

[Fresno Bee: Letter to the Editor - April 8, 2004](#)

Feel better, save money, spare the air -- take a walk

Daphne Saul

Fresno

Who would like to save money? Enjoy a beautiful spring day? Greet neighbors and friends? Get some exercise and feel more alert? Support the local economy? See the beautiful Sierra Nevada range more often?

If any of these things sound appealing, I would encourage my fellow Fresnoans to get out and walk. Walk to the local grocery store, restaurants or other stores. Instead of driving to the mall, people can park in one spot and walk to all the stores they need to visit.

We should always think of walking before we think of driving, and if we are able to walk, we should do it. Even if we can only do this once a week, we will help ourselves and our community.

[Los Angeles Times - April 8, 2004](#)

By Elizabeth Shogren, Times Staff Writer

More National Parks Fail New EPA Smog Ratings

(Air quality in at least eight treasured sites, including Yosemite, violates tougher rules.)

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency plans to announce next week that the air quality in areas that include at least eight of the nation's most popular national parks, including [Yosemite, is in violation of a new and more protective federal smog standard, National Park Service officials said Wednesday.](#)

Yosemite would join a roster of national parks — including Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Joshua Tree in California — listed as having unhealthy air. The air quality in those three parks already violates the EPA's old and less stringent smog standard, which was based on a one-hour measurement of air quality. That is being phased out in favor of an eight-hour measurement.

Other popular national parks to be newly designated as having dirty air include Rocky Mountain in Colorado, Great Smoky Mountain in North Carolina and Tennessee, Acadia in Maine, and Shenandoah in Virginia, National Park Service officials said.

"The fact that the behavior of society is messing up the cities we have learned to expect, but to have the same effects occur in areas that are supposed to be special national treasures is disturbing, to say the least," said Christine Shaver, chief of the air resources division of the National Park Service.

[The EPA's announcement, scheduled for April 15, will identify the counties across the country that exceed the new standard for ground-level ozone, the main component of smog. State and local governments will be required to devise plans to clean up the air by specified deadlines that vary from three years to 20 years, depending on the severity of the pollution problem. The EPA must approve the plans, and areas that fail to meet deadlines face severe penalties, such as a loss of highway funds.](#)

The National Park Service estimates that 112 of its 387 sites — including national monuments, historic sites, battlefields, seashores and recreation areas — are in areas expected to be in violation of the new standard, officials said. Point Reyes National Seashore in Northern California and Cape Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts are among those likely to be listed.

More than 110 million people — almost 40% of the nation's population — live in places where the air is too dirty to meet the new standard, according to EPA measurements of air quality between 2000 and 2002.

But when Americans escape the cities to relax in some of their favorite national parks, they could be breathing air with unhealthy amounts of ground-level ozone — a pollutant that can aggravate asthma, encourage respiratory illnesses like pneumonia, and damage lungs. It also eats away at the flora and fauna in the parks.

Although more cities will be designated as having unhealthy air under the new ozone standard than under the old standard, urban areas across the country have seen improvement in smog levels in recent years.

However, smog levels have been steadily increasing at many national parks. From 1993 to 2002, 18 out of the 28 national parks that monitor the air for ozone experienced increases in their eight-hour ozone levels, according to EPA data.

The National Park Service was particularly concerned about the smoggy air designations for seven of the parks and the Point Reyes National Seashore, which were given special protection by Congress in the 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act. The action increased pressure on states and local governments to protect the air quality in pristine areas.

National Park Service officials said visitors who flock to Yosemite — a mecca for climbers, backpackers and photographers — likely would be stunned to learn that it had been designated as having unhealthy air.

"It is going to surprise a lot of people, but it's not going to surprise the park's managers," said Judy Rocchio, regional air quality program coordinator for the National Park Service.

The air quality monitor at Turtleback Dome measured violations of the new smog standard six times in 2000, four times in 2001, 24 times in 2002 and 10 times in 2003, according to National Park Service data.

The park is trying to reduce pollution with a plan that would limit day-use access by cars and trucks, but that would have a limited impact on Yosemite's smog problem. Most of the dirty air in Yosemite blows in from the Central and San Joaquin valleys, where millions of cars, trucks, buses, farm vehicles and construction equipment emit huge amounts of pollution. Bay Area pollutants are also a factor.

In addition to threatening visitors' health, the pollution can weaken and cause early deaths of the park's Ponderosa and Jeffrey pines, which are sensitive to ozone, Rocchio said.

"The main message is that people really have to make decisions in their lives to pollute less," Rocchio said. "Your parks depend on what you do at home."

Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, which are immediately downwind of the San Joaquin Valley in Central California, have the worst smog of any national park. The parks' air monitors have measured violations of the smog standard on as many as 81 days a year, according to National Park Service data. Instead of being treated to clear views of the Sierra Nevada's majestic peaks, visitors often are disappointed by panoramas of mountains blanketed by brown smog.

The next dirtiest is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the nation's most visited park. It has half a million acres of abundant old-growth forests, rugged mountains and winding rivers that straddle Tennessee and North Carolina. But the vistas often are marred by pollution from coal-fired power plants and other industrial sources.

Air quality monitors in Death Valley National Park show smog levels nearing but not exceeding the standard. But Inyo County, where most of the park is located, is expected to be designated as violating the new standard, officials said.

Bad air days in the parks generally come in the summer, when heat combines with pollutants emitted from cars and smokestacks to heighten ozone levels. At these times, visitors — especially older people and children — are warned not to hike, bike, climb or engage in rigorous activities.

"It shakes me up to think that we have to issue health alerts to visitors to tell them it's a bad day to go hiking because of air pollution," said Shaver of the National Park Service.

"As a citizen of the country, that's very depressing to think we have that level of air pollution problems in our national parks — and some that are not right next to cities."

[Editorial, The Bakersfield Californian, April 8, 2004](#)

Border roadblock

Free trade is up against environmentalists striving for better air quality. It's too bad a decent compromise wasn't reached before the attorneys general of California and eight other states filed briefs on the issue recently with the U.S. Supreme Court. They are opposing the Bush administration's effort to open U.S. roads to Mexican trucks without air quality studies.

The court is scheduled to hear oral arguments April 21 on the administration's request to review a lower court order that prevented Mexican trucks from using U.S. highways without the environmental studies. A decision is expected in June.

Meanwhile, until the high court makes a decision, there is a moratorium on most Mexican trucks entering the United States.

The Bush administration hopes to open the border to Mexican trucks to abide by the North American Free Trade Agreement, which drops trade restrictions among Canada, the United States and Mexico.

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer said: "This action is not anti-free trade, anti-NAFTA or anti-Mexico. This is about protecting our residents' health and making sure the federal government fulfills its statutory duty to help states achieve those objectives."

Joining him in filing the briefs were attorneys general from Arizona, Oklahoma, Massachusetts, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin.

In reply to their briefs, U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson said Mexico "asserts that its country has suffered economic damages in the billions of dollars from the moratorium on cross-border operations."

Yet the attorneys general have valid concerns. They argue that an environmental study was needed because of the possibility of increased air pollution from Mexican trucks.

In a report to federal authorities, Lockyer said an independent study found that Mexican trucks operating in California's Imperial Valley would increase nitrogen oxide emissions in that area by about one-third of a ton each day.

Under the NAFTA agreement, an estimated 30,000 Mexico-based diesel trucks would be allowed to cross the border and travel across the nation. Critics say most trucks hauling freight from Mexico are older and more likely to pollute than U.S. trucks.

Places like the Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley suffer from some of the dirtiest air in the nation. About 8,500 Mexican trucking firms are now allowed to operate in commercial zones in the United States that extend about 75 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border.

Lockyer notes that more and more children in the state are suffering from asthma. "All we're asking is that the Bush administration comply with the law and fully study the potential environmental damage that would be caused by allowing high-polluting trucks to travel freely on our highways."

Officials of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which oversees the Mexico truck issue, said an air-impact study was not required under terms of NAFTA.

However, because the Supreme Court is considering the issue, officials of the agency have begun a review of air-quality impacts in case the court rules against them.

In retrospect, it would have been prudent if agency officials had started the air-quality study long ago and even agreed to the study when the attorneys general were threatening to file their briefs with the Supreme Court.

No matter which way the court rules, the air study should be completed.

[Contra Costa Times - April 8, 2004](#)

By Rachel Konrad - ASSOCIATED PRESS

EPA reaches \$4.2 million deal to clean up San Jose Superfund site

SAN JOSE - The Environmental Protection Agency announced a \$4.2 million settlement Wednesday to cover cleanup expenses at a Superfund site contaminated by volatile pesticides, herbicides and other toxins.

Ten companies and the U.S. Navy will reimburse the EPA for costs associated with past and future decontamination at the abandoned Lorentz Barrel and Drum site in San Jose. The property requires a vapor extraction system and an asphalt-concrete cap, according to the EPA.

The container recycling facility, used from 1947 to 1987, sits atop an aquifer that provides drinking water for the San Francisco Bay area. Three public water supply well fields are located within a mile of the site, and nearly 1,000 residents live nearby.

In 1987 and 1988, about 26,000 abandoned drums and 3,000 tons of highly contaminated soil were removed from the site, and part of the property was fenced and covered. The soil and ground water still contains heavy metals, volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds, and polychlorinated biphenyls, the EPA reported.

In addition to the Navy, companies that used the facility and named in the settlement include Ford Motor Co., General Mills Inc., Golden Gate Petroleum Co., Pennzoil-Quaker State Co. and Sunsweet Growers Inc.

[NEW YORK TIMES - April 7, 2004](#)

More Hybrid Cars Come, Critics Want More

By REUTERS

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Automakers are promising to introduce more gas-electric hybrid vehicles but the pace is not fast enough for U.S. consumers who want better fuel economy as gas prices rise, or environmentalists who complain the industry could do more to conserve resources.

Ford Motor Co. (F.N) on Wednesday said it will add a second hybrid, powered by both a gas engine and electric batteries, to its lineup in late 2006 or early 2007.

The 2007 model-year Mercury Mariner hybrid sport utility vehicle will build on the lessons learned from the Ford Escape hybrid SUV, which goes on sale later this summer, Ford officials said at the New York Auto Show. Ford is also planning a hybrid version of a midsize sedan beyond 2007.

Despite what Ford described as "stepping up its commitment" to hybrids, a coalition of environmental and human rights groups singled out the second-largest U.S. automaker for not offering the fuel-saving technology across its vehicle lineup.

The coalition, including the Sierra Club, said it planned to demonstrate outside the New York Auto Show on Saturday, where the industry is displaying many of its new models, to inform the public that Ford and the industry could do more to cut emissions and the U.S. dependence on oil imports.

"Ford has shown that they can make a 35 mpg SUV -- now they need to use this technology throughout their fleet to clean up the environment and cut our oil dependence," Dan Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming and energy program, said in a statement.

Although U.S. gas prices have recently hit record highs, unadjusted for inflation, SUVs and large pickup trucks have been the fastest-growing segments of the market this year.

But demand for more fuel-efficient vehicles such as hybrids could grow if gas prices continue to steadily climb, J.D. Power and Associates, a California-based research group, said following a study of 7,126 consumers released this week.

Already, consumers in some parts of the country are on waiting lists for hybrid vehicles.

GUILT-FREE SUVS?

Environmental groups have focused on Ford, in particular Chief Executive Bill Ford Jr., who was an outspoken advocate for the environment before he took over as CEO in 2001. Since then, the automaker has backed down on one of Bill Ford's most noted environmental initiatives -- to boost the fuel economy of Ford SUVs by 25 percent by next year.

The Escape hybrid, Ford's first gas-electric vehicle, will be the most fuel-efficient SUV when it goes on sale this summer, Ford said, getting better fuel economy than most

cars on the market. But the Escape has been delayed because Ford said it needed more time for testing.

Meanwhile, Toyota Motor Co. (7203.T) will roll out two hybrid SUVs within the next year, in addition to its Prius sedan, which has been on sale in the United States for about four years. Honda Motor Co. (7267.T) will offer its third hybrid late this year when it offers the technology on a version of its popular Accord sedan.

Both Toyota and Honda, currently the only automakers to offer hybrids, have reported strong demand for the vehicles. Last week, Toyota said it would raise the price of its Prius hybrid sedan by \$300 or 1.5 percent, after increasing its targeted annual U.S. sales volume to 47,000 last December from its previous target of 36,000.

Hybrids, however, remain only a small fraction of overall U.S. sales, which are expected to total 16.7 million vehicles this year.

One of the Toyota hybrid SUVs, the Lexus RX 400h, will usher in a new era of hybrids that offer a racy ride without the guilt. The RX400h, which goes on sale this fall, will accelerate from zero to 60 miles per hour in 7.5 seconds, about half a second faster than the RX 330 SUV, but will get more than six miles per gallon better fuel economy.

``When you talk to SUV buyers, the number one dissatisfaction is fuel economy," Dennis Clements, the group vice president and general manager of Lexus, told Reuters in an interview. ``So I think that (RX 400h) will resonate. The luxury SUV business continues to grow, quite dramatically."

[New York Times - April 7, 2004](#)

John Millett 202-564-7842 / millett.john@epa.gov

EPA Awards Grants to Reduce Pollution from Trucks at Truck Stops

EPA, under the SmartWay Transport Partnership, is awarding grants to states and non-profit organizations across the country. These grants target emission reductions from trucks while they idle for long periods at truck stops and other truck waiting areas. EPA will focus on issuing grants along major transportation interstate corridors. Approximately \$800,000 will be awarded, with grants ranging in size from \$100,000 to \$200,000. The grant recipients will deploy stationary idle reduction technology at strategic locations along the National Highway System. Annually, long duration truck idling consumes one billion gallons of diesel fuel, and contributes over 11 million tons of carbon dioxide, 180,000 tons of nitrogen oxides and 5,000 tons of particulate matter. Much of this fuel consumption and the associated emissions can be reduced with the use of idle reduction technologies. Today's grant focuses on the deployment of a stationary idle reduction technology commonly known as "truck stop electrification." For information on applying for this grant visit the following web site:

http://www.epa.gov/air/grants_funding.html

[San Francisco Chronicle - Wednesday, April 7, 2004](#)

Verne Kopytoff, Chronicle Staff Writer

Opponents gear up against Shell Oil

Consumer group asks Lockyer to halt plan to close refinery

A consumer group has asked state Attorney General Bill Lockyer to block Shell [from closing its Bakersfield refinery](#) after unearthing internal company documents that show the facility actually has been profitable.

The group, the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, said closing the refinery would lead to higher gas prices in the state. It accused Shell Oil Products US of deceiving the public and trying to manipulate the gas market.

"Only an oil company that wants to short the market and artificially drive up the price of gasoline would demolish a highly profitable refinery rather than sell it," said Jamie Court, president of the foundation, which is based in Santa Monica.

In a letter sent Tuesday, the group asked Lockyer to file suit against Shell under the state's Unfair Business Competition Law. It asked Lockyer to force Shell to either sell the refinery or keep it running.

If Lockyer doesn't act, the group said it would file its own suit.

Tom Dresslar, a spokesman for the attorney general, said Lockyer "has been aggressively investigating the planned shutdown and exploring a number of legal theories, including antitrust."

At the same time, he cautioned that "as a general rule, government cannot force private companies to keep operating a business that they don't want to operate."

[Shell, owned by Royal Dutch/Shell, disclosed in November that it plans to close the Bakersfield refinery, which accounts for 2 percent of the state's refining capacity. Declining production of heavy crude in the San Joaquin Valley made operating the facility beyond Oct. 1 economically unviable, the company said.](#)

Many consumer groups immediately criticized the decision. Losing the refinery's supplies would tighten California's gas market even more than it already is, they said.

Currently, 13 refineries supply the state with just enough of its special blend of smog-reducing fuel to meet demand. In 1983, the state had 37 refineries.

Gas prices have become a sensitive subject among many drivers and political candidates this year as pump prices have soared. The average price of self-serve regular is \$2.13 in the state, according to the federal government, just a few cents shy of the all-time high hit last year.

However, prices are less remarkable when inflation is taken into account. In that case, the all-time record for the state was set in 1980 -- \$2.78 per gallon in today's dollars.

The internal documents released Tuesday show that Shell's Bakersfield refinery is actually the company's best U.S. performer so far in 2004. Its refining margin was \$23.01 per barrel as of April 2, beating out all seven other Shell refineries, some of which had margins as low as \$7.19 per barrel.

Since 1998, the Bakersfield refinery has turned a net profit after taxes in four out of six years for a total profit of \$14.5 million. Through February, it has made \$2 million in profit, according to the documents released Tuesday.

The apparently good results were underscored in a message that a Shell manager sent to Bakersfield refinery employees at the end of 2003. It said: "We turned in excellent operational performance this year. We are the most reliable Shell U.S. refinery in 2003 and achieved world-class performance two years in a row now."

Cameron Smyth, a spokesman for Shell, would not comment on the possibility of a lawsuit and said he was unaware of his company doing anything improper. He emphasized that the Bakersfield refinery has lost money in two of the past three years and that the company expects it to show a loss again in 2004, despite the early profit.

"The refinery is closing because of the lack of crude," Smyth said.

Smyth acknowledged that Shell did not seek any buyers before deciding to close the refinery. The company is willing to entertain offers, but no reasonable ones have been received, he said.

E-mail Verne Kopytoff at vkopytoff@sfchronicle.com <mailto:vkopytoff@sfchronicle.com>.