

Air rule for Valley dairies provokes sharp debate

By Mark Grossi - The Fresno Bee

Fresno Bee and Modesto Bee, Tues., March 14, 2006

The dairy industry wants more detail and more real-world answers for preventing air pollution coming from cows.

Environmentalists say the many tons of corrosive ammonia from cow waste are not being addressed.

Clashes and criticisms stood out Monday at the first public workshop on a controversial livestock air rule. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District took note of the concerns for possible revisions.

The troubleshooting session attracted a full house for a rule workshop. Another session is scheduled at 1:30 p.m. today in Bakersfield, and people can participate in Fresno on a video-conference system.

The rule could be revised before a public hearing at the district's governing board in June. According to state law, the district must approve a livestock air rule by July 1.

At the moment, officials believe the Valley's 2.5 million dairy animals produce more of one smog-making gas than passenger cars, though vehicles create far more overall pollution than any other source.

Daniela Simunovic of Fresno Metro Ministry said the Valley's status as one of the worst air basins in the country makes the rule necessary.

"Rules like this are crucial," she said.

The rule would apply to dairies with at least 1,000 milking cows, meaning 233 dairies in the Valley are subject to the rule, according to the district.

Air regulation of dairies is in its infancy, so uncertainty comes with parts of the rule.

Scientists still are studying dairy waste emissions of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which are one of the building-block gases for smog.

District officials said they purposely wrote the rule to include many fixes that many dairies already use in everyday business, such as frequent flushing of corrals and covering feed stockpiles.

But Karla Edwards, executive director of the Fresno County Farm Bureau, said the proposal needed tweaking and clarification, listing numerous areas of concern. She added that the proposal contains some pollution-reduction options that no dairy owners would use.

"Slotted floors and enclosed barns are not a reality in the San Joaquin Valley," she said, noting they are expensive and generally used in the frigid Midwest.

The ammonia issue drew some political heat. Estimates show farming soon will send 315 tons of ammonia into the air daily, most of it from dairies.

The number will rise to nearly 330 tons by the end of the decade as the industry expands.

"Why aren't you talking about ammonia?" asked D.C. Wilson, who believes he has invented a feed additive to reduce ammonia from dairy waste. He spoke via video conference from Modesto.

Ammonia is not a gas that the district normally would regulate. But it combines with nitrogen oxides from vehicle exhaust to form tiny, lung-irritating specks called ammonium nitrate. The district does regulate the specks.

To control the ammonium nitrate, officials are aiming rules at the nitrogen oxides from cars and other similar sources. By reducing that pollutant, they can decrease the amount of ammonium nitrate, officials said.

But environmentalists argue Senate Bill 700, the law creating the dairy air rule, forces the district to go after all pollutants.

The district legal staff disputes that interpretation.

News from the San Joaquin Valley

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, March 14, 2006

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- San Joaquin Valley air regulators discussed new regulations aimed at curbing pollution from barnyard animals in a workshop on Monday.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's rule would require frequent corral flushing, covering feed stockpiles, and other measures to minimize gases that lead to smog.

The valley's 2.5 million cows are a major source of smog in the region, which has some of the dirtiest air in the nation, air regulators said.

Leaders in the \$4 billion dairy industry said they want more research on dairy emissions before the rule takes effect July 1. Scientists still are confirming recent research on smog-forming gases from cows and manure.

Environmentalists said the rule doesn't go far enough because it does not regulate ammonia from cow waste.

Mojave, Calif. (AP) — A Kern County school district wants to keep a pollution-belching school bus in its fleet that first hit the road when Harry Truman was president.

School Bus One, built in 1951, is used by Mojave Unified School District in parades and special events, despite the state's push to replace old buses with newer, cleaner models.

"We do less to keep this bus on the road than we do with the new ones," said Joe Welling, a mechanic for the school district who has worked on the old bus for nearly a quarter century.

Buses built before 1977 emit about 60 times more soot than newer buses, said air regulators.

"We recognize the emission issues, but it's a museum piece to us," said Superintendent Larry Phelps.

Noisy leaf blowers are exchanged for quieter, low-polluting models

By Susan Abram - LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

in the San Diego Union-Tribune, Sunday, March 12, 2006

LOS ANGELES – In an effort to rid residential neighborhoods of air and noise pollution, air quality officials recently launched the first in a series of leaf blower exchanges for landscapers, gardeners and other yardwork enthusiasts.

About 300 people paid \$200 each to ditch their outdated, ear-splitting, cough-inducing machines for quieter, low-polluting brands that retail for \$460. The event, sponsored by the South Coast Air

Quality Management District, took place at Toro's Lawnmower, Garden and Chain Saw Center off Foothill Boulevard.

"A lot of professional landscapers and gardeners know they get a lot of flak about blowers," said Laura Toro, owner of the garden shop. "Anything that offers cleaner fuel, that is quieter and is very lightweight will make a lot of difference."

Dan Andrus was among those who made the switch.

"It's quieter," said the landscaper, one of the last customers of the day. "You're not going to have the ear problems in 20 years."

Andrus, who runs All American Landscape in La Crescenta, said shelling out an extra \$200 for the tool was a good compromise to meet various regulations on leaf blowers still imposed in some cities across the state.

"I think the biggest danger (of a ban) is landscapers are going to go back to hoses and waste precious water," he said.

The AQMD's goal is to retire 1,500 blowers and cut 14 tons of pollution. A typical backpack-style blower can pollute the air as much as 80 new cars driven during that same year, experts say. Five more exchanges were to be held. Garden equipment generates about 6 percent of the region's smog-forming pollutants, compared to the 76 percent created by vehicles, including cars, trucks, trains and planes, AQMD officials have said. In recent years, state regulators have cut pollution from lawn mowers and chain saws as well.

Barbara Alvarez, owner of Golden State Landscape in Valinda, said she purchased a half-dozen blowers seven months ago, and already her crew of 10 has given them a thumbs-up.

Alvarez has worked to get statewide legislation that would make it illegal for cities to ban blowers, an essential tool for gardeners, she said.

"It is an excellent blower," she said. "I haven't had one complaint from any customer. I myself can stand next to it and have a conversation."

Chinese Official Notes Damage to Environment

From the Associated Press

Los Angeles Times, Tues., March 12, 2006

BEIJING - China must sharply improve environmental protection or it could face disaster after two decades of breakneck growth that have poisoned its air, water and soil, the country's top environmental official said Saturday.

The director of the State Environmental Protection Administration said that more than half of China's 21,000 chemical companies were near the Yangtze and Yellow rivers - which provide drinking water for tens of millions of people - and accidents could bring "disastrous consequences."

"Facts have proved that prosperity at the expense of the environment is very superficial and very weak," Zhou Shengxian said at a news conference during the annual meeting of China's parliament. "It's only delaying disaster."

China's cities are among the world's smoggiest and its major rivers are badly polluted, leaving hundreds of millions of people without enough clean drinking water.

Protests have erupted throughout the country over farmers' complaints that uncontrolled factory discharges were ruining crops and water.

Environmental protection took on new urgency for Chinese leaders after a chemical spill in November, which sent toxic substances into northeastern China's Songhua River and forced cities in China and Russia to shut off water supplies.

Zhou's agency said in a report that its goals for this year included better prevention and pollution control, stricter environmental law enforcement and increased supervision of nuclear and radiation safety.

Zhou took office after the outcry over the November disaster forced the resignation of his predecessor, who was the highest-ranking Chinese official to be ousted over an environmental incident.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Tuesday, March 14, 2006](#)

Dairy rules a 'first step'

Air pollution regulators must be doing something right. Both environmentalists and farmers say proposed dairy rules stink. A workshop will be held today at 1:30 p.m. in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's offices at 2700 M St., Suite 275, to review the proposed rules.

The district faces a July 1 deadline to enact air cleanup rules that include controls over dairies. Legislation authored by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, requires agricultural operations, including dairies, to reduce the pollutants they spew into the air. For decades, agriculture has been exempt from air cleanup rules.

Dairy industry representatives complain more scientific studies must be done before cleanup rules are adopted. Environmentalists argue the rules being proposed do not go far enough.

The rules are a good compromise, giving farmers a list of low-tech options to reduce pollution. A bone of contention is the contribution ammonia has on the valley's dirty air. When manure and urine from cattle mix, ammonia results. Ammonia reacts with nitrogen oxides to form fine particles linked to respiratory problems.

Some dairy industry representatives want the ammonia rules and others settled now, rather than later. "It's disingenuous to develop a control scheme today and three, four, five years later to come back with something different that's going to be costly," said industry representative John Dunlap, who also represents a company trying to market ammonia-cutting technology to dairies.

But because the dairy industry has been exempt from air pollution rules, science-backed pollution information dates back to the 1930s, when dairies were small. Today's factory-size dairies pose significant pollution problems.

As study of the dairy industry unfolds, likely the rules will change and the costs will climb. Cleanup of Kern's oil industry in the 1980s followed this same pattern.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Tuesday, March 14, 2006:](#)

How green is Arnold?

When it comes to climate change, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger needs to choose his leading role.

Will he follow through on pledges to cut heat-trapping gases from industry smokestacks and vehicle tailpipes? Or will he fall back on sound-bites that won't dent the problem?

Since December, his administration has sat on a report by scientists on curbing emissions of heat-trapping gases. The report laid it out bluntly: Government restrictions are needed, but a whole new industry could emerge to curb pollution.

The study gave rise to a politically loaded suggestion for a levy on fuel to pay for pollution research and requirements for some industries to keep track of greenhouse gas emissions.

The state Chamber of Commerce denounced the ideas as job-killing burdens on industry. It's a sensitive subject for a pro-business governor facing re-election.

But the climate-change report also touches on Schwarzenegger's clean-and-green side. He broke with the Bush administration last year by declaring that global warming is for real. "I say the debate is over. We know the science. We see the threat. And we know the time for action is now," he said.

The governor is already on record in favor of electrical utilities obtaining 20 percent of their fuel from renewable sources such as wind, water or solar by 2010. He also supports cleaner tailpipe-emission rules now challenged in court by automakers.

But broader and more far-reaching challenges remain if California wants to clean its air, develop pollution fighting technology and lead the country into a new clean industry. Schwarzenegger offered to lead this cause. He shouldn't walk away now.