

## **Gass-fire smoke blankets area**

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, July 20, 2005

Smoke from a 5,000-acre grass fire near Livermore blanketed much of northern Stanislaus and southern San Joaquin counties Tuesday. The incident began about 4:30 p.m. and spread quickly, threatening the area around Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, said Becky Bamberger, a volunteer information officer with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Officials at the lab declared a state of emergency and evacuated personnel, she said. One outbuilding at the lab burned and several structures were threatened. The fire spread east into the windmill farms to the south of Interstate 580. It was expected to grow to 10,000 acres by morning, Bamberger said. About 175 firefighters were battling the flames on the ground and from the air. There was no containment as of 8 p.m.

## **Blaze consumes 2,000 acres**

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Wednesday, July 20, 2005

More than 2,000 acres of Altamont Hills grasslands were consumed Tuesday afternoon, sending a hazy-gray smoke cloud over much of Tracy.

Several fire departments, including Tracy and Livermore-Pleasanton, sent strike teams into the hills to assist the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

As the fire raced across the dry grassy hills, the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory declared an emergency when the flames approached its Site 300 facility off Corral Hollow Road, near the Alameda County border.

The emergency, declared at 5:43 p.m., enabled laboratory firefighters to obtain mutual aid from other fire departments.

In an effort to cut off the spreading flames, lab officials said firefighters set backfires along the western portion of Site 300 to protect area buildings.

The smoke from the blaze was visible for several miles across the southern skies of Tracy.

Many commuters making their way home over the Altamont saw the smoke swallow hills adjacent to interstates 580 and 205, but vision along the roadway was reportedly still clear around 6 p.m.

About 90 minutes later, fire officials reported the fire was burning out of control as it approached I-205.

It took firefighters several hours to contain the blaze. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

## **Emission factor**

### **Air board says cows worse for air than cars; farmers disagree**

By Shannon Darling, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, July 20, 2005

Cows pollute more than cars, air regulators are saying - something that has left some dairy owners in disbelief.

The San Joaquin Valley Air District said it recently determined that one cow produces 20.6 pounds of smog-making gas a year, making cattle the largest source of smog-forming gases in the Valley, more than passenger cars, pesticides, prescribed burning or lawn mowers. The number, which is up for public comment, would be used in determining just how many dairies in the eight-county San Joaquin Valley air basin will require permits.

But the projected amount of pollution the Valley's 2.5 million cows produce has already been the source of heated debate.

"Some say it is too high, some say it is too low," said Jaime Holt, public education administrator with the air district.

But farmers disagree and believe that more studies need to be done before such a large number is settled on.

"They are bogus numbers," said Tom Mendes, a dairyman from Riverdale, south of Fresno.

Mendes said he doesn't believe cows pollute as much as the air district says.

"Would you rather be stuck in a garage for 24 hours with a car running or 24 hours in a garage with three cows?" Mendes said.

Mendes said he believes the dairy industry, which brought in a combined total of \$1.3 billion into Tulare County last year, is being picked on in the air district's report.

"It's a getcha attitude," Mendes said. "I think it will be resolved in courts."

But Holt said an independent study group took science and all viewpoints under consideration when they analyzed the emission factor.

Frank Mitloehner, an air quality extension specialist at the University of California, Davis, said cows produce more smog-forming gases than other animals because of their four-chambered stomachs.

When humans eat, he said, their body boils everything down to glucose. Cows, on the other hand, boil everything down to volatile fatty acids.

"These volatile fatty acids are what a cow needs," he said. "The good news is that these volatile fatty acids are absorbed by the cow. We don't know how much of these gases are released through the mouth when the cow brings up their cud and chews."

Mitloehner has researched this for years by carefully measuring the gases that cows, enclosed in chambers, produced.

Mitloehner questions some of the numbers in the air district's report, and one of them came from his own research. He gave the district information and said he told air district officials not to use it because it wasn't complete.

He also said another number in the report cited research done on decomposing manure in England - a study that would need to be simulated in the Valley should it be considered.

"I've told them in two letters and at two public meetings that this number [of volatile fatty acids] wasn't suitable," Mitloehner said. "It could be higher. It could be lower."

The air district, Holt said, will make a final decision on the number by Aug. 1, a deadline set forth following a lawsuit brought on by the dairy industry.

"This is really just step 1 of a process that is going to be ongoing indefinitely," Holt said.

David Grantz, air quality specialist at UC Riverside and a citizen member of the dairy permitting advisory group, said the group tried to come up with the best number it could. In past years, it was estimated that a cow produced 12.8 pounds of smog-forming gases a year, based on a study done in the 1930s.

"We are mightily out of legal compliance in terms of ozone," Grantz said. "We had to make our best guess."

Others say something has to be done about the Valley's smog and fast.

During a public meeting last week, Tom Frantz, president of Association of Irrigated Residents, said the number was too low, saying dairies contribute to smog that leads to high asthma rates and other lung diseases in the area.

Rob Hilarides, a dairyman from Lindsay, said he believes dairies should do their part to keep the air clean but hopes that such a high number won't overly regulate the industry.

He said the Hilarides dairy already does its part to keep the air clean. The dairy sands roads to keep dust down and installed a \$1 million digester system that burns the gases that come off a manure lagoon to power the dairy.

The 20-foot-deep lagoon is covered with a liner so methane and carbon dioxide are trapped and then burned in engines that produce enough electricity to run a milking barn that milks 6,000 cows twice a day.

"It burns real clean," said Hilarides, who pointed Tuesday to a engine running without smoke and then a flame that was invisible during the day.

Once the number is established by the air district, the organization will then determine how to regulate dairies. Hilarides said he believes more dairies will likely install anaerobic digester lagoons as a result, but it is very expensive.

It cost Hilarides \$1 million to build his system, \$500,000 of which was done with an energy grant.

"I don't believe dairies are bad for the air," he said.

Hilarides said dairies have crop land that helps clean the air and recycle many agricultural by-products. Cows, for example, will eat plums and oranges that don't make it to the table and will even eat the byproduct of cheese-making - whey.

"Everybody has to do their part. But [regulation has] to be fair and can't put people out of work," he said.

## **Ozone doesn't make outside a 'no' zone**

### **Officials encourage outdoor exercise in moderation, even on smoggy days**

By Edie Lau -- Bee Science Writer

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, July 20, 2005

A group of health and clean-air advocates who decided to define how much exercise is safe for children on polluted days has made a happy discovery.

Protecting young lungs during a Sacramento summer doesn't mean having to be a couch potato.

"Yes, we do have air-quality problems, but it doesn't mean you have to stop living your life," said Kori Titus, policy and communications director of the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails. "You don't have to stop exercising."

For example, when ozone concentrations reach heights deemed unhealthy for everyone - as happened in parts of Sacramento three days in a row last week - it's still OK to play sports, provided players are allowed more time to rest between periods of exertion, according to the chart.

And even if ozone levels are very unhealthy, the chart says it's all right to exercise outside, as long as the activity is moderate or light and lasts less than one hour.

"It's definitely less stringent than even I thought (it would be)," said Titus, who convened a group of experts from the health departments and air quality management districts in Sacramento and Yolo counties to develop the guidelines. The chart will be available at the lung association Web site, [www.saclung.org](http://www.saclung.org) <<http://www.saclung.org>>.

Titus said the recommendations are based on the science behind the Air Quality Index, a numerical rating of air pollution levels developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Under the AQI, levels of zero to 50 are good; 51 to 100 moderate; 101 to 150 unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as people with asthma or other respiratory problems; 151 to 200 unhealthy for everyone; and 201 to 300 very unhealthy for everyone.

Titus said when the group looked at the data underlying the AQI, it learned that each descriptor - "unhealthy" and so on - is based upon prolonged exposure of four hours or longer.

That's how the panel determined that moderate exercise for short periods is safe even when the air is fairly dirty.

"Who's going to be out there for four hours unless you work outdoors?" Titus said. "We thought it was important to break it down into the exposures that people would actually have."

Another reason the chart is not very restrictive is that ozone levels can vary widely in the region, Titus said. So it may be safe to play basketball in east Sacramento on an afternoon when it's unhealthy to jog in Folsom.

Lori Kobza-Lee, a spokeswoman for the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, recommended that people check not only the air-quality forecast for the day, but also the actual ozone levels by going to the Web site [www.sparetheair.com](http://www.sparetheair.com) <<http://www.sparetheair.com>> before deciding whether to cancel or modify outdoor activities.

The chart is geared for children because their lungs are still developing, making them most vulnerable to the effects of breathing bad air. However, Titus said, the recommendations apply to people of all ages.

Sacramento County Public Health Officer Dr. Glennah Trochet, who first suggested crafting the guide, noted that the information is not new, just more specific than what's been available to date.

"What I have now is a tool in plain English that gives people better direction," Trochet said. "When the air quality is bad and people ask if they should stay in, we can tell them now that 15 minutes, like a recess, may be OK, but two hours may not be OK."

She also noted that people need not skip exercise altogether. "There's nothing that says they can't do it indoors during bad air days," she said.

One limitation of the chart is that it applies only to ozone. Exposure to pollutants such as particulates is a health risk, as well. Titus said she hopes to factor in particle pollution in the future.

Diann Rogers, director of a children's soccer camp taking place in Folsom next week, said the exercise guide is the sort of thing she needs to help her gauge whether and when to modify workouts.

Initially worried about the heat, Rogers called the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District this week for advice. Kobza-Lee told her that dirty air might also be a problem.

"I originally scheduled the soccer camp in the evening, thinking that's when you get the breezes and it's cooler," Rogers said. "I didn't know that's when the ozone is the worst."

With that piece of knowledge and a copy of the chart in hand, Rogers said she's making contingency plans.

"If it's very unhealthy, we would either just cancel, or sit down," she said. "We can talk about famous games and people in soccer. We'll have some backup things (to do)."

## **EPA grant could help CUSD replace diesel buses**

### **New vehicles would run on clean-burning fuel**

By Heather Kulterman

Clovis Independent, Friday, July 15, 2005

Clovis Unified is looking to make some cuts this year -- cuts to pollution, that is.

The district is applying for a federal grant to help replace nine, aged diesel school buses with new, efficient, cleaner compressed natural gas buses.

Thanks to the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean School Bus USA program, nearly half the cost of the clean buses could be covered. The EPA has offered to spend \$7.5 million on 20 to 30 bus replacement projects, paying from 30 to 45 percent of the costs to public schools.

Clovis Unified will seek the Governing Board's approval to pursue the grant on July 20.

The Clean School Bus USA grants were first given out in 2003 to school districts, nonprofits and government agencies. According to the EPA, 120 agencies applied the first year and 17 were awarded between \$5,000 and \$700,000 to replace older, polluting vehicles.

This year only public schools will be allowed to apply.

Bill McGuire, CUSD associate superintendent, said if Clovis receives EPA money to replace nine of the district's oldest diesel buses, it will seek other grants from the state and the San Joaquin Air Resource Board to cover the remaining costs.

Money for a compressed natural gas bus -- averaging \$150,000 each -- would have to come out of the district's general operating fund if grants were not received.

"This grant is great for us. No one here could find \$150,000 for us to buy a new bus, and we haven't paid for a new bus out of unrestricted general fund dollars in a long time," McGuire said.

Even if the district had to pay a portion of the cost, McGuire said the natural gas buses would save money in the long run.

Roughly a quarter of the district's 80-bus fleet currently runs on compressed natural gas. The buses require less maintenance and are cheaper to fuel.

Fuel is especially cheap for the natural gas buses because Clovis Unified owns and operates one of the two compressed natural gas filling stations in the greater Fresno area.

Unlike diesel fuel, the per-gallon cost of compressed natural gas has not increased over the last few years.

Compressed natural-gas buses do require tank replacements every 15 years unlike buses running on other fuels. Still, the district believes them to be the best choice.

"Our upfront costs may be higher with a CNG bus, but over a lifetime it's cheaper, has better operation and it's cleaner and better for the air," McGuire said.

According to the Alternative Fuel Data Center, compressed natural gas is a clean-burning fuel alternative that produces far fewer harmful emissions than either diesel or reformulated gasoline. In some studies, the AFDC reported that some compressed natural gas engines had a reduction of 90 percent in carbon monoxide and particulate matters and 50 percent reduction in nitrogen oxides or NOx, all of which pollute the air.

Transportation director Joe Bjerke said the argument over the truly cleanliest fuel rages on, but when it comes to reducing particulate matter and NOx emissions, compressed natural gas is the clean winner.

Members of the transportation department will often clear the garage when a diesel bus is being worked on, but a natural gas bus hardly produces any irritating emissions at all, said Dan Faria, of the transportation department.

"You stand behind a CNG bus, and you can't see or smell the exhaust. You would just feel the heat. It's pretty incredible. We've had tremendous luck with them," Faria said.

"A CNG bus with 100,000 miles and years on it will come in and the tail pipe will be completely clean, like it just came off the factory floor."

## **Poll to test waters on half-cent tax**

### **KernCOG seeking input on road projects worth tax measure**

By SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, July 20, 2005

Is it worth an extra half-cent at the cash register to improve the roads that got you to the store?

That's what local roads buffs want to find out. They're poised to survey potential voters, asking them which transportation projects, if any, would be worth an extra half-cent each time they swipe their credit card.

Half-cent sales tax measures have failed here in the past, but local officials and citizens are readying themselves for another try next fall.

When the campaign begins, local government must bow out. But for now it's still in the mix, figuring out which roads projects best meet public need -- and public want.

"We can't campaign," said Ron Brummett, executive director of Kern Council of Governments, the regional transportation planning agency paying for the surveys. "We can find out what the public is thinking."

Two surveys will cost about \$100,000, and they'll be tailored to different regions, asking voters from Shafter about Shafter-area projects, Ridgecrest voters about Ridgecrest-area projects, etc. The project list will likely change based on survey results, but for now it includes \$19 million for roads radiating from California City, \$18 million to widen Taft Highway and about 40 other projects in between.

KernCOG will decide whether to hire a survey consultant at its meeting Thursday night. The first survey will likely get under way after Labor Day.

"What they're doing is very helpful," said Danielle McKinney, vice president of Kern Economic Development Corp. and a member of the citizens' group known as Kern County Citizens for Quality Transportation.

"You have to make sure (the roads projects are) a priority in the entire county, not just in the city of Bakersfield."

If the measure passes, it would raise nearly \$1 billion for transportation projects over 20 years. Fifty-eight percent of Kern voters supported the tax in 2003, according to a poll by the citizens' group backing the tax. To pass, it needs a two-thirds majority.

### **What's next**

The half-cent sales tax effort - also known as the Safe Roads Measure - doesn't become "political" until all of Kern's cities endorse a laundry list of construction, maintenance, [air quality](#) and public transportation projects. If that happens, the list will go to the county Board of Supervisors, which will decide whether to put it on the ballot in 2006. If it makes it to the ballot, a citizens' group known as Kern County Citizens for Quality Transportation will begin fund raising and campaigning.

The citizens' group is a coalition that includes the Kern Taxpayers Association, the League of Women Voters, public transportation advocates, builders, economic development experts and other local groups.

[Merced Sun-Star, Editorial, Wednesday, July 20, 2005](#)

## **Our View: Smog problem not going away**

### **Federal, state governments' lack of commitment to efficiency, practicality hurts the Valley**

The current heat wave is doing more than frying lawns and fraying tempers. It's causing a dramatic increase in the smog that forms in the Valley during the day, when compared with the relatively light levels reached earlier this year.

This snuck up on us, to some extent, because cooler and windier days in May and June kept the air cleaner than usual. Perhaps we should have known that was just a lull before the ozone storm.

On these blistering days, we long for even the slightest breeze to take the edge off the heat. But such winds turn out to be trouble for Valley residents in small communities and rural areas, because they blow in more pollutants from urban areas.

Thus Arvin, which lies downwind of Bakersfield, its much larger neighbor in Kern County, has already recorded 16 violations of the air quality health standards this year. Similarly, Clovis and the small towns of eastern Fresno County -- as well as Sequoia National Park -- lie in the path of smog blown in from Fresno.

It may get worse. This is the beginning of what is usually the worst ozone period, from late July through September. Ozone is the principal component of summer smog. It's formed when various gases -- mostly emissions from vehicles -- are literally cooked in the Valley's hot sun.

A litany of cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses -- and deaths -- are blamed on smog. It does its worst damage on the most vulnerable: children, the elderly and those already suffering from such heart and lung ailments.

Nor should we expect any serious abatement of the problem anytime soon. Federal and state governments control what we may do about vehicle emissions, and neither shows any real inclination to get serious about more efficient cars or other alternatives. That leaves local agencies with their hands effectively tied in dealing with 60 percent of the problem.

Until practical, efficient alternatives -- new fuels, new vehicles, real mass transit -- are widely available, our summers will remain filled with coughing, wheezing and worse.