

It's all relative: Valley may 'cool' to 100

Cloud cover could shave a few degrees off thermometer this weekend.

By Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, July 21, 2005

The central San Joaquin Valley could be celebrating 100 this weekend — 100 degrees, that is.

Forecasters predict the mercury will start dropping and highs could be near the century mark by Friday in Fresno, Visalia and Madera.

And that's reason for a valleywide pool party.

The dip in temperatures will come after more than a week of 100-plus-degree days, with health warnings from doctors about heatstroke being the rule.

"I didn't think we'd ever get to the point where we said, 'only 100,'" said Mark Burger, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Hanford. Burger cautioned the cooler air is only a "slow decline" and not a "cooling trend."

But Hurricane Emily, which battered the south Texas coast with rain, could bring some cloud cover to the area this weekend, dropping temperatures from Wednesday's high of 105 in Fresno and 104 in Madera.

"We could see more moisture and cloud cover aloft to keep temperatures down in the afternoon," Burger said.

The forecast shows daytime temperatures should hover at 100 on Friday in Fresno, Visalia and Madera. The forecast calls for slightly higher temperatures Saturday, with the mercury not rising above 100 in the three cities Sunday.

But it's still too hot to let our guard down. Dr. Andrew Robertson, medical officer at Community Medical Centers, reminds people to drink fluids and take it easy in the hot weather.

"It catches up to you without you knowing it — so take care out there," he said earlier this week on a 107-degree day.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecasts air quality will be unhealthy for everyone today in Tulare County and unhealthy for sensitive people in Fresno and Kings counties. People are asked to "spare the air" by driving less in Fresno, Kern, Kings and Tulare counties.

Mysterious ash piles identified

Officials: Residents not at risk, despite unhealthy properties

By Gretchen Wenner, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 21, 2005

The mysterious ash moonscape at a sludge farm outside Wasco contains hazardous materials that can cause blindness, sear holes through nasal cartilage, fill lungs with fluid or collapse an esophagus, according to paperwork filed with state regulators.

Air regulators say the ash poses no health risk to nearby residents.

Still, it's unclear exactly who's charged with oversight of the estimated 72,000 tons of gray powder stockpiled at the open-air site, where human and industrial sewage from the coastal city of Oxnard is applied to local farmland.

And county regulators haven't yet determined whether the ash is caustic enough to be classified as hazardous waste.

This much is known, according to filings provided Tuesday by Oxnard officials:

- Calcium oxide makes up 10 percent to 40 percent of the material, measured by weight. Its dust can cause reactions ranging from an irritated throat to pneumonia and pulmonary edema

(fluid in the lungs). Calcium oxide can chemically burn skin and eyes, possibly causing blindness; it can also burn mouths and collapse or permanently damage an esophagus.

- Calcium hydroxide, which in dust form causes the same reactions listed above, makes up 31 percent to 69 percent of the material.

Other components cause less severe reactions, such as coughs, runny noses and irritated eyes. Those substances are calcined coke, calcium carbonate, calcium sulfate and calcium sulfite.

Robert Montgomery, an Oxnard wastewater official who provided the paperwork, said the filing lists a range of percentages because composition of the ash varies.

The material comes from the BP West Coast Products LLC oil refinery in the Los Angeles area. It is used at the Wasco site to kill pathogens in the sewage sludge.

In recent months, local, state and Oxnard city officials have agreed the massive mounds need significant trimming.

Only a year's worth of the ash, or about 16,800 tons, is allowed to be kept at the site.

More than four times that is estimated to be there now. All of it sits uncovered, near sensitive duck-hunting ponds that border some of the property.

But Dave Warner, permit director at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the operation is currently in full compliance with district rules.

And a risk analysis showed "the facility did not pose a risk to the population around it," Warner said.

Wasco City Councilman Larry Pearson and his colleagues have been trying for months to get clear answers as to exactly what the ash is, whether it has high enough pH levels to be classified as hazardous waste and what agency is ultimately in charge of overseeing cleanup efforts.

Pearson has been frustrated by the slow pace.

"Where's the county at?" Pearson wondered. "It's not a new issue anymore."

County environmental officials say they've been trying to pin down origins, composition and risks of the ash, but add they too are struggling to get concrete information.

First off, there are many players. Oxnard owns the nearly 1,300-acre facility. The property sits off Gun Club Road, about eight miles northwest of Wasco city limits, but is in Kern County's jurisdiction.

Trucking firm U.S.A. Transport, Inc., based in the San Bernardino County city of Adelanto, runs the operation for Oxnard. The firm's drivers haul in sewage from the coast as well as ash from the BP refinery in Carson, south of Los Angeles.

Then there's a mix of regulators, from county planners and environmental staff to state air and water officials, all in charge of monitoring different aspects of the ash piles.

Matt Constantine of the Kern County Environmental Health Services Department said he's still waiting for test results that will determine whether cleanup will be tackled under hazardous waste guidelines.

Montgomery, the Oxnard waste official, repeated that city's commitment to getting the property cleaned up.

U.S.A. Transport officials could not be reached for comment.

The story so far:

- In May, media reports drew the public's attention to giant, eerie piles of ash at a sludge processing site outside Wasco owned by the city of Oxnard.

- In June, a town hall meeting in Wasco provided some answers but still left attendees wondering what the stuff was.
- Currently, county environmental regulators are still waiting for test results to determine whether the material needs to be handled as hazardous waste.

Spare the Air

Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, July 20, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has declared a Spare the Air Day for today in Tulare County.

The district alerts residents when air quality is expected to reach unhealthful levels.

When a Spare the Air Day is called, residents are asked to curtail activities that cause air pollution for the next 24 hours.

Information: (800) 766-4463.

New limits on refinery burn-offs Health problems, pollution blamed on routine flaring

Erin Hallissy, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, July 21, 2005

In a decision praised by environmentalists and labor unions, Bay Area air quality officials imposed the toughest regulations in the nation Wednesday to reduce flaring at the East Bay's five oil refineries.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District board of directors overwhelmingly approved a plan that requires refineries to minimize routine flaring, which can release a toxic brew of gases and chemicals that critics say cause health problems and increase air pollution.

"I think it's really noteworthy that we're taking this leadership position on a very complicated issue and are going to provide not only cleaner air but better health protection," said district spokeswoman Teresa Lee. "We are going to show in the Bay Area that it can be done efficiently and effectively."

Other areas in the nation where refineries are located, including Southern California, may follow the groundbreaking plan, Lee said.

For years, environmentalists and residents who live near the Bay Area's refineries -- four along the waterfront in Contra Costa County and one in Solano County -- have complained that the plants routinely burn off gases from smokestacks, affecting air quality and exacerbating health problems for people with asthma and other respiratory illnesses. They forced the district to start looking into reducing flaring four years ago, leading to Wednesday's vote.

"It's definitely a precedent," said Greg Karras of Communities for a Better Environment, an environmental group that has urged stricter regulations of refineries and issued a report Wednesday asserting that flares harm community health. "This will have a benefit in reducing the highest levels of pollutants, and it's a great health benefit. It was a complete victory for the community."

Refinery officials, who have been participating in meetings about the regulations while denying that flaring has created problems or were done routinely, said Wednesday they would not oppose the new standards. The new rules also require refineries to file annual plans detailing steps they have taken to reduce flaring.

"The refineries all along have been advising that we thought that the rule was unnecessary," said Bill Tanner, spokesman for the ConocoPhillips refinery in Rodeo. "We do not consider flares to be a significant source of air pollution."

Dennis Bolt of the Western States Petroleum Association, said refiners also did not believe flares were a health threat but they understood the community's concerns and agreed to the rules, which allow flaring during emergencies.

"When this issue about flaring surfaced in 2001, we did not believe that flaring caused health impacts, and we don't believe it today," Bolt said. "But we heard loud and clear what the people were saying, what the public policymakers were saying and what the air district was saying. We're trying to be sensitive to how people feel. We feel that we've learned enough where we can comply with it."

Flaring -- which looks like flames coming from a smokestack -- is caused by excess gases being burned off during emergencies or plant maintenance operations that involve shutting down or restarting units. But critics complained that some refineries burned off gases during routine operations, creating unnecessary emissions that can lead to ground-level ozone pollution and create health problems.

The district required flare monitoring in 2003, which has reduced pollution from about 8 tons of organic gases a day to 2 tons, Lee said. Bolt attributed most of that reduction to the installation of a new compressor at the Tesoro Golden Eagle Refinery east of Martinez, which enabled excess gases to be captured before they were released into flares.

Other refineries, which already had compressors, have been able to find ways to reduce flaring, Bolt said.

Kevin Golden, who represented the Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 342 and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 302, said workers had joined environmentalists to push for tougher oversight.

"When the refineries are flaring, the people who are closest to these flares are the workers on site," Golden said. "We see this as securing better employment in the future. When refineries modernize and are more efficient, they shut down less, and people stay on the job longer."

Bay Area Restricts 'Flaring'

Refineries' practice is found to pollute the air. Southland agency plans to set similar limits.

By Miguel Bustillo, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, July 21, 2005

San Francisco area smog officials on Wednesday approved the nation's first rule requiring oil refineries to reduce the air pollution they generate by flaring, or openly burning gases.

Southern California air quality officials plan to impose similar limitations later this year.

The regulation to reduce flaring, approved Wednesday by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, follows years of complaints by community groups in Richmond, where refineries were regularly burning excess gases.

After air quality officials agreed to monitor the practice, they found it was responsible for eight tons of pollution a day, including six tons of smog-forming volatile organic compounds.

The rule, which is being watched closely by air pollution officials around the country, requires refineries to develop detailed plans to reduce flaring, limiting it to emergency circumstances when releasing the gases is necessary for safety. Refineries that exceed limits for flaring have to file reports explaining why.

The extent of air pollution nationally from flaring remains unknown, some air quality officials said, because few states and cities track it, believing that the practice rarely occurs.

"Flares are an important safety-control device when refineries have excess gases" that they must burn off to avoid explosions, said Jack Broadbent, the chief executive officer of the Bay Area district. "But we had a situation where refineries were relying on flares as a routine way of running

the facility."

In the Los Angeles region, similar complaints about pollution from flaring in the South Bay spurred the South Coast Air Quality Management District to monitor the practice.

It also found that flaring emissions were worse than suspected, releasing chemicals responsible for smog and particle pollution.

As a result, South Coast officials expect to approve regulations this fall that would cap emissions from flaring and trigger fines for refineries that fail to comply.

"We are going to develop a rule that has a little more teeth" than the one approved by the Bay Area district, said Laki Tisopulos, assistant deputy executive officer in charge of new rules for the South Coast district.

Since the air quality agencies began monitoring flaring, refineries have made an effort to reduce the practice. Bay Area officials said daily emissions had been reduced by 75%, and South Coast officials said emissions dropped by as much as 70%.

Joe Sparano, president of the Western States Petroleum Assn., argued that the progress demonstrated that regulations were not needed.

But he said the oil industry could live with the regulations as long as they permitted some flaring to avoid safety problems and lengthy refinery shutdowns, which could affect California's already volatile gasoline prices.

Air district clamps down on flares from refineries

By Douglas Fischer, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Thurs., July 21, 2005

The days when local refineries could shunt waste petrochemicals to a smokestack, spark a flame and burn them into the atmosphere came to an official close Wednesday as air regulators approved the nation's first limits on the use of refinery flares.

Activists and county health officials called the near-unanimous decision a huge win for the region's air quality and for downwind communities' health.

"We've won our air district back," said a jubilant Greg Karras, senior scientist at Communities for a Better Environment, which pushed for years for the new rules. "They've won themselves a huge reduction in the very highest hours of pollution exposure ... and they've won some real health benefits."

Refiners supported the compromise measure but noted flarings' contribution to the region's overall air pollution remains minuscule.

Flaring pumps into the air unknown quantities of smog-forming hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides, plus other pollutants including sulfur dioxide, benzene, toluene and mercury. But the air district and refineries said Wednesday that upward of 98 percent of those pollutants are destroyed by incineration. And air district figures suggest flaring accounts for less than one one-thousandth of the region's total smog-forming emissions, compared to 45 percent for autos and trucks.

"Flares are essential safety devices. They are a key element of our industry's long-standing practice of safety first." said Joe Sparano, president of the Western States Petroleum Association. "The reality of flares is that they almost completely combust the gases involved."

Refineries use flares to burn off excess gas. In an emergency, when gases under extreme pressure must be immediately decompressed, flares offer the only safe way do that and reduce risk to workers, communities and the environment, refiners say.

Wednesday's rules do not challenge that. Instead, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District clamped down on the practice of flaring as a routine means to dispose of waste vapors.

The new rules require refineries to analyze root causes and notify the district for any large flaring events, develop a flaring minimization plan and submit an annual report evaluating all flares that emit more than 500 pounds of sulfur dioxide.

Flaring emissions have already dropped an estimated 75 percent from when the district started monitoring them in 2004, the district said.

The rules are expected to solidify those gains, which until now came from voluntary reductions. Other local air districts - particularly Los Angeles - and the state are watching closely. One analysis by the South Coast Air District in Los Angeles concluded that between 2 to 14 percent of all flaring events were true emergencies.

Total compliance cost for the five refineries covered by the rule ranges from \$1.4 million per year to \$10.6 million, mostly for equipment upgrades and emissions controls, according to district figures.

This has been long overdue, said Contra Costa County Supervisor Mark Desaulnier, who sits both on the local air district board and the state air board. Its really a threshold - a moment for the district to put us back as national leaders.

But it was clear from Wednesday's testimony that many residents of the largely low-income communities near refineries attribute a host of ailments, including asthma and breast cancer, to flares.

And although they were happy with this first step, they wanted more to be done.

Richmond resident Belen Ramirez-Rocha, a babysitter, described for the board the tormenting skin conditions and breathing difficulties she saw in children under her care.

Its not a coincidence, she said told the board in Spanish, that the illnesses I just described happened after a flaring accident put tons of chemicals into the air

Livermore fire blew past nuclear lab

By Roger Hoskins, staff writer

Modesto Bee, Thursday, July 21, 2005

A wind-blown wildfire in Livermore that burned past a nuclear weapons laboratory and about 500 homes without damaging them, and left smoke hovering over San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, was fully contained Wednesday, authorities said.

The fire, which began about 4:30 p.m. Tuesday and quickly spread through rolling grasslands in the windy Altamont Pass, was estimated at 10,250 acres Wednesday, said Chopper Snyder, a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection dispatcher.

Two outbuildings were destroyed by flames, but the blaze left the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory untouched after an initial scare, Snyder said.

No homes were threatened and no injuries were reported, he said.

The Northern San Joaquin Valley felt the brunt of the fire's plume of ashes.

Modesto had a two-hour spike in particulate pollutants Tuesday night with readings at 67 and 133 parts per million. The 24-hour average is usually about 15 for this time of the year.

Readings were back to normal by Wednesday afternoon, according to meteorologist Sean Ferreria.

CDF Battalion Chief Dennis Townsend said the fire hazard is growing along the central Sierra and grasslands covered by the Madera, Mariposa, Merced unit.

"The fuel moistures are dropping rapidly," he said.

Townsend said manzanita and other plants are drying out.

"We have a tremendous crop of grass and it's growing in places where it isn't usually found," he said. "Fortunately, we haven't had any wind events."

Townsend defined wind events as sustained wind over 10mph. The high winds and hazards of thunderstorms are expected to reach their peak in the next few weeks.

He said the state's forestry units had their fingers crossed that "things wouldn't click together for a big fire."

The Mariposa station has fought about 28 fires this week, 20 in the grasslands and eight in the high country, about normal for this time of year. Townsend said all of the area's firefighting assets, personnel, equipment and airborne vehicles are still in place, a critical factor in containing fires as the hazard increases.

Townsend cautioned people to stay inside during the hottest part of the day and to limit fires to designated areas and to do all cooking inside, if possible.

The fire at the Altamont Pass "grew from a small spot alongside the road to 3,000 acres in about an hour," said Bill Morrison, an assistant chief with the department of forestry.

The fast-moving fire had prompted officials at the nuclear laboratory to declare an operational emergency, allowing agencies from outside the lab to come in and help protect an experimental test site.

The fire's cause was under investigation.

Poll says legislators should act on climate Californians believe impact of warming has already begun

Maria Alicia Gaura, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, July 21, 2005

A strong majority of Californians, rejecting Bush administration assertions that global warming is not yet a proven phenomenon, believe the effects of climate change have already begun and want state legislators to take action to lessen human activities that scientists say are warming the planet, a new poll shows.

The survey conducted by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California indicates that 86 percent of state residents believe that global warming will affect current or future generations. Of those respondents, 57 percent say the changes are already under way.

Only 9 percent of Californians overall, and 20 percent of California Republicans, say that global warming "will never happen," according to the survey.

"I've been polling on environmental issues for two decades, and several things (in the study results) jumped out at me," said Mark Baldassare, director of research at the San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute.

"The first was the high level of concern about global warming, and secondly the desire to have the state take an active role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions," Baldassare said. "And third, the willingness of the public to make lifestyle and financial sacrifices for the sake of improving air quality."

The poll, which surveyed 2,502 adults between June 28 and July 12, was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and is the second in a three-year series intended to measure public opinion about education, population and environment issues.

It is also the sixth annual survey on the California environment conducted by the institute since June 2000.

Among other study findings:

-- Three in four respondents say that global warming is a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" threat to California's economy and quality of life, potentially causing increased air pollution, droughts, coastal erosion and flooding.

-- 77 percent of respondents favor a state law requiring automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new cars beginning in 2009, and 69 percent support a plan to reduce those emissions from cars and industry by more than 80 percent over the next 50 years.

-- A majority of Californians also favor developing a hydrogen fueling network across the state, and incentives aimed at installing solar systems on 1 million California buildings by 2018.

The poll also contained bad news for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger despite his support for the hydrogen, solar and emission reductions plans.

Schwarzenegger's overall approval rating dropped from a robust 57 percent in June 2004 to 34 percent in the current poll -- even lower than President Bush's 38 percent approval rating among the poll's respondents. And 51 percent of respondents said the state is "headed in the wrong direction," according to the poll.

"This kind of swing we're seeing in the governor's ratings is very unusual," Baldassare said. "He had sky-high approval ratings, particularly for a Republican governor in a state that is more Democratic than Republican in nature."

The poll did not explore why respondents' opinions about the governor had changed, and Baldassare speculated that the volatility could stem from a perception that Schwarzenegger promised more than he could deliver.

"He created very high expectations that over time have been difficult to maintain," Baldassare said.

But when asked about Bush and Schwarzenegger's environmental policies, Bush was disapproved by 54 percent of poll respondents compared to Schwarzenegger's disapproval rating of 35 percent. Both men's approval ratings on environmental issues came in at 32 percent.

Californians' distrust of federal environmental policy was further expressed by 54 percent of respondents, who favor having state government create its own policies to address global warming.

Although only 35 percent thought state government should have primary responsibility for setting air quality standards, just 17 percent of respondents thought the federal government was up to the job.

Environmental concerns are widespread, but it has apparently taken high gasoline prices to inspire state residents to drive less.

High prices at the pump have caused 43 percent of Californians to cut back on driving, according to the poll. And 64 percent have "seriously" considered getting a more fuel-efficient car, and 9 percent already drive such a vehicle.

Lower-income Californians were more likely to have cut back on driving, with 51 percent of those with incomes under \$40,000 per year having cut back, compared to 31 percent of those with incomes above \$80,000 annually.

Baldassare said he hopes the poll results will inspire state policymakers to tackle the issues of high concern to California voters, even if those issues have not traditionally been viewed as a state responsibility.

California by itself is the sixth-largest economy on Earth, Baldassare noted, and efforts here "could potentially have major worldwide impacts."

The entire report will be available on the Public Policy Institute of California's web site today, at ppic.org.

We're fed up with pollution and willing to pay for solutions

Poll finds strong support for governor's proposals

By Hank Shaw
Stockton Record, Thursday, July 21, 2005

SACRAMENTO -- Central Valley residents of all ethnicities and political persuasions are worried about high gas prices, global warming and pollution -- and they are willing to pay more to drive fuel-efficient vehicles and clean up California's environment, according to poll results to be released today.

A survey of more than 2,500 Californians conducted from June 28 to July 12 in five different languages by the Public Policy Institute of California found widespread support for tougher environmental standards, including three proposals championed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Californians support the governor's plans to lend state support to promote solar power and hydrogen fuel cells even though his overall approval ratings remain poor: Just 41 percent of likely voters think Schwarzenegger is doing a good job.

"Schwarzenegger's problem is more global and has little to do with his environmental record," said poll director Mark Baldassare, who noted that 54 percent of Californians oppose the special election Schwarzenegger has called for this November.

On Schwarzenegger's environmental proposals:

71 percent of likely voters support his proposal to toughen emission standards for the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Its weakest support is among Republicans, 69 percent of whom still support the idea. A majority of Californians think global warming has already begun. 76 percent of likely voters and 69 percent of Republicans support state subsidies to install solar power in homes and offices. 55 percent of likely voters favor state support in developing hydrogen fuel cells. Republican support on this initiative is soft, with 47 percent supporting it and 35 percent opposing.

One of the more striking findings of the survey was the growing awareness among Central Valley residents of the region's air quality, which is among the worst in America.

In June 2000, only 28 percent of Valley residents -- defined as people living from Shasta County to Kern County -- thought air pollution was a "big problem." Now 45 percent feel that way. Nearly two-thirds of all Valley residents think the air has grown worse in the past decade.

Most Valley residents think -- and scientists agree -- that the causes of all this bad air are vehicle emissions, residential development and agriculture.

To stop this, Central Valley residents overwhelmingly favor tougher emissions standards on the cars and trucks they drive, even if it means paying more for the vehicle. Statewide, Californians of all regions and political stripes feel the same, the poll found.

All regions and all groups except Republicans favor tougher air pollution standards for agriculture. Republicans are split on that issue. And all groups support stricter standards on the trucking and railroad industries, even if it makes it more costly for these groups to operate.

High gasoline prices, now averaging about \$2.45 in Stockton, are also affecting Californians' behavior, the survey shows.

According to the poll, 43 percent of Californians say they're driving less because of the increases. Drivers like Janine Ibarra and her family are typical.

"My son has a 65 Mustang and he doesn't drive around as much as usual because it is a gas guzzler," Ibarra said as she filled up her sport utility vehicle at a Safeway in Tracy. "I do notice we aren't filling up as much."

The poll found a majority of Californians are seriously considering buying a hybrid car even if it means paying more.

Tracy resident Annette Freschi says it's too hard for her to restrict her driving, so she may go hybrid, which she says will save her gas money while clearing her conscience about polluting the air.

"We're concerned for the environment," Freschi said.

Tracy Toyota general sales manager Steve Moroz says a year ago he sold around eight hybrid Priuses a month. Now he's selling about 20, and the wait to buy a new hybrid SUV Highlander could be more than a year.

"We're seeing a huge jump in hybrid sales -- the surge has just been incredible," Moroz said. "With the economy the way it is, people have really been turned on to the fuel economy."

Staff Writer Erin Sherbert contributed to this report.

Majority in state wants climate action Survey finds 86 percent think a warming trend will affect their own or future generations.

By Don Thompson, Associated Press

Orange County Register, Thursday, July 21, 2005

SACRAMENTO - A strong majority of Californians believe global warming will have a serious effect on their lives, are convinced human activity is to blame and want the state to address the problem independently of the federal government, according to a poll released Thursday.

The survey by the nonprofit Public Policy Institute of California found 86 percent of residents think the warming trend will affect their own or future generations, and 57 percent say it's already being felt.

Three-quarters say warming will seriously affect the state's economy and quality of life, with heavy majorities saying problems could include worsened air pollution, droughts, coastal erosion and flooding.

The telephone survey of 2,502 adult residents found 54 percent want California to act on its own to slow global warming, without waiting for the federal government.

Specific California programs have stronger support: 77 percent like a state law requiring auto manufacturers to cut so-called greenhouse gases in new cars starting in 2009, while 69 percent support Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's call to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent over the next 50 years. His "million solar roofs" plan was backed by 76 percent, and his "hydrogen highway" proposal by 55 percent.

Still, Schwarzenegger's overall approval rating was 34 percent, down from 40 percent in May, and his environmental record was supported by 32 percent. Slim majorities think California is

heading in the wrong direction and oppose the special election Schwarzenegger has set for November.

The survey was conducted between June 28 and July 12, paid for by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and has an error margin of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

It also found residents trust state government more than the federal government on environmental matters, aggravated by a majority's disagreement with President George W. Bush.

San Francisco officials approve groundbreaking smog rules

San Diego Union Tribune, Thursday, July 21, 2005

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Oil refineries will have to cut the air pollution they generate while burning gases under a groundbreaking rule approved by smog regulators.

The rule, which the Bay Area Air Quality Management District adopted Wednesday, is the first of its kind in the nation. Air quality officials throughout the country are closely monitoring it, and regulators in Southern California aim to impose similar restrictions later this year.

Community groups in Richmond had long complained about flares, which occur when refineries burn excess gases. Air quality officials found that flaring spewed out eight tons of pollution a day, including six tons of volatile organic compounds, which contribute to smog.

Under the new Bay Area rule, refineries can let off flares only for safety reasons. Violators will have to file reports explaining why they exceed limits.

"Flares are an important safety-control device when refineries have excess gases" that they must burn off to avoid explosions, said Jack Broadbent, the chief executive officer of the Bay Area district. "But we had a situation where refineries were relying on flares as a routine way of running the facility."

In the Los Angeles region, the South Coast Air Quality Management District began monitoring flaring in response to complaints about the practice at refineries in coastal communities south of Los Angeles. Flaring emissions turned out to be worse than suspected.

South Coast officials intend to impose new rules this fall capping the excess emissions and fining violating refineries.

"We are going to develop a rule that has a little more teeth" than the one approved by the Bay Area district, said Laki Tisopulos, assistant deputy executive officer in charge of new rules for the South Coast district.

Refineries have tried to cut flaring since air quality agencies began monitoring the practice. In the Bay Area, emissions have plummeted 75 percent, and in the Los Angeles region, 70 percent.

Joe Sparano, president of the Western States Petroleum Association, said these reductions show that the regulations are unnecessary. He said, however, that the oil industry wouldn't object to them as long as flaring is allowed to avoid safety problems and refinery shutdowns, which could further inflate the state's gasoline prices.

[Letters to the Modesto Bee, Thursday, July 21, 2005](#)

Developers out to pave over our valley

In the July 14 article about land trusts ("Land trusts becoming common in valley," Page B-1), Bill Zoslocki, president of the Building Industry Association of Central California, had the audacity to call supporters of farmland mitigation short-sighted and selfish. Supporters of farmland mitigation care about preserving farmland and protecting our national food supply. They are generally concerned with the overall long-term health of the valley.

It is Mr. Zoslocki and the developers he represents who are short-sighted and selfish. Their ultimate goal is to pave over every inch of farmland and open space in this valley. They use their vast financial resources to influence politicians and defeat any measure aimed at protecting farmland. They build McMansions that most people who live and work in the valley cannot afford.

Their goal is to maximize profits now, and let future generations worry about crowded conditions, poor air and water quality, and the loss of the ability to grow our own food.

Mr. Zoslocki states that officials should focus on providing adequate housing. What he really means is that politicians should gut environmental laws and officials should avoid scrutinizing development projects in order to pave over farmland at an even faster pace.

Robert Smith, Patterson

Ag doing its part to help valley air

In response to the editorial "Ag groups should fund better pollution studies" (July 1, Page B-6): The agriculture community has asked government to use sound science when making policy regulating farmers. A perfect example of when this failed is the recent decision by the San Joaquin Valley Regional Air Pollution Control District on how much pollution comes from dairies.

Based on 75-year-old data, emissions estimates for dairy operations were set at 12.8pounds of reactive organic gases per head per year. The dairy industry invested significantly in new research in California, finding the emissions were half the district's estimate.

Environmentalists disagreed with this current and sound research, and so the air district decided to use a study completed in Britain. Using that, and a compromise with environmental groups, they came up with a vague and flawed number.

Making everybody happy is not the way the air district should be evaluating science. The agricultural industry spends millions every year to develop practices to produce more with less. Among the hundreds of examples is the almond industry, working hard to reduce dust from harvesting; and all Central Valley agriculture spending millions to monitor storm and irrigation runoff. Plain and simple, agriculture is doing its part and more.

The problem with ag? We have not spent money on finding out what we contribute to the enhancement of our environment. That is what we should be doing.

Wayne Zipser, executive manager, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau
Modesto

[Visalia Times-Delta editorial, Thursday, July 21, 2005:](#)

Agree on air data for dairies

Cows or cars: Which one produces more bad air?

Ridiculous question? Yes. But that is one argument among policymakers who are developing strategies for improving our air quality.

The debate about how much dairies contribute to air pollution is threatening to distract from the problem and trivialize the issue. As with other serious problems, the solution will only be served by using sound science and generally accepted standards. Instead, we are getting exaggerated claims among various interests.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is preparing to establish a standard for reducing air pollution by dairies. The dairy industry challenges the standard, of course. But so does one of the scientists the district used to establish the standard.

So far, there seems to be little common ground when the discussion turns to dairies and air quality. There appears to be no consistent measure of emissions from dairies, but that isn't stopping people from making comparisons, such as "cows pollute more than cars." Nor is it preventing the dairy industry from digging in its heels and resisting measures that would improve things.

All sides ought to return to square one and get some research they trust.

To do that, the various interests will have to abandon their preconceptions.

First, it must be recognized that dairies do produce gases that contribute to poor air quality. The question is how much. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has been trying to calculate that amount. That's commendable, but the district's current estimate that a cow produces 20.6 pounds of smog-producing gas a year is based on incomplete data and a study in England.

The dairy industry says that number is way too high and cites a 1930 study that determined 12.8 pounds was the right amount. The dairy industry said that figure is wrong, too, and proposes 3.4 pounds.

Obviously, the various interests are a long way from consensus.

All sides ought to cooperate on reliable research so at least they are arguing on the same page.

Meanwhile, the dairy industry must acknowledge that dairies are a source of air pollution and that mitigation is necessary. It does no good for the dairy industry to shrug off its responsibility for cleaner air just because other sources are bigger polluters.

Some of those sources, such as vehicle emissions, have already made improvements. Dairy and agriculture in general must do its part.

Unfortunately, when the air pollution control district focuses on one element or industry, it makes it appear that the industry is picking on that industry.

Statements such as "cows pollute more than cars," are not a healthy contribution to the discussion. Pointing a finger at the plume from a smokestack doesn't reduce the emissions from one's own tailpipe.

We urge the dairy industry and the air quality policymakers to agree on a standard for measuring emissions, establish their data and then work together on a plan for improvement.

After all, who cares if cows, cars or people are the biggest polluters? The point is that all of them can and should do things that improve air quality.