

Hispanics seek voice on air Concerns rise over pollution of skies, waterways.

By Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee
Fresno Bee, Tuesday, March 29, 2005

Hispanics in the San Joaquin Valley rank odors from dairies and industry, pesticide drift, traffic exhaust and contaminated water among the top environmental problems in their communities.

But Hispanics say their concerns about the environment often go unheard by those with the authority to clean the air and water, according to a report by the Latino Issues Forum made public Monday.

Community dialogues or platicas with about 370 Hispanics living in mostly rural communities from Kern County to Stanislaus County found a "disconnect between community residents and those making environmental decisions," said Chione Flegal, senior program manager at Latino Issues Forum.

Latino Issues Forum partnered with Metro Ministry, Family HealthCare Network and La Union del Pueblo Entero to produce the report.

The partnership is working with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which enforces pollution rules in the Valley, to create environmental justice guidelines. "We are trying to work as much as we can to give justice to the communities who aren't heard," said Rey León, senior policy analyst at the Latino Issues Forum.

Jaime Holt, public education administrator at the pollution control district, said an environmental justice policy will formalize the "district's commitment to involve all Valley residents, regardless of who they are, where they live, what color their skin or how much money they make."

Carolina Simunovic, environmental health director at Fresno Metro Ministry, said the report highlights the need to pay attention to environmental hazards on a neighborhood level.

For example, several participants from Woodville in Tulare County complained of worn-out roads traveled by diesel trucks from neighboring industries, and parents questioned the health impact of a dairy near their children's school.

In Fresno and Madera counties, residents cited smog, refineries, diesel trucks and traffic on Highway 99 as sources of pollution.

But they also voiced concern about pesticide runoff in agricultural fields and waste recycling plants being located too close to residential neighborhoods.

And North Valley residents raised the issues of dairy farms, pesticides, dust and particulate matter in the air.

Most of the participants from throughout the Valley identified health problems that they associated with exposure to pollutants.

About 16% of the respondents had asthma or some other type of respiratory condition, while 24% of the participants with children said their youngsters had asthma. California's asthma rate is 11.9%.

The survey also found 46% of those surveyed, many of whom are agricultural workers, lacked health insurance; 24% said their children did not have health insurance.

The report, "New Voices for Change: Environmental Health Issues in the Latino Community of the San Joaquin Valley," makes several recommendations for addressing environmental concerns. They include:

The governor and Legislature should take a leadership role in providing universal health access for California residents.

The state should secure funds for more rural pollutant monitors in rural communities.

The San Joaquin Valley air district should develop an air-quality education campaign with Spanish broadcasting and print media.

Blast serves as reminder for local refinery

Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday, March 29, 2005

ERIN WALDNER, Californian staff writer

The powerful explosion at a Texas refinery that left 15 people dead last week occurred while the plant was undergoing a routine maintenance project known as a turnaround. Here in Bakersfield, the oil refinery on Rosedale Highway underwent its own turnaround this month. The plant was gradually shut down, maintenance work was performed, and now the plant is being brought back to life.

Only two more units need to be brought back online, and that work should be completed by the end of the week, Flying J refinery manager Eugene Cotten said Monday.

All the other units have been started back up safely, Cotten said.

Turnarounds can be dangerous.

"You're doing things that you don't do very often. You have to reinforce the procedures to make sure people don't forget" what they're supposed to do, said Cotten, a veteran in the refining industry.

In California, turnarounds are done once a year, usually starting in January, when there's less demand for gasoline, said Rob Schlichting, a spokesman for the California Energy Commission. He said often it's a partial turnaround, meaning only part of the refinery is taken off line.

In general, oil refineries pose certain hazards to its workers and neighbors.

In January, an explosion at the Kern Oil & Refining Co. plant on Panama Lane left three men injured.

One of the men, 49-year-old Duane Herdt, remains at the Grossman Burn Center at Sherman Oaks Hospital in critical condition, Debbie Groveman, a spokeswoman for the burn center, said Monday.

She said Herdt suffered burns to nearly half of his body, including his face, torso and upper and lower extremities.

The refinery directed questions about the explosion to Neil Walker, a spokesman for the plant. He was out of the office Monday.

The California Department of Industrial Relations is still investigating the cause of the accident, said agency spokesman Dean Fryer.

The most deadly refinery accident in recent California history occurred in Martinez, near San Francisco, in 1999, when a processing unit at a Tosco refinery caught fire.

Four workers were killed. A fifth was seriously injured.

For 77-year-old Anna Toy of Bakersfield, the explosion at the Texas refinery brought back memories of a fire at the old Golden Bear refinery in the 1930s. Toy said one of her father's friends was killed in the fire.

"I do remember my dad taking me out there afterwards to see the damage," she said.

From an emissions standpoint, if an explosion were to occur today at the Flying J refinery on Rosedale Highway, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District would be concerned about the possible release of vapors, said Jon Adams, an air quality compliance manager with the district.

Certain vapors, he said, can form ozone, which is an irritant to the human lung.

Under Shell, the refinery had a good environmental and safety program, according to Adams.

"They did have violations with us, but they were able to keep that number down," he said.

In 1995, an explosion at the Sunland oil refinery on Coffee Road killed a passing motorist. The refinery never reopened.

Adams said it's possible an explosion like that could happen at the Flying J refinery if a substantial amount of vapors were released from the plant and they came into contact with the exhaust fumes from a passing vehicle.

But, Adams also said, "I drive Rosedale every day. I feel safe."

Since the deadly fire at the Tosco refinery in Martinez, state laws were enacted that established two process safety management teams in California. They investigate companies that use processes involving fuels or explosives.

"They'll come in and do random inspections of the refineries," said Fryer.

The teams can issue citations on the spot.

Texas does not have teams like this in place, Fryer said.

After the explosion at the Texas refinery, management at the Flying J plant reviewed with employees and contractors guidelines for conducting the turnaround, Cotten said. Flying J, which recently acquired the refinery from Shell Oil Co. adopted the procedures already in place at the refinery. The refinery now goes by the name Big West Oil of California.

The explosion in Texas was "very disheartening," Cotten said. "That kind of tragedy is bad whatever industry it happens in. It reinforces that this business is kind of a risk."

County parks may get upgrade Supervisors to vote to apply for \$1.2m grant

Tulare Advance-Register and Visalia Times-Delta

Monday, March 28, 2005

By Lynn Doan, Staff writer

In the next four years, Tulare County residents could see \$1.2 million in improvements to parks and other public areas, courtesy of a one-time grant from the state.

The grant, which was created with the passage of Proposition 40 in 2002, would be used to renovate arbors, public bathrooms, concrete walkways and benches in public parks, said Neil Pilegard, the county's parks and recreation manager. The Tulare County Board of Supervisors is expected to vote Tuesday to apply for the grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

"We'll be using it for quite a few different things," he said. "We'd like to use it to bring some of the facilities into better condition for the public."

As part of the state's California Clean Water, [Clean Air](#), Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002, the grant program divvies up \$327.7 million between local governments. Tulare County is entitled to \$1.2 million based on population, Pilegard said.

Pilegard said the grant is on a reimbursement schedule, meaning the county will have to pay for and complete the renovations, and then ask the state to reimburse it for the costs. The county must also submit to the state a list of its planned projects by June 2006 and complete them by June 2009, he said.

Other items

Supervisors will also hold a public hearing on a proposed rock quarry that neighbors have been fighting for more than 10 years.

The county's Planning Commission gave Kaweah River Rock the go-ahead in January to build its second quarry on a 280-acre site east of State Route 245 between Avenue 332 and the Kaweah River. But a group of Woodlake residents, Valley Citizens for Water, appealed the commission's decision.

Residents said they are afraid the proposed quarry would reduce or damage groundwater.

Members also fear that excavation would damage the aquifer that supports their groundwater and change the way they pump water.

The group's representative, Del Strange, said the project would "destroy a significant portion of the Kaweah aquifer."

"The long-term impact on the county's groundwater resources could be devastating," he said.

This is the second time Kaweah River Rock has sought a permit for a quarry in the area.

It proposed a much larger project in 1995, but Valley Citizens for Water managed to derail it in 1999.

The Board of Supervisors can decide to uphold the commission's decision or deny Kaweah River Rock a permit for the quarry.

Contest seeks PSA entries from teens for clean-air campaign

Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday, March 29, 2005

Local high school students are invited to join a radio and television public service announcement contest sponsored by the Tobacco Free Coalition of Kern County and the Kern County Department of Public Health.

The "Strike Down Secondhand Smoke" campaign promotes a clean-air environment by focusing on decreasing second-hand smoke in the home and in cars.

Students will create and submit public service announcement contest entries, formatted via spoken word, poetry, singing, rapping and dramatic interpretation. Television entries may be submitted via VHS or on CD-ROM.

Five winning 60-second radio PSAs and five television PSAs will be chosen and aired on Bakersfield's radio and television stations.

Entries must be received by April 19; announcement of the top five winners in both categories and awarding of prizes will be Monday, May 9, at Liberty High School.

Details of the contest, entry and judging criteria and the rules are available from the Kern High School District Special Projects Department.

To learn more about the campaign, call Allison Perkins-Thomas, marketing consultant, at 588-3360.

Incentive to cut emissions as pollution costs rise

DAILY DIGEST

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, March 29, 2005

By David R. Baker

HOUSTON - Add one more thing to the list of rising energy-related costs: the price to pollute.

The price of sulfur dioxide allowances - a right for a power plant to emit 1 ton of sulfur dioxide under a federal pollution control program - has risen 250 percent in the past year. Allowances that once traded for \$100 topped \$200 in early 2004 and shot to \$700 in the past few months.

The higher prices reflect both the success of the 10-year-old pollution control program and a number of changing realities for power producers, such as the doubling of the price of low-sulfur coal and tighter expected environmental rules.

The sulfur dioxide allowance trading program was created as a way to reduce acid rain created by emissions from power plant smokestacks. It assigned a cap on sulfur dioxide emissions for the entire power industry and then created a trading system for allowances that would let companies decide whether it was more cost-effective to reduce their emissions or buy the right to pollute.

The Environmental Protection Agency's annual auction of new sulphur dioxide emission allowances, which will be unsealed today, could drive prices up even further as companies scramble to find ways to comply with their annual pollution limits. The winning bids are likely to be close to the price of allowances traded on the open market, which was \$690 per ton last week. Unsuccessful bidders will need to buy allowances on the open market to meet their needs.

Overall, the program is considered a success in that it has reduced sulfur dioxide emissions by more than 32 percent from 1990 levels and has done it in a way that proved predictable and cost effective to businesses. A 2003 congressional report estimates that the program costs about \$1.5 billion per year but yields as much as \$77 billion in benefits, including reductions in U. S. death and illness rates, improved visibility and lower amounts of particulate matter in the air.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, March 29, 2005:](#)

'Present both sides'

I am appalled at how biased and narrow-minded The Bee is about the Environmental Protection Agency's new air pollution rules, as characterized in the March 24 editorial, "Politics trump science."

I'm puzzled why you did not consider evidence on the EPA's Web site that "cap and trade" has historically worked. What you failed to mention is that this program was initiated in 1990 to significantly reduce acid rain problems caused by sulfur dioxide emissions. So far with this program, such emissions have been reduced beyond expectations and in a shorter amount of time.

The reason the EPA did not go with across-the-board mandatory regulations on mercury emissions is because it is simply too expensive for sources to undertake. With this system, individual sources are allowed to make a choice on how to reduce emissions or purchase allowances.

This market-based mechanism encourages polluters to upgrade equipment to meet the cap, allowing them to customize their compliance strategies to their individual economies. The goal is to reduce emissions; this is just a more cost-effective way of meeting it.

Next time, I suggest you present both sides when discussing a problem, instead of simply saying something will not work.

Brian Barr, Sanger

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, March 28, 2005:](#)

'Our polluted air'

I've been wanting to write to your paper about people getting asthma from our polluted air. About 42 years ago, two of our daughters had asthma really bad. Our oldest daughter didn't have it. I don't know the reason why. Within a few years they outgrew it.

Why are people complaining? We know the air is not clean, so what can we do? Walk to the grocery stores or department stores or maybe ride our bikes.

We love the Opinion pages of The Bee. We hope you keep it up.

Gladys Douty
Fresno