

## **Tallow smell fills the noses of south Modesto residents**

### **Neighbors are complaining more over 87-year old plant**

By Joel Hood, staff writer

Modesto Bee, Tues., Nov. 16, 2004

Ellen Knight says she's lived in south Modesto for more than 30 years and, remarkably, the rotting carcass smell that so often permeates from the nearby tallow plant has never been a nuisance.

Until now.

Knight and other area residents say the smell has been particularly bad this fall, a period when cooler temperatures traditionally give them relief from the smells produced by the plant's rendering of birds and livestock into grease, glue and other products.

"For some reason, I've really noticed (the smell) the last couple of months," said Knight, who lives near Crows Landing and Hatch roads. "When I'm in my car, when I open my front door. It's really bad."

The number of complaints about the Modesto Tallow plant to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has risen sharply this fall, reaching a high of 29 in October, said district spokesman Anthony Presto. There were 51 complaints filed in September and October, compared with 43 filed from September to December in 2003.

While air district officials say they can't pinpoint the reason for the increase, some speculated that the plant is burning more feathers this year than in past fall periods. Presto suggested that weather conditions like Monday's fog layer also have kept the sour smell closer to the ground. And depending on how the wind is blowing, it's a stench that can be smelled in downtown Modesto and throughout the area.

Modesto Tallow Co. President Jeff Podesto declined comment and other plant officials did not return phone calls Monday.

The facility, which has perched near the bank of the Tuolumne River in south Modesto since 1917, has stepped up efforts in recent years to control odor. In 2002, the company installed thermal oxidizing equipment intended to burn away odor molecules and reduce smell.

But the following year, the air district received 189 complaints against the plant, the highest one-year total since the district formed in 1992, Presto said. In 12 years, there have been about 1,900 complaints logged against the plant, he added.

Jami Aggers, a compliance manager for the air district, said the recent upswing in complaints doesn't necessarily mean the smell is getting worse. It could be a result of heightened public awareness.

Complaints have resulted in a number of on-site investigations of the tallow plant this fall, Aggers said. And the plant has twice recently been cited for not complying with district air quality standards: once for having odor control equipment that was not operating and the second time for insufficient chlorine levels in the equipment, she said.

"We've been out there a lot lately," Aggers said, though she would not give specific inspection dates. "Sometimes we find them not in compliance, but a lot of times they are and there is nothing that can be done."

In June 2002, a month before the odor-reducing equipment was installed, the air district threatened to revoke the facility's emissions permit and impose a daily \$25,000 fine if company officials could not control the smell.

To file a complaint with the air district, call 800-281-7003.

## Company may keep up its old tire routine

By Stephanie Tavares, staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 16, 2004

A local cement company that has been burning old chopped-up tires as fuel on and off for the last two years may get to do so on a permanent basis, despite the protests of area residents.

The Kern County Air Pollution Control Board recommended Nov. 3 that National Cement, located near Lebec in southern Kern County, be granted a permit to replace 25 percent of its current fuel source, petroleum coke and natural gas, with tires.

Before the Air Pollution Control District can grant the new permit, which would be permanent, the company needs to pay application fees and the environmental impact report's health risk assessment must be examined and approved by the California Air Resources Board and the state Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessments.

The Air Pollution Control District expects approvals of the health risk assessment by Nov. 25 and Jan. 9, respectively.

But people who live near the plant are less than pleased that National Cement will be allowed to burn tires.

The environmental impact report, based on a 180-day trial, shows that although emission levels of most toxins decreased when the factory burned tires instead of petroleum coke, others increased.

Residents are particularly alarmed at an approximately 20 percent increase in the amount of dioxin -- a general term for a group of hundreds of chemicals that are highly persistent in the environment -- released into the air during the experimental period.

"Obviously, what they have been burning, petroleum coke, is pretty nasty stuff and does pretty bad things. But as far as the tire burning, one of the pollutants is dioxin and we're very concerned about that because it's very toxic," said Lebec resident Linda McCay.

But according to the environmental report, the predicted health hazards for maximum exposure to the plant's exhaust for a continuous 70-year period were minimal.

"These numbers would have to be much higher to show a significant health risk over a 70-year period; even for a seven- or eight-hour period," said county Air Pollution Control Officer Tom Paxson of the dioxin emissions.

But predicted effects do not convince neighbors who say they don't trust the company to operate responsibly.

National Cement has been cited for 63 air pollution violations since the plant opened in 1966; 43 of those were in the last four years.

Records show most of those violations were for non-carcinogenic toxins.

National Cement President Don Unmacht said the most recent violations were caused by stricter emissions standards imposed on the company after a new fuel-efficient kiln was installed in 1997.

"We've struggled through that, but I think our compliance in the future is going to be good," Unmacht said. "Those (carcinogenic) emissions are well-regulated and they're basically not a problem."

Residents are also upset that the county allowed the company to burn tires as fuel without their knowledge.

National Cement was allowed to burn tires as fuel throughout 2003 under an Experimental Research Exemption from the county Air Pollution Control District. The permit allowed the company to replace up to 25 percent of its fuel with tires for a total of 180 days while a state-licensed independent testing company and air district staff monitored and recorded the amount of toxins the process produced.

Paxson said the county was not obligated to inform nearby residents, but that they would never allow an unsafe project.

"We don't accept exemption applications for everyone. We determine first if the experiment will be safe, and we monitor it closely," Paxson said.

That permit expired in December 2003 and the data collected by both the Air Pollution Control District and the air testing company were used as the basis for the environmental impact report included in the company's application for the permit.

The company is currently burning tires under a second permit that has allowed it to use tires as up to 50 percent of its fuel since June.

## **Local dealership has new hybrid trucks**

By Doug Keeler, city editor

Taft Midway-Driller, Monday, Nov. 15, 2004

A local car and truck dealership is the first in Kern County to get new hybrid electric-gasoline powered trucks.

Two of the hybrid pickups were delivered to Taft Chevrolet Buick Pontiac this week.

Devinder Bains, the owner of the dealership, said the new trucks will provide much improved fuel economy while cutting down on pollution.

The gasoline engine provides the power driving on roads or highways, but the electric motor takes over when stopped.

"When you stop at a stop light, the engine turns off," Bains said. "When the light turns green, your car engine can take over again.

Bains took delivery of a pair of 2005 Chevrolet Silverado trucks on Wednesday and the vehicles are now available for test drives.

Not only that, the hybrid electric-gasoline vehicles can serve as mobile electric generators with four ground fault protected 120-volt outlets.

The generator can provide up to 2400 watts of power.

That means a truck parked in your driveway can serve as an emergency generator during a power outage.

The trucks also feature an electronic starter.

One of the big advantages of the hybrid technology is the decrease in exhaust emissions.

Since the gasoline engine is off when idling, pollution is reduced.

"You create most of your emissions when you are stopped," explained Bains.

The generator provides plenty of power for emergency, construction or recreational uses.

Chevrolet says the generator can power everything from home appliances to a 1/2-inch power drill, 6 1/2-inch circular saw or 14-inch chain saw.

Tailgaters and campers can run everything from a video game to refrigerator or microwave oven.

## **Raceway meeting**

Modesto Bee, Tues., Nov. 16, 2004

A proposed motorsports park near Atwater is the reason for a public meeting scheduled for tonight by Merced County Citizens Against the Raceway. Organizers said speakers will present information and opinions regarding what they see as raceway-associated problems, including noise, traffic congestion, air pollution and health risks. The proposed raceway site is on Fox Road near the federal penitentiary east of the runways at the former Castle Air Force Base.

Representatives of Citizens Against the Raceway said about 30,000 people live within five miles of the proposed site. Citizens Against the Raceway is an informal group of residents from Atwater, Winton and Merced. The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. at Sierra Presbyterian Church, Yosemite Avenue and M Street, Merced. For more information, call 357-0701. - Mike Conway

## **Stuck on the Freeway? Here's Something Else to Fume About**

**Recent studies suggest that exposure to air pollution in stop-and-go traffic could increase cardiovascular risks.**

By Caitlin Liu, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Tues., Nov. 16, 2004

Spending time in traffic — especially when the conditions are stop-and-go — could be bad for your health because of the air pollution flowing into your automobile, recent research shows.

Although rolling up the windows might help a bit, no car is airtight. Turning on the fan makes only a modest difference at best, experts say. Short of donning a gas mask or holding your breath, your best bet is to avoid driving behind certain types of diesel vehicles and to minimize your time on congested freeways.

"Since traffic is the major source of toxins, you're getting substantial exposure to these agents in your daily commute," said Jean Ospital, health effects officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District. The health risks, he added, increase with the amount of exposure.

One recent study, funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, suggests that exposure to air pollution particulate matter while driving could cause cardiovascular changes that have been associated with increased risks of heart attacks, inflammation and arteriosclerosis.

Published in the April 15 issue of the American Journal of Respiratory Critical Care Medicine, the study followed nine North Carolina state highway troopers for four days. The officers — all nonsmokers between the ages of 23 and 30, and in "excellent physical condition" — were connected to electrodes that kept track of their heart rate. Blood samples were drawn before and after each work shift. Patrol cars were equipped with devices to monitor air quality.

By having the troopers keep a log of their daily activity, researchers were able to factor out stressful events — such as a high-speed chase — that might be responsible for some cardiovascular responses.

Still, they observed that for these healthy men, exposure to particulate matter while inside their vehicles was correlated with irregular heart rhythm, elevated blood protein levels and other blood cell changes.

"The higher the dose of air pollution, the more we saw a [cardiovascular] change," said study co-author Dr. Wayne E. Cascio, chief of cardiology at Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University. "A high level [of pollution] for a short term could be the same as a smaller dose over a long period of time."

In a follow-up study to be published in the journal Particle and Fibre Toxicology, Cascio and his colleagues found that the connection between air pollution and cardiovascular changes seemed particularly strong when it came to stop-and-go traffic, which generates more air toxins than smooth driving. Chemical analyses of the air inside patrol cars found that acceleration increases the level of aldehyde in the air, while braking releases copper metal particles.

A separate study, published in August in the journal Atmospheric Environment, found that driving behind certain types of diesel vehicles can dramatically elevate the levels of black carbon — or diesel soot — in the air inside your car.

The study said that being behind a diesel bus with a low tailpipe could subject you to 18 times as much black carbon than if you are tailing a modern, gasoline-powered passenger vehicle.

The amount of black carbon in the air is an indicator of the level of diesel exhaust. According to the AQMD, 90% of the cancer-causing air pollution in the region comes from vehicle emissions, and the major source of cancer-causing toxins is diesel exhaust.

Ironically, the study showed that exposure to black carbons may be higher when you're behind a medium-size delivery truck with a low tailpipe or a diesel passenger car than when you're tailing a big rig with exhaust piping out its top. That's because the smaller vehicles blow toxic particles directly at your car.

"By far, the best thing to do is avoid driving behind these vehicles and avoid driving on freeways dominated by these vehicles," said Arthur M. Winer, professor of Environmental Health Services at the UCLA School of Public Health and a co-author of the study. "That will help reduce your exposure."

Winer and his colleagues also found that the time people spend inside their car averaged 1 1/2 hours a day — or about 6% of their time — but accounted for one-third to one-half of their daily exposure to diesel exhaust.

The diesel study analyzed data that had been collected in 1997 by researchers funded by the California Air Resources Board. By equipping a car with an air-quality monitor, researchers measured real-time black carbon levels inside a car driving on freeways and roads in Los Angeles and Sacramento. Windows were closed, and different fan settings were used. Each run was recorded by a video camera aimed at capturing what was in front of the driver.

The most important predictor of black carbon levels inside the test vehicle was the type of vehicle followed, the 2004 analysis found. Researchers did not control for whether air conditioning was used, but found that variables such as speed, following distance and ventilation did not matter much.

"Vehicles are very porous," Winer said. "They're not space capsules. They're not submarines. They're not airtight."

Some manufacturers of car air purifiers sold in stores and over the Internet claim their products can eliminate toxins and remove odors. But air pollution experts and others are skeptical.

Last year, Consumer Reports tested several in-home air purifiers and deemed them "not effective." The organization has not reviewed any in-vehicle air purifiers.

"Some of them generate ozone to destroy odors," professor Roger Atkinson, director of the Air Pollution Research Center at UC Riverside, said of such devices in general. "The thing about ozone is it kills your sense of smell. That's why you don't notice odors anymore."

Atkinson and others say it is ironic that such devices can add ozone, considering that it's the main ingredient in Southern California's smog.

"We've worked 35 years trying to reduce ozone!" said Jerry Martin, spokesman for the Air Resources Board.

## **Hahn Shift on Port Cleanup Is Criticized**

**Activists say the mayor is renegeing on a promise with his plan to cap pollution at 2001 levels.**

By Deborah Schoch, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Tues., Nov. 16, 2004

When James K. Hahn ran for mayor in 2001, he vowed to see to it that the Port of Los Angeles dealt with the adverse effects of its years-long building boom on the region's environment.

Port-area residents — worried about air pollution, noise and traffic — cheered Hahn's promise, viewing it as a commitment to make right past shortcomings at the port.

But the mayor has backed off his promise to require new remediation efforts for past projects that harmed the environment. Instead, he plans to address the contentious issue through his "no net increase" pledge to reduce port pollution to 2001 levels and cap it there, said Deputy Mayor Doane Liu.

Some clean-air activists reacted to Hahn's decision with bewilderment and anger, claiming he is renegeing on a bold commitment to slash toxic air contaminants from the port, which along with the adjoining Long Beach port is Southern California's single largest source of air pollution.

Hahn's "no net increase" approach, critics say, would not repair the effects of what they claim is the port's failure to adequately address toxic pollutants, traffic and blight when it approved pre-2001 projects.

Gail Ruderman Feuer, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said that cutting pollution to 2001 levels is commendable, but insufficient. She cited a 1999 study that found sharply higher cancer risks in areas near the ports and along freeways east to the Inland Empire.

"The bad news is that the air levels in 2001 were unhealthy for the community," she said. "We need him also to follow through on his initial pledge, to mitigate all expansion projects."

Liu countered that Hahn remains committed to reducing pollution at the port.

"The mayor has come up with the most creative and progressive way to mitigate past impacts, by declaring there will be no net increase," Liu said. He also cited the mayor's push to convert docked ships to nonpolluting electric power.

The mayor's pledge to mitigate impacts of old projects would be difficult and legally questionable, Liu said. "You can't undo projects that have been completed," he said, "but the mayor is absolutely committed to improving the quality of life for harbor residents."

Central to the debate is the Port of Los Angeles' unprecedented growth since the mid-1990s, transforming it into the nation's largest port. Before building several major terminals, the port was required under state laws to conduct environmental impact statements and mitigate harmful effects on the environment.

Some port critics claim that the port erred in not requiring more stringent mitigation for such expansions as Pier 400, the Maersk Sealand project that opened in 2002 as the world's largest container terminal.

More stringent measures, they say, would have helped curb major increases in diesel fumes from ships, trains and trucks.

Responding to concerns, Hahn wrote port critic Noel Park in May 2001 during his first mayoral campaign, listing the steps he would take to alleviate the effects of the port. He promised to "review all past, present and future environmental documents in an open public process to ensure that all laws — particularly those related to environmental projects — have been obeyed, all city procedures followed, and all adverse impacts upon the communities mitigated."

Sandra Genis, a consultant working for a port advisory group, has reviewed the port's major environmental reports and issued a stinging critique in August that lists shortcomings. For instance, Genis wrote that the port's documents for Pier 400 predicted significant increases in air pollution, but the port required no action to cut toxic substances.

Port officials said Monday that the \$25,000 consultant's report, paid for by the port, is incomplete and contains errors, and they refused a Times request to interview Genis.

[Modesto Bee commentary, Tues., Nov. 16, 2004:](#)

## **Air District should question car surcharge plan**

By Mike Nelson

Much discussion has taken place over the years about the effects of air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley. There is no argument the valley suffers from some of the worst air pollution in the United States. The causes are both man-made and natural.

There are three funding sources used by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to operate the various programs designed to reduce air pollution:

Permit fees paid annually by businesses operating within the district.

Federal and state grants the district receives annually from the California Air Resources Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Fees generated by a \$4 surcharge on every vehicle registered within the district. This surcharge provides the Valley Air District with approximately 35 percent of its funding.

Beginning in January, the Department of Motor Vehicles will begin collecting an additional \$1 for a total of \$5 per vehicle per year. This is a result of Senate Bill 709, enacted in 2003.

Last week, the air district's governing board was asked to increase this surcharge by \$2, with collection to begin in April. Such an increase was authorized by Assembly Bill 923.

The motion to increase this surcharge failed on a split vote, 5-5. While arguments for the proposal were well thought out, an equal number of governing board members felt that this proposal wasn't necessary for a variety of reasons. I had three main concerns with this proposal:

The public had not been given adequate notice of fee increases.

At the time of the board's discussion, district staff did not have a complete list of proposed uses for the additional funds. The governing board should not be asked to authorize fee increases until there is a plan in place to use the funds.

Is it right for the motoring public to be forced to pay for clean air projects that do not relate directly to the operation of their cars? While funds generated by this surcharge might be used to reduce emissions from registered vehicles, they might also be used to reduce emissions from non-registered sources such as agricultural vehicles and school buses. Not that these aren't important pollution sources that need to be controlled, but whose responsibility is it to pay for them?

While this proposal failed, it will come back for reconsideration at the board's Dec. 16 meeting.

Anyone who wants to comment or voice concerns can attend the meeting or provide written comments. For more information or to submit comments, go to [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org) <<http://www.valleyair.org>> or call the Valley Air District at (559) 230-6000.

*Nelson is a governing board member of the Valley Air District and a member of the Merced County Board of Supervisors.*

[Letter to the Merced Sun-Star, Tues., Nov. 16, 2004:](#)

### **Wait until all facts are in**

Editor: Please wait for the environmental impact report to be reviewed and turned over to the public before using air quality concerns as a reason to quash the effort to bring the Riverside Motorsport Park to Merced County.

In the meantime, realize that expansion in population is going to happen whether we like it or not. The populace needs a place to live and work. It's about time something came along that could significantly alter the higher-than-average unemployment rate in Merced County.

Think of all the people who could be put to work and taken off county aid.

I am very excited about the possibilities for my 13-year-old twins' sake. It would be an extremely cool place for them to work part time while they go to school, and could also offer career opportunities in the future.

My point is that if the EIR determines that the air will be significantly negatively impacted, I would be opposed to the park, but until then, I wish everyone would keep an open mind and consider what it could do for Merced County and for your family's entertainment options.

Vicki Miller

Merced