

Winds prompt warning

The Fresno Bee
Friday, May 26, 2006

High winds have prompted health warnings for today through Saturday evening from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The high winds — forecast to be 20 mph with possible gusts to 30-35 mph in Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties and the Valley portion of Kern counties — can kick up dust from dry land and create unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter ten microns and smaller, or PM-10, the district said.

Residents affected by blowing dust are advised to use caution. People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion. Everyone else is advised to reduce prolonged exposure.

High winds stir up health warnings

Staff reports
Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, May 26, 2006

Expected high winds in the central and southern Valley prompted local air-pollution officials to issue a health cautionary statement for this morning through Saturday evening.

The high winds -- forecast to be 20 miles per hour with possible gusts to 30-35 mph -- can kick up dust from dry land and create unhealthful concentrations of particulate matter.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Air district offers electric lawn mower discounts

The Fresno Bee, Sunday
May 28, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will offer Valley residents a \$229 discount on an electric lawn mower during its annual Clean Green Yard Machine program at 9 a.m. Saturday at College of the Sequoias, Lot 7, in Visalia.

Residents must turn in their gasoline-powered lawn mowers to receive the discount.

The event is first come, first served, and good while supplies last.

Details: (209) 557-6400 or visit www.valleyair.org.

Student art sought for 2007 calendar

By Sentinel Staff
Hanford Sentinel, Sunday, May 28, 2006

HANFORD - The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is looking for student artwork for its 2007 Clean Air Kids Calendar.

Deadline for submission is Sept. 30.

Valley school students in kindergarten through 12th grade are eligible to enter. Artists should place the page sideways, in landscape orientation, so the paper is 8-1/2 inches high and 11 inches wide.

Artwork should be in color and contain a message about a way to help clean the air.

"We hope that before summer recess, teachers will encourage their students to draw a colorful picture about how they feel we can reduce air pollution," said Jaime Holt, public information administrator for the air district. "Entries in English, Spanish or both languages are welcomed, as the calendar is bilingual."

Fourteen drawings and clean-air themes will be selected and reproduced in a four-color calendar and the artists' photos will be featured.

About 20,000 calendars are distributed free to schools, community groups, health-care facilities, churches and non-profit organizations in December.

For information, email public.education@valleyair.org or call 230-6000.

Environmental group says four dairies violated air act

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers

Thursday, May 25, 2006, 3:30 PM

HANFORD, Calif. (AP) - An environmental group said Thursday it will sue four San Joaquin Valley dairies for allegedly violating the Clean Air Act by starting construction without clean air permits.

A group called the Association of Irrigated Residents sent letters to Endeavor Gold Dairy, the Martin Ranch Family Dairy, the Turner Ranch Family Dairy and the Yokum Dairy, all in Kings County. The group of residents from Tulare and Kern counties is represented by the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

The group sent letters to the dairies, giving them 60 days to respond or risk lawsuits in federal court.

The dairies also violated the Clean Air Act by not outfitting their dairies with equipment that helps control and reduce pollution, the group said.

Pollution on dairies usually comes from manure, livestock feed and from gases emitted by the cows during digestion. It can cause asthma, damage to the lung tissue and even premature death.

Huge dairies are one of the leading causes of the Valley's air pollution, a problem that surpasses pollution by cars, oil and gas production, and pesticides, according to the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Several counties in the San Joaquin Valley were ranked as some of the top most ozone-polluted areas of the country by the American Lung Association's 2006 "State of the Air" report issued last month.

The Endeavor Gold Dairy, Martin Ranch Family Dairy and Turner Ranch Family Dairy have applied for permits with the Air District, but did not get them before they started building.

The dairies were not immediately available for comment.

Odor complaints about plant drop significantly, board says

by John Holland

Modesto Bee, Sunday, May 28, 2006

Six months into its phased shutdown, Modesto Tallow Co. isn't making such a stink anymore, people monitoring the plant said.

Odor complaints, which once numbered in the hundreds per year, have dropped to a few, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District reported Thursday.

"We have periodically checked it just to make sure things are going according to plan, and we haven't detected anything," said Jami Aggers, northern region compliance manager for the district.

In December, the agency and the company announced a settlement that will lead to the shutdown of the 89-year-old plant by Dec. 31. Rendering has stopped, but the site can be a drop-off point until year's end for grease and butchering waste bound for other plants.

"There has been a world of difference," said John Campopiano, principal of nearby Shackelford School. "I would say there have been maybe three to five days when I noticed an odor, but the intensity is nowhere what it was."

Maria Cerrato, a yard duty worker at Shackelford, said the odor has diminished overall but returns about once a week, usually around noon for about an hour.

"It smells like a dead dog," Cerrato said in Spanish. "The children start covering their noses. It's a disgusting smell that makes you want to vomit."

Aggers said the air district has received a "small handful" of odor complaints since December but could not verify that they were caused by Modesto Tallow.

The plant, built before the surrounding area was developed, was long a destination for dead animals from dairies and other sources, as well as restaurant grease and waste from butcher shops.

The announcement of the closure prompted concern among dairy farmers about what to do with their dead animals. Other companies have taken up the slack, said Santos Ramos, manager of Sisk Tallow, southwest of Turlock.

Hauling longer distances adds to cost

Sisk collects animals and takes them to another company in Sacramento for rendering, Ramos said. Other animals have gone to plants operated near Crows Landing by Darling International and in Fresno County by Baker Commodities, he said.

The loss of Modesto Tallow nonetheless has increased costs, because the animals have to be hauled longer distances, said Ray Souza, a dairyman who lives west of Turlock.

Having Modesto Tallow handle a carcass cost \$60 to \$80, he said, but that went up about \$20 because of hauling costs from other companies, Souza said. He ended up getting a discount from his new rendering company by paying a flat monthly fee.

Souza said the real test for the region's rendering industry will be in the next few months because dead animals start to decompose quickly in hot weather, Souza said.

"If there is a weak link, that would expose it," he said.

Dairy industry people estimate that 2 percent to 5 percent of animals in a herd die each year and are not suitable for meat production.

Develop tallow site, exec urges

No proposal on table yet, but residences and stores could be built at old plant

by John Holland

Modesto Bee, Sunday, May 28, 2006

The president of Modesto Tallow Co., which is shutting down this year after decades of odor complaints, said homes and stores might rise on the site.

William Shirley, who oversees the south Modesto plant from Dallas, said he might apply later this year for city permits for "big-box" retail, along with apartments or other residential uses.

"Our plans are to clean up the site and demolish the buildings and develop it," Shirley said Friday. "In the long run, it will be good for the city and improve the tax base."

Such a project would be a dramatic change for the site, where animal waste was rendered into raw material for other products since 1917. It also could boost the nearby Crows Landing Road corridor, a mix of stores, industry and mainly low-income neighborhoods.

Shirley said he does not yet have a detailed proposal for the property.

He would need City Council approval to rezone the 55-acre site, now designated for heavy industry. He also would have to show Stanislaus County health officials that no toxic substances are left behind.

"We certainly would like to see the site redeveloped," said Steve Mitchell, principal planner for the city. "It has potential for other uses."

Mitchell said the plans might have to include a buffer for flood control and wildlife habitat on the part of the site abutting the Tuolumne River.

Modesto Tallow is shutting down in phases under a settlement announced in December with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The plant has drawn many complaints from neighbors, who said the stench often was unbearable. At times, it has drifted to downtown Modesto and other nearby areas.

Plant can be drop-off site

Under the settlement, the plant had to stop rendering immediately but can be a drop-off site for grease and butchering waste through 2006. This material must be shipped to other renderers within 24 hours.

The Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources is monitoring the plant during the phaseout, Director Sonya Harrigfeld said.

A key concern is the need to remove a leaky underground fuel tank, she said. If the soil is severely contaminated, it would have to be hauled to a hazardous waste dump, she said.

If the leak is not bad, the affected area could be capped with asphalt, as has been done at many service stations, Harrigfeld said. If homes are planned, they should be away from that soil, she said.

Shirley said his company also could have to remove asbestos from the site.

Paul Caruso, who battled Modesto Tallow while serving on the county Board of Supervisors, said he remains leery of its promises but is nonetheless intrigued by the redevelopment idea.

Caruso, who owns a small shopping center on Crows Landing Road, said he would prefer to see stores and offices, but no homes, on the rendering site.

"I do know that at the community level, there is great interest in future development there — correct development," he said. "Anything to bring the area up is wonderful."

Smoggy days equal a free ride on ACE

ERIN SHERBERT

Stockton Record, Monday, May 29, 2006

San Joaquin County commuters can get a free ride to work in the Bay Area on the Altamont Commuter Express train on the smoggiest days this summer.

The Spare the Air Campaign starts Thursday and runs through October 13. During that period, commuters can take buses, trains and ferries for free on the first three weekdays that Bay Area air quality is projected to exceed federal health standards, officials said.

On those days, San Joaquin County commuters heading into the Bay Area can hop a free ride on the ACE train, said Mike Steenburgh, marketing manager for ACE.

ACE operates three daily, round-trip commuter trains between Stockton and San Jose with stops in Lathrop, Tracy, Pleasanton, Fremont and Santa Clara. About 1,500 passengers ride the train each day.

The campaign is meant to take cars off the road and introduce more people to public transit, officials said.

"Our passengers benefit greatly from it, and it does make them aware (of air-quality issues)" Steenburgh said.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District will determine on which days to "spare the air," notifying agencies and commuters one day in advance so that people can plan to take advantage of the free rides, said Ashley Nguyen, senior planner with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area's transportation-planning agency.

Commuters who want to be notified of Spare the Air days can sign up for e-mail alerts at <http://airalert.sparetheair.org>.

In 2005, air quality in the Bay Area triggered a Spare the Air day only one time, but it attracted 21,000 new riders to ACE and other public transit across the Bay Area, Nguyen said.

The Spare the Air Campaign started in the Bay Area in 1991, when the public was asked to refrain from activities that contribute to air pollution, such as driving.

In 2005, ACE and 20 other agencies started offering free rides on the smoggiest days between June and October. This year, 23 transit agencies are participating in the \$7 million campaign. The MTC and Bay Area Quality Management District are paying the cost of encouraging riders to use public transit.

San Joaquin County does not offer free rides to commuters on Spare the Air days, Steenburgh added. Last year, San Joaquin County had two such days.

Officials from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which covers eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley, said the region does not have enough public transit connecting communities to make it worth investing in a similar program, said Jaime Holt, a spokeswoman for the district.

"It's something we need out here," Steenburgh said. "Our air quality is worse than (the Bay Area), and projects like this should be utilized in the Central Valley."

Commuters such as Gary Tittle agree.

"It's a good perk for people who already use mass transit," said Tittle, who rides ACE from Tracy to San Jose. "I think Spare the Air should happen in San Joaquin."

Lodi looking at the future of city's transportation

Jeff Hood, Lodi Bureau Chief
Stockton Record, Monday, May 29, 2006

LODI - Evelyn Comartin's house was built in a vineyard 56 years ago near Lodi Avenue and Ham Lane, a corner then controlled by a two-way stop.

Now the intersection is one of five in Lodi that will be congested for the foreseeable future, especially with as many as 2,500 new homes projected on 392 acres of farmland west of the existing city limits.

Comartin's already lost part of her front yard to a Ham Lane widening project years ago. She said traffic volume goes up every time there's a new development built in the city.

"Now here we are, in the middle of everything," said Comartin, 79. "I'm sure they'll want to take the rest of our front yard off so the cars can go through our bedroom."

Wider streets, more turn lanes, new traffic signals and changing current signals' timing are ways to reduce the effect of growth on Lodi's streets, according to study assessing the environmental effects of the Westside and Southwest Gateway projects planned west of Lower Sacramento Road.

City officials originally ruled there was no need for Frontier Community Builders to conduct the study, because the project would not have an environmental impact. The Stockton-based homebuilders, however, decided differently after hearing some community members complain about the no-impact finding.

In addition to the worsened traffic, the study found the developments will result in the loss of prime farmland, [worse air quality](#) and an inducement for Lodi to continue developing land to the west.

Although wider streets and new light signals were listed as ways to reduce the effect new residents would have on traffic, Randy Hatch, Lodi's community development director, said residents could be better off accepting worse congestion.

If the choice is a short walk or a long wait at a traffic light, more residents may choose to walk to a nearby store for convenience shopping, he said.

"We may not simply want to widen our way to convenient traffic," Hatch said. "We don't want congestion, but do we want a 12-lane road? If we have a 12-lane road, we don't have congestion, but we have a moat around the community."

He feels that with six lanes rather than four, the additional two lanes creates a barrier for bicycle use and walking.

"What we're going to propose is, we want to accept a higher degree of traffic congestion in return for what we think is a more walkable community and a more livable community," Hatch added.

Lodi resident Ann Cerney, an attorney who closely watches the city's land-use decisions, said the report offered no surprises. But she said she opposes city officials allowing large developments before Lodi finishes an update of its General Plan, the document that specifies where and when the city will grow.

Cerney said residents can take steps giving them the power to regulate the city's future growth, such as creating an urban growth boundary that sets the outer limits of city services.

"If the people want to do anything about this, they're going to have to jump up and down and do something," Cerney said.

Lodi officials are collecting comments and questions about the study before releasing its final version. If adopted by the Lodi City Council, it would set the stage for annexation and development.

Not all of the initial plans by Frontier Community Builders line up with those in Lodi's Westside Facilities Master Plan, issued in January 2001. That plan called for a greenbelt/stormwater drainage basin on the western edge, but FCB's Tom Doucette said the canal-like drainage plans weren't practical.

The newer plans call for a pedestrian "spine," as Doucette called it, linking walkways with homes, an aquatics center, parks, schools and shopping, rather than a path on the western edge away from parks and homes.

The developments from Harney Lane to just north of Sargent Road/Lodi Avenue will range from low- to high-density housing, from detached houses to apartment buildings and townhomes.

State to Target Pesticide Pollution

Officials are seeking the reformulation of hundreds of products and plan stricter rules on soil fumigants to cut smog-causing emissions.

By Marla Cone, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, May 30, 2006

State officials are mounting a major initiative to clean up California's smoggy farm regions with new regulations and policies that will target hundreds of pesticides.

The Department of Pesticide Regulation — long criticized for failing to act as air quality deteriorated in the San Joaquin Valley — has developed a strategy to eliminate tons of smog-forming gases that waft daily from fields treated with fumigants and other agricultural chemicals.

The agency has asked manufacturers to begin reformulating more than 700 insecticides, herbicides and other pest-killing chemicals, and it plans to impose stricter rules next year on the use of soil fumigants, which are highly polluting gases that by weight account for about one-quarter of all pesticide applied on California crops.

The state initiative would establish the only air pollution standards for pesticides in the nation. The aim is to begin cleaning up emissions soon, reducing air pollution from pesticides at least 20% by 2008.

"For years, there have been complaints that we dragged our feet as air quality declined," said Mary-Ann Warmerdam, director of the pesticide agency. "That is history. This administration is committed to cleaning up our air, and DPR will do its part to achieve that goal."

Most pest-killing chemicals contain volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which evaporate from fields and are a key component of ozone, California's most abundant air pollutant.

Bakersfield, Fresno and the rest of the San Joaquin Valley experience some of the unhealthiest smog conditions in the United States, rivaling the Los Angeles Basin. Pesticides are responsible for 27 tons per day of the region's smog-forming fumes — only about 7% of its total but enough to rank among the top five sources. In Ventura County, pesticides create about 8 tons per day, almost all from fumigants used on strawberry fields.

"What I really like about this move by DPR is that for the first time the department is seriously addressing the air pollution emitted by pesticides," said Bill Magavern, senior representative of Sierra Club California. "We still have to see a concrete proposal to know whether this will have the teeth that it needs, but it looks like the department really is moving in that direction. This move is long overdue, so we are, of

course, impatient to see the process move forward."

For about a decade, California's smog plans have included goals for reducing fumes from pesticide use.

But until now, no steps were taken by the Department of Pesticide Regulation, the agency that controls which chemicals are legal in California and how they are used.

In April, a federal judge in Sacramento, ruling on a lawsuit filed by a public interest group, ordered California to cut pesticide emissions 20% by 2008. The agency has appealed the court ruling, but Warmerdam decided to act anyway.

"We believe this initiative will go beyond the court order in terms of improving air quality," pesticide agency spokesman Glenn Brank said.

Under the state's plan, the most immediate smog benefit — at least a 20% reduction — would come from controls on fumigants, which are responsible for about half of the San Joaquin Valley's pesticide emissions.

Mark Murai, president of the California Strawberry Commission, said Monday that the industry had decided a year ago to move toward emission reductions and had earmarked \$500,000 to develop new field techniques for fumigants.

"We're definitely not sticking our heads in the sand. We want to be part of the solution," said Murai, a third-generation strawberry grower from Newport Beach. "I don't know if we'll reach that goal [of a 20% reduction by 2008], but we're certainly going to try."

Fumigants such as methyl bromide, metam sodium and chloropicrin are injected into fields before they are planted to sterilize soil and kill diseases, insects and weeds that threaten strawberries, almonds, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes and other crops. Because they are gases, they contain high concentrations of smog-forming compounds, and some seep into the air. They also are highly toxic and can have neurological and reproductive effects when inhaled.

By the end of 2007, the pesticide department plans to adopt regulations that require growers either to control fumigant emissions through new techniques — such as deeper soil injections and better tarps — or reduce the tons used. Workshops will be convened in August to work out the details.

California's growers have already reduced by almost 60% the use of the fumigant methyl bromide, which is being phased out under an international treaty because it damages Earth's protective ozone layer.

Growers worry that the pesticide agency, seeking to reduce smog, may mandate more reductions before they can develop new ways to safeguard crops. California grew \$1.3 billion worth of strawberries last year, 88% of the nation's crop.

"If we want to keep food production here in our own country, we have to work out viable alternatives for farmers who have been doing this for generations," Murai said. "I think DPR understands that, but there are mandates they are under. It's important that we work together to get real-world solutions. California already has the strictest regulations in the world."

Magavern of the Sierra Club said he feared that some chemical companies and growers would "have to be dragged kicking and screaming" into safer techniques and products.

"The real solution is substituting less toxic alternatives," he said.

In addition to fumigants, the state agency has begun scrutinizing the volatile organic compound content of more than 700 other pesticides and sent orders requiring reformulation to manufacturers last month. The agency is reviewing the manufacturers' plans, and those that cannot meet a goal of reducing the VOC

content could be subject to bans.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has not set any air pollution standards for pesticides. But California officials hope to persuade the EPA, which is reviewing use of all fumigants, to follow its lead.

"California growers shouldn't suffer a potential competitive disadvantage in comparison with other states just because California is doing right by the environment and human health," Brank said.

As part of its initiative, the pesticide agency is promoting more environmentally friendly technologies, such as a \$30,000 "smart sprayer" that is equipped with ultrasonic sensors to prevent excessive spraying.

In addition to fighting smog, such measures could protect people living in the fast-growing suburbs of the San Joaquin Valley from toxic chemicals drifting off fields.

"Overuse of pesticides is not just a farm issue anymore," Magavern said. "It's an urban and suburban issue too."

California regulators move to phase out dry cleaning solvent

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Friday, May 26, 2006

SACRAMENTO (AP) - California air regulators have voted to develop a plan to phase out a hazardous dry cleaning solvent.

Thursday's move by the state Air Resources Board could make California the first state to ban perchloroethylene, or "perc," the primary chemical used in dry cleaning.

The vote came despite protests from the industry and against the recommendation of the board's own staff.

State regulators have previously declared the chemical a toxic air and water contaminant that can cause serious health problems such as cancer.

The board directed its staff to study the economic effects of the phase-out to find ways to provide incentives for small businesses to replace their expensive dry cleaning equipment. New cleaning machinery can cost up to \$140,000.

"They made it very clear they don't want this to happen overnight, but they want to send a strong signal to dry cleaners that they should not be buying any expensive new perc equipment in the next year or two," said board spokesman Jerry Martin.

The California Cleaners Association opposed the decision, citing a 20 year study of dry cleaning employees in four European countries it says showed no increased health risks.

"California and the numbers they choose to use have regulators in the rest of the nation shaking their heads," said association spokeswoman Sandra Giarde.

In 2002, the South Coast Air Quality Management District became the first regulators in the nation to ban perchloroethylene, forcing more than 2000 Southern California cleaners to give up use of the chemical by 2020.

State Ready to Phase Out Dry-Clean Solvent

The air regulators' vote to develop a plan for a gradual ban goes against staff recommendation.

By Janet Wilson, staff writer

L.A. Times, Friday, May 26, 2006

California is poised to become the first state to phase out the main chemical used by dry cleaners, following a unanimous vote by the state's Air Resources Board on Thursday to develop a plan to eliminate perchloroethylene — or "perc."

Citing health risks to workers, nearby residents and businesses, the board took the action despite industry protests and a contrary recommendation by its own staff.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District enacted the first ban anywhere in the U.S. on perc in 2002, giving nearly 2,100 cleaners in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and Orange counties until 2020 to phase out the chemical. That policy could well serve as a model for the rest of the state, a board spokesman said.

The state board sought to cushion the blow to the estimated 2,500 small, independent dry cleaners that will be affected by directing its staff to study the economic effects and possibly come up with a tax credit and financial incentives for replacing the costly equipment that makes use of the banned chemical during the next six to eight months.

"They made it very clear they don't want this to happen overnight ... but they want to send a strong signal to dry cleaners that they should not be buying any expensive new perc equipment in the next year or two," said board spokesman Jerry Martin.

New cleaning machinery can cost between \$40,000 and \$140,000 depending on the type of technology used.

California regulators previously declared perc a known toxic air and water contaminant that can cause cancer and other health problems. The air board staff concluded that exposure to perc emissions at close range increases the risk of cancer in an additional 50 to 100 people per million.

"The board recognized this is the right thing to do when you have a highly toxic chemical, and you have alternatives already available in the marketplace," said Tim Carmichael, president of the Coalition for Clean Air, one of more than a dozen environmental groups that lobbied the board to ban the solvent.

But industry representatives disputed the risk assessments and said dry cleaners across the country had already reduced perc emissions between 70% and 80%.

Sandra Giarde of the California Cleaners Assn. said a 20-year study of thousands of dry cleaning employees in four Nordic countries showed "no increased risk.... California and the numbers they choose to use have regulators in the rest of the nation shaking their heads."

Peter Sinsheimer, director of the Pollution Prevention Center at Occidental College, who is overseeing a state-funded pilot program to install "wet-cleaning" machines, said that process, which combines water and detergent with sophisticated reshaping and finishing equipment, was by far the safest alternative. He said many dry cleaners were already switching to it.

But Giarde and others said wet cleaning was far more expensive than using perc because it required several pieces of equipment and extensive worker retraining.

The air board staff had spent three years crafting proposals for tougher regulation of perc that would allow its continued use. Board members rejected that approach.

"Of course I'm disappointed," Giarde said.

"The staff approach was an actual balanced approach. But nothing air boards do surprises me anymore."

Air board to ban a toxic cleaner

By Chris Bowman

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, May 27, 2006

The state Air Resources Board plans to phase out the primary chemical used by dry cleaners, citing a breathing hazard to workers and neighboring residents and businesses.

The board's staff had recommended rules that would have significantly reduced the toxic fumes. But the nine board members, all appointees of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, this week supported stronger action.

They unanimously voted to develop a regulation that would altogether ban the chemical perchloroethylene, or perc, from dry cleaning after many owners testified that safer alternatives remove stains just as well and for less cost, said Jerry Martin, a board spokesman.

The board did not set a deadline for the phaseout of the solvent, asking its staff to develop those details in a revised proposal that is expected to be presented for board consideration sometime next year, Martin said.

There are 2,100 cleaners in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties already under a mandate by the South Coast Air Quality Management District to phase out perc by 2020.

Some air purifiers can cause 'smog alert' in homes

By Michael Gardner, COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

Published in the San Diego Union-Tribune

May 26, 2006

SACRAMENTO – Some Californians in search of healthy air may actually be getting the opposite.

The California Air Resources Board reviewed an assessment of certain air purifiers yesterday that can generate unhealthy amounts of ozone – a major component of outdoor pollution.

“They're creating a smog alert in your living room,” said Bonne Holmes-Gen of the American Lung Association.

The study has provided more ammunition for state regulators as they step up a campaign to warn consumers by working with local officials, doctors and veterinarians about certain purifiers.

That's about all regulators can do. The board has no authority to impose standards on indoor air cleaners.

“Consumers take it for granted that someone has reviewed the safety of the product,” said Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, who has a bill to grant the board oversight powers.

If AB 2276 is signed into law, California will become the first state in the nation to regulate ozone-generating air purifiers.

The market for portable air cleaners is being driven by Californians seeking relief from the daily doses of smog and allergy-triggering molds and pollens, state regulators say.

“Consumers are looking for a quick fix,” said Tom Phillips, a state air pollution specialist.

Manufacturers are selling an array of models with claims to clear away dust, smoke, pet dander and other irritants.

“They promise the world in removing pollutants,” Phillips said.

Wayne Morris, a vice president of the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, said his members do not want to be unfairly tainted because many air cleaners use technologies that do not purposely generate ozone.

Of those that do produce some ozone, none exceeds federal guidelines, he said.

“Our members have always complied with this level and will continue to do so,” Morris added.

Many of the appliances are touted as “activated oxygen” or “energized oxygen,” suggesting a healthy dose of air.

“Not all air cleaners are problematic. But a number of them are, so they need to be tested,” Pavley said.

Shipping Line Acts for Cleaner Air at L.A. Harbor

Maersk, with the busiest container terminal, breaks with the industry by saying all of its vessels calling at state ports will use low-sulfur fuel.

By Dan Weikel, staff writer

L.A. Times, Saturday, May 27, 2006

Bucking the maritime industry, the largest shipping line in the world took a critical step Friday toward reducing air pollution in Los Angeles Harbor by vowing to use clean-burning, low-sulfur fuel in all its cargo vessels that call at California ports.

Officials for Maersk Inc., which operates the busiest container terminal in Los Angeles, also announced that the company has been testing new pollution controls for cargo ships that have the potential to greatly reduce nitrogen oxides, a key component of smog.

Cargo ships — some of which discharge more exhaust per day than 12,000 cars — are responsible for much of the air pollution in the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Largely unregulated, the world's fleet of cargo vessels has emerged as a leading source of nitrogen oxides and sulfur oxides, which have been linked to global warming, respiratory illness and premature deaths.

"Protecting the environment where we live and work is a priority at Maersk," said Gene Pentimonti, a senior vice president for the company. "This program will provide immediate benefits to the city of Los Angeles and the state of California at no cost to the taxpayer."

Maersk plans to shift from dirty bunker fuel to low-sulfur fuel in all of its 37 cargo ships that serve California ports. Already, 70% of the company's vessels are switching to the cleaner-burning fuel 24 miles from port.

Bunker fuel is a remnant of the refining process for gasoline and diesel fuel. With a sulfur content up to 3%, it is so dirty that its emissions can legally contain 3,000 times more sulfur than the fuel used in new diesel trucks.

In contrast, the sulfur content of the cleaner-burning fuel is 0.2%. Maersk, which is working with environmental engineers at UC Riverside, estimates that the change could reduce sulfur oxides by 92%, particulate matter by 73% and nitrogen oxides by 10%.

The world sulfur standard set by the International Maritime Organization is 4.5%, a limit critics view as useless because the average sulfur content of bunker fuel is about 3%. The maritime organization, which is composed of the world's shipping nations, is considering a revision of its air pollution regulations this year.

Pentimonti said that low-sulfur fuel is about twice as expensive as bunker fuel and that the program has cost Maersk about \$2 million to \$3 million so far.

Along with the clean-fuel initiative, Maersk has outfitted one of its ships with catalytic converters that have removed up to 90% of nitrogen oxides during testing. Pentimonti said the system, which cost about \$300,000 to install, is not ready for widespread application.

The International Maritime Organization's current regulations call for a 30% reduction in nitrogen oxide from new ships or those being refitted with new engines.

Maersk's voluntary actions represent a significant break with the maritime industry, which has been questioning the availability of low-sulfur fuel and the potential cost of outfitting cargo ships with emission-control technology.

Recently, shipping lines threatened to sue the California Air Resources Board after it adopted plans in April to regulate emissions from auxiliary engines, which are used on ships to generate electricity while in port.

"This raises the bar for everyone," said Geraldine Knatz, director of the Port of Los Angeles. "Maersk has gone out and done this on its own without anyone forcing it upon them. It's above and beyond what's now being discussed."

In the last several years, port officials, state regulators and environmental groups have been formulating plans to greatly improve air quality throughout the Los Angeles-Long Beach harbor complex, which handles more than 40% of the nation's international trade.

They are especially concerned because cargo volumes in both ports are expected to double — maybe triple — in the next 20 years.

The proposals apply to auxiliary engines and heavy equipment powered by diesel engines, including trucks, cranes, cargo-handling vehicles, locomotives and small craft such as commercial fishing boats and charter vessels.

Maersk, which is part of A.P. Moller-Maersk in Denmark, announced its air pollution initiative during a news conference at Pier 400, the giant terminal it operates in Los Angeles Harbor.

Attending the event were Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, state Sen. Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) many government officials and state air quality regulators.

"For the ports to grow appropriately and to be the gateway for the nation, we've got to grow green. We've got to grow smart," Villaraigosa said. "By converting to cleaner fuels, Maersk is demonstrating bold leadership."

Environmental groups, including the Coalition for Clean Air and the Natural Resources Defense Council, also praised Maersk's efforts to lead the industry in controlling air pollution from ships.

"For five years, we had to sue the Port of Los Angeles to get any measures implemented," said Julie Masters, an attorney for the natural resources group.

"Now, the biggest shipping line in world is stepping up to the plate and putting low-sulfur fuel in their main engines. Maersk is proving the naysayers wrong."

Maersk ships calling on California ports to use cleaner fuel

By Alex Veiga, AP Business Writer

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle, Bakersfield Californian and other papers

Friday, May 26, 2006

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Maersk Line cargo ships bound for California ports will begin using a cleaner burning fuel when they are docked or near land, a move that should reduce the impact of harmful ship emissions near port communities, the ocean carrier said Friday.

Ships using diesel engines at sea and to generate electricity during land-side operations typically emit particulate matter and sulfur oxides, as well as precursors to ground-level ozone and smog, such as nitrogen oxides and other compounds.

Some studies have linked diesel fumes and other types of port pollution to cancer, respiratory illness, stunted growth among children, and other medical problems.

Maersk's initiative calls for ships to switch over from the regular Bunker C fuel used to power main and auxiliary diesel engines to a distilled blend when the ships are within a 24-mile range of land and while docked.

Bunker C is a heavy petroleum product that typically has a sulfur content of 2.7 percent. The refined blend has a sulfur content of around 0.2 percent, said Gene Pentimonti, spokesman for Maersk Inc., the U.S. arm of Maersk Line parent and Danish shipping giant A.P. Moller-Maersk.

The company projects the program will slash about 400 tons a year of vessel-related pollution, including cutting down on particulate matter by about 73 percent, sulfur dioxide by about 92 percent and nitrogen oxides by about 10 percent.

In California, roughly 150 Maersk cargo ships call on the ports of Los Angeles and Oakland, with about 10 different ships at the ports in a week.

Since March 31, about 60 percent of that fleet has begun participating in the initiative; the rest will do so within about four to five weeks, Pentimonti said.

The cleaner fuel will cost Maersk about twice as much as Bunker C, or an additional \$2 million to \$3 million in fuel costs a year, the company said.

Environmental groups hailed the move, while acknowledging that more needs to be done to cut down on overall air pollution at communities near major port hubs such as the adjacent ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

"Its not going to solve the entire problem there, but it is a step," said Ed Hopkins, director of the Sierra Club's environmental quality program in Washington, D.C.

Emissions from port equipment, such as diesel-powered cranes, and the thousands of diesel trucks that visit ports daily, often idling for long periods, are bigger contributors to overall air pollution than ships.

Still, ships remain a significant source of air pollutants, said Martin Schlageter, campaign director for the Coalition for Clean Air, which advocates for better air quality in California.

"When you cut emissions, as Maersk is doing, you're taking a big bite out of that pie," Schlageter said.

All cargo ships calling on California will be required to shift over to a cleaner diesel fuel in auxiliary engines when they come within 24 miles of shore starting next year. Maersk's initiative takes it further, by also switching out the fuel on its ships' main engines, said Jerry Martin, spokesman for the California Air Resources Board.

The state has also required that terminal operators install cleaner-burning engines on port equipment by 2010.

Spring into allergy season

By Dhyana Levey, DLEVEY@MERCEDSUN-STAR.COM

Merced Sun-Star, May 23, 2006

With a sniff, Fran Peraino of Merced reached for a box of allergy medicine at Rite Aid on Friday afternoon.

Merced pharmacy is selling two to three times the usual amount of allergy medicine

"I'm just having the stuffy head and sinus pressure," she said. "It seems to be worse this year. I don't know why."

She's not alone.

Down the street at Merced Community Pharmacy, owner and pharmacist Paula Le said she is seeing two to three times the usual amount of people coming in for allergy medicine.

But allergy season hasn't gotten worse -- it's just going on for longer, said Angel Waldron, spokeswoman for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

"Temperatures were higher than normal this year across the whole country," she said. "We've had a milder winter so trees are pollinating earlier."

So instead of two months of suffering, people are feeling symptoms for about four or five.

"When you are dealing with it for weeks upon weeks, it seems to be worse than usual," Waldron said.

This is sending people with runny noses, watery eyes, coughs and itchy throats running for doctors' offices and drug stores.

"I see people with allergy problems every day," said Dr. Brian Sugimoto, a physician at Mercy Medical Center Merced. "And I'm surrounded with people with allergy problems at home. It's the environment. ... Something came into bloom."

Trees are the main culprit, Waldron said. Tree pollen spores are so lightweight they can travel up to 500 miles.

"Even in an area not as green as others, spores drift there so easily," she said.

The San Joaquin Valley is known for its pollution problems. People have speculated that this is a reason for bad allergies here. But Anthony Presto, public education representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said he hasn't seen a connection between the two.

Waldron agreed.

"Smog is an irritant more than an allergen," she said. "It's problematic for someone with asthma but it's in a different class. Pollution doesn't factor into it."

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation recently released a study of the 2006 top 100 spring allergy capitals of the United States. No Merced County cities were big enough to be considered for the list. But Sacramento ranked No. 8, Modesto ranked No. 30 and Fresno was No. 90.

Hartford, Conn. took the No. 1 spot as the worse place for spring allergies this year.

The study was based on a city's pollen score, the average amount of medicine used per patient and the amount of certified allergists in the area.

People should see a doctor when over-the-counter allergy medicine isn't helping or if its side effects are unbearable, Sugimoto said.

Some products such as Benadryl make people too sleepy to function.

"I usually recommend Claritin -- it doesn't make you sleepy," Le, the pharmacist, said. "Then take Benadryl at night."

Popular products Claritin and Alavert contain Lortadine as a main ingredient.

"Lortadine is low in sedation," Sugimoto said.

If people aren't sure why they are having allergy-like symptoms, it's a good idea to check with a physician before taking medication, he said.

Even with testing, it can be hard to figure out what exactly someone is allergic to.

"When you walk outside and start sneezing, it can be any number of thousands of things," Sugimoto said.

Although over-the-counter medicine can be sufficient, people with severe allergic reactions have to seek other alternatives. Some patients need a higher dosage, some use prescription nasal spray and some even have to get shots.

"Allergies are a disease without a cure," Waldron said. "But you can have a management plan."

Reporter Dhyana Levey can be reached at 385-2472 or dlevey@mercedsun-star.com.

Nitrogen Dioxide a Serious Risk

[Excerpt from Science: Notebook section]

SCIENCE: Notebook

The Washington Post

Monday, May 29, 2006; Page A10

Nitrogen dioxide pollution in the air can kill people, according to a new study published last week in the European Respiratory Journal.

The paper -- which was written by Klea Katsouyanni and Evangelia Samoli, professors at the Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology at the University of Athens, and several other European researchers -- draws on data from 15 European cities and looks at the kind of pollution that is emitted largely by diesel engines.

Looking at heart- and lung-related deaths in the days after nitrogen dioxide exposure, Katsouyanni and Samoli found an increase of 10 micrograms of NO₂ per cubic meter of air increased deaths from heart and lung conditions by 0.40 percent and 0.38 percent, respectively.

Bart Ostro, chief of the California Environmental Protection Agency's air pollution epidemiology unit, said the paper is "way more suggestive than many other studies" in terms of linking nitrogen dioxide to mortality. He added that although more study is needed, it is one of the reasons California is on the verge of adopting new nitrogen dioxide standards -- including a one-hour exposure level-- that are stricter than federal regulations.

"The effects are so severe, we don't feel like we can risk being wrong," he said.

-- Juliet Eilperin

Burnham brain research takes major step forward

Study examines molecule workings

By Bruce Lieberman, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

San Diego Union-Tribune, May 25, 2006

San Diego scientists have identified a link between certain molecules and the symptoms seen in brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

The researchers are the first to describe how these molecules, called free radicals, wreak havoc on proteins inside cells. Their findings are published today in the journal *Nature*.

Free radicals are molecules with unstable nitrogen or oxygen atoms. They are natural byproducts of metabolism, but they are also found in environmental toxins such as cigarette smoke and air pollution. Many people attempt to fight them by eating food rich in antioxidant nutrients and taking vitamin supplements.

Researchers at the Burnham Institute in La Jolla found that nitric oxide, one type of free radical, destroys the ability of a protein called PDI to fix other proteins that have folded incorrectly. Proteins are the building blocks of cells, and they must be shaped precisely to work properly. Misshaped proteins that accumulate as clumps inside brain cells are hallmarks of Alzheimer's and other neurological diseases.

The discovery may help answer how free radicals can be as dangerous as gene defects, said Stuart Lipton, who led the study at Burnham.

"There was a puzzle: How could something in the environment mimic what a genetic mutation could do?" Lipton said. "This is an important link." Scientists have known that nitric oxide might be an important player in many neurodegenerative diseases. But they did not know how free radicals could be at the root of the misshaped proteins that characterize these diseases.

In their study, Lipton and his colleagues showed how nitric oxide attaches itself to PDI – short for "Protein Disulfide Isomerase" – essentially disabling it.

Once a cell loses this housecleaning ability, a chain reaction of cell damage by other free radicals ensues.

"The trick is now to develop a drug that protects PDI or somehow limits nitric oxide's access to PDI," Lipton said.

Dr. Jonathan Stamler, who studies the effects of nitric oxide on human health at Duke University, said it's been extremely difficult to connect the dots between free radicals and the onset of disease inside cells.

"I like the case he's made," Stamler said of Lipton's work. "I think it fits well with the emerging idea that nitric oxide can play an important role in many diseases."

The human body naturally clears cells of free radicals. But antioxidants such as vitamins E and C, beta-carotene and selenium, which are found in food and supplements, also may help. However, it's unclear how effective these antioxidants are in promoting health in brain cells, Lipton said.

The discovery that free radicals may cause many diseases that typically afflict the elderly makes sense, he said. As people grow older, their natural ability to clear free radicals diminishes and cell damage can follow.

Panel begins budget negotiations; hundreds of bills face deadline

By Steve Lawrence, Associated Press Writer

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle, LA Daily News and other papers, Monday, May 29, 2006

SACRAMENTO (AP) - Six lawmakers are scheduled this week to begin the tedious task of ironing out differences between Assembly and Senate versions of the state budget, but this year their job could be easier than usual.

Both chambers have produced spending plans for the fiscal year starting July 1 that are remarkably similar to the \$131.1 billion budget Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed earlier this month.

"Over the years I've worked here, this is about the smallest number of differences between us and the Senate and us and the administration that I've seen," said Craig Cornett, budget adviser to Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles.

Nunez is predicting that lawmakers will approve a new budget by the rarely met June 15 deadline.

"I think we are well on our way to meet that goal and objective," he said last week. "I think we can get there. I really do.... We do spend a little bit more than the governor does ... but not by more than 1 percent."

In most years, lawmakers end up in a partisan deadlock over the budget that can drag on for weeks - even months - because California is one of the few states that requires more than simple majority votes to pass a budget.

This week also is the deadline for more than 500 bills to pass their initial house, and both the Assembly and Senate have scheduled long sessions to deal with those measures.

Here are some of the bills awaiting votes:

- Measures by Assemblywoman Sally Lieber, D-Santa Clara, and Sen. Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, would raise the state minimum wage by \$1 an hour, to \$7.75, and require annual increases to keep up with

inflation. Schwarzenegger, who has vetoed two previous attempts to raise the wage, supports the \$1 increase but opposes the automatic cost-of-living adjustments.

- A bill by Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Redwood City, would authorize \$2,500 discounts for consumers who buy new cars that emit low amounts of greenhouse gases and impose \$2,500 surcharges on new vehicles that produce high levels of greenhouse gases, which are blamed for global warming.
- Legislation by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, would limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants.
- Another Perata bill would set up a discount prescription drug program for uninsured, low-income Californians.
- A bill by Assemblyman Johan Klehs, D-San Leandro, would impose a so-called excess profits tax on oil companies.
- Another attempt by Cedillo would allow illegal immigrants to qualify for California driver's licenses. Schwarzenegger vetoed two earlier versions of the legislation.
- Legislation by Sen. Gloria Romero, D-Los Angeles, would limit use of 25-years-to-life, "three-strikes" prison sentences for nonviolent crimes.
- A bill by Nunez would help telephone companies get into the cable television business.
- A Lieber bill would require the state Air Resources Board to control indoor air pollution emitted by building products, consumer goods, appliances - even cockroaches.
- An attempt by Sen. Debra Ortiz, D-Sacramento, and Attorney General Bill Lockyer would block Internet sales of cigarettes to minors by requiring that shipments of cigarettes into the state go only to licensed dealers.
- Legislation introduced by Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, with the support of animal rights groups would limit the tethering of dogs.

Gas prices painful? Take a tax hike and call us in the morning

Higher sales tax on gas among ideas

by Erik N. Nelson

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, May 30, 2006

It is often said that pain and improvement go hand-in-hand. The athlete must endure it to build strength. Negotiators must make painful compromises to reach a deal. The dental patient must bear the sharp pain of treatment to end the long-running toothache.

Managing transportation in the Bay Area and beyond also involves a kind of benevolent pain, a hurt that is supposed to help, and in the end, make us all feel better.

That could mean paying more for a gallon of gasoline, sitting in line 30 minutes longer to pay bridge toll or paying for the privilege of driving in downtown San Francisco.

To some, it's unnecessary, it's misguided social engineering and it's even un-American. To others, it's a way to cure traffic jams, [pollution](#) and make the nation stronger in the face of terror.

"There's this addiction to oil that we have in this country. The reality is, we have to find ways to move people away from foreign oil," says Assemblyman Joe Nation, D-San Rafael.

His way? Charge Californians — already hurting from record gas prices — another 25 cents a gallon in gasoline sales tax. The pain would be blunted by phasing in the increase at a nickel a pop over five years and offering a tax credit for the lowest 20 percent of income-earners.

There is some pleasure in Nation's bill in Sacramento, from the \$2.6 billion a year it would raise for improving traffic flow and the \$1.3 billion for alternative-fuel transportation research to the \$1.3 billion in rebates for those who buy alternative-fuel vehicles. Besides raising all that money, "it would change people's behavior," the assemblyman says.

"Typically, gas prices shoot up, and they'll probably come back down," says Nation, who is an economist by trade. "People say, 'It's just Memorial Day, I'm going to keep the big car because I know prices are going to fall again.'

"What evidence shows, is if those prices stay high for a year or more, people start to change their behavior," says Nation, who would see to it that prices don't come back down.

And Nation has a point, considering how unflinching Americans' demand for fuel can be, says Rod Diridon, executive director of the Mineta Transportation Institute in San Jose.

While most product sales are subject to normal pressures of price, supply and demand, "when you have a product that everybody wants to use, no matter what the price, that's called inelastic demand."

Consumers won't snap to their senses until they reach a point of "elasticity conversion," when they hurt enough to change their habits, ride BART or trade in the SUV for a hybrid. Or so the theory goes.

Americans are so enamored of their cars that the point of unbearable pain may have already exceeded \$3.50 a gallon, Diridon says.

While the prospects of Nation's bill surviving an election-year legislature are dubious, the Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission is more certain of using the pain principle to fix the problem of lines at toll booths and the high cost of collecting cash tolls.

The solution: Longer lines and more pain in the seat-cushion.

The idea, likely to be approved at the MTC's

June 14 meeting, converts 10 cash-only lanes to FasTrak-only lanes on most Bay Area bridges, which require a radio transponder that identifies motorists and allows the Bay Area Toll Authority to deduct the amount of the toll from the motorist's pre-paid account.

The switch, planned for April, is expected to cause 30- to 35-minute delays on the Dumbarton and Carquinez bridges, but those delays are the bitter pill that will make people sign up for FasTrak accounts, says MTC spokesman Randy Rentschler.

And in the end, delays will be reduced as a result of this prodding. "You kind of focus the pain in one small segment, rather than stringing it out for a long period of time," Rentschler says.

There also is the pleasure principle, the one that comes from getting a discount for using a transponder — offered by other toll agencies around the country — but the MTC doesn't have enough legal or financial leeway to do more than providing random \$100 prizes and one-time bonuses to new members, Rentschler says.

If certain members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors have their way, the city will follow London's example of needling motorists to lead them in a new direction. London charges nearly \$15 a day, excluding nights, weekends and holidays, for driving downtown, paid by a transponder.

San Francisco Supervisor Jake McGoldrick, pointing to London's 30-percent congestion reduction, has convinced the city to study the idea under a \$1 million Federal Highway Administration grant.

The Bay Area's well-intentioned pain fixation has its detractors, as one might expect.

Republican state controller candidate Tony Strickland is particularly peeved with Nation's gas tax proposal.

"Social engineering is not working. People are still driving their cars, and they feel even more of a severe pain at the pump now." Like many Republicans, he's proposing to eliminate California's sales tax on gasoline, and ease that pain.

Strickland is so into the pleasure principle that he recently handed out 21 cents per gallon to motorists at gas stations to show just how good his proposal would make them feel.

"With an average price at \$3, you would think at that price, citizens would get out of their cars right now, but most of California is built around the automobile," Strickland says.

But with demand going up and supplies lagging, Nation says the status quo simply can't be preserved.

As many nurses have warned while holding a syringe, you can take the pain now, or live with it later.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Friday, May 26, 2006](#)

We've got miles to go before the valley air is clean

The valley faces a tough new standard for reducing emissions of smog-creating chemicals in four years. We're not likely to make it. But then, we never reached the less rigorous old standard, either.

It's a sobering message about how much further the valley has to go before we attain what we honestly can say is clean air.

Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District estimate that we'll have to cut emissions by 60 percent before April 5, 2010, when the new standard takes effect. Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, gave this bleak assessment of the chances: "We couldn't get there if we shut down every business in the valley."

So what do we do?

New state and federal standards for emissions from auto engines and the fuels they burn will be in effect in coming years, and that will help. It also would help if the Bush administration quit playing games with rules about the fuel efficiency of vehicles sold in this country.

The Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards are too low, and there's little evidence this administration ever will be serious about raising them.

The standards have been 27.5 miles per gallon since 1990. The average for 2005 model year cars was 28.9 mpg, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. While it's true that cars and trucks are

much cleaner than when the standards were established, in the wake of the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s, there now are many more of them.

We only recently have celebrated a small victory in the fight for cleaner air. The valley air district has asked the EPA to declare that we are in compliance with the rules on small particles of dust and soot called PM-10 (particles measuring 10 microns), which are implicated in many respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and deaths.

That is a milestone, but more bad news is coming. We are a long way from reaching compliance on PM-2.5, much smaller particles, which ultimately may prove to be an even greater health risk than the larger particles.

It always comes back to vehicles, which account for much more than half of our air pollution. Getting out of our cars and trucks seems difficult, largely because we have so few alternatives. Buses are slow and too often inconvenient; the Amtrak service is useful but not convenient to get to the Bay Area. There aren't enough bike paths and the roads aren't safe for those on two wheels.

No one ever said this would be easy.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Sunday, May 28, 2006](#)

Larger ag land parcels could reduce sprawl

Only a few decades ago, families could and did survive on farms of only 10 acres. They could grow fruits and vegetables, have a couple of cows, feed the family and sell any extras to pay for other essentials. That's why Stanislaus County, through its zoning law, defined agricultural areas as parcels of 10 acres or more.

In 1983, in a controversial decision at the time, the Board of Supervisors raised the minimum ag parcel size to 40 acres. The argument was that it would take at least that much to create an economically viable farm. This expanded size limit deliberately made it hard for property owners to divide parcels into two-, three- or five-acre ranchettes, which were growing in popularity among people who wanted the country lifestyle, but for whom farming was, at most, a hobby.

Today, some people still yearn for a rural lifestyle, away from the noise and bustle of city life. And they're willing to buy 40 acres or more if that's what it takes to get the solitude and the view they desire. Farming? That's not part of their plans.

As Bee staff writer Garth Stapley explained in a May 20 article, this demand for rural living has led several farmers to split large parcels into what are 40-acre home sites. Other proposals are pending, adding as many as 24,000 acres that someday could be removed from ag uses. Such splits create a host of problems.

Stanislaus County is considering whether it should raise the minimum parcel size in agricultural zones, to keep rangeland in acreages large enough to be sustainable as farms.

There are good reasons for a revision in the ag zoning limits. It's too soon for specifics, but this is an objective worth pursuing.

The current 40-acre parcel size makes sense on the richest soil, where almonds, grapes and other high-yield crops do well. But on rangeland, 40 acres can support maybe a dozen cows and calves, nowhere near enough for a farmer to make a living. Some counties already have a 120- or 160-acre minimum for this type of land, much of which lies at the edge of the valley and in the lower foothills.

With long-term farmland protection, there are other reasons to discourage residential sprawl into remote areas:

Services. City dwellers who buy rural home sites frequently still have urban expectations. They object to long waits for police, fire and ambulance responses.

Roads. These new rural residents also are likely to complain about narrow country roads, especially after getting stuck behind slow-moving tractors. They'll press for roads to be widened, strengthened and smoothed — expensive improvements that counties cannot afford.

Environment. Wildlife and native plants are displaced as people and pets move in.

County officials have started talking about farm parcel sizes as part of a larger discussion in updating the agricultural element of the general plan. So far, relatively few people have been involved.

This subject needs and deserves the participation of a wider audience. Hundreds of people attended meetings in the late 1980s and early '90s, when the ag element was being written and rewritten. We hope there is that kind of interest again.

Some conflict is inevitable, even within the farming community. Farmers naturally are concerned about their land, but many are as interested (or more) in protecting farming practices as they are in protecting property rights. For many, their land is their retirement account. They want to be able to sell it for the highest price possible — when they want to sell it.

The ag element is clearly out of date. It only marginally notes concerns about [air quality](#), for example, because it was written before studies showed that our valley has some of the nation's worst pollution. But it spells out general goals that are still appropriate today: Strengthening the ag economy, preserving ag land and protecting the natural resources that sustain ag. Those are strong principles to guide the discussion.

Typically, the people speaking out against sprawl cite developments of side-by-side houses. But California and some other states are losing as much or more ag land to the sprawl of low-density rural residential developments, those 40-acre ranchettes.

That's why the county should look hard at its ag zoning and how many acres are required for sustainable farming in the 21st century.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Monday, May 29, 2006](#)

Why are so many in area dying young?

I recently moved from Fremont. One of the first things I did was subscribe to The Bee so I could find out about my new home. It had become a habit to read the obituaries and I started to do so in The Bee. I was overwhelmed by the fact that so many people die at a young age here and that so many people die, period. On most days, there were three people who died in their 30s and half of the rest died under age 60.

There most often is not a cause of death listed. I wonder if it might not be the poor quality of the air, perhaps the incessant train whistling at all hours of the night disturbing sleep, or maybe it's from people banging their heads on the top of their cars when driving on Modesto's pothole-filled streets. I wonder.

LYNN M. CLIFFORD, Salida

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Saturday, May 27, 2006:](#)
Scaled down bond package good for Central Valley

The \$37 billion bond approved by the Legislature holds promise for the Central Valley. We can upgrade Highway 99; build and renovate schools; provide affordable housing, especially for farmworkers; and improve our levees and flood protection.

Realizing this package will require a collaborative effort of the valley legislative delegation, city and county governments, community groups and valley residents.

The transportation package provides \$1 billion for Highway 99 improvements; \$4 billion for rail, bus and transit improvements; \$1 billion for transit safety and disaster response; and \$200 million for school bus retrofitting and replacement, which is important for [air quality](#) here.

The partnership for the San Joaquin Valley voted unanimously that funding for Highway 99 is a No. 1 priority, and this \$1 billion is a down payment on the \$6 billion needed to upgrade this vital artery.

We owe it to Central Valley students to secure as much funding as we can for our schools. The package has \$1.9 billion for new school construction; \$3.3 billion for school rehabilitation; \$1.58 billion for higher education, which includes UC Merced, Cal State Bakersfield, and Cal State Fresno; and \$1.5 billion for community colleges.

I am also authoring AB 2045, which would make it easier for valley schools to compete for supplemental funding for school construction.

The housing bond remedies the problem of high housing prices by providing \$195 million for supportive housing; \$135 million for farmworker housing; \$100 million for affordable housing innovation; and \$50 million for emergency housing.

Our rainfall puts our levee and water storage systems to the test. We must improve levees, upgrade existing water storage facilities, and build new ones. The flood protection bond offers the possibility for valley officials to secure up to \$200 million to complete preliminary work for a dam at Temperance Flat.

This bond provides \$3 billion to handle levee concerns; \$500 million for flood control subventions; \$290 million for flood corridors, bypasses and flood plain mapping; and \$300 million for storm flood management.

Last week, Sen. Jeff Denham unveiled SB902, of which I am a principal co-author. It would provide \$500 million for construction of Temperance Flat dam; \$125 million to conduct storage projects; and \$600 million for restoring San Joaquin River.

These bonds are a step in a long campaign to bring our region's infrastructure up to the world-class status it deserves to be. This is a first step, and it is the right step.

This most recent attempt by Republican and Democratic leaders to put together a bond package did not include water storage of any kind. Since water storage was taken off the table, we did not have any leverage to negotiate for it.

In the end, I supported these bonds so that I could maintain a leveraged position in fighting for surface water storage.

I am now in a position to work with Speaker Fabian Nunez and the valley delegation to address this very pressing issue for the valley.

Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, represents the 30th Assembly District, which includes part of Bakersfield, and Delano, Shafter, McFarland, Wasco and Arvin.