

Smog plumes waft in Valley's heat

Breezes carry huge doses of Fresno pollution to outlying areas.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Sunday, July 17, 2005

The suddenly torrid summer is causing smog violations all over the San Joaquin Valley with at least 10 monitors recording unhealthy levels each day since Wednesday.

No place has been smoggier this year than Arvin in Kern County, but other places now are taking turns spiking high pollution numbers. On Friday, it was the Sierra Skypark in northwest Fresno. On Thursday, the spotlight was on Bakersfield.

Even Sequoia National Park, far from city traffic jams, had two violations last week.

The corrosive smog hangs aground and builds in stale, hot air. The National Weather Service is calling for a high of 108 today and Monday, as well as 100-plus readings throughout the week.

The high temperature Saturday was 109.

"We're sitting here frying under a ridge of high pressure," said Weather Service meteorologist Jeff Myers. "There's not much air movement at all."

But that does not mean pollution stands still.

Stewing in a heated brew of trapped chemicals, bad-air plumes wander the Valley on light summer breezes. They carry huge doses of rush-hour pollution from Fresno to small towns such as Parlier in eastern Fresno County.

"It tends to peak earlier in the day toward Sierra Skypark," said supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "Later on, it turns around and goes east. You see ozone spikes in places like Parlier, Clovis and Arvin." Arvin, downwind of Bakersfield, has recorded 16 health violations this year. That's more violations than the four monitors combined in Fresno and Clovis, a metropolitan area of more than 500,000 residents.

The July heat wave and the dirty-air binge have jolted the Valley, because mild temperatures and cleansing breezes in May and June kept the air cleaner. As a result, the Valley has a total of only 21 bad-air days. In many years, the total is twice as high by mid-July.

"We had more mixing in the atmosphere during June," said Shipp. "We've still got a ways to go this summer."

Indeed, late July, August and September are prime times for ozone, the main ingredient of smog. Ozone forms when gases from sources such as vehicles combine in heat and sunlight.

It is basically invisible and odorless, hanging in the Valley's murky haze, which contains tiny bits of smoke, soot, dust, moisture and chemicals.

The gas attacks the skin, eyes and lungs. Microscopic damage in the lungs can turn into scarring with years of exposure.

The health effects are hardest on children, the elderly and those who already have lung problems.

No health advisories have been issued this year, but air officials advise residents to avoid smog-making activities, such as driving, and strenuous outdoor activities from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

When the sun goes down, ozone stops forming. In a twist of atmospheric chemistry, smog-making gases coming from cars actually scavenge ozone and reduce it to very low levels overnight.

Sequoia National Park does not have a lot of evening traffic, so overnight ozone readings can remain much higher than in downtown Fresno.

But Fresno has a big daytime problem with smog. All three of the city's monitors showed smog violations on Friday. Neighboring Clovis did, too.

The 100-plus-degree streak is five days long now, but Fresno has gone much longer. The city reached 100 or higher for 21 of 22 days in July 2003, peaking at 107 three times during that stretch.

Long July heat waves are not unusual, meteorologists said.

"If you were to combine June and July," said meteorologist Jan Null, who runs a consulting business called Golden Gate Weather Service, "you'd probably get a pretty average number of 100-degree days for those two months."

As heat keeps up, lights go out

Blackouts no surprise as Valley temperatures top 100.

By Tim Eberly / The Fresno Bee

When Tim Lueth lived in Wisconsin, rain and lightning almost always meant a power outage, too.

Now that Lueth lives in Fresno, things have changed.

Thunderstorms are few and far between here. But Lueth now expects to part ways with electricity when the temperature climbs into triple digits - as it often does in the summer months.

So, when Lueth came home from work Friday afternoon, he wasn't surprised that his air conditioning was off.

"Here in California, you get the heat and you can almost count on the electricity going out," Lueth, 50, said. He was one of about 635 customers affected in five power outages in Fresno on Friday. As far as heat-related outages go, it was an average day.

But Fresno is just getting warmed up. Friday was the eighth day of 100-degree heat this summer, and the fourth in a row. And there isn't much hope in sight: The National Weather Service says Fresno should be in the 100s for the next seven days.

Friday's high in Fresno peaked at 106 degrees. But the hottest spot in the Central Valley was Coalinga, with a high of 109. Madera tied Fresno at 106, while Visalia hit 100.

Air quality officials have called for back-to-back Spare the Air days today and Sunday in Fresno, Tulare and Kings counties. Madera and Merced county residents are being asked to help reduce air pollution today. Valley residents can do their part to reduce pollution by driving as little as possible.

When Lueth got home Friday at 3:30 p.m., the milk processing plant employee almost wanted to go back to work.

"If I knew the power was going to be out, I would have stayed at work and sat in a cooler or something," Lueth joked.

He kept himself hydrated with bottles of cold water, and considered splashing around in a friend's pool or going to a nearby bar where a friend was working.

"I'd probably sit in there and have a cold beer," Lueth said.

Instead, he occasionally walked outside to get a taste of real heat. That way, he said, when he went inside, it didn't seem so hot.

His power was restored about 6 p.m.

Liz Gomez, spokeswoman for Pacific Gas & Electric Co., said the company's grid is most stressed during peak hours of 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., when most people are getting home from work and using air conditioners and other appliances.

"They want to turn their air conditioner on and cool their house off. Of course, it's understandable," she said. "[But] it's overworking. The equipment does overheat and that causes it to fail."

Spare the Air Day

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, July 17, 2005

Air quality officials have forecast today is a Spare the Air day, and they urge all residents to curtail outdoor activities to protect their health. Spare the Air conditions are declared whenever the Air Quality Index is likely to exceed 150, considered unhealthy for everyone. At these levels, ground level ozone pollution can harm healthy lung tissue and aggravate asthma and other breathing problems.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District urges residents to avoid outdoor exertion in the middle of the day.

Children and the elderly, in particular, are advised to avoid all outdoor activities.

Residents also are urged to help reduce the smog problem by driving less and using public transportation if possible, avoid using gas-powered lawn equipment and off-road vehicles and use water-based paints and solvents instead of oil-based varieties.

Spare the Air

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, July 18, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has forecast a Spare the Air day for today and Tuesday in Tulare County.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District alerts residents when air quality is expected to reach unhealthful levels.

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

Information: (800) 766-4463.

Tehachapi looks to plan for future growth

By Sarah Ruby, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, July 17, 2005

After stalling two building projects in the county for fear of not having enough water to serve them, Tehachapi-area officials have quenched those fears only to acknowledge that the growth they can handle isn't necessarily the growth they want. They've got enough water to nearly double the population of Tehachapi and the surrounding area.

"The word we received from the water district is positive," said Tehachapi City Manager Jason Caudle. "The question is, do we want to continue with the growth we've been seeing?"

To answer that question, city and county officials are hoping to pool their money to draw up a plan for the area, which would spell out where to put all new development. "Specific plans," as they are known, cost about \$400,000 to \$500,000, but writing them forces communities to hash out difficult land-use decisions all at once, rather than project-by-project. Tehachapi's would be at least a two-year process, county planners say.

Greater Tehachapi is expected to grow faster than any other city in the county, according to Kern Council of Governments, a regional transportation planning agency. Its population will increase by an average of 2.6 percent per year through 2020, Kern COG studies show.

Locals have been actively trying to preserve their rural mountain way of life for at least 15 years.

"This is kind of normal, it seems -- development forges ahead, people aren't paying attention and ... we have a problem, or many problems," said Chuck McCollough, Tehachapi resident and founder of the Cummings Valley Protective Association. "We don't want to see this area turn into another San Fernando Valley."

Transportation and air quality

Transportation and air quality stand out among their concerns. The city of Tehachapi charges developers for traffic improvements, but it's trying to spread that practice to the county to ensure a well-funded approach to improving roads.

Air quality is harder to quantify -- alarmingly so, according to several residents -- because there are no air quality monitors in the Tehachapi-Cummings Valley area. Its air basin is governed by the Kern County Air Pollution Control District and has less dire pollution problems than the San Joaquin Valley. But Tehachapi's nearest full-time station is in Mojave.

With readings from Mojave, air regulators use 1995 ozone data collected in Tehachapi to estimate today's air quality. They have several years of particulate data, but stopped collecting it in 2004.

The Kern County air district is looking at the cost of installing monitoring stations in Tehachapi and other mountain areas. A fully stocked monitoring facility costs roughly \$150,000, said David Jones, air pollution control officer for the district. He'll present the costs and benefits of new stations to the air board in November.

Water not really a problem

"We have enough water for full development with sound growth management," said Bob Jasper, general manager of the Tehachapi-Cummings County Water District.

With careful attention to growth patterns and groundwater supplies, he said, the district's 266,000-acre area will be relatively water-secure for years. In 2004, the 30,000 people in its service area, plus local farms and industrial operations, used little more than half the district's total annual supply, he said.

"There's more than enough for 100,000 people," he said.

The water picture wasn't always so rosy. Jasper discovered a looming water crisis when he came to the area as a young engineer in the early 1960s.

"If folks don't stop doing what you're doing you'll be in deep doo-doo by the mid-1970s," he recalled telling local leaders. He hadn't been in town three months.

The community averted disaster by importing water from state-run canals to replenish what they were pumping from the ground. Tehachapi-Cummings County Water District became one of the first agencies to bank water, beating its valley neighbors by several decades. This effort raised the underground water level by 70 feet, according to a grand jury report released this year.

In the past month, water supply concerns were stoked once again. The planning department noticed that more than 9,000 lots are waiting to be built upon within the Tehachapi-Cummings County service area. Roughly 2,000 of those are in the city of Tehachapi -- enough to double the 2,200-home community.

Spare the Air and your health

By Ken Carlson, staff writer

Modesto Bee, Friday, July 15, 2005

Samuel Bailey tinkered with his friend's Volkswagen Beetle Thursday afternoon until Bailey's body told him it was time to go indoors.

Bailey, 61, a resident of the Modern RV and Trailer Park on Ninth Street in Modesto, said he has experienced minor heatstroke twice this year.

"I have shortness of breath, feel nauseated and light-headed," said Bailey, describing the symptoms. "And I have high blood pressure - that doesn't help."

Bailey had an air-conditioned recreational vehicle waiting for him, and he planned to check on a friend who lives in the same park.

As smog enveloped Modesto and the city's temperature neared a high of 103, Bailey did exactly what health officials recommend for elderly people, those who suffer from asthma or other lung ailments, or heart disease, and those who work outside: Avoid strenuous activity in the afternoon.

"If have some yard work to do or you need to do some shopping, get that done in the morning when the air quality is not as bad," said Kelly Malay, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Today promises much of the same, with a high temperature of 105 in the forecast for Modesto, and the air district declaring a second consecutive Spare the Air day in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties.

To help "spare the air" from pollution, people are asked to car-pool or take public transit, and refrain from using gas-powered garden equipment.

Of course, plenty of exhaust is still going into the air. A high-pressure system acts like a lid over the valley, Malay explained, and the result is stagnant air.

Spare the Air Days are based on forecasts for ozone - a key ingredient of smog. Ozone is produced when sunlight reacts with gases from cars, trucks, livestock wastes and industrial plants. According to preliminary data, Stanislaus County air violated federal smog standards on Wednesday, Malay said.

'Wise to stay indoors'

Ozone pollution damages lung tissue and worsens conditions for people with asthma and emphysema, health experts said.

Magdalena Franco, an office worker at Kirschen Elementary School in Modesto, said she used her inhaler after experiencing asthma symptoms Thursday. Kirschen's students left for home at 1:15 p.m. because it was a minimum day.

"We have not had too many kids with asthma using their inhalers, but (Wednesday) we had a few," she said. Franco said her own symptoms "feel like my chest gets tight and I start to cough. I use the inhaler and it calms me down."

Starting next month, the Modesto City Schools Board of Education has decided, colored flags will be raised over campuses to alert children, parents and staff about each day's forecasted air quality.

Conditions today would trigger an orange flag, indicating that the air is expected to be unhealthy for sensitive people, and that they should limit their outdoor activity.

Dr. Wallace Carroll, a Modesto allergist, said he did not have asthma sufferers lining up at his office Thursday. They tend to come in during times of high pollen and also when upper respiratory tract infections occur in the winter.

Heightened levels of ozone can worsen the lung inflammation that occurs with asthma, he said.

"Children are not going to have a horrible attack because of an irritating day like this," he said. "But I think children with severe asthma would be wise to stay indoors on Spare the Air Days."

Graham Pierce, the Modesto-based state director for PHI Air Medical Group, a helicopter company that provides air ambulance service for Doctors Medical Center, said anyone exerting themselves outdoors should be careful to avoid heat exhaustion and dehydration.

Check on the elderly

As he spoke, a copter headed to Yosemite National Park for a 75-year-old with difficulty breathing.

"We are seeing people who are doing the normal things they do, and they don't understand how much they should drink to keep hydrated and keep from getting heatstroke," Pierce said.

People in the sensitive categories need to keep cool, he said. And it is a good idea to check on elderly family members and neighbors.

At Modern RV and Trailer Park, Bailey found his friend Charles Bargewell relaxing in his small, air-conditioned motor home. The 70-year-old retired truck driver planned to wait until the evening or this morning to go with his friend to the grocery store.

"I don't go anywhere when it gets too hot," he said. "It never used to bother me, but we all get old."

Bargewell and others can expect temperatures in the triple digits through Tuesday, forecasters said.

New hybrid buses will offer a breath of fresh air for S.J. County

By Erin Sherbert

Stockton Record, Friday, July 15, 2005

STOCKTON -- Bus passengers around San Joaquin County will be riding more environmentally friendly buses once the San Joaquin Regional Transit District rolls out 50 new diesel-electric hybrids next year.

The district is using more than \$20 million in federal grants to replace 50 old buses with the hybrids, which will serve Stockton and routes connecting other cities in the county, said Paul Rapp, a spokesman for the district.

Most of the money will come from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement program.

The district will use matching funds from Measure K, the county's half-cent sales tax voters passed in 1990, to pay for the buses, Rapp said.

Those new buses are expected to be in service sometime next year.

Rapp said the new diesel-electric hybrids are more economical. They are designed to save fuel and lower emissions by as much as 90 percent by using electric motors and smaller diesel engines, transit officials said.

By using less diesel fuel, the hybrids will emit less carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, both of which pollute the air.

"Hybrids are the bus of the future," said Duane Isetti, chairman of the district board. "It's cutting down on all of the emissions. It's clean air."

Eventually, the district wants to replace its entire fleet of 120 buses with hybrids, Isetti said. The transit district was one of the first in the state to switch to hybrids.

Last year, it put into service its first two hybrid buses.

The new hybrids will be better designed, with larger doors and wheelchair ramps instead of lifts.

The front of the buses will be at curb level so riders with mobility issues can get onto the buses easier, Rapp said.

Also, the new buses will be designed to fit in with the district's plans for bus rapid transit, a system similar to light rail, in which buses travel more quickly and efficiently and make fewer stops along routes, Rapp said.

No hiding from the heat in the valley

Broken hot-streak records predicted

By Kim Perry, staff writer

Modesto Bee, Monday, July 18, 2005

For the sixth straight day, people in the Northern San Joaquin Valley sweltered in triple-digit heat. Forecasters expect the streak to continue.

With Sunday's high temperature of 103, Modesto's 100-and-up streak hit six days, matching hot streaks in June 1959, July 1961, July 1988 and July 2003.

There were eight straight triple-digit days in August 1996, and that streak should be surpassed, forecasters predict.

If they are right, and triple digits continue through the workweek, that would surpass the 10 straight 100-plus days the Modesto Irrigation District recorded in June 1981.

MID's downtown thermometer topped out at 103 degrees Sunday, while the National Weather Service station at Modesto Airport reported 105 degrees.

People in Turlock, Merced, Los Banos, Atwater and Stockton felt 106-degree heat. Oakdale and Patterson were at 105, Ceres recorded 102, and Manteca was an even 100.

There was no escape in the foothills. Sonora peaked at 104 degrees, and Mariposa had the hottest local reading at 107.

Even Yosemite Valley reached 100 degrees.

Along with the hot temperatures comes poor air quality.

Today is the fifth straight day for Spare the Air in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

A Spare the Air day is declared when air quality reaches unhealthy levels, and residents are asked to reduce pollution-causing activities, such as driving, using gas-powered tools and barbecuing.

Until the heat wave breaks and air quality improves, the air district advises people to keep close to home or avoid peak heat hours.

But some people go out no matter what, as could be seen Sunday. They just do it earlier in the day.

Golfers still took to the greens despite sweltering heat. Busy hours at Modesto Municipal Golf Course shifted to mornings from 6 to 11, said Ryan Canfield, who works in the pro shop.

"The later part of the day is dead until closing," he said.

Devoted golfers like Doug Groves, 60, weren't deterred by sizzling conditions. He plays 365 days a year and suggests extreme golfers look for shade and a breeze. Groves, outfitted in a sweat-soaked T-shirt, said his water sprayer keeps him cool.

"You do whatever it takes after 40 years (of playing golf)," said the Ceres man. "It doesn't bother us - Mount St. Helens wouldn't bother us."

Plus, there's room to spread out. Not many people practice their swing in 100-degree weather.

Muni wasn't the only course to take a hit during this summer's heat wave. The number of customers at St. Stanislaus Golf in Modesto fluctuated with the temperatures.

"People are buying more drinks, and less balls and rounds," said Kris Hooton, 18, a pro shop cashier.

When the mercury rises, people are looking to cool down. And that means ice cream. Business at Cold Stone Creamery on Pelandale Avenue in Modesto picks up in the late afternoon when temperatures peak.

"We're making twice as much ice cream as we usually do and making a ton of cakes," said employee Monica Rodriguez, 19.

Lines start between 3 and 4 p.m. and usually don't stop until closing, said Rodriguez, of Ripon. Cold Stone's Vintage Faire Mall location made \$400 more than on the same day last year, said store director Whitney Martin, 20.

Unhealthy air forecast

By News-Sentinel Staff

Lodi News Sentinel, Monday, July 18, 2005

People in San Joaquin County are advised to carpool, use public transportation and not go out for lunch due to unhealthy air forecast for today in the county.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has designated today as a "spare the air day" in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced and Madera counties. The southern San Joaquin Valley has been designated a "spare the air day" today and Tuesday.

In addition to driving as little as possible, residents are advised to use water-based instead of oil-based paint and solvent.

For more information, call (559) 230-5800 or see the Web site, www.valleyair.org.

Hoping growth takes off

Planning for future at Tracy Municipal Airport

Stockton Record, Sunday, July 17, 2005

TRACY -- From his chair at the Tracy Flight School, Lloyd McFarlin can envision a municipal airport awash with recreational pilots and their planes. He can picture businesses springing up on both sides of him: an upholstery shop, a paint store, a manufacturing facility for aircraft components, even a restaurant.

In reality, his is the only business at Tracy Municipal Airport, said McFarlin, who has leased space there from the city for 13 years.

And that won't change until the city fully realizes the airport's potential and invests in the infrastructure -- specifically, a connection to the city sewer line that is needed to draw those businesses, he said.

But Airport Manager Rod Buchanan said the airport has made vast improvements in the three years since a strategic plan was developed to enhance and maintain the facility, create financial stability and increase public awareness.

The facility went from being a drain on city coffers -- to the tune of about \$80,000 a year -- to producing a modest profit, he said. Last year, the profit was \$14,000.

Negotiation of a long-term lease with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to place air monitoring equipment at the airport and increases in hangar rental rates have contributed to the turnaround.

McFarlin said the Livermore Municipal Airport is an example of what Tracy's could become. That airport contributes about \$34 million to the community each year through taxes, businesses and visitors, airport manager Leander Hauri said.

Livermore has 600 aircraft based out of the 643-acre facility, and there is a three-year wait for hangar space, Hauri said.

Tracy's 300-acre facility has 100 aircraft based there and nearly 100 percent occupancy of the 51 city-owned hangars, Buchanan said.

Buchanan said the sewer line extension, estimated to cost \$700,000 in 1998, isn't the magic component that will catapult the airport into financial success.

"If we put the sewer line in tomorrow, I doubt very seriously we would have businesses knocking down our door to come to Tracy," he said.

But he said it's one piece of a much larger picture that will help the airport achieve its potential.

So is the aggressive pursuit of funding from the Federal Aviation Administration and the state. With \$500,000 in funding this year, the airport purchased crack sealer to prolong the life of the asphalt and make several other improvements, Buchanan said.

The city also has worked to bring more community members to the airport, holding three open houses in three years, drawing 5,000 people. The outreach has resulted in fewer complaints about the noise, Buchanan said.

"We don't even get one a month anymore," he said.

Andres Rodriguez said he doesn't have any complaints. He's lived across the street from the airport on south Tracy Boulevard for six years, and said the noise from tractor-trailer rigs speeding up and down the roadway is more bothersome than anything coming out of the airport.

John Howard, chairman of the airport commission, said the commission wants to see the airport grow and will look to the City Council for assistance.

He said if the airport can't get the kind of infrastructure and support from the city it needs, it will never be more than a "small country airport that's going nowhere."

He, too, would like to see the sewer line extended to the property and one of Tracy's two runways expanded from about 4,000 feet to at least 5,500 feet to safely accommodate most aircraft.

A presentation on those issues and more is being readied for the City Council and will be offered in August, Howard said.

Heat to reach 108

Modesto Bee, Sunday, July 17, 2005

It'll be wicked hot today in Modesto. The forecast calls for a sizzling high of 108 degrees, which would tie the record for this date set in 1935. That would be 4 degrees short of the all-time high of 112, set on June 15, 1961. On Saturday, the temperature in Modesto reached 105, which was 2 degrees off the all-time high for that date, also in 1935. Temperatures are expected to remain in the 100s through Wednesday, according to AccuWeather. Not only will it remain hot today, the air will stay bad, too. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said today will be a Spare the Air day in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties.

Hot weather spawning smog

Zachary K. Johnson
Stockton Record, Saturday, July 16, 2005

It's summertime, and the breathing's not easy for everyone in San Joaquin County, where intense heat prompted air-quality watchers to warn residents about pollution in the Valley.

Today will be the third straight Spare the Air Day forecast by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

When smog gets trapped in the valley, those with respiratory problems suffer first.

Both of Irene Camy's sons have asthma.

"When it gets hot and smoggy, I keep them indoors," she said.

Her 5-year-old's asthma is triggered by dust, and her 3-year-old's asthma kicks in when there are pollen or pollutants in the air.

Camy said when her sons' asthma strikes, their lungs make a crackling noise as they struggle to breathe.

For the past week, she has been giving her youngest son cough medicine, nasal spray, breathing treatments and decongestants because the air has triggered his asthma.

During summer, pollutants heated by the sun create ground-level ozone -- better known as smog -- and hot, high-pressure air above the ground forms a vapor lid, trapping ozone in the valley, according to the pollution control district.

The district had forecast levels of ozone as unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as asthmatics, on all three Spare the Air Days, but the forecasts never panned out even though temperatures soared past 105 degrees on Thursday and Friday, according to statistics released Friday.

Last year, there were only three Spare the Air Days in San Joaquin County all summer. There were 15 in 2003.

Periods of high levels of ozone often coincide with high hospital admissions and emergency room visits, said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, a spokeswoman for the American Lung Association of California. High ozone levels can even kill the elderly, she said.

Nooo! Heat expected to linger

By Daryl Farnsworth, staff writer

Modesto Bee, Saturday, July 16, 2005

Temperatures in Modesto and the Northern San Joaquin Valley are expected to sizzle for the next several days and could reach 107 today, an AccuWeather meteorologist said Friday.

That would tie the record for the hottest July 16, which was in 1935, meteorologist Paul Yeager said.

"We're looking at the same general weather pattern through Monday," he said. "And there should be less of a chance of thunderstorms over the mountains by Sunday and Monday."

Yeager said the high-pressure system sitting over California might start to weaken early next week, which could drop the temperatures into the upper 90s by Wednesday.

Friday's high in Modesto was 103, according to the Modesto Irrigation District. The hottest July 15 recorded in Modesto was 108 in 1972, he said.

Today will be the third Spare the Air day in a row in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

When air quality reaches unhealthy levels, a Spare the Air day is declared and residents are asked to avoid or reduce pollution-causing activities for 24 hours.

Spare the Air is a voluntary, summertime effort to reduce air pollution, specifically ground-level ozone.

Although there is a possibility of lightning strikes in the Sierra the next several days, fire officials have ordered no fire restrictions. The recent hot weather has the forest starting to dry out below 6,000 feet.

"The grass, brush and pine needles are drying out now and fire conditions are becoming more volatile by the day," said Pat Kaunert, spokesman for the Stanislaus National Forest Service.

Campers and visitors to the mountains are being asked to use extra care and responsibility with a campfire. Campers outside a developed campground are required to have a camp fire permit, Kaunert said.

He said visitors with questions on fire safety can ask a ranger when they get their permit.

"We had a wonderful winter and there's still snow on the peaks and spectacular views," he said. "We have natural air conditioning coming off the snowy peaks of the Sierra right now," Kaunert said Friday afternoon.

"There are so many great places to camp," he said. "The people in the valley who are tired of the heat are invited to come up and enjoy the forests, and we have lots of camp sites available," he said.

"Camping is great, the rivers are running high and the fishing is excellent," he said.

To pick up a free campfire permit, visitors need to stop at a local ranger station, Forest Service office, or California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection station, he said.

Kaunert recommended having a fire in a natural clearing and before lighting the fire to clear all grass, leaves, pine needles around the fire ring for a distance of 5 to 10 feet.

He said an adult must be with a fire at all times, even if the fire is cold or smoldering.

He said to completely douse a campfire you need lots of water.

"Pour about 5 gallons of water on the fire or coals and stir until it becomes like soup. Then use your bare hand to check to make sure the fire is out. Drown a campfire," he said.

"Never turn your back on a fire, even if it's smoldering," he said. "An afternoon wind can fan the fire and whip it back up and bring it back to life," he said.

Spare the Air and your health

Elderly, asthma sufferers advised to take extra care in smog and 100-plus temps

By Ken Carlson, staff writer

Modesto Bee, Friday, July 15, 2005

Samuel Bailey tinkered with his friend's Volkswagen Beetle Thursday afternoon until Bailey's body told him it was time to go indoors.

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'Wise to stay indoors'

Ozone pollution damages lung tissue and worsens conditions for people with asthma and emphysema, health experts said.

Magdalena Franco, an office worker at Kirschen Elementary School in Modesto, said she used her inhaler after experiencing asthma symptoms Thursday. Kirschen's students left for home at 1:15 p.m. because it was a minimum day.

"We have not had too many kids with asthma using their inhalers, but (Wednesday) we had a few," she said. Franco said her own symptoms "feel like my chest gets tight and I start to cough. I use the inhaler and it calms me down."

Starting next month, the Modesto City Schools Board of Education has decided, colored flags will be raised over campuses to alert children, parents and staff about each day's fore-casted air quality.

Conditions today would trigger an orange flag, indicating that the air is expected to be unhealthy for sensitive people, and that they should limit their outdoor activity.

Dr. Wallace Carroll, a Modesto allergist, said he did not have asthma sufferers lining up at his office Thursday. They tend to come in during times of high pollen and also when upper respiratory tract infections occur in the winter.

Heightened levels of ozone can worsen the lung inflammation that occurs with asthma, he said.

"Children are not going to have a horrible attack because of an irritating day like this," he said. "But I think children with severe asthma would be wise to stay indoors on Spare the Air Days."

Graham Pierce, the Modesto-based state director for PHI Air Medical Group, a helicopter company that provides air ambulance service for Doctors Medical Center, said anyone exerting themselves outdoors should be careful to avoid heat exhaustion and dehydration.

Check on the elderly

As he spoke, a copter headed to Yosemite National Park for a 75-year-old with difficulty breathing.

"We are seeing people who are doing the normal things they do, and they don't understand how much they should drink to keep hydrated and keep from getting heatstroke," Pierce said.

People in the sensitive categories need to keep cool, he said. And it is a good idea to check on elderly family members and neighbors.

At Modern RV and Trailer Park, Bailey found his friend Charles Bargewell relaxing in his small, air-conditioned motor home. The 70-year-old retired truck driver planned to wait until the evening or this morning to go with his friend to the grocery store.

"I don't go anywhere when it gets too hot," he said. "It never used to bother me, but we all get old."

Bargewell and others can expects temperatures in the triple digits through Tuesday, forecasters said.

Spare the Air for another day

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Friday, July 15, 2005

The summer's second Spare the Air day has arrived - one day after the first. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has extended its dangerous air warning to today. Officials said that unhealthy air conditions could continue into next week. According to district meteorologist Shawn Ferreria, a strong high pressure system has created a "lid" over the region, preventing air pollution from escaping and keeping wind speeds very low. The air in San Joaquin County is rated unhealthy for sensitive groups. This means young children, senior citizens and asthma sufferers, among others, should try to stay inside if possible. The air will be worst between 3 and 7 p.m. District officials have asked that people avoid driving if possible, taking advantage of free rides on the Altamont Commuter Express and other transit systems. Weather service AccuWeather predicts a high of 101 degrees in Tracy today, dropping into the high 90s over the weekend.

Week in review

Airing concerns

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, July 17, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley air district says individual dairy cows spew at least 20.6 pounds of smog-forming volatile organic compounds each year, 60 percent more than earlier estimates.

The dairy industry is predictably upset, but so are at least four scientists who did the research the district used to reach its number, saying the estimate is flawed.

What's next: The district must make its cow pollution estimate final Aug. 1. Once that's determined dairies could be subject to greater regulation.

Court Nixes Regulating Greenhouse Gases

By John Heilprin, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, July 17, 2005

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- States lost a bid Friday to force the Bush administration to regulate heat-trapping industrial gases that have been blamed for global warming.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia said the Environmental Protection Agency acted properly when it rejected a nonprofit group's petition. The group had asked EPA to impose new controls on carbon dioxide and other automobile pollutants that scientists say trap heat in the atmosphere like a greenhouse.

Tom Reilly, the Massachusetts attorney general, said the states probably would ask for the full appeals court to hear the case.

"With each day of inaction, the problem of global warming worsens," Reilly said. "We will continue to fight to compel the federal government to use its legal authority to address this serious problem."

After EPA rejected the group's petition, 12 states and several cities argued that EPA should regulate those gases under the Clean Air Act and hadn't justified its decision not to. The three federal appeals judges ruled otherwise.

Judge A. Raymond Randolph, writing for the panel, and Judge David Santelle, who disagreed with Randolph on some of the issues in the case, each sidestepped the larger question of whether EPA lacks authority to order reductions in greenhouse gases.

In August 2003, the EPA's top lawyer issued an opinion that the agency lacked that authority, a reversal of a Clinton administration legal opinion that the gases should be regulated.

The Bush administration used that opinion to justify denying the request from the nonprofit group, International Center for Technology Assessment, and other groups seeking new federal controls on auto emissions.

Randolph said the court assumed for the sake of argument that EPA has the authority to regulate greenhouse gases as air pollutants but that "the question we address is whether EPA properly declined to exercise that authority."

Randolph said the court should defer to a federal agency's judgment in policy questions that are "on the frontiers of scientific knowledge."

Judge David Tatel also disagreed with Randolph on some of the issues. Most notably, he found that greenhouse gases "plainly fall within the meaning" of air pollutants that should be regulated.

If the EPA administrator finds that the gases contribute to air pollution that puts the public's health or welfare in danger, Tatel wrote, "then EPA has authority — indeed, the obligation — to regulate their emissions from motor vehicles."

States challenging the EPA's rejection of that petition were California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington, along with the U.S. territory of American Samoa and the cities Baltimore, New York and Washington, D.C.

Reilly said the states were disappointed by the ruling but "heartened" that Tatel, the only judge to look at the issue of EPA's legal authority on greenhouse gases, "firmly rejected EPA's claim."

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On the Net:

EPA:

<http://epa.gov>

Diesel fallout cited as hazard along busy route Residents near parkway face health dangers, report says

Erin Hallissy, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Monday, July 18, 2005

Big rigs that rumble through North Richmond neighborhoods, freight trains that idle for hours on train tracks and in rail yards, and cargo ships delivering thousands of foreign cars to Richmond's port are spewing so much diesel exhaust that nearby residents could face serious health problems, according to a report released today.

The report, produced by the Pacific Institute, an environmental policy group in Oakland, says that average diesel emissions near the Richmond Parkway, which cuts from Interstate 80 to Interstate 580 and is near several rail lines, are 40 times higher than average in California.

Some residents who kept monitors in their homes found that weekday levels of soot were four times higher than at a home in Lafayette, which is far removed from industry and heavy truck traffic.

"We are in the belly of the beast, because we get the fallout," said Lee Jones of the Neighborhood House of North Richmond.

Jones, who moved to North Richmond five years ago from Oakland, said he is concerned that diesel pollution is affecting the health of his 13-year-old granddaughter, Dominique, who has asthma.

Jones, who kept a pollution monitor in his house for three weeks, said big rigs and trains weren't the only things that create a problem. Construction equipment such as backhoes that are working on new housing developments nearby also caused a spike in diesel readings.

"I used to sit and watch the meter go up and down," he said. "If a big truck passed by dropping off equipment, it would set it off."

Emily Lee, outreach coordinator for the Pacific Institute, said health impacts from diesel pollution can include increases in the rates of cancer, heart disease and premature death, and it can worsen asthma.

Two years ago, the group reported that West Oakland also had high levels of diesel pollution because of traffic around the Port of Oakland. Lee said the institute is working with residents and city officials to establish truck routes to reduce pollution in residential neighborhoods.

Michael Kent, the hazardous materials ombudsman for the Contra Costa Health Services Department, said the new study is the first time anyone has tried to quantify the amount of diesel pollution in the North Richmond and Richmond Parkway area, a low-income area where neighborhoods are built in the shadow of refineries and industrial plants.

"It's important to get a more scientific quantification," he said, noting that residents have long complained that they are subjected to heavy pollution because of the industrial uses near the Richmond Parkway, heavy rail traffic and the estimated 7,000 trucks traveling in the area each day.

The diesel report, which will be presented to the city of San Pablo tonight and later to the Richmond City Council and the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, proposes solutions to the problems of diesel pollution, including clearly marked truck routes that would prohibit trucks from traveling through residential neighborhoods.

Other recommendations include regulating emissions at rail yards and in the port by reducing engine idling times, encouraging the replacement of older diesel engines with new and cleaner engines, and enforcing laws that prohibit trucks and buses from idling for more than five minutes. It's not unusual for residents to see trucks idling for hours on roadsides, sometimes while the driver naps, Jones said.

Jones said that when he first moved to North Richmond, he noticed black soot on the side of his home, something he had never seen at his former residence in Oakland.

Diesel exhaust has 40 toxic compounds, including formaldehyde, benzene and particulate matter, according to the report. It estimates that more than 90 tons of diesel pollution are released in the Richmond area per year.

West Contra Costa County has a higher rate of asthma hospitalizations, with some ZIP codes showing more than 25 hospitalizations per 10,000 residents, compared with Contra Costa County as a whole, which had about 14 hospitalizations per 10,000 residents, according to data from Community Action to Fight Asthma, a network of asthma coalitions.

Jones said residents realize that trucks play a valuable role in transporting goods to and from local businesses, but regulations should be established and enforced to keep pollution to a minimum.

"We do need those businesses out here," he said. "There's no animosity. We realize that we need one another."

Polluting Now to Save Trees in the Future

In Wisconsin, a test of climate change gives clues to scientists and jitters to local residents.

By P.J. Huffstutter, Los Angeles Times

Monday, July 18, 2005

HARSHAW, Wis. - Scientists wearing protective face masks roamed a private, remote 80-acre grove, checking the levels of greenhouse gases being sprayed onto the trees.

For the last eight years, researcher David F. Karnosky and dozens of scientists have trucked billions of pounds of ozone and other gases to these woods, where aspen and pine trees blanket the surrounding hills.

They have sprayed thousands of trees with the gases to simulate what pollution is expected to be 50 years from now. Their goal is to determine how Wisconsin forests will fare with increased levels of pollution.

The \$8-million project - Aspen FACE - is the world's largest outdoor climate-change experiment.

Started in 1997 on U.S. Forest Service land about 150 miles northwest of Green Bay, it is one of four such outdoor projects that the Department of Energy is funding. The pollution that scientists are recreating is one and a half times that found in northern Wisconsin, "or about the same levels on a clear day in Los Angeles," Karnosky said.

"Ozone, in large quantities and over long periods of time, is dangerous. It does to the lungs what it does to leaves: breaks down cell walls," said Karnosky, a professor of forest genetics at Michigan Technological University. "Outside the testing site, though, it's fine. Why would we endanger the forests that we're ultimately trying to protect?"

Some environmentalists and local residents are protesting the project - not because of the research, but because of where it is taking place.

They are concerned that the testing is contaminating the air of neighboring farms and retirement homes, and they want the government to shut down the project or move it indoors.

Protesters have put up signs, each about the size of a garage door. One sits across from the lab's entrance and warns, "Danger: Air Pollution Test Site." Another down the road shows the outline of a child collapsing amid a cloud of black smoke.

Some residents have called the academics "tree killers" and "air destroyers."

"The scientists say they are careful with the gases, that they control how much they use, that there are all these security measures and sensors in place to make sure the gases stay where they're supposed to," said John Herman, 55, a farmer whose property butts up to the project site. "But how can they control where the wind blows, and how that wind moves the gases?"

The project site is in a part of Oneida County called Harshaw, which is little more than a ZIP code for the scientists' mail. At one time, the site was a potato farm edged with tall, thick pine and poplar trees that blocked out the sun. The land was cleared, and scientists built 12 giant rings made of white PVC pipe.

The individual rings are about 100 feet wide, about one-third the size of a football field. More pipes - 30 feet high - fence in each ring's 500 trees.

Scientists planted a mix of trees - aspen, paper birch and sugar maple trees - that thrived locally. As the saplings grew, scientists cut vents into the pipes; the gases would travel through the pipes and shoot through the holes and onto the trees.

Today, the trees have grown so tall that branches sway over the tops of the pipe fence. The leaves rustle and flutter, sounding like waves crashing onto a shore.

At the base of each ring is a small shed, where computerized monitors track the wind speed and the soil temperature and regulate how much natural air, carbon dioxide and ozone is sprayed onto the trees.

Research occurs when the trees have leaves, which scientists harvest and grind up to extract genetic information.

Every year, from spring through fall, Karnosky and a team of about 70 scientists, on a rotating basis, come to the area to conduct research. They check chemical levels in the soil, gather leaves to see how the trees are absorbing pollution, and monitor how hearty or withered the trees look.

The federal government hopes the research will show how energy production, such as utility companies burning fossil fuels, hurts the environment.

But the project is also trying to figure out ways to protect one of the state's dominant industries.

Natural Asbestos, Cancer Linked

By Eric Bailey, Los Angeles Times

Sunday, July 17, 2005

SACRAMENTO - A new study has found that everyday exposure to naturally occurring asbestos boosts the chances of developing a deadly form of cancer but added that the risks are relatively low.

The statewide study by a team of UC Davis researchers is expected to affect the ongoing debate over how to tackle the problem in fast-growing communities in the Sierra foothills where asbestos fibers embedded in the ground are being unearthed by new housing tracts.

In California, researchers determined that the risk of contracting mesothelioma - a rare and lethal form of cancer - is about 1 in 100,000 people each year, though those chances increase for residents who live near pockets of natural asbestos.

Although the overall danger is low, researchers encouraged public officials to press ahead with efforts to reduce the likelihood of breathing the spear-shaped fibers, particularly in areas of the state where new housing developments are pushing into terrain dotted with the type of rock that acts as a seedbed of naturally occurring asbestos.

Marc Schenker, chairman of the UC Davis department of public health sciences and lead author of the study released last week, called the threat in such spots "a health hazard" that should be "considered seriously."

The battle over what to do has been most intense in El Dorado Hills, a fast-growing upscale community about 30 miles east of Sacramento.

Although some residents are alarmed that veins of asbestos uncovered by development could be risking lives, others contend that the threat has been overblown.

Throughout the region, officials have tried to gauge the threat of asbestos or have taken precautions to control its spread. Last year, to prevent asbestos-laden dust from being stirred up, almost all the exposed ground at a high school in El Dorado Hills was capped with concrete or ground cover - at a cost of \$2.5 million.

Officials with the federal Environmental Protection Agency conducted tests in El Dorado Hills in October to see how much asbestos-laden dust is kicked up by normal recreation.

EPA workers rode bikes, played baseball and kicked soccer balls - to mention just a few activities - while wearing air monitors, respirator masks and protective moon suits.

The tussle over asbestos has boiled over at the state Capitol, where legislation that could require tougher standards for builders to ensure that asbestos deposits are left untouched or sealed up has run into opposition from the building industry.

But when releasing the new study, Schenker mostly steered clear of politics and focused on science.

Funded by the National Cancer Institute, the research effort used public health records, geologic maps and satellite mapping to pinpoint victims of mesothelioma across California over a 10-year period concluding in 1997.

Researchers found that the risk increased closer to deposits of naturally occurring asbestos, which is most prevalent in the Sierra foothills, the Coast Range and the Klamath Mountains in the state's far north.

A person living within four miles of an asbestos deposit had about double the chance of contracting mesothelioma as someone about 40 miles away.

Mesothelioma has a long latency period of about three decades, but then it strikes with a vengeance. Patients typically die within a year of diagnosis.

Given the possibility of a jump in mesothelioma 30 years from now, Schenker said public efforts should focus on protecting people from the disease, a type of cancer that is preventable. "Our biggest efforts should be to reduce those future cancers," he said, adding that it is "less costly to prevent now than treat later."

Nationwide, mesothelioma is rare. A person is about eight times more likely to get pancreatic cancer. The annual death toll from mesothelioma is estimated to be about on par with fatalities linked to secondhand tobacco smoke.

Researchers found that mesothelioma death rates in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties fall below the state average. The highest rates are in Trinity and Sierra counties.

Drivers give green light to 'veggie mobiles'

By Amelia Hansen, TriValley Herald

Saturday, July 16, 2005

Josh Nelson pours off sentiments separated from used vegetable oil at the Bay Area Biofuel plant in Richmond.

NANCY HALL fires up her 1979 300D Mercedes Benz and the sweet smell of cooking oil fills the air.

"I've been an environmental activist my whole life," Hall says as she climbs behind the wheel of the heavy, brown sedan. "I've gotten grants to plant trees. I'm a vegetarian for environmental reasons. Biodiesel seemed like the next piece of the puzzle."

Hall's "veggie mobile" runs on recycled fryer oil. The used vegetable oil or animal fat is collected from restaurants and put through a relatively simple treatment process. Untreated vegetable oil can be pumped into modified diesel cars, but biodiesel can be used in any diesel motor.

Hall is part of a burgeoning grassroots movement determined to reduce greenhouse gases and the country's dependence on petroleum. But the cookingoil idea also has begun to attract

businesses, national parks, high-profile musicians and government agencies.

Here in San Mateo County, Pacifica may become the first city to move grease from the fryer to the fuel tank.

The city is proposing to manufacture biodiesel at the Calera Creek Water Recycling Plant on the west side of Highway 1. A mobile unit would clean and treat the grease at the site.

Biodiesel, as outlined in a report presented in May to the City Council by Public Works Director Scott Holmes, could become an alternative fuel source for residents and city vehicles.

It also could save Pacifica about \$50,000 a year if the city ran its generators on biodiesel during peak energy times.

"It's a plan that would serve the greater good while protecting the environment," Councilman Jim Vreeland said. "It would also be part of the commitment the city has towards making our environment our economy."

New old issue

The debate over climate change and the world's dependence on petroleum may have brought biodiesel back into the international focus, but it's hardly a new innovation.

In the early 1900s, Rudolf Diesel designed the prototype diesel engine, which was run entirely on peanut oil.

"The diesel engine can be fed with vegetable oils and would help considerably in the development of agriculture in the countries which use it," he is quoted as saying.

But petroleum-based diesel was too cheap and easy to come by for Diesel's dream to be realized back then. Today, with the entire world hooked on petrol, prices and pollution are skyrocketing.

According to the United States Energy Information Administration, petroleum demand for 2005 is projected to average 20.9 million barrels per day, up two percent from last year. It

Nancy Hall fills her 1979 Mercedes Benz 300 D with biodiesel fuel at the GreenRide Biofuels pump station in Pacifica. The co-op's price for biodiesel is approximately \$3 per gallon.

This is expected to grow another 1.9 percent in 2006.

But studies show biodiesel has environmental advantages over petroleum fuel.

Carbon monoxide emissions are, on average, 47 percent lower than regular diesel emissions; total hydrocarbons are approximately 67 percent lower; and sulfur emissions are virtually eliminated.

Nitrogen oxides, or NOx, are the one source of biodiesel emissions found to be higher than regular diesel.

When compared with the tremendous amount of gasoline and diesel still pumping through this country, biodiesel is just a drop in the bucket.

But considering that biodiesel sales in the United States have jumped from 500,000 gallons in 1999 to 25 million gallons in 2003, those drops appear to be adding up.

Green gasoline

Nancy Hall is a member of a 12-person cooperative called GreenRide Biofuels. Based in Pacifica, the co-op has formed a relationship with Bay Area Biofuel, a biodiesel manufacturer in Richmond.

The company's motto is, "Where the gas is always greener."

Bay Area Biofuel makes regular deliveries to a home in Pacifica, where co-op members go to fill up their "veggie mobiles." The Richmond company charges \$2.65 a gallon; a delivery fee brings it up to \$3 a gallon for the co-op members.

Hall is happy to pay a little extra for the non-petroleum fuel.

"I live below the poverty line," the 49-year-old musician and activist said. "Why would I chose to pay more? Because when you look at the oil drilling, the global warming, war ... that shows you the true cost of petroleum."

Most in the biodiesel business share a similar philosophy.

Kenneth and Herman Kron, brothers who run Bay Area Biofuel, consider themselves part of a growing green industry movement that they hope is altering the way people think about and use energy.

They are also fundamentally interested in improving air quality. When Kenneth's son was diagnosed with asthma, the Krons immediately became more focused on the factors that contribute to respiratory distress.

Kenneth introduced the concept of biodiesel to Herman, a sculptor and welder. Herman is now the lead engineer and head of production for the business.

"Before, I didn't have the philosophy that something could be made from a waste product," Herman Kron said. "Now it has become a mission."

Cooking the fuel

On a recent tour of the plant, Kron shared the nuts-and-bolts process behind his mission with Hall and Pacifica Mayor Julie Lancelle.

The collected restaurant oil is pumped into insulated cylinders and heated

Modified signage on Nancy Hall's Mercedes Benz reflects her fuel of choice as she visits the GreenRide Biofuels' pump station in Pacifica. (MATHEW SUMNER - STAFF)

to more than 150 degrees, allowing water and other impurities to settle to the bottom.

Then comes the reaction process, or "transesterification," where lye and methanol are mixed with the oil. The reaction removes glycerin, which is drained into a holding tank for purification.

The biodiesel is then put through three wash cycles, removing final impurities, and allowed to settle for five days.

The finished product is the color of honey and smells like vegetable oil. It's even drinkable, as Kron has proved in the past.

While such large corporations as Darling International have long dominated the grease-rendering and oil-collecting business, small startups such as Bay Area Biofuel are beginning to thrive.

The company collects used oil from 65 restaurants in San Francisco, makes 9,000 gallons of

biodiesel a month and makes deliveries to the East Bay, Marin County and the Peninsula.

The more restaurants they can sign up, the more biodiesel they can create and the more deliveries they can make.

"We would be willing to deliver it to the moon," Kron said.

Hall, and GreenRide Biofuels, is working with the City of Pacifica to get the biodiesel-making process going at the Calera Creek plant.

Vreeland said the city likely will hire a consultant. Scott Holmes also is working on a process that may help counter nitrogen oxide emissions.

In the meantime, Hall and her colleagues already are approaching Pacifica restaurants about collecting used oil. Thanks to the french fry, onion ring and donut eaters of Pacifica, a large unused resource is waiting to be tapped.

For more information on Bay Area Biofuel visit www.bayareabiofuel.com.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, July 18, 2005:](#)

Great Valley, great needs

Think tank provides valuable research and expertise.

If you're driving toward a precipice, you appreciate the sign that warns you away.

Our Valley is poised "on the edge of a cliff," in the words of Carol Whiteside. "You go down the list -- there are big decisions to be made in terms of land use; the ecological future of the region; and creating a regulatory environment that allows jobs to come in or we'll never reduce the poverty."

Fortunately, there are signs defining those dangers, identifying some of the solutions and pointing out a better path. The figurative task of posting those signs has been the role of the Great Valley Center, of which Whiteside is president.

Since its inception in 1997, the Great Valley Center has helped to define the Valley's issues and seek solutions. But the center, based in Modesto, is facing difficult financial issues of its own -- issues we hope it overcomes. Few other entities in the Valley tackle issues quite the way the center does.

"Nobody else has created a regional dialogue and thought broadly about the entire region the way people think about L.A. or the Bay Area," said Whiteside. "That's one of our unique roles." When we begin to think regionally, we see that our most vexing problems -- from air pollution to jobs to education to demands on water -- are not unique, that solutions work best when shared.

While looking within for solutions, the center also helps the Valley reach out. Our congressional delegation is united in its efforts in part because the center has helped our representatives identify issues and solutions.

Among those priorities are Highway 99 improvements, better rural Internet connections, health care, solar energy, formation of trusts to protect farmland and improving air quality.

The center's annual Great Valley Conference has served as a catalyst and facilitator for identifying problems and solutions.

Great costs are attached to great projects. This year, expenses neared \$5 million; last year they topped \$6 million.

The money comes from donations -- some as small as \$10, others much larger, from major donors such as the James Irvine Foundation, Hewlett Foundation and Packard Foundation. Dozens of other foundations and businesses contribute, as well as hundreds of individuals. As Ellen Herod, director of development, points out, there are more \$100 donors than there are \$5,000 donors.

This year, the center is facing funding challenges because the foundations that provided the seed money in 1997 are turning to other priorities. Now it's time for others to help.

The Great Valley Center's work has tied us together as a region. That must not change.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sunday, July 17, 2005:](#)

Bakersfield deserves better

Rosedale Ranch proponent contends new development should respect the environment, enhance the quality of life and contribute to the overall economic health of the community

As a lifelong resident of Bakersfield, I have always taken a lot of pride in our community. It was a great place to grow up and it has been a great place to raise my own family.

In recent years, more and more people have come to appreciate the appeal of living in Bakersfield. That growth has brought us some long-overdue respect we're not the brunt of Johnny Carson jokes anymore. But it has also resulted in a pattern of piecemeal development and a patchwork of walled subdivisions.

I believe Bakersfield deserves better. With the population of Kern County expected to nearly double to more than 1.1 million people in the next 25 years, we have to figure out how to accommodate that growth in a way that makes us all feel proud to live in Bakersfield.

While planning the future uses of the Rosedale Ranch property in northwest Bakersfield, I became aware of the concept of "Smart Growth," a comprehensive, long-range approach to planning that assures new development respects the environment, enhances the quality of life and contributes to the overall economic health of the community.

These are the same principles and policies at the core of the Vision 2020 mission statement. Large-scale "master planned communities," like Rosedale Ranch, are an important element of smart growth, especially in expanding urban and suburban areas, such as Bakersfield.

Ordinarily 1,500 acres or more in size and under single ownership, master planned communities (MPCs) or what I prefer to call "well-planned" communities offer unique opportunities to create a "place," in contrast to being simply a "project."

While their look and character may vary from one another, MPCs typically demonstrate two primary principles that, I believe, distinguish good development from poor development:

- They take a comprehensive approach to planning, design, construction and management.
- They incorporate an intentionally balanced mix of land uses so that people can live, work, shop and play in their own community, and be part of a place in which they take great pride.

A successful MPC is the result of the thoughtful organization of uses, spaces, elements and amenities to create a sense of "community" and "place."

First and foremost, MPCs are about creating places for people to live. The best well-planned communities provide a wide variety of housing choices, sizes, and prices; incorporate a complementary mix of community services, shopping, education, employment, and entertainment; provide a balance of housing and jobs; include common green space, recreational amenities, trails and parks; treat streets as a critical design element; are pedestrian friendly and encourage alternative forms of transportation; use efficient and sustainable infrastructure; recognize the importance of aesthetics by establishing design guidelines to address architecture, site design, landscape and signage; and incorporate a form of community governance to assure the long-term viability of the community.

One of the most appealing aspects of a well-planned MPC is the ability to create a small-town atmosphere and an environment where people can walk, bike, or take public transit to work, school, shopping, entertainment, and social activities.

In these new communities, walkability is very important. Since most people are comfortable walking about a quarter-mile to a given destination, keeping retail centers, employment centers

and civic uses in close proximity is critical. The village center for such a new community becomes an important gathering place for friends and neighbors.

A pedestrian-friendly community will have a well-designed interconnected trail system and open space network. An equally important element for walkability is the street network within the community.

Streets must be designed to be pedestrian-friendly with pleasant tree-lined sidewalks that are separated from the curb by a landscaped parkway; narrower driving lanes; and design features that will slow or "calm" traffic, especially at points where pedestrians will cross the streets.

One innovative traffic control and calming method is the use of roundabouts in lieu of stop signs or traffic signals. Roundabouts require a driver to approach and maneuver through an intersection at safe, slow speeds, reducing both the number and severity of collisions.

Improved air quality is another benefit as traffic is continuously moving and vehicles are not stopped with engines idling waiting for the signal light to change.

The city of Bakersfield will soon experience the implementation of many of these "Smart Growth" principles in practice. Rosedale Ranch, our new master planned, or "well-planned," community has been designed to deliver the best example of community development that Bakersfield has yet seen. We are scheduled for City Planning Commission and City Council approvals later this summer.

Keith Gardiner is managing partner of Rosedale Ranch.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sunday, July 17, 2005:](#)

Pot of gold, or pile of manure?

By Dianne Hardisty, Californian Editorial Page Editor

A friend of mine was on the homestretch of a cross-country drive with his two children when he passed through a wide spot in a Texas road. Upon reaching Bakersfield, he e-mailed me:

"One man's trash is truly another man's treasure. While on vacation I was driving on Highway 54 through Dalhart, Texas, trying to get back to Bakersfield. Dalhart is known for only one thing that I could see, and that's hundreds of thousands of cattle in feedlots lining both sides of Highway 54.

"But, to the story. I was listening to the Dalhart radio station and they were interviewing a member of their Chamber of Commerce, who was commenting on an 'open house' they were having that day at a new dairy.

"She was talking about how the goal of their Chamber was to get 10 new dairies in the Dalhart area and that they had already gotten eight, with most of those, including the latest, coming from California."

That got me to thinking. Are we just a bunch of unappreciative latte-sipping, tree-hugging wimps in Bakersfield? While Dalhartians see a pot of gold at the end of the dairy rainbow, most of us see only a pile of manure.

Maybe we should be more open-minded. Just what do these Panhandle Texans see in dairies that we are missing? In Dalhart, the stench of cattle has become the sweet fragrance of *Ode a l'manure*.

I called David Lowe at the High Plains Dairy Council in Dalhart to find out. Lowe's day job is raising grain and selling it to feed the hundreds of thousands of cattle and hogs being fattened and raised in megalots along and around the highway. He and his buddies formed the council because they believe recruiting dairies to Dalhart is good for their businesses and good for the area's economy.

Dalhart is a city of about 7,500 people on a 4,000-foot plateau in the northwest corner of the Texas Panhandle. Dalhart became a town in 1901, when the railroad arrived. Before that, it was part of the XIT Ranch, once the largest fenced range in the world.

A former Air Force fighter pilot who has made Dalhart his home for about 25 years, Lowe is a big fan of the city. He's seen the world. There's no place like Dalhart.

"We're strictly an ag area," he said, when I called him last week. Lowe claims the prevailing winds keep the feedlot smells away from the town. With the exception of some dust kicked up in bad weather, the air is clean. The land is cheap. The feed is plentiful.

With most folks making their living from agriculture, seldom is heard a discouraging word about the feedlots or their new neighbors, the dairies. Lowe admitted "we have a few old soreheads," but their objections don't amount to much.

Lowe and his partners travel around the country extolling the virtues of Dalhart. They boast that there are now eight dairies where zero existed three years ago. Lowe hopes Dalhart will have 50 dairies in five years many relocating from California and others from Texas' urbanizing areas, such as Waco, where 14 dairies were sued by the city for polluting its river and drinking water.

Lowe says he doesn't blame Californians for wanting dairies to *mooove* along. "If I lived in California, with its bad air quality, I wouldn't want dairies. California is such a crowded state. We can go miles without seeing a city."

I thanked Lowe for his hospitality and randomly called another Dalhart business. Without even trying, I hit a sorehead, who spoke to me only after I promised they would not be identified. Dalhart's a small town and the owner couldn't afford to lose any business.

The store owner worried about the impact dairies were having on land values and grain prices both of which have spiked to the benefit of folks like Lowe, but at the expense of existing ranches.

There are concerns that Waco's pollution problems will be repeated in Dalhart. And some are haunted by the memories of an earlier "boom," when Nebraska farmers rushed to buy Dalhart's cheap land, only to retreat in a few years when their farms failed.

"A lot of people are concerned," said the shop owner. "But the complainers are not as organized as those promoting dairies."

Nancy at Gebo's clothing store was more understanding, pointing out that odors and pollution "go with the territory of being a farming community." Lawana Hey at Hodie's Bar-B-Q said adding dairy cows to Dalhart's feedlots was no big deal. "This town more or less lives off cattle. We already got so much livestock here. We're used to it. You might as well add dairies."

Frances Ondracek at the Dalhart Bowl seemed to embody the city's spirit:

Mr. Ondracek, I'm calling from The Bakersfield Californian newspaper. I'm writing a column about dairies moving to your town.

Huh?

Mr. Ondracek, sir, can you hear me?

Huh?

Is there someone else I can talk to?

No one else is here.

Well, I'll call back.

No, what do you want?

Is it OK that all these dairies are moving to Dalhart.

(I was now shouting into the phone.)

Yup.

Why.

Good for business.

Have you lived in Dalhart for a long time?

All my life.

If you don't mind me asking, how many years might that be?

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OK, to make sure I understand. You don't care what moves to your town, the more cows the better. And you aren't bothered by the smells or anything else as long as it's good for business.

Yup.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, July 17, 2005:](#)

Cows' contribution to air pollution overplayed

I object to Bill McEwen's negative column about cows on June 30.

Cows eat grass, permanent pasture and alfalfa. These are all green plants that are grown for their use, and these green plants, as they grow, take pollutants out of the air and put oxygen back into the air. He did not mention this.

So there are 1.4 million cows -- there are 25 million people in California. At a ratio of five people per cow, I think people produce a lot more air pollution than cows.

Cars and trucks burn fuel that is made in refineries. The refineries make pollution and then the cars and trucks make pollution. At no point is the fuel for vehicles involved in cleaning up the air, such as green grass and pasture will do.

Mr. McEwen wants more bureaucracy to regulate nature. What we need to do is regulate bureaucracies. Mr. McEwen's cow stance is not to be believed. Our country survived larger numbers of buffalo and elk as compared with cows, and it did the country no harm. Certainly, the products of milk, cheese and meat I doubt Mr. McEwen would totally do without if given the choice.

Gerald E. Peters, Fresno