

EPA chief gets earful on dust proposal

Valley officials don't want him to drop federal health standard for rural pollution sources.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, February 9, 2006

GOSHEN — The Environmental Protection Agency's top boss has gotten an earful from scientists about his proposal to drop the federal health standard for dust and soot in rural areas.

On Wednesday, EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson heard from San Joaquin Valley officials, who suggest his proposal is not the best fit here.

Johnson proposed the rollback in December, after his staffers concluded rural pollution sources, mainly farming and mining, do not create city pollution.

"It is a proposal," he said Wednesday. "It's complex science. I welcome comments because what I need to do is base my ultimate decision on the best available science."

Johnson was in the Valley to tour the Phoenix Bio Industries ethanol plant in Goshen. It is part of his West Coast tour to tout the Bush administration's energy plan.

The 25,000-square-mile Valley is high on the EPA's agenda because it is home to some of the country's dirtiest air. The Valley is a mix of urban and rural settings, all of which share air quality problems, officials told Johnson.

For instance, the Fresno-Clovis metropolitan area is several times larger than the city of Madera, which is just north across the San Joaquin River.

"We think it will harm our mission to tell people on one side of a river that the standard applies, but it doesn't on the other side," said Seyed Sadredin, deputy air pollution control officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district will submit data to the EPA on the Valley's particulate pollution to show that the problem is not just based in cities. Johnson said he wanted to see the data because his December proposal was not based on the most recent information.

"I want to get all the information we can into the agency," Johnson said, "so the decision is based on science."

The federal Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee last week challenged Johnson's conclusions, disputing the call for the rural dust exemption.

The panel also said the agency's proposal casts doubt on studies linking tiny particle pollution to heart problems, lung disease and early mortality.

Many scientists and other experts have said health studies indicate thousands of lives could be saved each year if the dust standard were tightened.

The EPA chief said he is prepared to look closely at the criticism.

"I don't view it as a disagreement," he said. "I view it as legitimate scientific debate. What I'm interested in is what does the science say?"

The proposal also would provide a national exemption for farming and mining in rural areas.

Farming is the biggest source of dust in the Valley, but the industry has largely complied with air quality reform during the past two years.

Farmers have given no indication that they want an exemption, said Valley air official Sadredin.

"They're committed to the improvements they have made," he said. "They are not looking for a rollback."

Valley moves ahead on air plan

Region among dirtiest in U.S.

By Warren Lutz , Staff Writer

The (Stockton) Record, Thursday, February 9, 2006

STOCKTON - Local officials are moving forward with new plans for battling air pollution, despite not knowing whether the last plan worked or if federal regulators will change the rules.

The particular problem is airborne pollutants 10 microns or smaller, or about the width of a human hair. That includes soot, ash and dust that can lodge deep in the lungs, possibly causing heart attacks and cancer.

The San Joaquin Valley - considered one of the country's dirtiest air basins - was a month away from meeting a three-year federal compliance standard when a Corcoran-area cotton harvest stirred up dust and pollutants around Thanksgiving.

Officials don't know whether that event exceeded pollution limits, because the tests aren't complete. But a violation could force San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials to rethink their strategy.

"It's pretty close," said Don Hunsaker, who supervises the district's air quality plans. The district is under orders to meet federal Clean Air Act standards by 2010. If it fails to consistently meet the three-year goal, the district would have to start a new anti-pollution plan.

Here's the other unknown: Those federal standards could change.

EPA officials last month proposed separating air pollution into two categories - smaller, "fine" pollutants and larger, "coarse" matter - and changed the amount of pollution allowed. They also exempted rural areas from meeting standards for coarse pollution caused by dust.

Although state air quality rules would remain in place, the new rules would make it harder to meet federal standards. The EPA's proposal would cut the daily allowed amount of fine pollutants by half. If the Valley fails to meet the standards, the government could withhold federal transportation funds, said Jerry Martin, a spokesman for the state Air Resources Board.

State officials have criticized the EPA's proposal, arguing it caters to agricultural and mining industries that are responsible for a large portion of air pollution. They fear residents in rural areas could suffer as a result of weaker rules.

The EPA is accepting comments on its proposal, which also received criticism from scientists tasked with providing the agency recommendations about air quality rules.

A final decision is expected by September.

In the meantime, San Joaquin officials are moving ahead with a 2006 pollution plan that mirrors a 2003 plan, without any new significant steps to cut the air pollution. Over the past several years, officials have placed ever-tighter restrictions on agriculture, trucking, food processing and real estate activities. Those restrictions have pushed the district closer to meeting federal standards.

A draft of the new plan calls for an annual 5 percent reduction in the total amount of air pollution. The district's governing board will consider the plan Thursday.

2006 World Ag Expo primed for Tuesday opening

Staff report

Selma Enterprise, Wednesday, February 8, 2006

Visitors to World Ag Expo next Tuesday through Thursday can take a chance on winning a new 2006 Dodge Ram pick-up truck by entering a special give-away.

The truck has a 1,500 Big Horn Quad Cab SLT 4-by-2 with a 5.7-liter hemi, multi-displacement engine. It also has inferno red crystal pearl coat paint, a cloth 40/20/40 premium bench seat, folding flat-load floor storage, a five-speed auto 545RFE transmission, an electronically controlled throttle and power-adjustable pedals.

You can register for the give-away at any entrance gate or at the Dodge exhibit (in U Street booths 32, 34) throughout the event. The winner will be announced at the Dodge booth at 3 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 16, the last day of the show. No purchase is necessary to enter the give-away.

"We are incredibly grateful to the California Dodge dealers for their generosity," said 2006 World Ag Expo Chairman Erin Ferguson. "They have been extremely supportive for many years. Sponsors such as Dodge keep us growing."

World Ag Expo is the largest agricultural exposition on the globe. Its hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday (Feb. 14-15), and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday.

Admission is \$7 per person, with a three-day pass costing \$18. Tickets can be purchased through the International Agri-Center, P.O. Box 1475, Tulare, CA 93275; by calling 1-800-999-9186 or (559) 688-1751; or on-line at www.farmshow.org to keep current. Call the two numbers for information about the giveaway and many other activities.

Here are some of the other activities that will be taking place during the three-day event:

Free Seminar

The integration of new technologies to create a system that dramatically reduces environmental concerns and generates profitable byproducts is the subject of a free seminar at World Ag Expo.

Agrimass Enviro-Energy, based in Visalia, is hosting the seminar at 1:10 p.m. on Wednesday in the Hilvers Building at the International Agri-Center. Speaking will be Agrimass Enviro-Energy President Leonard Chapman; Michael McGolden, president and CEO of Coaltec Energy USA; and Conly Hansen, of Andigen.

This presentation will help dairymen understand how the integration of today's technologies can help them comply with increasingly stringent [air and water quality regulations](#) and turn animal waste into profitable byproducts including energy and a marketable organic humus.

Help Builders As Well

The latest technology, products and services exhibited at the Expo aren't only beneficial for the agriculture industry, they can be directed towards the construction industry as well.

Showcased are the latest in tractors, backhoes, loaders and utility vehicles, plus support products and technologies to make construction work more advanced and more competitive. The products will be displayed on the 2.5 million square feet of the International Agri-Center showgrounds.

Ride and Drive

Visitors will have the opportunity to test drive the newest tractors and trucks in the Ride and Drive

sections, and attend more than 100 free seminars on air, water, land and labor issues.

A range of agribusiness seminars will be featured during the show. All seminars are free with paid admission to the World Ag Expo. Topics include current issues such as food safety, organic farming certification process, and ag equipment theft. Seminars will be located at Median and Q Streets on the showgrounds.

AgVentures! Open

The new, world-class, interactive, agricultural learning center, AgVentures!, will be open for attendees to experience at the Heritage Complex, located on the International Agri-Center grounds.

AgVentures! is the newly remodeled learning center, with 15 custom-designed, professionally-built, interactive agriculture-based exhibits. The learning center, used for educational purposes throughout the year, offers visitors a chance to learn about life sciences, farming and agriculture technology.

Visit Crop Center

The California Crop Center at the 2006 World Ag Expo will demonstrate its focus on its namesake, California crops, through the "We Believe in Growing" crop identification contest. The center is dedicated to educating World Ag Expo attendees about the 350 commodities grown by the state's farmers.

Contestants will compete in three divisions: crop growers and farm operation personnel; Future Farmers of America (FFA), 4-H and Grange Youth; and CAPCA-member-certified pest control advisors and operators.

Trimble Navigation has donated an AgGPS EZ-Steer System as the grand prize in the growers' division. The EZ-Steer was named the 2005 Product of the Year by AgriMarketing Magazine.

Contest entry forms may be obtained by visiting www.farmshow.org <<http://www.farmshow.org>>. Winners will be announced Thursday at 3:15 p.m. in the California Crop Center, located just south of Pavilion C, along Median Street.

Take A Tour

World Ag Expo show attendees can tour agriculture operations in the heart of California's Central Valley during the show's three day.

"About one-half of all ag production in California occurs within a 100-mile radius of World Ag Expo and the International Agri-Center," Ferguson said. "We are exceptionally fortunate to have these great and diverse facilities to tour right in our own backyard."

Each day of the show, visitors can choose either a dairy and farm tour or an agribusiness tour. Tours are scheduled to run concurrently, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., leaving from the Heritage Complex, located on the west end of the show grounds.

Farm Tours Committee Chairman David Watte chose sites that will be in "full swing" operation during February, providing a maximum experience at each site.

Tours are \$20 per person. Space is limited and reservations are first-come, first-served, and registration must include full payment via check or credit card. Registration forms and online reservations may be made by visiting www.farmshow.org. For questions regarding the ag tours, contact Amy Babb at (559) 688-1030.