

Air advisory issued

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2005

People in Stanislaus and Merced counties are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as those with chronic breathing problems. The "burning discouraged" advisory comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Today's advisory is the first step: a voluntary request. The next step is a mandatory prohibition. No advisory is issued for today for San Joaquin County.

Hole in Ozone May Stay Longer Than Expected

With banned chemicals still being released into the Earth's atmosphere, scientists say the layer's recovery may take two decades more, till 2065.

By Usha Lee McFarling, Times Staff Writer
LA Times, December 7, 2005

SAN FRANCISCO - The ozone hole over Antarctica may persist two decades longer than predicted, until 2065, because ozone-destroying chemicals are still being released by developed nations a decade after their production and importation was banned.

The Montreal Protocol, ratified in 1987, banned the creation of chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, used as coolant by developed nations. It followed the discovery that such chemicals ripped apart ozone molecules and severely thinned the layer of ozone that sits about 20 miles above the Earth's surface and shields the planet from ultraviolet radiation that causes cancer and cataracts and can harm wildlife.

Developing countries have been allowed to continue using the chemicals for several decades to avoid the higher cost of replacement chemicals. Scientists had predicted that the phasing out of the chemicals by developed nations would allow the ozone hole over Antarctica to recover by 2040 or 2050.

But measurements taken in 2003 and released Tuesday showed that emissions of the chemicals from the United States and Canada made up about 15% of the world total even though the nations are no longer allowed to produce the compounds, said Dale Hurst, an atmospheric chemist from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who made the measurements.

He estimated that developed countries accounted for about half of the world's total.

"These fractions are surprisingly high," Hurst said at a briefing on the issue held in San Francisco at the American Geophysical Union's meeting of 11,000 earth scientists. "We would have expected them to be exhausted by 2003."

Hurst said he believed the compounds were not new ones, but left over from old fire extinguishers, refrigerators and air-conditioning systems that were created before the ban went into effect but are being legally recycled and slowly leaking chemicals into the atmosphere.

Hurst said in an interview that he doubted there was much illicit production of two key CFCs in the U.S. or Canada because his measurements showed no traces of a chemical used in their production.

The overall rates of two major ozone-destroying chemicals, chlorine and bromine, peaked in 2002 and were now in decline, he said.

But scientists greatly underestimated the amount of already-produced chemicals that remained and were still in use, Hurst said.

The ozone hole over the Antarctic is now not expected to recover until 2065, said John Austin, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientist who runs computer models of how the ozone layer will respond in the future.

The ozone hole over Antarctica was detected 20 years ago. This year's hole was one of the largest recorded: 9.4 million square miles, about the size of North America. In 1998, the hole was 10.1 million square miles, according to NASA, and was similarly large in 2000 and 2003. Before 1985, the ozone hole measured less than 4 million square miles.

Hurst's measurements taken by low-flying aircraft of ozone-destroying chemicals near the planet's surface have been confirmed by satellite, said Michelle Santee, an atmospheric scientist at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Total levels of chlorine in the stratosphere have declined in recent years, but they are still five times as high as natural levels, she said. In addition, the particular chlorine molecule that destroys ozone - chlorine oxide - is still forming in high amounts during winter months over the Antarctic.

"As a result, the ozone has been eaten away," Santee said.

Some of the chemicals involved persist for 100 years and can continually tear apart ozone through chemical reactions, she said.

The latest measurements will be used to create a scientific assessment of ozone depletion that will be given in 2007 to the signers of the Montreal Protocol and could be used to make changes in the treaty, said John Newman, a physicist and ozone expert at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md.

"There will be a new look at these chemicals," Newman said. But he added that because the compounds were already regulated, "I'm not sure there's a lot we can do."

CFCs are allowed to be recycled. Moving them from one place to another allows some of the chemicals to leak out. But the alternative to recycling would be to vent them to the atmosphere all at once, which would raise levels more suddenly, the scientists said.

Another compound, called methyl bromide, is used as a fumigant in agriculture and importation and is exempt from the Montreal Protocol because no sufficient replacement has been found, Hurst said. That compound is 45 to 60 times more effective at depleting ozone than CFCs are. But it persists for only eight months in the atmosphere, so it may not prove to be as much of a long-term problem for ozone, Hurst said.

The trends are the same for thinning ozone at the North Pole, but the problem there is not as severe because the area doesn't consistently experience the extremely cold conditions needed for the ozone-depleting forms of chlorine to be created. Winds around the North Pole are also stronger and tend to blow ozone back into areas that have been thinned.

Austin's models show that the ozone layer over the Arctic should recover between 2030 and 2040, but he said his estimates were more uncertain there than for the Antarctic because of weather patterns and long-term atmospheric patterns that could alter ozone levels in unpredictable ways.

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, Dec. 7, 2005](#)

Track critics take new tack

Editor: Now that the environmental impact report has actually been released, after long months of shamelessly misrepresenting the facts the critics of the Riverside Motorsports Park project are resorting to a new tactic: stall and delay.

We are now roughly halfway through the EIR's 45-day public comment period. The vocal minority opposed to the project has made its objections heard. Why do they need more time? So they can attempt to feverishly whip up more opposition with their "sky is falling" rhetoric, of course!

These are many of the same folks who promised gloom and doom because of the opening of U.S. Penitentiary, Atwater, ironically on land immediately adjacent to RMP. Remember all the foolish rhetoric these folks gave us? Remember how we were supposed to be overrun by increased traffic, how our neighborhoods were going to be ruined by the undesirable element moving into the area to be near their incarcerated loved ones? Of course you don't, because none of the rhetoric was true. The only thing that USP Atwater did was provide the initial spark in what has turned out to be a real estate boom of near- historic proportions.

The same is true in this case. I for one trust that the Merced County Board of Supervisors will not only carefully weigh all opinions generated by the EIR, but the facts as presented by the report and the undeniable, hugely positive impact RMP is going to have on our community.

Those that decry RMP for its supposed deleterious effect on our "rural, agrarian way of life" need only open their eyes and take a look around. Take a drive around North Merced, from Highway 59 to Lake Road. Take a drive around Livingston, Planada, Atwater. Progress and growth are not coming; progress and growth are already here.

Riverside Motorsports Park will not impair the positive growth cycle we are in. Rather, it will enhance it and only serve to improve the overall quality of the Merced area.

It only took me 10 minutes to write this letter. I do not need additional time to air my sentiments on the EIR, and neither do the RMP detractors.

JIM KAYSER
Merced