's happy; if not, additional measures will be considered. That could mean including more farmers (now, those farming less than 100 contiguous acres are excluded) or requiring more than five dust-reduction measures in each plan.

Most of the measures are common sense. And some people believe farmers already are taking these steps, meaning there will be little dust reduction. Some say the state is going easy on farmers.

We don't agree. We see farmers stepping up to face this difficult task -- with some grumbles, no doubt, but stepping up nonetheless. The Almond Board, which represents 6,000 growers, has spent \$1.3 million on research -- a credible contribution. Thousands of growers have attended workshops conducted by the Farm Bureau so they can get this right. With each plan, they must pay a fee.

Our biggest worry is that the air district is relying on guesswork to measure compliance. We need accurate measurements. The air board hopes scientists at various universities -- such as the University of California at Davis, where much work already has been done, and UC Merced - will provide the hard data.

Until that data arrives, this will have to do. We all breathe the same air -- farmers and environmentalists alike. PM-10 makes everyone less healthy; it's time to clear the air.

[Modesto Bee, Argus Hamilton – Opinions, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2004](#)

Valley farmers perform crucial service to world

Fresno farmers were harassed Monday by air quality commissars for emitting dust particles. Hands off these guys. These farmers grow lettuce and celery and carrots, producing the finest blend of supermodel feed in the entire Western world.