

Tailpipes hazardous to health

USC researchers find links to asthma, death

By Kerry Cavanaugh

L.A. Daily News, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2005

Children living near freeways have a greater chance of developing asthma, and people living in communities with airborne particle pollution are more likely to die earlier than those who don't, according to two studies released today.

Led by researchers at the University of Southern California, the studies suggest that air pollution - particularly from vehicles - may be worse for people's health than previously thought.

Children are especially susceptible to air pollution because their bodies are still developing and they breathe more rapidly than adults.

By measuring tailpipe pollution at the children's homes and analyzing traffic on nearby roadways, researchers in one study found the closer children lived to a freeway, the higher their chance of developing asthma.

The study, led by James Gauderman of USC's Keck School of Medicine, demonstrates that breathing vehicle exhaust can play a role in developing asthma, and it joins a growing library of research showing that air pollution can cause asthma.

Gauderman said he hopes people will consider the potential health problems from building schools and housing tracts next to freeways.

"Even if you lived in a generally low-polluted area, but lived near a freeway, the risks were increased there as well," he said. "We need to think a little more about that before we place people so close to a source of fresh vehicle exhaust."

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Jan Perry, who also sits on the South Coast Air Quality Management District, said the study is a wake-up call to planners.

"Family housing should not be encouraged next to freeways. You can use that for light-industrial uses. It doesn't necessarily have to be for housing."

Bonnie Holmes-Gen, vice president of government relations for the American Lung Association of California, said the findings do not definitively prove that air pollution can cause asthma, but they're surprising.

"We expect more research will come out showing the linkage between asthma and air pollution," Holmes-Gen said.

In a separate study led by USC Keck School of Medicine professor Michael Jerrett, researchers studied two decades of data on Los Angeles area residents and found that, as the levels of fine particulate matter increased, so did the risk of death.

Jerrett's research also saw a link between particulate-matter levels and death from heart attack and lung cancer.

Researchers plan to conduct a similar study in New York City to see if they find a similar trend.

Fine particulate matter is created from vehicles' exhaust, including diesel exhaust, and from fires and industrial pollution. It's made up a microscopic bits of acids, chemicals, metals, dusts and allergens that can reach deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.

Officials seek to curb fireworks

Plans for ban scrapped in favor of city, county effort to toughen restrictions

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2005

When it comes to fireworks, local officials want a new slogan: No more Mr. Nice Guy.

Plans for tough rules and big fines for the metropolitan area -- but no all-out ban -- bubbled up during a joint meeting of city and county officials Monday evening.

No formal action was taken, but officials agreed a cohesive plan is needed for the entire metro area. Currently, city rules are stricter than the county's in metropolitan Bakersfield, creating an enforcement nightmare.

Some ideas put forth:

* Enact whopping fines, perhaps as much as \$1,500, for lighting or possessing illegal fireworks.

* Change the way fees for violations are processed so money stays in the county, instead of going to the state, in order to fund local enforcement.

* Limit use to the Fourth of July and possibly New Year's Eve. Currently, legal fireworks can be set off 365 days a year.

* Allow sales only from noon on July 3 to 8 p.m. on July 4. Industry folks say 80 percent of sales are made during that time. Currently, sales start at noon July 1.

* Increase fees for booths selling fireworks.

* Create a task force of city and county fire officials and law enforcement personnel to come up with plans that can be in place before July 4, 2006.

The joint meeting is a twice-yearly affair that brings together Bakersfield's seven City Council members (although Councilman Mike Maggard was absent Monday) and Kern's five county supervisors.

A Bakersfield man's death on July 4, 2004, from a device scrapped together from Piccolo Petes and a metal canister led the City Council to ban such "whistling" fireworks in June.

The fireworks issue drew many concerned residents, some from as far off as Ridgecrest and California City. All urged officials to steer clear of a ban, saying their nonprofit groups would wither without the money they make from sales.

"If we do not have this fireworks booth ... we cannot see that the veterans are taken to the hospital" or are sheltered or fed, said Cathy Morgan of the American Legion Auxiliary in Shafter.

Morgan inspired chuckles when she added: "Please be kind enough to put everybody you find that has illegal fireworks in jail. I'll help you if I can."

No vaccines; dogs dying

Animal advocate Marilyn Stewart, the only person to speak during a general public comment period, told officials about grisly conditions at the county animal shelter, including a lack of vaccines since Sept. 9.

"The sick rate, the illness rate, has gone sky high," Stewart said.

Shelter workers are killing about 70 dogs a day, she said, in large part due to illness.

Stewart, who operates ALPHA Canine Sanctuary, a dog rescue facility, said she communicated with the county staffer now in charge of animal control, David Price III, on Sept. 9.

Price left a message on her voicemail, Stewart said, saying there'd been a snafu because the county hadn't paid its bill, but vaccines were being sent via overnight delivery.

"As of this morning, there were no vaccines," Stewart told the assembled officials. "I'm here again to ask for help."

In other business, officials:

* Passed a resolution put forward by Supervisor Michael Rubio to try replacing fleets of heavy-duty city and county vehicles with cleaner burning ones, ideally by 2010, some three years before certain federal [air-quality](#) mandates kick in. Rubio's effort met with some resistance.

Michael Turnipseed of the Kern County Taxpayers Association objected to "hyperbole and exaggeration" of wording that referred to a "growing air quality problem," saying some air quality factors are improving. The wording was removed. After changes in that and other language, the resolution was unanimously passed.

* Reviewed plans for local highway projects, which received a major boost last month when Rep. Bill Thomas, the powerful Bakersfield Republican, stuffed \$722 million for local freeways in the federal highway bill.

The money will help fund a network encircling the metro area and providing a regional east-west link to Interstate 5.

In recent days, however, there has been some talk in Washington, D.C., about highway funds being snagged to help pay for the Gulf Coast recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

It's not yet clear how such an action might affect local projects, and Thomas refused to comment Monday on what is being discussed in Congress.

City Council will review bicycle plan

By Sentinel Staff

Hanford Sentinel, Tues. Sept. 20, 2005

HANFORD -- City decision-makers will have a lot to do during 75 minutes of Tuesday's study session.

First, the City Council will hear a presentation by the Building Industry Association of Tulare/Kings Counties regarding [draft air board rules](#).

The council will then review the 2005 Kings County Regional Bicycle Plan and animal ordinance.

Also, outside organization funding allocations -- leftover business from last week -- will be discussed again. The council will take a vote on this Tuesday night.

All the organizations will likely receive less than they asked for, as the total requested amount of \$38,000 is well in excess of \$25,000, which the city budget calls for.

In other business, the council will:

-- Introduce an ordinance authoring the establishment of a refuse and recycling development impact fee.

-- Authorize to execute an agreement with Hanford Cemetery District for the trade of land next to the Hanford Municipal Airport.

The City Council meets for a study session at 4 p.m. and reconvenes for a regular session at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday in the Council Chambers, Civic Auditorium, 400 N. Douty St.

GAO pushes for more federal involvement in wind farms

By Frederic J. Frommer, Associated Press
Tri-Valley Herald, Tues, Sept. 20, 2005

WASHINGTON - A government report on Monday urged federal officials to take a more active role in weighing the impact of wind power farms on bird and bat deaths, saying local and state regulators sometimes lack the necessary expertise.

The report by the Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm, found that the federal government offers minimal oversight in approving wind power plants, leaving decision-making at the state and local level.

As a result, the GAO found, "No one is considering the impacts of wind power on a regional or 'ecosystem' scale - a scale that often spans governmental jurisdictions."

The GAO urged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work with state and local officials to alert them about proposed wind farms' impacts on wildlife.

Wind power is one of the fastest-growing sources of renewable energy, and the Department of Energy calls for wind to generate 5 percent of the nation's electricity by 2020, up from less than 1 percent.

Wind energy poses a dilemma for environmentalists who support its [pollution-free](#) electricity but have grown increasingly alarmed at its death toll on birds and bats.

Windmills in the Altamont Pass, for example, kill an estimated 1,700 to 4,700 birds a year, including between 880 and 1,300 of such federally protected raptors as burrowing owls, red-tailed hawks and golden eagles. Meanwhile, thousands of bats have been killed by wind turbines on wind farms in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

The GAO said it was difficult to quantify wind power's impact on wildlife, but noted that millions of birds are killed by other causes, such as collisions with buildings and towers, poisoning by pesticides and attacks by domestic and feral cats.

"In the context of other sources of avian mortalities, it does not appear that wind power is responsible for a significant number of dead birds," the GAO said.

The American Wind Energy Association, the trade group for the wind power industry, seized on that conclusion.

"Despite its modest impacts, the more (wind) is used instead of fossil fuels, the better for the environment and for consumers," said the group's executive director, Randall Swisher.

But the congressmen who requested the study, West Virginia Democratic Reps. Nick Rahall and Alan Mollohan, said the report showed that wind energy expansion should be approached with caution.

"We must balance our use of our natural resources with their protection to help ensure that our robust tourism industry and sense of Mountaineer pride do not suffer from poor foresight," said Rahall, the ranking Democrat on the House Resources Committee.

Added Mollohan: "We don't have enough information about the number of birds and bats that are being killed, why they are being killed, or whether any effective strategies can be devised for keeping wildlife away from the blades."

Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, said all alternative energy sources have positive and negative sides.

"For wind power, the downside is that the blades can kill birds in substantial numbers," he said. "Site selection is crucial in helping minimize this adverse impact."

The GAO said few studies have been done to determine effective solutions to minimize bat and bird deaths at wind farms.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2005:](#)

No time to rest on air quality laurels

All the talk about the San Joaquin Valley's poor air quality appears to be having some results: Air quality is improving.

No, we can't see the mountains every day in the summer, as many old-timers claim was once the rule, not the exception.

No, we haven't climbed out of the cellar in the rankings of the nation's worst air quality (with Los Angeles).

And certainly no, it is not time to relax efforts to reduce smog and particles in the air, not when the region is starting to make progress.

But yes, this year officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are hopeful that for the first time in at least 15 years, the Valley will comply with standards set by the federal government for improvement of our air quality. Not clean air, by any means, but improvement.

That's a start, and a good one. It means what has been taking place is working, and that efforts to clean the air are having an effect other than satisfying some bureaucrat's obsession with attainment statistics.

In validating those strategies, too, it means the region has to keep pushing for higher standards of air quality.

That presents a different kind of challenge: So far, efforts to clean Valley air have been focused on the low-hanging fruit: the obvious polluters, the smoking cars and trucks, the dirty diesel engines, the open fires belching smoke.

Now that there has been some improvement, it will become increasingly difficult to do better. Reducing pollution will be a matter of making significant changes in public and private lifestyle choices and changing the way we do business.

Some businesses have already felt the pinch. Agriculture, for instance, had largely been exempted from air-quality improvement requirements until the past few years. Now in their effort to seek improvement measures, air quality officials are considering things such as pollution by dairies and certain kinds of farming techniques.

Local governments will need to do the things they are already doing, but do them better: conversion to natural gas vehicles, changes in vehicle use, for instance. But they also need to do a better job of leading the rest of us by installing more transportation alternatives such as bike lanes and avenues for electric scooters.

Individuals have also begun to sense the change, in things such as fireplace use and the use of barbecues and small engines. Making progress now will require things that people so far have been reluctant to embrace: prohibition of gas-powered blowers, "leave the car home" days, car pooling and alternative transportation.

Improved air quality is a hopeful sign. It shows this is not an intractable problem. It's something we can keep working on.

And if we ever expect to return to those days when we could see the mountains every day in the summer, we have to keep working on it.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2005 \(also in the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Sept. 18\)](#)

Valley air isn't clean, but at least it's cleaner

The San Joaquin Valley has good news to celebrate — provisionally, anyway — as it nears achievement of one federal air quality standard, which doesn't happen often hereabouts.

If the region makes it to the end of this year without exceeding the standard for particulate matter of a certain size, called PM-10, it will have gone three years without such a violation. That's considered meeting the standard, and it would be the first time the valley has met such a mark for either particulate matter or ozone, the two main villains in our dirty air.

There is a caveat: Valley air is still far from complying with several other, more restrictive federal standards, and it likely will take many years and much more hard work to meet those. "Cleaner" air does not mean "clean" air.

It's also not entirely clear just why the air has been cleaner in the valley over the past three years. The weather has almost certainly played a part. This summer saw a record string of 100-degree-plus temperatures, but a long and wet spring delayed the onset of the hot days. How did that affect this year's air quality readings? Hard to say.

We'd like to think — and we're not alone — that various small efforts that have been made to this point by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, businesses, farmers, government agencies and countless individuals have begun to add up to something significant.

Many of those changes have fallen on agriculture, which has had to eliminate most open-field burning, reduce dust from tilling and unpaved roads and refit or replace older diesel engines used to pump irrigation water, among other new rules. Regulations on the use of fireplaces have impacted urban dwellers, but they've also helped clean the air.

The chief offender for both ozone and particulate matter remains the individual automobile and all our other vehicles, accounting for as much as 60 percent of the problem. New regulations governing diesel emissions will make a difference as they come into effect, and higher gasoline prices may force wiser use of automobiles, but the convenience of private vehicles — and our passion for them above all other conveyances — likely means it will take years to make a real dent in the bad air.

Still, cleaner air is better than dirtier, and that really is something to celebrate. May this be the first in a long string of years when we have something to make us happier about the air we all breathe.

[Modesto Bee, Opinion Column, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2005](#)

We blithely ignore environmental facts at our peril

by Brad Barker

At a recent Stanislaus County supervisors' meeting, a retired hydrologist spoke about the dangers of expanding the community of Salida onto some of the most productive farmland anywhere.

His points were not complicated: Irrigated farmlands replenish underground aquifers. Developed lands do not. Development could lead to water shortages.

The board chairman needed to dismiss the analysis because he supports planning for big development. His response to the speaker: "In the part I could understand I think you raised some pretty good issues. I just couldn't understand it all." And then he laughed. To me, the chairman's response meant that sprawl-mongers don't want to be confused by the facts.

How did we end up in a world where science doesn't matter, facts don't matter, logic doesn't matter, nature doesn't matter?

And why are local, state and federal policies enacted for the short-term profits of campaign contributors instead of the long-term benefits of everyone?

Earlier this month, some friends and I had a chance to escape the upside-down world by attending the first national Sierra Club convention in San Francisco. It was the largest gathering of members since John Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892. For a few days we were among several thousand people who value science, appreciate facts and cherish nature. It was wonderful.

John Muir is featured with Half Dome on the new California state quarter. But that quarter won't be enough to protect Muir's legacy. Politicians are too easily influenced by larger denominations. Catch the drift? The toxic drift?

Years ago in Modesto, I saw a bumper sticker on a pickup: "Hey Sierra Club, kiss my axe!" I was already a member of the club, the biggest and oldest environmental organization in the world, so I wondered about my town. What did I expect — an "I brake for whales" sticker? However, I wasn't alone. Our local Sierra Club group, the Yokuts, has about a thousand dues-paying members.

If you think the environmental movement is passé or just for hippies, you're not paying attention. Despite the squawking of polluters, our regulatory agencies do a better job regulating environmentalists than the businesses that pollute. Maybe you've heard of Hilmar Cheese and Modesto Tallow?

Our valley has environmental problems. Less than 1 percent of pesticide violators caught in Stanislaus County are ever penalized. This pesticide enforcement record is the worst of any agricultural county in California.

Air quality sanctions are delayed again and again. Wal-Mart sues to trample local zoning decisions. With Alice-in-Wonderland logic, our local congressmen claim that reducing critical wildlife habitat will help endangered species.

The city of Riverbank may add 8,000 people by annexing some of the richest farmland in the valley while allowing the developers to pay \$423,870 to "update" Riverbank's general plan. No strings attached?

And now Gov. Schwarzenegger has appointed a blue-ribbon panel to find regional solutions to San Joaquin Valley problems. Tragically, the panel includes the county supervisor who is confused by science and the developer who hopes to expand Riverbank. The panel has 18 members; only four are Democrats, probably Blue Dogs. None appears to be an environmentalist.

So, it's a "blue-ribbon" panel? Their ribbon is really asphalt gray.

[Sacramento Bee, Letters to the editor, Tues., Sept. 20, 2005](#)

Cost in high gas prices

We have been told for years that if we would just increase the price of gas there would be less driving and thus less pollution. Well, with \$3 gas we have an ideal chance to test this theory.

Do we have less pollution? Perhaps, but we also have less vacation rental, less tax revenue, less gaming revenue, fewer jobs and lower wages, more people who cannot afford to commute to work and higher prices.

Some times you have to be careful what you wish for.

- David Dewitt, South Lake Tahoe

Oil industry responsibility

New Orleans has been devastated, and of course people want to help. But what of the oil industry's responsibility to the New Orleans community? For decades oil companies have used the New Orleans area for a significant percentage of the country's oil refineries, which have caused high levels of pollution. These refineries have been an important link in the oil industry's mammoth profits, now being driven to an obscene level by the recent run-up in oil prices.

And what are the oil companies doing for the people suffering from this disaster? Given the level of their total worth and profits, next to nothing. If the oil industry is willing to utilize the New Orleans area to operate its refineries and willing to make as much money as it can on the gas price increases caused by the hurricane damage, then it's time for the oil companies to give significant support to this community.

- Ken Peterson, Sacramento