

Study says bad air can induce death

Associated Press

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FRESNO - Polluted air that hangs over the San Joaquin Valley in fall and winter may cause three times the number of premature deaths than previously estimated, according to new studies.

Children who live next to freeways also appear more likely to suffer from asthma, according to the reports released Tuesday by the University of Southern California.

While the study was conducted in Los Angeles, researchers say the details should concern the valley, which has some of the most polluted air in the nation.

"The picture that's evolving now is one that suggests air pollution is a much bigger and more significant threat to public health than we previously thought," said Michael Jerrett, an associate professor of preventive medicine at USC's Keck School of Medicine.

Jerrett and researchers took pollution readings from sites in the Los Angeles area and looked at the relationship between fine particles in the air and the health of residents.

The USC researchers found deaths increased by up to 17 percent for each increase of 10 micrograms per cubic meter of particles in the air. And deaths from heart disease rose by as much as 39 percent. More lung cancer deaths also occurred.

Fresno cardiologist John G. Telles said many studies show particulate pollution affects the heart: admission rates to hospitals for heart attacks increase and implanted heart defibrillators are more apt to go off on bad air days.

"It means we've got to do something about it," he said.

In another pollution study released Tuesday, Keck school researchers found that the closer children live to busy freeways, the more likely they are to have asthma.

Children living about a quarter of a mile away from a freeway had an 89 percent higher risk of asthma than those living a mile from the dense traffic.

Builders Say New Air Board Fee On Land Use Unfair

Valley Voice Newspaper, September 22, 2005

San Joaquin Valley - Valley builders are forging a coalition to fight draft rules proposed by the Valley Air Board to tax certain land uses in the valley targeting new growth to fight smog.

Proponents argue it's about time sprawl paid its fair share to improve the valley air noting how rapid growth here is making it harder to reach clean air goals.

But builders make a point. "We want to pay our fair share but we think it unfair that the new rules apply only to new growth," says Tulare/Kings BIA executive director Bob Keenan.

Keenan addressed the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Board this past week and got approval from the board to join a growing list of groups opposing what is being called "The Air Board Tax that everyone will pay."

Tulare Chamber, local Farm Bureau and area Realtors are also fighting the plan that could be adopted by the Air Board in November. Keenan has a busy speaking schedule to add cities and counties to his coalition list that could be quite impressive come November when this issue will be on the front burner.

The so-called indirect source rule is a way to target air emissions from new development that typically means more traffic. So the rule would target home subdivisions over 50 units, shopping centers and industrial projects that each - the logic goes -generate added air pollution for the valley.

Proponents suggest a look at recent history suggests valley growth will overwhelm our air shed considering the population could reach 7 million people by 2040. They note that even though cars are far cleaner than they were years ago, the number of vehicle miles traveled is growing faster than population growth meaning any gains we make to clean the air with new technology or all

the investment made by farmers and central valley dairies will be threatened by new growth and traffic.

But the BIA's Keenan suggests the added cost the Air Board will put on development will simply be passed on to consumers and in the meantime the Air Board has not even suggested how it would use up to \$130 million in new fees it would receive each year to improve our air.

Target the New Guy

Air Board member and Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley says he has "major problem with indirect source rule." He says "I don't like that it just targets the new guy" rather than some fairer approach figuring we are all in this together.

He says a new development like a new Walmart in Dinuba doesn't necessarily mean more traffic because of the project, because Dinuba area shoppers who frequent Walmart will now not have to travel to Tulare or Selma to shop at Walmart. There is now a store nearby and therefore might be expected to improve the air.

Worthley argues that rather than attacking the problems through taxing real estate - taking away the approval process from local jurisdictions, he suggests a tax on fuel. "We're trying to get at reducing traffic anyway - why not tax fuel based on the fact if you use more fuel you will pay more to clean the air," he notes. Such a suggestion would require new state legislation.

Consider however, how much screaming there would be over a new "gas tax" even as fuel reaches record levels in the state. Despite this fairer approach, is it politically possible?

The fee per house on new development - \$1000 per home - would not seem to be too much to ask similar to a per home fee based on the number of vehicle miles traveled. That's what the City of Visalia does with its transportation impact fees that help pay for roads.

The roads need to service the subdivisions and schools are needed to serve these subdivisions and builders pay fees for these necessary amenities. So why not clean air?

Arguing for some sort of fee is the fact that many of new subdivisions in valley cities are at the edge of town helping to build a sprawling city that requires use of vehicles to get around rather than promote infill for which a builder might get credits rather than pay a tax, some have suggested.

Others note that farmers have been asked to step up to the plate to help clean the air and are doing so but that development, including shopping centers and new home subdivisions haven't met their obligation.

With the rapid growth in huge new subdivisions and coming of big national builders with high profit margins, it seems inevitable that new growth might be an easy target for regulators looking to meet future Clean Air standards.

But BIA's Keenan says send the Air Board back to the drawing board" to come up with the fairer plan.

Consider that shopping centers and industrial space - each important job and revenue generators for valley cities - will be highly impacted by the fees and sometimes projects just won't be built.

Economy Killer?

"We're talking about an economy killer," claims Keenan. The proposed fee for a regional shopping center would be \$1.2 million in 2006 and \$4.2 million by 2010. Just to build a mini mart with gas station the proposed fee would add \$450,000 to the cost of the project by 2010.

The new rule would also target distribution centers - Visalia's only expansion industry base for jobs that could be targeted if the fee is so high distribution companies choose to locate elsewhere instead of bringing jobs here. Here again, the target might be fuel - in this case diesel used by the trucking industry that is a problem for our air - perhaps a fee on this fuel could spur more use of cleaner burning diesel.

Worthley says if the indirect source rule proposal can't be derailed completely, he hopes it can be substantially modified to apply say to just big home developments that can more easily absorb the cost of fees on new homes. New home subdivisions in Kern County have agreed to fund further air projects on a per unit basis.

Pushing in favor of some sort of fee is the Sierra Club and Environmental Defense has suggested the fee be used to help preserve farm land, revitalization of existing communities, reduce vehicle miles traveled and improve affordable housing.

Worthley says while he can support these goals, what he doesn't want to see the Air Board grow into some kind of regional government that oversees the details including the everyday lives of citizens. He sees benefits however, in promoting infill in cities and air benefits that might bring.

The Air Board itself suggests what is their target - mobile emissions that now account for 69% of the NOx emissions in our Air District. But since they can't target the cars they try to indirectly target land uses that attract or generate these motor trips.

If the proposed rules seem like overkill, the plain fact is that new growth does generate air pollution and that community infill and building standards that reward conservation would be good for everyone. So what's fair?

Dirty-air study ups death risk

By DAVID DANIELSKI

Riverside Press, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2005

Fine-particle pollution increases Inland residents' risk of dying from heart attack, lung cancer and diabetes, USC researchers found. The particles include diesel soot, acids and chemicals from dairies, factories and automobiles.

Inland-area residents are more likely to die of heart attacks, lung cancer and other diseases than people who live in places with less air pollution from diesel soot and other microscopic particles, a research team reported Tuesday.

University of Southern California scientists found that the particle pollution is up to three times more deadly than previously believed, said Michael Jerrett, lead author of the study published in the journal *Epidemiology*.

The team of 11 scientists examined medical records and deaths among nearly 23,000 Southern California residents who participated in a cancer-prevention study over 18 years.

"Moving from Venice or other coastal areas to Riverside or San Bernardino, we saw the relative risk of disease increasing," Jerrett said.

The Inland area has the highest concentrations of fine-particle pollution in Southern California and among the highest in the nation.

Specifically, Inland residents had:

11 percent more deaths from any disease.

25 percent more deaths from heart attacks.

20 percent more deaths from lung cancer.

79 percent higher risk of dying from diabetes.

Jerrett cautioned that the numbers of diabetes deaths were small, giving the research team less confidence in the risk calculation.

Jerrett and Southern California air-pollution regulators said the study's findings were striking.

"It reminds us that air pollution does have serious effects and tells us we have to move faster toward meeting our healthful air-quality standards," said Jean Ospital, health-effects officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

The deaths linked to fine-particle air pollution were about three times higher than those reported in previous research, including a landmark 1993 Harvard study that compared death rates in six U.S. cities.

Improved Measuring Cited

Jerrett attributed the new results to the precise pollution measurements available for 23 communities within the South Coast basin, which includes the Inland area.

"The big difference was having the ability to hone in on the exposure in areas within the city," he said.

The researchers also had medical records of 22,905 people in the region who had participated in American Cancer Society surveys from 1982 to 2000. Within that group, 5,856 died during the 18-year period.

The scientists' calculations were adjusted to account for smoking, obesity, workplace hazards, social economics, gender, age and race, among many other factors that affect death rates.

The study adds to growing evidence that particle pollution causes inflammation of certain tissues, which, in turn, contributes to disease processes such as artery blockages that lead to heart attacks, Jerrett said.

'Not Just the Frail'

"It is not just the frail being harvested by the air pollution," he said.

The researchers will test their results by doing a similar study of particle pollution in the New York City area, Jerrett said.

Most of the particle pollution comes from vehicles. Jerrett said regulators need to cut tailpipe emissions, especially from trucks, trains and boats. And homes, he added, should be built away from freeways.

Those who live near freeways should install HEPA and electrostatic air filters that remove harmful particles, he said.

"Societally, we have to reduce our reliance on the automobile," he said.

Another group of USC scientists, in a separate study, reported Tuesday that the closer children live to a freeway, the greater their chance of getting asthma. The researchers attributed the trend to higher levels of the pollutant nitrogen dioxide, a tailpipe emission.

The researchers, led by James Gauderman, looked at 208 children, 15 percent of whom had asthma. All the children are part of a larger USC study that has tracked the respiratory health of thousands of Southern California children since 1993.

Studies: Bad air even worse killer

By Barbara Anderson, the Fresno Bee

in the Modesto Bee, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2005 (previously in the Fresno Bee)

Two new air pollution studies give the San Joaquin Valley more reason to clean up its air.

Polluted air — the type that hangs over the valley in fall and winter — may be causing three times the number of premature deaths as were previously estimated. And children who live next to traffic-heavy freeways appear more likely to suffer from asthma, according to reports released Tuesday by professors at the University of Southern California.

"The picture that's evolving now is one that suggests air pollution is a much bigger and more significant threat to public health than we previously thought," said Michael Jerrett, an associate professor of preventive medicine at the university's Keck School of Medicine.

Jerrett and researchers took pollution readings from sites in the Los Angeles area and looked at the relationship between fine particles, called PM 2.5 because they are less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, and the health of residents.

The researchers looked at ozone, the main ingredient of smog, but found no significant tie between ozone levels and early deaths.

The researchers found deaths increased by up to 17 percent for each increase of 10 micrograms per cubic meter of PM 2.5 particles. And deaths from heart disease rose by as much as 39 percent. More lung cancer deaths also occurred.

The link between premature death and fine particulates is not new. The particle darts have been blamed for about 1,100 early deaths annually in the valley.

But the latest study, which zeroed in on particulate levels in individual neighborhoods, shows the connection between air pollution and early death to be three times as large as that reported in past studies of cities in the United States, Jerrett said.

Doctor: Smog increases heart problems

Fresno cardiologist John G. Telles said myriad studies indicate particulate pollution affects the heart: Admission rates to hospitals for heart attacks increase, and im-planted heart defibrillators are more apt to go off on bad air days. The documentation is there, he said. "It means we've got to do something about it."

The San Joaquin Valley can become hazy with soot in late fall and winter, and fog presses the pollutants close to the ground, where they can be easily inhaled.

In another pollution study released Tuesday, Keck School of Medicine researchers found that the closer children live to busy freeways, the more likely they are to have asthma.

Children living about a quarter of a mile away from a freeway had an 89 percent higher risk of asthma than those living a mile away from the dense traffic.

"Even kids in a low-pollution community can have increased risk of asthma if they live in close proximity to those roadways," said the study's lead author, James Gauderman, an associate professor of preventive medicine.

Researchers measured the distance 208 children lived to freeways in 10 Southern California cities and estimated traffic-related pollution levels by analyzing weather conditions and vehicle counts. They also measured levels of nitrogen dioxide outside the homes of the children. Cars and trucks emit nitrogen dioxide from tailpipes.

Gauderman said he can't say if nitrogen dioxide is to blame for the increased risk for asthma. The pollutant could be a marker for other pollutants thrown into the air from cars and trucks traveling freeways.

EPA Wants to Ease Toxic Spill Reporting

By JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, September 21, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The government wants to quit forcing companies to report small releases of toxic pollutants and allow them to submit reports on their pollution less frequently.

Saying it wants to ease its regulatory burden on companies, the Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday proposed adopting a "short form" that would excuse companies from disclosing spills and other releases of toxic substances if:

_They claim to release fewer than 5,000 pounds of a specific chemical. The current limit is 500 pounds.

_They store onsite but claim to release "zero" amounts of the worst pollutants, such as mercury, DDT and PCBs, that persist in the environment and work up the food chain. However, they must report if they have stored dioxin or dioxin-like compounds, even if none is released.

EPA said it also plans to ask Congress for permission to require the accounting every other year instead of annually. The EPA's annual Toxics Release Inventory began under a 1986 community right-to-know law. The first year the change could be possible, if Congress agreed, would be 2008.

"We certainly recognize there will be concerns moving to every other year," said Kimberly Nelson, EPA's assistant administrator for environmental information. "Every community will still have the same information about the types of toxic releases. They just won't have some of the details in terms of how that particular substance was managed or released."

Independent Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont called the proposal "a frontal assault" on one of the nation's most successful environmental laws.

"The community right to know act will become the community right to know every other year act," said Jeffords, a former chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "This proposal would deny communities up-to-date information about local toxic releases, reduce incentives to minimize the generation of toxic waste and undermine the ability of public health agencies and researchers to identify important trends."

Reducing information on more than 600 chemicals put in the air, water and land will make it harder for officials, communities and interest groups to help protect public health, said Meghan Purvis, an environmental health advocate for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

Some big chemical companies said complying with the annual toxic inventory is not a problem for them.

"We are so in compliance it's not funny," Andrew Liveris, president of The Dow Chemical Company, told the AP. "We've adjusted to it many years ago."

The looser reporting requirements are intended to let off the hook as many as a third of the 23,000 companies that now report their pollution to the government, according to the EPA.

Nelson estimated the shorter forms would save businesses about 165,000 hours a year in paperwork. If Congress agrees to require the reports every two years instead of annually, that would save another 2 million hours, she said.

"With 20 years of experience under our belt, we recognize that we can reduce the burden without losing much of the data we now receive," Nelson said in an interview. "These are very small facilities that account for a very small percentage of the releases."

In the latest inventory EPA released in May, overall chemical pollution fell more than 6 percent from 2002 to 2003, the latest year for which total figures are available, though there were increases in levels of mercury, PCBs and dioxin. Some 4.44 billion pounds of toxic chemicals were released in 2003, compared with 4.74 billion pounds in 2002.

On the Net:

Environmental Protection Agency:

U.S. Public Interest Research Group:

www.epa.gov/tri www.epa.gov/tri www.epa.gov/tri

Mysterious Stench Swirls Around City

Southland residents from the coast to the Valley report a rotting garbage-like odor.

By Valerie Reitman, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, September 22, 2005

Steve Randall caught wind of the stench on his way to work. It reminded him of a hot and humid summer day — in Manhattan.

"It was that sort of weird, clinging cloud-of-garbage-like smell that has come to characterize New York in August," Randall said.

Considering that it was cool and rainy en route from Westwood to Santa Monica on Tuesday, Randall wanted to make sure he wasn't imagining it. He asked the security guard at his office to come outside to corroborate. The guard didn't smell anything unusual and instead lampooned Randall. " 'This is what fresh air smells like after it rains,' " Randall recalls the dubious guard's retort.

But his wife had smelled the same thing at their Westwood home.

And so it went across the Southland, as some detected strong odors from the coast to the Valley. Workplaces and weblogs were buzzing, with descriptions comparing the smell to old socks, rotting cabbage soup, kimchi, moldy wet wallboard and the "dampness of the air interacting with my cat's litter box."

But others in those same places didn't detect anything unusual.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District, the regional government air pollution control agency, fielded about seven calls from residents in Granada Hills on Tuesday night reporting odors of garbage and sewage. But the inspector the agency sent to investigate didn't detect any odor or possible cause, spokeswoman Tina Cherry said.

City and county officials said they didn't know what might have triggered the odors either.

But environmentalists speculated that the first heavy rain in weeks had flooded storm drains with debris, oil, animal waste and litter. As the material decomposed, it may have created odors. This could explain why the smell was detected in some areas and not others.

"Whenever we get a significant amount of rain, especially where there's a lot of concrete and asphalt, it causes a build-up in storm drains," said Matt McClain, spokesman for the Surfrider Foundation. "When it's decomposing, you get a lot of smells."

It's this "first flush" of the season that causes the most water pollution, McClain said.

Carolyn Sun, 30, a jewelry designer, says she inhaled the odor en route to a party in Miracle Mile on Tuesday night. "It was like a stew of sulfur, sewage and bad omen."

Los Angeles County health officials said that bacteria levels in the coastal waters — which many storm drains run into — were 10 times the acceptable state levels Tuesday and were expected to be even higher Wednesday.

They advised against swimming in the ocean for at least three days.

In addition, the red tide of algae bloom in the ocean has been particularly heavy in the last few days, which may be responsible for fishy odors that have wafted to areas within about a quarter-mile of the coast.

"It was really bad this past weekend," said Heather Hoecherl, science and policy director of Heal the Bay, a nonprofit organization in Santa Monica.

Reddish by day and glowing green at night, the red tide moves with the currents. "It's patchy throughout the bay, so some areas might be more funky than others," Hoecherl said, noting that after Tuesday's rains, surfers were describing the shoreline as "one big glowing blob."

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2005](#)

Did someone send our cows away

I'm delighted to know that the San Joaquin Valley has fallen into third place with our polluted air. Los Angeles has taken first place and Houston second. Now, can someone tell me how many cows were shipped into those two cities so we could lose our No. 1 standing? Perhaps the environmentalists have an answer.

Is it any wonder that we don't believe half of what we read?

VIRGINA VAZ , Newman