

Officials: Time to spare the air

by Aaron Swarts

Tri-Valley Herald, Thurs., July 6, 2006

With the nations birthday party in the rearview mirror and the dog days of summer on the way, its time for Valley residents to be mindful of some of the things they cant see.

To date, San Joaquin County has already declared one Spare the Air day warning by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District, an event that did not occur until July 14 last year.

Overall, we have had earlier spare the air days this year, said Air District spokeswoman Janelle Schneider of the eight counties that make up the Central Valley. Last year the first spare the air day in the Valley was on July 14. This year it came in mid-June.

The warnings are part of a voluntary program, issued when air quality is deemed unhealthy by the air district.

Schneider was quick to note that the early drop in air quality, during a season that runs from the first week in June to the end of September, is not necessarily a sign of things to come.

There is no way to anticipate how the rest of the summer is going play out, based on what we have seen thus far, she said. It is still very early in the season.

San Joaquin County had a total of six spare the air declarations in 2005, a number that is typically lower than the central and southern regions of the Valley, Schneider said.

San Joaquin residents can help to alleviate the problem by decreasing their time behind the wheel, Schneider said.

There are typically 96 million vehicles on the road each day in the Valley, she said. Over half of the Valleys pollution is caused by vehicles, so we encourage residents to forgo any unnecessary driving during spare the air days.

Some materials used in typical backyard summer cookouts can also have a negative impact on air quality.

If you are going to barbecue, remember that charcoal lighter fluid releases harmful emissions, Schneider said. A better option would be an electric charcoal starter.

For more information on improving Valley air quality or to check the status of the air quality daily, visit the San Joaquin Air Districts Web site at <<http://www.valleyair.org>> or contact them at (559) 230-5853.

Tougher clean air plan could ease pollution at California ports

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, July 6, 2006

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The agency that regulates the global shipping industry is considering whether to strengthen outdated emissions standards for cargo vessels.

If the International Maritime Organization adopts tougher measures than its current fuel and emission standards, a large source of air pollution for California ports could be significantly reduced.

"There should be more stringent standards," said Eivind Vagslid, an environmental official with the London-based agency, whose 166 member nations include the United States.

Over the years, the world fleet of cargo vessels has emerged as a leading source of sulfur dioxides, particulates and nitrogen oxides. Some studies have linked the emissions to global warming, respiratory illness, cancer and other medical problems.

Almost 5,800 ships called at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles last year, releasing roughly 14,000 tons of air pollutants. In 2004, more than 7,200 ships sailed past Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, releasing almost 16,000 tons of pollutants.

The agency will consider regulating particulates and whether to require ships built before 2000 to retrofit their main engines with air pollution controls. The current standards apply only to new ships and those being refitted with new engines.

Vagslid said the current standards were formulated in 1997, but it took eight years for member nations to ratify them. They went into effect in May 2005.

"The levels of the past were set quite leniently to get nations to ratify them and to make them technically achievable," Vagslid said.

The International Maritime Organization could adopt the revised standards as early as next July. Its rules are enforced by port authorities, coast guards and maritime agencies around the world.

Meanwhile, port officials in Long Beach and Los Angeles are proposing a clean-air plan that seeks to reduce diesel emissions from cargo ships, trains and trucks by more than 50 percent. The \$2 billion, five-year proposal was unveiled last Wednesday and is expected to be approved by both harbor commissions in September.

Plan May Ease Air Pollution at Ports

Stricter international freighter rules would make L.A. and Long Beach facilities safer.

By Dan Weikel, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, July 6, 2006

Even before the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach unveiled an ambitious clean-air plan last week, an international agency that regulates the global shipping industry was considering whether to strengthen outdated emissions standards for cargo vessels - a move that could significantly improve air quality.

"There should be more stringent standards," said Eivind Vagslid, an environmental official with the International Maritime Organization, which began considering a revision of its 1997 regulations in April. "The levels of the past were set quite leniently to get nations to ratify them and to make them technically achievable."

Over the years, the world fleet of cargo vessels has emerged as a leading source of sulfur oxides, particulates and nitrogen oxides. Many ships emit as much exhaust per day as 12,000 cars.

The emissions have been linked to global warming, respiratory illnesses and premature deaths. In the Los Angeles area, studies show that diesel exhaust from trucks, locomotives, heavy equipment and ships causes cancer and is responsible for 70% of pollution-related health problems and hundreds of deaths every year.

If tougher maritime organization standards are adopted, they could reduce a large source of air pollution for the Los Angeles-Long Beach harbor complex, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, which are next to a main shipping lane, and Bay Area ports such as Oakland.

Almost 5,800 ships called at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach last year, releasing roughly 14,000 tons of air pollutants. In 2004, more than 7,200 ships sailed past Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, releasing almost 16,000 tons of pollutants.

Air quality officials in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties fear that projected growth in ship traffic will erase gains they have made in cutting pollution from onshore sources such as automobiles, manufacturers and businesses.

"It's good to see the talks are going on," said Tom Murphy, a manager at the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District. "The current IMO standards are nonstandards."

Based in London, the International Maritime Organization develops international standards for ship safety, security, vessel design, environmental protection and crew training. It has 166 member nations, including the United States. The agency's rules are enforced by port authorities, coast guards and maritime agencies around the world.

The organization could adopt revised standards as early as next July.

Rather than wait for the maritime association to act, port officials in Los Angeles and Long Beach have forged ahead with their own clean-air plan - a draft of which was announced at a June 28 news conference.

The \$2-billion, five-year proposal seeks to reduce sooty diesel emissions from cargo ships, trains and trucks by more than 50%. Harbor officials hope to achieve those goals by specifying conditions in terminal leases, revising port rules and adjusting harbor fees as an incentive.

The plan, expected to be approved by both harbor commissions in September, calls for international cargo ships to use low-sulfur fuel within 20 nautical miles of local ports and to cut nitrogen oxide emissions by 45%.

Meanwhile, the maritime agency will continue formulating new emissions standards to significantly reduce sulfur oxides, particulates and nitrogen oxides from oceangoing vessels.

Tougher measures to limit air pollution from incineration of shipboard waste and from tanker operations - such as the loading and unloading of crude oil, petroleum products and hazardous chemicals - also are on the agenda.

For the first time, Vagslid said, the IMO will consider regulating particulates and whether to require ships built before 2000 to retrofit their main engines with air pollution controls, such as scrubbers and catalytic converters. The current standards apply only to new ships and those being refitted with new engines.

Vagslid said the effort is the result of pressure from European nations interested in improving the maritime agency's current fuel and emissions standards, which have been widely viewed as ineffective.

Those regulations were formulated in 1997, but it took eight years for member nations to ratify them. They finally went into effect in May 2005.

The 1997 regulations set the sulfur content for ship fuel at 4.5% - noticeably above the 3% sulfur content of fuel generally available worldwide.

The current International Maritime Organization standards also call for a 25% to 30% reduction in nitrogen oxides in new engines placed in ships starting in 2000. But environmentalists and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency question whether those regulations will be effective.

"No one takes these regulations seriously," said Teri Shore, a campaign director for Bluewater Network, an environmental group involved with marine issues. "Ship air pollution is growing, and growing faster than other pollution sources."

The 1997 rules, however, allow ratifying nations to establish special zones with more stringent sulfur standards for fuel. Two have been set up, in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The United States, which is close to ratifying the 1997 regulations, is studying such a zone for North America.

Because shipping is a global industry, there is widespread agreement among maritime organization member states to establish uniform standards. But the agency's proceedings are complicated by various competing interests: ship owners, regulatory agencies and maritime nations with differing views about how far air quality standards should go.

Some IMO member states are Third World countries with ship registries that make it possible for vessel owners to avoid taxes, labor laws and the tougher regulations of developed nations.

Political pressure, however, has been mounting around the globe to have the maritime organization take a tougher stance on air pollution from main engines.

EPA officials say they want to see significant reductions in emissions from foreign-flagged vessels and regulations for engines on older ships.

"We want IMO standards that reflect the EPA's view on technology and limits," said Margo Oge, the agency's director of transportation and air quality.

In April, the month the IMO talks began, the International Assn. of Ports and Harbors called on the organization to establish more stringent air quality standards.

"Unfortunately, the IMO, because it works on a consensus basis, can fall prey to the lowest common denominator," said Geraldine Knatz, director of the Port of Los Angeles. "But there are too many things happening worldwide this time to have the IMO sit back and do nothing."

The talks also are overshadowed by recent developments at Maersk Inc., the world's largest shipping line. In May, the Danish company announced that all of its ships would switch to clean-burning low-sulfur fuel within 24 miles of California ports.

Maersk further revealed that it is testing pollution controls for ship engines that can reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by roughly 90%.

"Maersk can put pressure on the proceedings," Vagslid said. "It shows that shipping lines can be profitable and protect the environment."

Port officials in Los Angeles and Long Beach questioned whether the IMO could develop new standards soon enough and strong enough to satisfy port officials and state air quality regulators.

Though harbor authorities don't have the legal authority to regulate foreign-flagged ships, they are devising alternative strategies to deal with the vessels while they are in port.

Besides the proposed clean-air plan, both ports have established speed-reduction programs to cut emissions from ships coming into port. In addition, both ports are beginning to supply onshore sources of electricity to ships so they won't have to run their auxiliary engines.

"We'd like to see voluntary efforts as much as we can," said Bob Kanter, director of planning and environmental affairs for the Port of Long Beach. "We've got to convince terminal operators and shipping lines that it is in their best interests to do these things."

County taking its time with motorsports park project

By Chris Collins

The Merced Sun-Star, July 4, 2006

When it comes to handling perhaps the most controversial project in local history, the Merced County Planning Department isn't taking any chances.

That means both fans and naysayers of the proposed 1,200-acre Riverside Motorsports Park will have to wait at least another month before the public free-for-all begins: workshops, hearings, debates and -- ultimately -- the big vote.

Supporters and opponents of the raceway have already been waiting since January, when they sent thousands of letters and postcards to the Planning Department decrying the \$230 million project as an environmental doomsday or hailing it as an economic boon.

Six months later, the county is still putting the last touches to its final environmental report on the project. That document will be used by planning commissioners and county supervisors to determine whether a plot of land north of Castle Airport should be turned into a race car Mecca.

"I know everybody's frustrated. They want to know, 'Where is it?'" said Bill Nicholson, the county's assistant planning director. "But you don't want to put a deadline on a document like this."

Nicholson said the consultant company Riverside Motorsports Park LLC hired, Sacramento-based EDAW, is reviewing the "administrative draft" of the environmental report and will send it back to the county later this month. Then the county will put the final touches to the document and let the public hearings begin.

As recently as August 2005, Riverside developers said they wanted to open what could be one of the biggest motorsports parks in the United States by spring 2007.

Mark Melville, a Gustine city councilman and Riverside's vice president, now says it will hopefully debut "sometime in 2008."

"I wish it could move a little bit faster, but any applicant (for a project) will tell you that," Melville said. "We'd like to be on the calendar in July, but it looks like that won't happen. So we'll see what happens in August."

Nicholson said much of the holdup is because of the large volume of "comment letters" the county received about Riverside. The Planning Department must respond to each letter before finalizing its environmental report.

The Riverside project received 87 comments late last year. In contrast, the 2,600-home expansion to the Fox Hills community -- which is three miles west of Los Banos and about the same size as the motorsports park -- got only four comment letters. The Fox Hills project was approved last week.

Melville said the environmental report that is under review has a "few wrinkles." He said his company has had to pay for more air and traffic studies to adequately respond to the comment letters.

Riverside's opponents, who have organized as the Citizens Against the Raceway, say they think the delays are an indication that the motorsports park faces serious environmental hurdles.

"I think it's taking a long time because the problems they have are insurmountable," said Lisa Kayser-Grant, a Merced homeschooler who is part of the anti-raceway group. "I think the solutions they come up with won't be acceptable."

The group's co-chair, retired Merced teacher Tom Grave, said he believes Riverside's developers and investors are anxiously wondering how much longer they'll have to pay for offices, lawyers and consultants before they can break ground.

"You can imagine these investors are going to expect some return on their money and are getting impatient," he said.

The Riverside project, which was first proposed in 2003, would pave over 223 acres of land designated by the state as "important farmland," according to the draft environmental report released November 2005.

The report also said the eight to 10 major events the park plans to host each year would temporarily clog up traffic throughout the county. It said that the events' noise levels would exceed county standards.

The report also raised concerns about air pollution and the park's impact on nine nearby homes. Riverside developers say their park will boost the local economy, improve residents' quality of life and create 1,250 new jobs.

Employers Go Extra Mile to Aid (and Keep) Commuters

By Alec MacGillis, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Thursday, July 6, 2006; VA05

When it comes to helping workers with their commutes, employers in the region have moved beyond such standbys as subsidized transit passes. They're giving workers vans to drive home, radically loosening telecommuting rules and even paying for walking shoes.

That is what the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments found in choosing the winners of its awards for employers that make an extra effort to aid workers with their commutes. Northern Virginia employers took two of the top three prizes.

As traffic congestion worsens and housing costs widen the distance for many between home and office, more employers are recognizing that making it easier, and more affordable, for workers to do their jobs is becoming more important to attract and retain talent, said Nick Ramfos, director of the government council's Commuter Connections program.

And even if employers are acting out of self-interest, it's a welcome trend for the region, Ramfos said, because it helps reduce traffic.

"From a business sense, these employers have latched on to these programs to keep their best and brightest, and we salute them, because it helps our region in terms of congestion and air quality," Ramfos said.

George Mason University won the award for the best incentives for alternative means of commuting. The college gives employees up to \$105 a month in transit subsidies and offers free shuttle service between the Vienna Metro station and its Fairfax campus and between the Fairfax and Prince William campuses.

Mason was particularly praised for its vanpool program, under which employees living in the region's farthest reaches use university-owned vans to get to and from work, with as many as eight workers in each van.

About 40 percent of the university's 5,000 employees use either transit or carpools to get to work. The annual costs are \$300,000 for the Metro shuttle and \$182,000 for the vanpools.

"A lot of people that work here live pretty far away, and we feel pretty strongly about . . . trying to provide employment for those people. These are people with great skills, but because they live that far away it's difficult for them to work" at George Mason, said Lillian C. Arevalo, director of operations on the university's Arlington campus.

Winning the award for the best telecommuting program was the U.S. Postal Service's Office of Inspector General, which employs more than 300 people at its headquarters in Arlington.

In late 2004, the agency started an initiative, Smart Workplace, that made it much easier for employees to do their work -- mostly investigations of fraud and misconduct within the postal service -- without going to the office. The program takes advantage of new technology, such as a centralized call center for employees, and new performance measures that emphasize output rather than attendance.

The agency has yet to compile detailed data on how often employees telecommute, but in its application for the award, it estimated that, on average, employees worked outside of the office, either at home or in the field, 144 days a year -- well more than half their workdays. Not surprisingly, the program has been hugely popular with employees, said Agapi Doulaveris, the agency's director of performance.

"Our philosophy is, 'Do your job in the best place to do your job,' " she said. "We have great technology, and we have the flexibility to realize that coming to the office may be counterproductive based on what you have to do."

The third major award, for the best marketing of alternative commuting options, went to Discovery Communications in Silver Spring. The company, one of Montgomery County's largest, received praise for its electronic postings of commuter-related announcements, the commuter information center it established near the Metro station close to its building and its annual commuter fair.

Ramfos, the Council of Governments official, said he expected more employers to start aggressively promoting and subsidizing alternative commuting options as they realize that not doing so puts them at a competitive disadvantage.

"We're not saying that every employer has to do these things," he said. "But there are some employers who maybe ought to be doing it, because there are other employers hiring their workers away because they're offering these benefits."

Not all cars pollute Kern's air equally

BY DANIELLE C. BELTON, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 5, 2006

What do a 2005 Ford GT, a 2000 BMW M5 and a 1997 GMC C1500 Yukon have in common? They're all really bad for our air.

According to a study released in June, not all cars pollute equally. And combined with Bakersfield's already heavily polluted air, hot weather and geography, experts say the kind of car you drive, regardless of whether it's old or new, could be a potential polluter.

The Auto Asthma Index, put together by the Environmental Working Group, correlates bad air and polluting vehicles with asthma-suffering children.

Found online at www.cleancarsforkids.org, the index looks at cars from 1985 to 2006 and ranks the best and worst cars according to those years, breaking out categories for small, medium and large cars, as well as minivans and SUVs.

The study then relates the car data with the known environmental information on specific cities and their weather and geographical information.

"We designed it as a tool that people would e-mail to their friends. Consumer-friendly," said Bill Walker, vice president of the group.

With the search feature, users can look up their own car or scan through the lists of car data for Bakersfield.

According to the site, among the most polluting cars of the 2006 models in Bakersfield are the Ford 250 Econoline, the Chrysler Town & Country, the Dodge Ram 1500 Pickup and the Chevrolet K2500 Avalanche. Those cars may be two or three times as polluting as the cleanest-running vehicles.

But they're still not as polluting as older models.

Some 6-year-old cars can be as much as 17 times more polluting than the cleanest-running vehicle.

A 2000 BMW 750i Luxury Protection is 24 times more polluting than the cleanest-running large car, according to the site. The popular 2004 Hummer H2 is 28 times more polluting.

A 1999 Toyota Camry is 53 times more polluting and a 1996 Volkswagen Jetta GLX is 93 times more polluting than its cleanest-running car counterpart.

The study also points out the cars least harmful to Bakersfield's air quality, such as the 2000 Chevrolet Impala, a 2004 Saturn Vue or 1998 Ford Ranger, which is only three times more polluting than the cleanest truck on the road.

"We want to start getting people to think about air pollution as a public health issue," Walker said. "On a practical level we want to give people information that will help them make smart choices."

But when shopping for the right car, smart shopping isn't always environmentally friendly shopping.

With budget and kids as a factor, some local car owners are more interested in convenience and what's the best car for the family.

"We drive an SUV. For our family size, we need an SUV," said Bakersfield mom Sheri Condi.

Condi, who has four children, drives a 1999 Suburban, a model made by both Chevrolet and GMC.

Local real estate agent Robin Noble said she "drives a lot" and almost bought a hybrid in 2002, but decided not to because of the newness of the technology.

"I was worried that in 2002 they hadn't gotten to a point where it was reliable," Noble said, adding that she was also concerned about the cost of repairing the hybrid if it broke down.

Instead Noble got a "small" SUV, a 2002 Ford Escape. According to Environmental Working Group's rankings, her car only pollutes 9 times more than the cleanest SUV.

"They're certainly convenient," Noble said of the SUVs. "My daughter drives a Suburban, but she has so many kids it's the only way she can do it all in one trip."

And the popular SUVs are a big hit with many Bakersfield families.

The Chevrolet Tahoe and GMC Yukon ranked Nos. 3 and 6 in sales of new trucks and SUVs for the month of May. But all that love of large cars pays a price.

"It's bad. (Coming from Los Angeles) over the grapevine we could see it," she said, gesturing to the cloud of yellow air that pops into the sky as you get closer to Kern County.

Bakersfield has the worst air in the country, according to the American Lung Association, which put it ahead of chronic offenders Los Angeles and Fresno this year.

Brenda Turner, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the number of "Spare the Air" days had been going down in Kern County. Last year there were only 18, compared with 27 in 2004 and 41 in 2003.

But this year there have already been six "Spare the Air" days, correlating with the first major heat wave that started in June.

"Bakersfield's got over 300,000 people now. That's more people, more cars," Turner said.

And that's bad news for children suffering from asthma.

"Whenever the air quality is really bad they're breathing in things that are not only damaging to the lungs but are a trigger for the bronchial spasms," said Sharon Borradori, program director for the American Lung Association.

Borradori emphasizes that Kern County's air is "just plain bad for everybody," but there are more than 34,000 children under the age of 14 in Kern County who suffer from asthma.

In 2003, Borradori said 274 of those children had to be hospitalized -- "and that's not counting the one's who went to the emergency room and were sent home."

Asthma is one of the main causes of school absenteeism, costing about 40,000 lost school days per year.

To select more environmentally friendly vehicles to help reduce air and asthma problems, Turner of the Air Pollution Control District suggests looking for cars with better gas mileage.

"The more efficient cars are, the less they pollute," Turner said. "Although in recent years people have gone to bigger cars."

But Walker wants to take that a bit further.

He points out that while lower gas mileage is often a good indicator of whether a car is a polluter, that only works for new cars.

Older vehicles become less and less environmentally friendly the longer they stay on the road.

"If a car has been on the road for over 100,000 miles, smog control equipment isn't as reliable or good," Walker said. "(The index) is meant to be a real-world check on the miles per gallon rating put out by the government."

Walker doesn't expect anyone to ditch their old car and get a new one based on the Environmental Working Group's study.

But he wouldn't mind if people would use it as a guide when they do buy a car.

"People buy cars all the time. Why don't I choose the one that's cleanest?" Walker said.

Most polluting

Small car: Chevrolet Corvette

Medium car: Buick Lacrosse/Allure

Large car: Chrysler 300C/SRT-8

Wagon: Saab 9-5 Wagon

SUV: Chevrolet K2500 Avalanche

Truck: Dodge Ram 1500 Pickup

Minivan: Chrysler Town & Country

Van: Ford E250 Econoline

Least polluting

Small car: Honda Insight

Medium car: Honda Accord

Large car: Mercedes-Benz S430

Wagon: Mercedes-Benz E430 Wagon

SUV: Lexus RX 400H

Truck: Honda Ridgeline

Minivan: Honda Odyssey

Van: Chevrolet G35

Top new cars sold in Bakersfield (May 2006)

Cars

1. Toyota Camry

2. Toyota Corolla

3. Nissan Altima

4. Honda Accord

5. Ford Crown Victoria

Trucks, SUVs, Minivans and full-sized vans

1. Ford F-Series

2. Chevrolet C/K Pickup

3. Chevrolet Tahoe

4. Dodge Ram Pickup

5. Toyota Tacoma

Source: Cross-Sell Report

Fireworks users busted

BY JENNY SHEARER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 5, 2006

The four-day crackdown on illegal fireworks activity resulted in about 150 citations, fire officials said Wednesday.

Kern County Fire Chief Dennis Thompson, right, and city of Bakersfield Fire Chief Ron Frazee addressed the media about illegal fireworks enforcement. A total of about 150 citations were handed out between the city and county.

Patrol teams of city and county firefighters and police and sheriff's deputies searched for violators.

"I still feel like the little Dutch boy putting my finger in the dike," said Capt. Ed Watts of the Bakersfield Fire Department.

"(For) every hole I plug, (there's) 10 more popping up," he said.

Watts finally went to sleep at 4 a.m. Wednesday after a night of enforcement duties.

Although fines for illegal fireworks range between \$500 and \$1,500, changing people's behavior was the goal of the patrols.

"I think it shows the value of interagency operation beyond firefighters to law enforcement," said Kern County Fire Chief Dennis Thompson.

City of Bakersfield Fire Department Chief Ron Frazee said about 80 citations were issued by city firefighters and police.

Between 60 and 70 citations were given by county firefighters and sheriff's deputies, Thompson said.

That compares to about 10 each in the city and county last year, officials said.

What awaits people who received citations depends where they were when using the fireworks. People cited in the city of Bakersfield will be prosecuted by city attorneys, Frazee said.

Those busted in county areas will go through an administrative process in which they'll appear before fire officials. If they want to appeal the ruling, they can do so with the county's Board of Supervisors, Thompson said.

Refusal to pay assessed fines will result in collections measures.

On Tuesday alone, 750 calls were made to the illegal fireworks hot line, Frazee said.

About 300 to 400 pounds of illegal fireworks were confiscated by city fire personnel.

The county's haul is still being tabulated, Thompson said.

Confiscated fireworks will eventually be turned over to the state fire marshal.

City of Bakersfield Fire Capt. Ed Watts said the back of his full-size, half-ton truck was full of illegal fireworks.

Much of what was seized was likely purchased in Nevada and brought and sold in California, Watts said.

Safety wasn't limited to the fireworks themselves. Fireworks contain soot, which can lead to increases in harmful particulate matter in the air.

Although air quality readings peaked between 9 and 11 p.m. Tuesday, levels this year were better compared with last, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Tuesday's average readings didn't violate federal air quality standards, said Brenda Turner, district spokeswoman.

In fact, the federal Environmental Protection Agency agreed with the district's findings that there have been no "particulate matter 10" violations for the past three years.

Fireworks citations were issued for everything from Ground Bloom flowers to more expensive and large fireworks.

"We had numerous stops where people told us (they) purchased it from a private party behind a fireworks booth or from someone driving through the neighborhood," Watts said.

Fireworks may have been responsible for a Wednesday house fire where a city of Bakersfield firefighter suffered neck and head injuries when a ceiling collapsed at the home on Rexford Way. The firefighter was treated and released, Frazee said.

Fire investigators believe a bottle rocket may have started the blaze, which caused about \$140,000 in damages.

Frazee appreciates that public safety personnel gave up spending time with their families on the Fourth to help with the enforcement efforts. "They did a bang-up job," Frazee said.

Patrol teams encountered some belligerent people during their rounds. About six were arrested.

"Law-abiding citizens on the Fourth of July turn into criminals," said Capt. Garth Milam of the Bakersfield Fire Department.

80 -- Approximate number of citations issued by city of Bakersfield firefighters.

60 to 70 -- Approximate number of citations issued by Kern County firefighters.

750 -- Approximate number of calls received by illegal fireworks hot line on Independence Day; personnel responded to 500.

6 -- Approximate number of arrests made during four-day enforcement period.

Sources: City of Bakersfield Fire Department, Kern County Fire Department

[Fresno Bee columnist, Thursday, July 6, 2006:](#)

In politics, nerds go the way of nice guys

By Bill McEwen / The Fresno Bee

As one geek to another, I've got advice for Phil Angelides as he tries to unseat Arnold Schwarzenegger.

There's no way to say it gently, Phil: you've got to find a way to overcome your overt nerdiness.

You and your advisers probably are thinking about other things, especially the television commercial in which Republicans use the words of a Democrat - Steve Westly - to skewer you and your plan to raise taxes.

Boy, that ad has to hurt.

I check my back pocket for my wallet every time I see it, and I bet millions of other Californians do, too.

The good news for you, Phil, is that many voters don't make up their minds until the last few days before the election, and your promise-the-world, tax-the-rich platform will appeal to lots of Democrats.

Plus you're going to attract public employees who aren't liberals and in fact might be right-wing Republicans but want to protect their salaries and pensions.

I call these people firefighters, cops and prison guards.

The bad news is - from your toothy smile to your XXL ears to your obvious intelligence - you have the look of a guy who should be state treasurer.

Not governor.

I was reminded of my terminal geekiness last week by a reader reacting to a column I'd written about a court challenge to a law requiring developers to pay air-pollution cleanup fees.

"You look and sound just like Al Gore," he said in a message on my voicemail.

Even though Gore has a hit movie and came within a Supreme Court decision of being president, I took the comment as an insult, because Gore is the long-reigning King of All Geeks.

It's true the reader might've been simply calling me a wacko environmentalist, but I don't think so.

You wouldn't either if you were born with 10,001 freckles that nearly 53 years later have refused to fade from your epidermis.

It's not fair, Phil, but that's how the world operates.

People gravitate toward beautiful people, and voters want a governor who looks gubernatorial - not like a goober.

Your challenge is to light a fire in the electorate by becoming, if not totally cool, a little less like the Guy Most Likely to Show Up at His High School Reunion in a White Shirt with a Pocket Protector.

Trust me, a new haircut isn't going to do it.

You'll have to get creative while remaining true to yourself because the only things voters dislike more than a nerd is a phony.

Too bad for you that you're running against a guy who has elevated cool into an art form.

How cool is Schwarzenegger?

He made professional bodybuilding and bad acting cool.

His crowning achievement: Making the sport-coat-and- dress-shirt-without-a-tie-look cool.

I bet even Brad Pitt is envious.

Like I said, Phil, it's patently unfair.

You can win the debates, you can raise a boatload of money and you can get Democrats to turn out in droves.

But it won't mean a thing if you can't fix the nerd thing.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, July 5, 2006](#)

Editorial: Sprawl's secret agent Mailer is a dumb attack on smarter growth

As the city of Sacramento revises its strategy for growth, somebody is trying to influence the outcome with a fancy, expensive (and inaccurate) mailer. The mystery activist is upset that the city is studying modest steps to grow "up" (by making more efficient use of existing communities), rather than "out" (in an ever-spreading case of urban sprawl).

The mailer is more of a curiosity than a pendulum-swinging event in city politics. But it is noteworthy, because it indicates there are some well-financed enemies of an emerging regional strategy to focus more growth closer to transit and jobs.

A story in Monday's Bee by Mary Lynne Vellinga detailed the mystery mailer that was sent to residents throughout Sacramento. "STOP THE SQUEEZE" was its headline. Its photo illustration is a woman in a fetal position, knees up to her cheek, with a shocked look on her face.

The text reads (in part): "Currently, the city's 'preferred regional scenario' packs new development into existing neighborhoods, even those that are already densely populated -- which will crowd schools, increase traffic, erode quality of life and create new dangers for children walking to and from school. You can protect your neighborhood and 'stop the squeeze' by attending one of the city's public hearings and expressing your opinion on the proposed General Plan."

The mailer's official author is the "Safe and Clean Schools Coalition." Its Capitol Mall address is the office of the political law firm Bell, McAndrews & Hiltachk. The firm referred questions to a lawyer in Auburn, Nina Salarno Ashford, who used to head the office of victims services for Attorney General Bill Lockyer.

She wouldn't identify the source of her coalition's money. And she probably doesn't ever have to; state disclosure requirements don't necessarily pertain to these kind of coalitions that put out "educational" mailers, even when they smell downright political. Ashford said the coalition truly worries about school overcrowding in Sacramento from the strategy of growing up rather than out.

"Clearly this leads to overcrowding and safety issues," she said.

Clearly? Hardly. The Sacramento City Unified School District is a mature urban district with enrollment that has been declining slightly. Enrollment growth, if anything, would be a welcome infusion of additional funds, because state support is based on attendance.

Child safety is not at risk if Sacramento were to build compact (and more affordable) housing developments closer to existing schools, shops and transit. The region, however, is at risk if communities don't do a better job focusing the growth inward rather than outward, pushing housing far from jobs.

Perpetual sprawl is what will increase overall traffic, increase air pollution and decrease our quality of life. But outward growth would make some landowners on the fringe pretty darn rich. Were any of them behind this mailer? If not, they should say so. If they don't speak up, you can assume that this isn't about schools at all but about who profits from sprawl.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, July 6, 2006:](#)

No help for air

The Bee published an editorial July 2 discussing a survey indicating a growing awareness of the effects of severe air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley. The Bee stated that 50% to 60% of air pollution "comes from all those vehicles we love to drive so much." Bravo! The Bee identified the largest source of our filthy air.

Yet, on June 26, an editorial strongly supported the reauthorization of Measure C, a tax to raise \$1.7 billion for transportation. The Bee wrote, "extending Measure C means investing in transportation improvements and new technologies that promote clean air." The facts do not support your conclusion.

The Measure C expenditure plan earmarks a paltry 4% of the tax for activities that will directly reduce air pollution (clean school buses, bicycle/pedestrian facilities) and 96% for business as usual (bus system subsidies, road maintenance, etc.). The new Measure C even wants to spend \$504 million on more freeways, despite your statement that "we needed freeways and we got them" from old Measure C.

The new Measure C is "Forward to the Past," and will do painfully little to improve air quality.

Stephen Lewis, Fresno

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, July 6, 2006:](#)

Earth threatened by pollution and meat diets

Al Gore's riveting documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" has focused public attention on the looming disaster of global warming and the associated flooding of coastal communities, extreme weather conditions, and destruction of wildlife habitats. Global warming is brought on by emission of "greenhouse gases," primarily carbon dioxide and the much more potent methane and nitrous oxide. These gases trap the sun's heat in our atmosphere creating a greenhouse effect.

Most of us blame automotive and industrial emissions. But animal agriculture is a major culprit as well. It emits carbon dioxide from the burning of forests to create animal pastures and from combustion of fossil fuels to operate farm machinery, trucks, refrigeration equipment, factory farms and slaughterhouses. It emits methane from the digestive tracts of cattle and nitrous oxide from animal waste cesspools.

According to a recent University of Chicago study, a meat-free diet reduces greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide per year - as much as switching from an SUV to a hybrid car.

Folks who care about the future of life on Earth would be well advised to consider switching to a meat-free diet even before they switch to a hybrid car.

VINCE CHRISTENSEN, Visalia