

Clearing the air

By Sarah Villicana, The Porterville Recorder
February 10, 2005

TULARE - Farmers and dairymen touring the world's largest agricultural exposition Wednesday learned the ins-and-outs of state and federal air pollution regulations - and the restrictions they're now facing based on the state of the region's abysmal air quality.

With Valley air rated as some of the worst in the nation, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says California growers and dairymen should look for ways to reduce emissions and prepare for more state and federal regulations in the years to come.

The state of the region's air was the topic of a pair of sessions Wednesday at the World Ag Expo: "Air Quality: Public Perception or Reality?" and "Clearing the Air for Dairy Products."

"The air district says we need to reduce 34 tons per day of volatile emissions to meet attainment," said Roger Isom of the Growers Association.

Some individuals at Wednesday's seminars were curious as to what they as farmer can really do to lower emissions and facilitate cleaner air.

"We are still in the process of looking at what will work, in terms of reducing those emissions," said air specialist Dr. Frank Mitloehner. "We don't have bottom line answers. Research is extremely important to the outcome."

Mitloehner said scientists have already learned much from ongoing studies on the sources of a type of dairy particulate emissions known as PM10.

"For example, we now know that emissions from lagoons are not as bad as we thought it would be," said Mitloehner, adding that lagoons make up about 10 to 20 percent of total emissions from dairies. "These studies take time that, unfortunately, legislation does not allow us to have."

As of Dec. 31, 2004, farmers with 100 or more acres of contiguous farmland were to submit a management plan describing how they intend to reduce dust particulate matter from getting into the air. The same deadline was shared by dairy operators, who were also required to submit a final Conservation Management Practices Plan, or CMP, to the air district.

Senate Bill 709 gives the air district authority to enforce necessary measures to improve the quality of Valley air. In addition, any farm equipment with an internal combustion engine must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency; and by 2006, farmers may only use the ultra-low sulfur diesel instead of low and agricultural burning is scheduled for a complete ban.

Chipping and shredding are advised methods of non-burning.

"The air in the San Joaquin Valley is rated at extreme non-attainment," said the air district's Dave Jones. "That puts us in the worst category possible (based upon the federal Clean Air Act) largely because of our geography and growth."

Jones addressed the reality of Valley air and said the management plans will help the air district reach an annual 5-percent reduction in PM10, as required by the EPA.

Unpaved roads, harvesting activities and farm equipment, and manure from corrals are all part of the PM10 pollution problem.

Growers are required to implement CMPs in five categories; land preparation, harvest activities, unpaved roads, unpaved equipment yards and other cultural practices.

Those affected by the rules heard slightly better news and were told to water dirt roads, consider night farming and reduce pruning as part of their overall plan for keeping the air breathable.

Dairy and farm owners who have not yet filed their CMPs with the air district were strongly advised to do so to avoid facing fines and penalties.

Report: San Joaquin Valley receiving few federal dollars

By BRIAN SKOLOFF, Associated Press Writer
in the S.F. Chronicle, February 9, 2005

Fresno, CA (AP) -- California's vast San Joaquin Valley has long been compared to the nation's Appalachian region for its levels of poverty, unemployment and lack of public funding for roads, schools and health care.

In fact, according to preliminary data from a congressional report released Tuesday, the valley suffered from a higher poverty rate in 2000 than the Appalachian region _ 20.5 percent compared to 13.6 percent _ yet received 21 percent less federal money per capita.

It's a contradiction valley congressional members say needs to be reconciled.

"We, I think, have always felt for many years that the San Joaquin Valley is short changed in the amount of federal funds received compared to other parts of California and other parts of the country," Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said during a news conference Tuesday.

"Too often the valley has been treated like a step child," Costa added.

The preliminary report, requested by six valley congressional representatives, including Costa, was released a day after President Bush proposed his \$2.57 trillion budget.

Per capita federal expenditures for the valley in 2002 _ including loans, retirement, disability, grants and wages _ were \$4,736, more than \$2,000 less than the per capita expenditures for the nation, according to the report.

The U.S Census Bureau considers seven of the valley's eight counties _ Fresno, Kern, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare _ to be metro areas. Kings County is considered rural.

"Metro counties in the United States, on average, receive higher per capita federal expenditure rates than the national rate. This was not the case in the San Joaquin Valley," the report states.

Kern County had the highest per capita expenditures in 2000 at \$5,667, followed by Kings County, with the region's second smallest population, at \$5,550.

Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, said there needs to be a fair balance of funds both nationally and statewide if the valley is ever to overcome its problems.

"It's a new day in the Central Valley for us ... where we're all fighting together for a common goal, that's fairness," Cardoza said, calling the report the "first bipartisan" effort by valley congressional leaders to work on behalf of the entire region.

The lawmakers stressed the need for federal funds to help make health care more available, deal with air pollution _ some of worst in the nation _ and enhance infrastructure such as roads and clean water.

One such move was quashed last year when delegates failed to get interstate status for Highway 99, the main north-south corridor slicing through the valley's expanse of farmlands. The move could have helped secure additional federal dollars to widen the roadway.

"If we can do that, it improves air quality by easing the flow of traffic through our communities," said Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, adding that the project will also attract more businesses to the area.

Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, noted that the lawmakers are not asking for additional federal spending, but are simply "advocating for a fair share of the existing funds."

Also involved in the push for more federal funds to the valley are Reps. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, and Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield.

Tim Ransdell, director of the California Institute for Federal Policy Research, said additional federal funding will be hard to come by but this bipartisan effort is a step in the right direction.

"Every member of Congress is pushing for their share of the budget pie ... It's a long, slow, arduous process to seek and win federal dollars," Ransdell said.

"But by getting together and speaking with one voice rather than several, members of Congress from this area are taking a strong step to move federal receipts in a positive direction for their constituents," he added. "The cohesiveness, cooperation and bipartisanship can make great strides, especially if a unified vision is maintained for an extended period of time."

Dairy suit could trigger future action

Ag Expo speaker details lake pollution lawsuit in Waco

By Luis Hernandez, Staff writer

Tulare Advance-Register, February 9, 2005

The outcome of a lawsuit filed against 14 Texas dairymen could prompt future legal action in the dairy industry, a panelist at the World Ag Expo said Tuesday.

Environmental Agriculture Engineer Norman Mullin said a defeat for the dairy industry in a suit the city of Waco filed alleging water pollution in a lake could trigger future lawsuits.

"It would make [the dairy industry] an easy target," Mullin said. "You could have battles going on all over where the dairies are concentrated."

Tulare County is the biggest dairy county in the world.

Speaking at the expo as part of a seminar, Mullin said the city of Waco filed a suit alleging water pollution in Lake Waco produced by discharge from 14 dairies in central Texas. Just in the discovery portion, the suit has caused the dairymen to spend \$1.5 million in legal fees.

The suit seeks compensation to operate a \$45 million water treatment plant, which was built against the advice of the lead engineer in the building project, Mullin said.

Mullin, who is working to defend the suit, said the suit is politically motivated because only 14 dairies were named in the suit. There are almost 100 dairies in a four-county area near the lake.

"They are the leaders of the dairy industry," he said.

Already, some dairies have settled, agreeing to city inspections when state officials have their visits at the dairies. That's just one of the many conditions in the confidential agreement.

But, the rest of the dairies have decided to fight the suit, Mullin said.

"They had no choice but to draw their line in the sand," he said. "It's a necessary fight."

And Mullin said he is convinced the dairymen will be on the winning side.

"The dairy industry will prevail, but there will be a lot of casualties," he said.

Mullin's conviction comes from the merits of the lawsuit. Mullin said the city treated everything as a violation. But the dairymen have complied with those.

If, as Mullin predicts, the dairymen win the suit, there will be plenty of positive outcome for the dairy industry.

Most notably, the public will learn there is one regulatory entity in Texas and that there is a need for sound science.

"Question the science," Mullin said. "It's your livelihood at stake."

Whether gas or wood-burning, fireplaces today accentuate decor Fireplace fancies

By Patricia Jiayi Ho

Visalia Times-Delta, February 10, 2005

Although people have been cozying up by the hearth since before time, advances in technology mean that you no longer have to settle for the smoky, utilitarian fireplaces of yore.

A new generation of gas and wood fireplaces boasts features that help them look better and burn cleaner.

"I've been doing this since 1979," said Bob Haun, owner of Buck Stove and Spa. "We used to see little black boxes, but this stuff now is gorgeous."

The fireplace industry has come a long way since the days of mortar-and-brick masonry fireplaces with foundations and chimneys. Manufacturers have recognized that fireplaces are integral parts of the aesthetics of a home and have outfitted their furnaces with a variety of trims and options for customization.

Trims come in 24-karat gold that needs no polishing, black cast iron, hammered nickel and more. Even the bricks in the firebox can be arranged in a herringbone pattern.

Interior designer David Gonzales said all this attention to detail is well deserved

"Fireplaces are frequently a primary focal point in homes," Gonzales said. "Seating in living rooms is centered around it."

The way your fireplace is styled can add aesthetic value to the decor of your home.

Insurance broker Turner Houston had the mantel of his fireplace made from river rock that he and a mason picked up from the Kaweah River.

"It's very natural-looking," he said. "The theme of my house is early California, and I think the fireplace follows the same theme."

Gas fireplaces

With new [air quality rules](#) that affect when, which and where solid-fuel burning fireplaces can be used, many are turning to gas for their combustion needs.

"Gas fireplaces make up about 80 percent of our business," Haun said.

In addition to burning cleaner, gas fireplaces or inserts do away with many of the inconveniences associated with their wood-burning predecessors.

Gas does not need to be chopped and seasoned. Storing stacks of wood is unnecessary, as is carrying it into the house. Maintaining a gas fireplace is easier, as ashes do not need to be taken out, and the chimney does not need to be swept.

Gas appliances also add a new level of convenience. They can be turned on with the push of a button, and a wall-mounted thermostat does away with the need to constantly tend the fire.

Many come with a remote control.

"Literally, you can sit on your easy chair, push a button and turn the fire on," Haun said.

Priced between \$600 and \$2,500, gas fireplaces also are surprisingly affordable.

Another advantage of a gas fireplace is that they can be installed just about anywhere in your home, chimney or no chimney. Direct-vent fireplaces can be vented through a wall - as opposed to the roof - allowing for much greater flexibility in placement. They can even be used as a room divider, with the fire visible from three sides.

If you already have an open fireplace, but want something that burns more efficiently, a gas or wood insert may be the solution. Unlike conventional fireplaces, inserts come with glass doors that seal the firebox, keeping hot air inside the room and combustion by-products out.

"More and more people are finding out about the benefits of turning their old dusty wood-burning fireplace into an efficient gas fireplace insert," said Terry Flynn, purchasing manager with Westwood Distributors.

"It adds beauty and warmth and can even save money on your gas bill."

Authentic wood-burning fireplace

Despite the conveniences of gas, some insist that there is nothing like the scent and crackle of an authentic fireplace. As the saying goes, wood heats three times: when you cut it, when you haul it and when it is burned.

Newer wood-burning appliances come with many of the trims that gas fireplaces do. They have also been developed to burn more completely and provide more heating.

Fireboxes designed for better airflow means, that more wood is transformed into heat rather than ash and smoke.

Wood-burning appliances sold today all comply with Environmental Protection Agency Standards, meaning they put out 4.5 grams per hour or less.

Some gas and wood fireplaces are so efficient that they have reached status of being heaters.

Traditional open-hearth fireplaces provide a small amount of radiant heat in immediate areas, while most of the heat escapes up the chimney. Newer wood and gas fireplaces take in cool air from the room, heat it in the fireboxes and then blow the warm air into the home.

Houston, who uses his fireplace about three times a week, has a standard wood burning fireplace that is equipped with a gas jet. With the wood-burning regulations, he is considering having a gas insert installed.

"The good appliances are heater-rated," Haun said. "Here fireplaces do not replace central heating because we need air conditioning, too. But in some coastal towns, they use fireplaces as sole sources of heat in the house."

District probes possible leak from Shell refinery

The Bakersfield Californian, February 10, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is investigating a possible leak Tuesday night at the Shell Bakersfield Refinery on Rosedale Highway.

The district received some calls around 6:30 p.m. about an odor in the area of the refinery, said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the agency.

She said an inspector with the district tracked the odor to a tank at the refinery.

"Apparently, there was some kind of leak in the vacuum system," she said.

She didn't know what the tank contained.

Shell spokesman Alan Spencer said Wednesday that the refinery was notified Tuesday night of odors coming from the area of the plant on Gibson Street, north of Rosedale Highway.

He said personnel checked the tanks in the area and were unable to determine what, if anything, was leaking. He said they did replace a valve on one of the tanks containing oil.

The refinery is investigating what might have caused the odors, according to Spencer.

Turner said the air pollution control district is looking into the matter as well, and that if it finds the refinery violated any air quality regulations, Shell could be fined.

Meeting Delay for Hahn Task Force Stirs Concern

By Deborah Schoch

Los Angeles Times, February 10, 2005

A task force formed by Mayor James K. Hahn to reduce port pollution will not meet again until March 2 and 3, reducing the likelihood that Hahn's long-promised pollution-slashing plan will be completed by the March 8 mayoral primary.

The task force had been expected to present a plan to the mayor by last Dec. 31, but the process has been slowed by the time-consuming process of collecting and analyzing information, task force members said. The date was also pushed back because of commissioners' scheduling conflicts, said Arley Baker, the port's director of public affairs.

The new dates, announced Wednesday by the port, immediately prompted concern among community groups because three of their four representatives on the task force cannot attend meetings on those days.

"I have a significant concern that not only is this meeting later than we expected, but there will be very limited community and environmental representation on the task force that day," said task force member Gail Ruderman Feuer, senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Told of the timing conflicts, Baker said Wednesday he will confer with the two commissioners who chair the task force.

Hahn pledged in 2001 to hold the line on air pollution from the Port of Los Angeles, but emissions have continued to grow, angering activists near the port and along truck-choked freeways. When port staff members produced a controversial plan last summer, Hahn rejected it and instead assembled a task force with members from regulatory agencies, industry, unions, environmentalists and community groups.

Most of the work is being done by a smaller group made up of experts from the port, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the state Air Resources Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The fast-growing Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex is now the single largest air polluter in the region.

Letter to the Editor in The Bakersfield Californian, February 10, 2005

He's looking out for us

A writer from Tehachapi complained that Sen. Dean Florez had a problem with political nitpicking and that he should stop worrying about Kern County and work on stopping the state government from taking our local monies.

Apparently the writer does not have his facts straight. Sen. Florez was only one of two elected representatives who supported Proposition 65 last November which would allow us, the people, to decide where our local monies went.

Instead, the other legislators (yes, Republicans included), switched to Proposition 1A and pretended Proposition 65 wasn't on the ballot and convinced the voters of Kern County to let Sacramento continue to steal our money.

I do so appreciate that Sen. Florez is looking out for us. If we left it up to our supervisors, we will be overcome by L.A.'s waste and anyone else who wants to dump on us. You've got to admit, there appears to be some lucrative deals being struck and some pockets being lined. It sure smells -- in more ways than one.

Without intervention by Sen. Florez, we may all have to move up to Tehachapi and join the letter writer up there, so that we, too, will have nice clean water and fresh air, sludge-free. No wonder he doesn't share the same concerns as the rest of us on the valley floor. Does he have any extra bedrooms?

-- **SHERRY GENTRY, Bakersfield**

Letter to the Editor in the San Francisco Chronicle, February 10, 2005

Editor -- Re "Mercury in fish poses heart risk for middle-aged men, study says" (Feb. 8). While the rest of the nation is fighting mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants, oil refineries are a significant source of mercury in the Bay Area. The water board charged with keeping mercury out of the bay has the legal responsibility and technical know-how to curtail mercury pollution from these refineries. Yet, just as the EPA succumbed to pressure from industry groups ("EPA cooked mercury rule," Feb. 4), our water board has succumbed to industry lobbying as well. The board's new toothless plan relies on mercury naturally drifting out of the bay over the next 120 years, a plan that even the EPA is on record opposing.

Adding insult to injury, on Wednesday, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board will consider yet another mercury loophole for refineries. In addition to promoting fish-consumption advisories, shouldn't our officials reduce the mercury entering our waters?

Sejal Choksi

Director, San Francisco Baykeeper

San Francisco

Letter to the Editor in the Modesto Bee, February 10, 2005

Blame industry, not cows, for pollution

The wind blows Bay Area pollution into the valley, then the pollution sits in the valley. I got a good laugh while reading The Bee ("Bad air blamed on burping bovine," Jan.28, Page A-1). Cows create pollution!

If we believe that, we are as stupid as the degenerates in Sacramento think we are. I have trouble accepting that The Bee is willing to go along with such a delusion.

Most of us know the factories in the Bay Area, such as refineries in Richmond and Martinez, are forced to "buy" credits for the amount of pollution they expel. They can buy additional credits to put out more pollution. The real story is who gets that money, how is it accounted for, who is being paid off and how is that money really used? Don't get me wrong, we need industry. But why the scam?

Modesto