

Air districts nationwide scrutinize valley

Attention focused on rule to enforce laws

by Mark Grossi - Fresno Bee

in the Fresno Bee and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Nineteen months ago, an unprecedented state law took aim at air pollution created by the San Joaquin Valley's urban sprawl, but local authorities still are wrestling with a way to enforce it. The law imposes developer fees for future air pollution from traffic and other activities related to new construction at the edge of cities in the valley's eight counties, from Stockton to Bakersfield. Now air districts nationwide are waiting to see how the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District designs a rule to enforce the law. The district predicted completion of the rule by December 2004, but now it's looking more like the first quarter of 2006.

Activists blame the delay on builders, saying the industry is intimidating the district. Industry officials reply that they merely monitor the district's progress. Air district officials say outside influences have not caused the delay.

Officials have spent time tweaking an analysis model to calculate the pollution savings for developers who locate a project near public transportation, a bike lane or retail stores. The developers will get credit for encouraging people to walk, ride bikes or take the bus.

The complexity of the analysis is the reason for the delay, they said.

"No one's ever done this kind of rule for air quality," said district Planning Manager Dave Mitchell. Still, activists say they see a familiar pattern: bureaucratic foot-dragging and special treatment for industry. They say the district has a history of favoring industries and delaying rules while valley residents suffer because of air quality as bad as or worse than that found in Los Angeles.

"I think they're worried about being sued by industry," said Carolina Simunovic, environmental health director at Fresno Metro Ministry.

The industry is not trying to delay, said Michael Prandini, president of the Building Industry Association in the Fresno-Madera area. But he said builders have serious doubts about the new rule.

"We don't think you can make the nexus between car trips and a tract of houses," he said. "You don't know who will be moving into the houses or what kind of cars they will drive. These may be people moving from Shaver Lake to Fresno so they make their trip to work shorter. How can you know?"

If the rule is done well, it will give residents more choices in housing, save money on transportation and make the air cleaner, said Kathryn Phillips, representing Environmental Defense.

"It has such potential to make the valley a better place," Phillips said.

Judge gives OK to sue over smog

SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Environmental groups have the right to sue state agencies for not controlling pesticide pollution, a federal judge in Sacramento ruled Monday. State air quality agencies violated the federal Clean Air Act, which calls for a 20 percent reduction in smog caused by pesticides between 1990 and 2005, the lawsuit says.

The required smog reduction hasn't happened in the San Joaquin Valley, where pesticide-induced smog has increased since 1990.

"I'm ecstatic that (the judge) saw it our way," said Teresa DeAnda, an activist from Earlimart whose organization joined four others in the suit.

They say the state's approach to pesticide smog pollution isn't working, and the judge's ruling allows them to continue their year-old case. The state relies on voluntary programs, said attorney Brent Newell, a lawyer for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, who represents the environmental groups. It won't force pesticide manufacturers and users to cut down smog, he said.

Those arguments are "(public relations) distortions," wrote Glenn Brank, spokesman for the state Department of Pesticide Regulation, in an e-mail. Smog from pesticides dropped consistently in the San Joaquin Valley through 2001, he wrote, but then levels began "creeping up."

By 2003, pesticide emissions were higher than they were in 1990.

The department is trying to get those numbers down, Brank wrote. In the next month, it will order manufacturers to reformulate more than 800 pesticides to reduce smog. It's working with industry to come up with cleaner ways to apply pesticides, and is researching better practices for fumigants.

"We have repeatedly voiced our commitment to clean air in the San Joaquin Valley and other areas," Brank wrote.

But pesticide regulators refuse to regulate, Newell said, and change hasn't happened voluntarily. The state points to low emissions in 2001, but that was "a complete anomaly," he said.

Smog is the common term for ozone, the product of a reaction between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds. Smog is linked to a host of lung problems, including asthma and decreased lung capacity.

Pesticides were the sixth-highest source of smog-forming volatile organic compounds in the San Joaquin Valley in 2004 -- after dairies, trucks, cars, agricultural burning and oil and gas production.

The pesticides with the most smog potential are methyl bromide, dichloropropene, metam-sodium, chlorpyrifos and oxyfluorfen, according to the plaintiffs' press release.

The Department of Pesticide Regulation is required to monitor pesticide-induced smog in five areas of the state: the Sacramento area, the San Joaquin Valley, Ventura, the south coast and the southeast desert. Sacramento and the south coast have met their smog goals, but the rest have more than they started with in 1990.

The local plaintiffs are DeAnda's El Comite para el Bienestar de Earlimart and the Shafter-based Association of Irrigated Residents. They joined three Ventura groups, Community and Children's Advocates Against Pesticide Poisoning, Wishtoyo Foundation and Ventura Coastkeeper.

The suit names the Department of Pesticide Regulation, California Environmental Protection Agency and the state Air Resources Board.

Diesel engine companies challenge emission rules on Earth Day Manufacturers go to court seeking to block stricter pollution standards

By Don Thompson, Associated Press
Tri Valley Herald, April 23, 2005

SACRAMENTO — Diesel engine manufacturers went to court Friday seeking to block stricter pollution standards set to take effect in one week, arguing that state regulators reneged on a \$1 billion 1998 legal settlement.

The California Air Resources Board says the pollution standards it adopted in December are needed because a voluntary program promoted by manufacturers wasn't working. Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Loren McMaster,

in a tentative ruling before he heard arguments, denied a manufacturers request that the initial April 30 compliance deadline be delayed while their lawsuit proceeds. He did not immediately issue a final order after Fridays hearing.

The outcome has national implications because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency struggles with the same enforcement problem.

The ARBs regulations require owners of trucks with diesel engines to remove so-called smog defeat timing devices that allow the engines to meet pollution requirements when trucks are inspected but exceed the limits when trucks travel at highway speeds.

The regulations apply to an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 vehicles licensed in other states that drive through California, as well as 58,000 California-licensed trucks.

The air board says removing the devices from California-registered trucks alone would trim air pollution the same amount as removing 1 million cars from California highways. Clean air advocates hope the regulations, if they stand, will spread nationwide.

The debate sharpened beyond the courtroom as air board Executive Officer Catherine Witherspoon accused manufacturers of endangering lives and costing California millions of dollars by not quickly replacing the devices on nearly a million trucks, buses and recreational vehicles built between 1993 and 1998.

She criticized the manufacturers for insisting their customers, the diesel trucks owners, pay for removing the devices.

But Caterpillar Inc., Cummins Inc., Mack Trucks Inc. and Volvo Powertrain Corp. said theyve already paid the state \$37 million in civil penalties and other costs. Recalling the trucks simply to replace the devices would cost truck owners millions of dollars in downtime costs for the replacement and new inspections if they comply, and \$300-\$800 in penalties for each truck if they dont, the companies said.

The ARB regulations require that the devices be removed starting April 30 on a phased-in schedule based on model years. An estimated 35,000 to 45,000 heavy-duty trucks are required to replace the devices by years end, while medium-duty trucks must be retrofitted by 2007.

The 1998 settlement required manufacturers to replace the defeat devices only when the heavy-duty engines needed major overhauls, which happens far less frequently than regulators had expected.

A year ago, the ARB agreed to a voluntary plan for the industry to reach 35 percent compliance by last November and 100 percent compliance by 2008.

But the board said only about 18 percent of the California-licensed vehicles had the upgrades by November, so it adopted the mandatory regulations.

McMaster tentatively ruled he has no authority to override a legitimate government regulation, no matter if it violates a settlement.

Caterpillar attorney Gilbert Keteltas, arguing for all the manufacturers, said the air board gave up its regulatory right under the settlement.

Deputy Attorney General William Brieger, arguing for the air board, said the agreement was with manufacturers, while the regulations are on diesel truck owners.

Green waste proposal denied

County supervisors vote to turn down transfer station in southwest part of Fresno.

By Marc Benjamin / The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Southwest Fresnoans and supporters of a proposed veterans home packed the Fresno County Board of Supervisors' chambers Tuesday to defeat a proposed green waste transfer station.

Supervisors voted 5-0 to oppose the plan. Supervisor Phil Larson, whose district includes the proposed site, signaled his opposition before public input was under way.

But Larson also showed sympathy for the applicant, Mike Kochergen, who has been planning the project for more than two years.

This month the Fresno City Council opposed the transfer station 7-0, but Larson said he had previously received letters of support for Kochergen's project from the city of Fresno. Tuesday's vote overturned a 5-2 Fresno County Planning Commission decision supporting Kochergen's plan.

"Mr. Kochergen has been led down a primrose path and then hung at the end of it," Larson said. "That's not a good way to operate." The site runs along the Fresno city limits near Brawley and Nielsen avenues, which is why the City Council examined the plan.

Kochergen's representative, Dirk Poeschel, told supervisors the facility would process mostly green waste but also was working with markets to receive fruit and vegetables that no longer could be kept in stores.

None of the waste was to be on the site more than 48 hours before being shipped to Avenal to be turned into compost, Poeschel said.

He said there would be no hazardous or human waste products, no rotting trash or demolition material, and work would be done under a roofed building in the center of a 27-acre parcel.

Poeschel said the project would reduce harmful air emissions because trucks would not have to travel far to drop off green waste. He also pointed out that if fewer miles were traveled by large trucks, there would be less wear and tear on city and county roads and would reduce potential for accidents.

Trucks now go to disposal sites north and south of Fresno.

The industrially zoned neighborhood was well-suited for Kochergen's project, he added.

"We are in a corridor with thousands of acres of industrially zoned lands," Poeschel said.

But the standing-room-only audience Tuesday evening made up almost entirely of opponents to the project, cited the Crippen waste site fire two years ago as a reason to keep the project from being approved. The Crippen fire took a month and \$6 million to extinguish. The site was about a mile from Kochergen's proposed transfer station.

Dennis Major said his granddaughter had to be hospitalized twice because of breathing problems from waste site fires.

George Finley said he is tired of southwest Fresno being dumped on by the rest of the Fresno metropolitan area.

"I have seen all the things nobody else wanted come to southwest Fresno," he said. "We don't create that garbage. Why do we have it?"

Residents also said Kochergen Farms has had several violations with the California Integrated Waste Management Board at its Avenal site.

Residents said southwest Fresno seemed to be turning a corner with its Kearney Palms shopping center, the future 780-home Running Horse development with a golf course and a veterans home planned about two miles south of Kochergen's site.

Veterans said they were concerned funding for the veterans home could be jeopardized if supervisors approved the green waste proposal.

Jack Parnell, president of the Central California Veterans Home Support Foundation, said the project has not been fully funded and that the federal government would withdraw funding if an unexpected environmental issue surfaced.

The veterans home would create 300 jobs with an annual payroll of up to \$30 million and cost more than \$100 million to build. It is expected to open in 2007.

"To be this far and have it stopped at this point is unthinkable," Parnell said.

Human waste, an unsavory import, raises concern in Central Valley

By JULIANA BARBASSA, Associated Press Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, April 26, 2005

Wasco, Calif. (AP) -- A strong wind raises clouds of powdery gray dust, obscuring the road and sky around Larry Pearson's truck as he drives past piles of dried human waste.

The mounds are part of an import stream some Kern County farmers would rather not have. Southern California cities and counties truck about 450,000 tons of treated sewage waste each year to the county, where it dries in massive piles and then is spread on land that is used to grow crops for livestock. It is not spread on land that is used to grow foods for market.

Pearson and some other residents say they've had enough of other people's sewage sludge, saying the unsavory mixture fouls the air and endangers the quality of groundwater. Some farmers also fear the practice could hurt the reputation of crops grown on the fertile soils of the southern San Joaquin Valley.

Critics are supporting a bill introduced in the state Legislature to stop the transport of human waste from California's urban counties to the state's farming communities.

"We've become their toilet," said Pearson, a councilman in the rural farming town of Wasco, as he surveyed a 1,280-acre sludge site about 15 miles from town.

The mound is owned and managed by the city of Oxnard, which annually sends 24,000 tons of biosolids, the byproduct of treating municipal wastewater.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency decided in the early 1990s that spreading the nation's treated sewage waste over farmland was preferable to sending it out to sea or pouring it in landfills. Since then, urban centers have trucked their sewage to rural areas, where the waste primarily is used as fertilizer for animal feed crops.

Kern County's wide open fields and location, just across the Tehachapi Mountains from the Los Angeles basin, make it an attractive dumping ground. The county's residents produce only about 2 percent of the state's total sewage waste, but its farms take about one-third of the biosolids.

"This is a wealthy, industrial area dumping anything they want on a rural, poor county," said Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who sponsored the bill that would forbid carting waste into Kern County.

The county's board of supervisors and many city councils have passed resolutions supporting the measure, which is scheduled for its first hearing on May 2.

Opposition to the sludge-dumping is not universal, however, even among farmers. Some swear by its benefits, saying it can improve soil quality by turning nutrient-poor ground heavy with clay into arable farmland.

"If you look at the cycle of life, of the economy here, it makes sense," said Ben Lapadula, general manager of Honey Bucket Farms.

The 6,000-acre operation near Delano has used biosolids for 12 years to fertilize land that grows fiber and cattle feed.

"When you grow a crop and export it, you're taking nutrients out of the soil. This brings those nutrients back," he said.

Erecting legal barriers between counties to prevent the sludge from being transported also could create problems for the state's more populous counties. They have little available land for sludge operations and might have to resort to contracting with private companies for disposal, a more expensive proposition.

"We wanted to do things the right way, to develop a long-term, responsible operation," said Mark Norris, Oxnard's wastewater superintendent. "This thing (the Florez bill) could put us back at square one. But we're still hopeful that common sense will prevail."

Biosolids are not used as fertilizer on land that grows crops for human consumption. Instead, they are tilled into grazing land or fields used to grow crops for feeding livestock.

Even then, the mixture is disinfected through heat and chemical processes that kill bacteria, Norris said.

"We're looking to be responsible, to be good neighbors," he said.

The city of Los Angeles also dumps its treated waste - about 250,000 tons per year - onto a site south of Bakersfield named Green Acres. Its biosolids program grows corn and alfalfa for cattle and has received awards and recognition from the EPA.

But some growers worry the practice could taint the reputation of crops from Kern County, one of the nation's most productive farming regions. The public might not realize that the sludge isn't used on fields that produce crops bound for the local grocery store.

Consumers "might not want to buy from a county that's known for taking human waste," said Paul Giboney, a ranch agronomist working for the M. Caratan farm, near Delano.

Giboney and others also are concerned about the content of biosolids, which contain the waste from industrial sites, dry cleaners, morgues, hospitals and other businesses. Chemicals and heavy metals are as much of a concern, if not more so, than human waste, they say.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control Board has cited concerns about biosolids adding to the ozone pollution that already makes the area one of the country's dirtiest air basins. Pollution comes in the form of emissions from the piles and the grit that is picked up and distributed by the valley's frequent winds.

Green Acres, Kern County's largest disposal site, sits next to a massive underground aquifer that stores irrigation and drinking water for surrounding farms and homes in Bakersfield and even Los Angeles.

The water usually lies 50 to 100 feet underground, but in wet years can rise to within 25 feet of the surface. The risk of the waste contaminating the water is real, said Lloyd Fryer, the senior water resources planner for the Kern County Water Agency.

"Of course we're concerned," Fryer said. "Once that water's contaminated, there's no treating it. It's gone."

Trustees to discuss the Northwest School Complex

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, April 26, 2005

The final environmental impact report for the proposed Northwest School Complex is up for approval tonight by the Visalia Unified School District board of trustees.

Loss of prime farmland and an increase in noise and air emissions were considered in the environmental study, but their effects were not enough to stop the project or scale it back.

"The district finds and determines that the project will have a significant effect upon the environment but the benefits of the project outweigh the unavoidable adverse impacts," according to the study.

The 160-acre complex, on the northwest corner of Akers Street and Riggins Avenue, will include a new elementary, middle and high school in northwest Visalia to meet the district's projected enrollment growth.

In addition to schools, the complex also includes a 4,500-spectator sports stadium, performing arts and library/learning centers, and eight acres of neighborhood commercial development.

"At this point we have no plans to develop that commercial space," said Mark Fulmer, Visalia Unified assistant superintendent of administrative services. "We wanted to include that there was a possible option to develop commercial space in the report."

Fulmer said a strip mall similar to the Rancho Viejo shopping center on Akers and Walnut Avenue might be developed on the corner of Riggins and Akers.

However, the plan at this point, he said, is to use the 160 acres for schools.

According to the environmental report, an estimated 8,368 daily vehicle trips associated with the schools and commercial center together will have a significant effect on air quality.

To help minimize the air pollution, the report calls for Visalia Unified to include measures recommended by the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

These measures include:

- Sidewalks and bikeways installed throughout the project to encourage walking and bicycling.
- Direct pedestrian access to the schools and sports stadium from planned transit stops.
- Landscaping designed to include deciduous trees along western and southern building exposures.
- Bicycle parking facilities for students and faculty.
- School facilities include energy-conserving features.

No project alternatives were recommended for air quality, noise or traffic.

Safety of air cleaners suspect

State and U.S. panels voice concern about household purifiers that produce ozone.

By Edie Lau -- Sacramento Bee Science Writer
in the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Bothered by dust from construction around her home in Sun City Lincoln Hills, Carole Russell ordered an air purifier she'd heard promoted by a popular radio talk show host.

Shortly after setting up the unit in her living room, Russell found that the air seemed even worse. A sharp smell like chlorine hung in the air. Her nose felt irritated, her throat raspy.

"I've almost turned the whole thing off, but it's kind of futile to spend \$794 and turn the thing off," she said.

The experience was bewildering to Russell, but to scientists in the field of indoor air pollution, her story is not surprising.

For well over a decade, independent and government researchers have suspected that certain types of indoor-air cleaners actually pollute their surroundings, potentially harming the people exposed.

The types of air cleaners in question generate ozone gas, either deliberately or as a byproduct of a process called ionization. The federal and state governments regulate ozone as a pollutant outdoors, but for the most part, no rules apply to ozone in the home.

That may change. A booming consumer market in air purifiers - valued at \$1 billion a year and rising - and new scientific evidence that even tiny increases in exposure to ozone may be unhealthy have at least two agencies seeking limits.

Last month, the California Air Resources Board - which long has been concerned about ozone generators but lacks the power to regulate indoor air - appealed to the state attorney general's office to step in.

The board asked the attorney general to determine whether air cleaners that emit ozone pose an environmental or consumer protection problem and if so, whether legal action is warranted. The attorney general's office is reviewing the request.

"Basically, we're asking, do these things work? Are they hurting people? Are they making false health claims?" said Gennet Paauwe, an air board spokeswoman.

The federal Consumer Product Safety Commission wants to know, too. It contracted last fall with Richard Shaughnessy, head of an indoor-air research program at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, to summarize the science on the subject, determine whether standards are needed and if so, what those standards should be.

Shaughnessy said he expects to make recommendations by the end of summer. Depending on the outcome, the product safety commission could call for voluntary or mandatory emissions limits, safety alerts and/or labeling, said agency spokesman Steve Forde.

Air cleaners come in many varieties, including some that use filters, others a process called ionization, some a combination. Shaughnessy noted that not all are a potential source of trouble. "There are many indoor air cleaners that are capable of providing improved air quality indoors," he said. "(But) it's a buyer-beware market right now."

Consumers Union weighed in on the subject in the May issue of Consumer Reports magazine, warning shoppers away from several models of air cleaners that it judged to be ineffective in cleaning and to have relatively high ozone output.

The types of air cleaners under government scrutiny produce ozone either deliberately or as a byproduct of ionization.

Depending on the type and the conditions under which measurements are taken, ozone emissions can vary greatly, from nearly zero to levels that would trigger smog alerts outdoors. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found in a 1995 study that some ozone generators set on high in rooms with closed doors produced concentrations up to 300 parts per billion - well over the federal pollution standard for ambient outdoor air, which is 80 ppb averaged over eight hours. Ozone is a gas produced in nature and through human activities. A layer of ozone above the atmosphere protects life on Earth from the sun's harsh ultraviolet rays. But down where people live, ozone stings eyes, burns noses and inflames lungs.

Ozone is a Jekyll-and-Hyde cousin of the oxygen we need to live. Oxygen is composed of two atoms of oxygen; ozone, three. That third atom makes it unstable and apt to react with other molecules.

That reactivity can be a useful tool. Ozone is considered an effective disinfectant for drinking water, for example.

At the same time, ozone's reactive nature does damage, cracking tires, fading blue jeans and reducing rubber bands to crumbs.

Advocates of using ozone to clean the air tout its ability to kill germs, but the EPA counters that at concentrations needed to kill viruses, bacteria, mold and other biological contaminants, the environment would be unsafe for people.

Simply put, ozone can be beneficial as long as you're not breathing it, said William Nazaroff, an environmental engineer at the University of California, Berkeley, who studies indoor-air quality.

As many residents of urban areas such as Sacramento know, ozone is created in sometimes hazardous volume when sunlight reacts with automotive exhaust. The federal government has treated ozone as a pollutant for 35 years.

But when it comes to ozone generators for household use, government action has been less decisive.

In 2001, the Federal Trade Commission won a \$1.5 million judgment against Alpine Industries, a company in Tennessee that designed and sold ozone generators. A jury found that Alpine had made hundreds of unsubstantiated claims about its machines, including claims about health benefits.

The company went out of business shortly afterward.

But the suit did not address the central question now dogging the industry: Can any level of ozone be considered safe?

"It better be safe, because that's the world we live in. These are levels that you and I are being exposed to right now," said James Marsden, a food-safety researcher at Kansas State University. Marsden recently was contracted by EcoQuest, a maker of ozone-emitting air purifiers that acquired some of Alpine's assets, to test whether its technology can successfully zap harmful bacteria in food.

EcoQuest maintains that when properly set, its home units produce ozone at concentrations of 20 ppb to 40 ppb - levels it calls both safe and refreshing.

The Sharper Image, which sells the market-leading air purifier, the Ionic Breeze, also strongly defends its product.

In documents provided by the company, officials maintain that the amount of ozone emitted is "insufficient to cause concern" and below existing federal guidelines.

Tom Lynch, director of sales for P3 International, a company in New York City that manufactures and imports a variety of electronic products, including ionizing air purifiers, said those existing government standards on ozone suggest low exposures to the gas are fine.

For example, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration limit for worker exposure is 100 ppb on average over an eight-hour workday.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has a limit of 50 ppb on indoor medical devices.

"I would have to believe that (it's safe), just based on what OSHA and FDA and all these other agencies say," Lynch said.

"We're just trying to follow government guidelines at this point," agreed Tom Ferguson, a public relations contractor for EcoQuest.

FDA spokeswoman Julie Zawisza said the medical-device standard is decades old and should not be used as a guide for household units.

Many air pollution scientists say it's not a good idea to add even trace levels of ozone to the environment - particularly when the exposure comes on top of exposure to ozone from traffic and other industrial sources.

Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in November by Yale University scientists linked increases in outdoor ozone as tiny as 10 ppb with a small but significant increase in the average daily death rate in 95 urban communities.

Dallas Hyde, a pulmonary researcher at the University of California, Davis, who studies how ozone affects the lungs of monkeys, said he and his colleagues have not seen obvious problems in animals exposed to levels below 80 ppb.

However, Hyde said, the researchers have not looked for subtle effects, such as whether levels of ozone as low as those discharged by some air cleaners might aggravate respiratory problems in people with asthma or similar conditions.

"If it were me, I wouldn't have one," Hyde said.

Nazaroff, the UC Berkeley environmental engineer, said the chemistry of air inside modern homes makes ozone potentially more dangerous indoors than out.

Ozone can react with gases from carpeting, furniture or household cleaners to produce secondary pollutants - things such as the carcinogen formaldehyde, as well as fine particles that can pass through the lungs into the bloodstream, triggering heart disease.

Seven weeks ago when she ordered her air purifier, Carole Russell knew nothing of the controversy over ozone. But after reading a recent Bee article that referred to some air cleaners possibly contributing to indoor pollution, Russell started doing some research.

She found that the EPA, the American Lung Association, the California Air Resources Board and the state Department of Health Services all warn consumers to avoid ozone generators. Russell turned off her machine.

HOW TO GET HELP

For more information about air purifiers and ozone, go to:

- * www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/ozonegen.html
- * www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/aircleaners.htm
- * www.cal-iaq.org

Council approves shuttle fare hike cost of riding to BART station will rise 23 percent

by Todd Milbourn

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Riders who take the commuter bus between Modesto and the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station will see the fare jump 23 percent starting Aug. 1.

In a 7-0 vote, the Modesto City Council approved the increase Tuesday night during a meeting that included discussions about buying new city vehicles and outsourcing jobs in the Public Works Department.

The City Council debated a 37 percent increase but lowered that after hearing from bus riders. "We understand there needs to be an increase, but this is just too much," said Ellie Yeager, 62, who has taken the bus to get to her office job in San Francisco nearly every weekday for two years. "They're asking for us to pay more, but they're not offering any better service."

Council members approved the increase in order to reduce the subsidy the bus service gets through other funding sources. The city will be able to channel the money raised by the fare hike — estimated at \$25,671 — into some of Modesto's deteriorating streets, which would suffer under proposed budget cuts.

"This is a big increase and it's not easy to do, but this budget isn't easy either," said Councilman Garrad Marsh, referring to Modesto's \$10 million budget deficit. Councilman Bob Dunbar acknowledged that it's a hefty increase but said the commuter route, compared with daily driving, "is still a bargain."

The increase comes as the price of gas is soaring. A gallon of regular unleaded averaged \$2.53 in Modesto on Tuesday, according to modestogasprices.com, a group that tracks prices. It also comes as the region combats growing traffic congestion and severe air problems that have contributed to some of the nation's highest asthma rates.

The commuter route isn't the only bus service facing an increase. Beginning July 1, Stanislaus Regional Transit riders traveling between and inside the county's rural cities will pay 15 percent to 30 percent higher fares. Meanwhile, Modesto officials are considering raising one-way bus tickets in the city from 85 cents to \$1.

On the commuter route, the increase likely will mean fewer riders — and more cars on Interstate 580 during rush hour. Fred Cavanah, Modesto's transit manager, said an "old rule of thumb" figures that for every 10 percent fares increase, the number of people riding decreases 3 percent. Yeager said she and several of her commuting friends would start looking for other ways to get over the Altamont Pass, including a carpool.

Last year, passengers aboard the city's two buses made 22,225 trips, Cavanah said.

The buses depart downtown Modesto's transit center early in the morning and pick up riders at Orchard Supply Hardware on Sisk Road before heading north on Highway 99 and eventually over the Altamont Pass to the BART station, where commuters hop on the train that takes them to their jobs in the Bay Area.

The last fare increase was in May 2003.

Also Tuesday night, the council approved a plan to seek proposals to outsource the city's leaf, tree and shrub pickup to a private firm.

City staff said private companies might be able to perform those jobs cheaper than the city, which currently spends about \$1 million for the services.

The proposal also would allow a private firm to charge residents for curbside pickup. According to a staff report, one company estimated the service would cost residents from \$3.40 to \$3.80 a month.

Private firms will submit their bids in July and, if the council approves, the selected firm would begin work in January 2006. The proposal puts at risk six city positions.

In other action, the council:

? Approved the purchase of \$1.9 million worth of vehicles, including 18 police cruisers, which city staff said are necessary to replace an aging fleet.

? OK'd changing the compass direction on a small segment of Martin Luther King Drive from north to south. The change was an effort to avoid creating duplicate addresses as a portion of the street is developed.

City staff advised those living at the 33 addresses in the affected area, from Maze Boulevard to Paradise Road to change their addresses.

Oakland in top 10 for 'green' cities

Environmental publication praises city for its solar energy, public transit, clean air and water

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri Valley Herald, April 25, 2005

OAKLAND — Oakland has been named one of America's Top 10 Greenest Cities by The Green Guide, a bimonthly, New York-based newsletter that focuses on environmental and health information.

Paul McRandle, a research editor at The Green Guide, said Oakland was chosen from about 25 cities in the United States.

"Oakland came out well on a number of issues, including clean air and clean water," he said.

Oakland also stood out, McRandle said, because of its innovative energy initiatives and public transportation system.

"Not only is BART available, but 23 percent of Oakland residents commute by bike or public transportation. That definitely cuts greenhouse gas emissions," he said. Oakland also allows solar production facilities to waive design review requirements for installation, which has sped up solar energy generation use by the city. Councilmember Nancy Nadel (West Oakland-Downtown), who is running her campaign for mayor with environmental issues in mind, said the city is moving forward on other green initiatives.

For example, the city is trying to prevent new wood burning stoves from being installed in homes to rein in air pollution.

"We're also working on controlling truck traffic from the port, which is another source of air pollution," she said.

"I think we are taking great strides and there's always more that we can do," she added. "I think the electorate expects that."

Oakland was chosen as a green city over Berkeley because The Green Guide wanted to include only large cities in their list.

Other cities include Austin, Texas, which strives to be the number one solar manufacturing city in the country and Boulder, Colo., which is surrounded by 46 square miles of public parkland and designated open space.

Program helps cut utility costs

By Tim Simmers, BUSINESS WRITER

Tri Valley Herald, April 25, 2005

MENLO PARK - THE PUBLISHER of Sunset Magazine has long promoted energy efficiency in its magazine articles about homes. But the company on Friday just flipped the switch on its own new low-cost, energy-efficient lighting system as part of an Earth Day celebration.

On a bright, sunny day overlooking a fragrant garden of peach-colored roses, Sunset announced that it is part of the official launch of a new program to help small businesses in San Mateo County significantly reduce their utility costs.

The program, called RightLights, has been funded with \$7 million from the nonprofit Ecology Action to help small businesses install energy-efficient lighting and fixture upgrades at little or no out-of-pocket cost.

Sunset's system is expected to save the "magazine of Western living" and its publishing operations some

\$52,000 a year in utility costs, or about \$367,000 over seven years. There will be additional savings in avoiding maintenance. And the avoided carbon dioxide emissions of the retrofit are the equivalent annually to planting 46 acres of trees or taking the emissions of 29 cars out of the air, program officials said.

"The quality of our new lighting is dramatically improved," said Tony Soria, facilities supervisor at Sunset, which employs 140 people at its Menlo Park headquarters. "Employee feedback has been very positive and so are the savings."

RightLights started in Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties and delivered nearly \$2 million in lighting-efficiency upgrades to small businesses, most of which employ fewer than 10 people. This business segment has been hit hard by rising energy costs yet is a prime engine for generating local jobs.

RightLights is expanding into San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. The group already has quietly upgraded the lighting efficiency of 400 small businesses in San Mateo County, and after its official launch Friday said it could install new lights and fixtures in 700 to 800 San Mateo County businesses by the end of the year, program manager Gene Thomas said. The program has served 2,000 businesses so far.

"This can make a huge difference environmentally and save companies ongoing money for utility bills," Thomas said.

Thomas said the average cost for the upgrade is about \$1,200, and businesses often pay about 15 percent out-of-pocket costs. Sunset's elaborate system cost about \$32,000. The company received a rebate of \$19,000 and recovered the rest in six months of utility bill savings, Soria said.

John and Lisa Hunt, who run the \$1.25 store in Foster City, just got lighting put into their store and are saving \$700 a month in utility costs.

"It cost nothing and it really improved the look of the store," said Lisa Hunt, who sells linens, glassware, kitchen utensils and other items that receive merchandising help from brighter lighting.

Cindy Smith, owner of Cindy's Flowers & Gifts in Menlo Park, also received an upgrade. She expects to save \$200 a month.

"Lighting in flowers is everything," Smith said.

Other local businesses already helped in the county include Una Mas taqueria in Menlo Park and Mountain Mike's Pizza in Redwood City and Belmont.

The program replaces inefficient lighting with more natural lighting that also reduces pollution and conserves energy.

The program is funded by California ratepayers under the auspices of the state Public Utilities Commission, with monies set aside from ratepayers.

"This program is the right thing to do," said state Assemblyman Ira Ruskin of Menlo Park. "This is essential to work with small businesses."

To qualify, a business has to be a PG&E customer and use less than 500 kilowatts of electricity. For more information on eligibility, call (888) 846-5050 or go to RightLights.org.

Tim Simmers can be reached at (650) 348-4361 or tsimmers@sanmateocountytimes.com. Most companies receive an 80 percent rebate for the costs, and it's often free.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, April 27, 2005:](#)

Better school buses

Children's safety, cleaner air behind Poochigian measure.

Many of those old, rattle-trap yellow school buses could be off the Valley's road - and the state's - if a Valley lawmaker has his way. We hope he does, for a couple of good reasons.

Sen. Chuck Poochigian, R-Fresno, is pushing legislation that would help school districts in California phase out older school buses in favor of newer models. That's a good idea because it would make the state's schoolchildren - those who ride buses - much safer. It would also help reduce air pollution significantly. That's good news for children and adults alike.

Poochigian's measure, Senate Bill 698, would first address buses built before 1977 that are still in service. That includes nearly 140 in Fresno County and the four surrounding counties. Those buses were built before the federal government began mandating certain safety features on school buses.

When those vehicles have been replaced, the measure would begin to phase out pre-1987 buses, built before the state began to regulate particulate emissions. Those are the microscopic bits of dirt and soot that can lodge deeply in human lungs and cause serious and sometimes deadly diseases - especially among children.

Diesel emissions in general are a serious problem in the Valley's mix of foul air. Newer diesel engines pollute less, and new regulations are coming that will further reduce the problem. But diesel engines also last a long time - that's one reason for their popularity - and thus the newer, cleaner engines would be slower to come into use without some measure such as Poochigian's. That's especially true of school buses, given the difficult budgetary times most districts face. The state would spend about \$250 million over five years in the first phase of Poochigian's measure.

The measure would be funded under a provision of Proposition 98, which mandates that the state spend 40% of its revenues on schools. That may not be exactly what voters had in mind for Proposition 98, but it's difficult to see how such a useful effort could otherwise be funded today.

The bill sailed through the Senate Energy, Utility and Communications Committee on Tuesday. It heads next to the Senate Appropriations Committee. We hope it finds its way to a signature by the governor.

[Letter to the Editor in the LA Times, April 25, 2005](#)

LAUSD moving to clean up buses

The article about a study on the dangers of bus fumes on LAUSD buses ["Bus Fumes Worse for Kids on Board," April 18] was a call to action to policymakers to consider ways to curb school bus pollution.

The Healthy Breathing Initiative, which set minimum environmental health standards for school buses operated by private contractors, was the first step toward committing ourselves to doing our part to reduce pollution and protect the health of our students and the community at large. Many reforms have been implemented since the passage (1 1/2 years ago) of the initiative. Today, all companies bidding for bus contracts must provide buses manufactured since 1994 with pollution controls. At present 90% of our contracted buses are modern, cleaner buses. The motion went even further by setting a preference for new, next-generation, low-emission diesel and alternative fuel buses.

We have also made strides in improving our district-owned fleet of buses. The health and safety of our students come first and must be a top priority. As the largest school district in California we have a responsibility to create the demand for cleaner buses and to push bus companies to improve their fleets.

Marlene Canter

Vice president, L.A. Unified School District Board of Education

[Letter to the Editor in the Tri Valley Herald, April 23, 2005](#)

Eating meat bad for environment

WITH ANOTHER Earth Day upon us, now is the perfect time to evaluate the effects our everyday choices have on the environment. When most people think of protecting the Earth, they may consider driving less, recycling or conserving water. These are all positive, but there is another simple, powerful action that makes a huge difference for the environment: eating less meat. About 450,000 factory farms produce most American meat, using an enormous amount of resources and contributing to virtually every environmental problem we face. Factory farms are responsible for about half of our total water use, and animal waste causes water pollution that devastates ecosystems and poisons groundwater. Waste and chemicals from factory farms also cause air pollution and human health problems. Cows and manure pits even produce greenhouse gases, contributing to the climate crisis.

Changing our diet is critical to the health of the planet. Happily, vegetarian options at restaurants and grocery stores have never been more delicious or plentiful, and countless cookbooks, Web sites and other resources are available.

Readers can learn more about the environmental benefits of choosing a plant-based meal at www.small-planet.org.

Erin Williams, President, Small Planet, Berkeley

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Wed. April 27, 2005](#)

Modesto signals worsen traffic

The survey by the Federal Highway Administration ("Too few cities coordinating traffic signals," April 22, Page E-1) confirms the suspicions of many who live or work in Modesto — driving through town is an inefficient, maddening exercise. Driving westbound on Standiford Avenue toward Highway 99 during the morning commute, it is routine for 15 or more cars to be stopped at

the Shawnee/Standiford light the moment a motorist on Shawnee Drive pulls up to the intersection.

Modesto's ad hoc development is partly to blame, along with population density. The (non)functioning of traffic lights, as the survey found, contributes to air pollution, wastes gas and wears out vehicles and the people who drive them.

Other cities have shown that traffic problems can be alleviated if proper timing of traffic lights is made a priority. San Francisco has several times the population (albeit with fewer motorists per capita and a superior public transportation system), yet I can drive from downtown San Francisco to Ocean Beach or from South of Market to the Marina at any time on any day faster than I can drive from Claus Road to Dale Road, or Claribel Road to downtown, I'd bet you!

STEVEN TORNATORE
San Francisco