

## **District: Air OK despite wildfire**

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2007

Air pollution control officials saw no significant changes Monday in air quality in the Bakersfield area as a result of the month-old Zaca fire.

Brenda Turner, public information officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the district's eight air monitors in Kern County had picked up no "pronounced air quality problems" from the fire as of Monday.

That might change, Turner said. The fire was at least 25 miles from the southwest corner of Kern County in recent days, but Turner said it will be at least September before it is fully contained.

Overall, Turner said, the air quality in Kern County is better this summer than it was last summer.

## **Air quality, health awareness seminar to be held**

DJ Becker, Staff Writer

The Madera Tribune, posted August 7, 2006

A seminar meant to educate the public on the Central Valley's air quality and its effects on their health will be held today from 1 to 4:30 p.m. at the First 5 Family Resource Center, 525 East Yosemite Ave.

"Anyone that is concerned about air quality in the valley should attend," said Catherine Garoupa, community organizer for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, which is hosting the seminar. "This is an issue that affects everyone."

The seminar is part of a series designed to promote public awareness of the issue and provide an overview of how the air quality impacts the public in their everyday lives. Educators and other government officials are welcome to attend.

Today's seminar is directed at educating the public to the current problems with valley air, how the air quality affects their health and what they can do to become active at the local and community level to have their voices effectively heard.

"It's time for change and to build on the recent public awareness and dissatisfaction with the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District," Garoupa said. "Most people say they don't know enough about air quality to really understand the air quality issues."

"The American Lung Association just ranked the Fresno/Madera area as the fourth worst in ozone pollution in the entire country. Asthma and chronic bronchitis are absolutely connected to air pollution in the air we breathe. We have twice the levels of childhood asthma and increasing levels of adult onset asthma here in the valley. It's really sad our environment is making us ill and it shouldn't be that way."

Snacks will be served at the seminar and childcare will be available. Completion certificates can be earned for participation. For further information and seminar dates, call the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, 232-1698.

## **Sierra Pacific pays \$13 million to settle air violations**

In the S.F. Chronicle and Contra Costa Times, Monday, August 6, 2007

SACRAMENTO, (AP) -- Lumber company Sierra Pacific Industries has paid \$13 million to settle air quality violations, the California Air Resources Board announced Monday.

The fine grew out of a 2004 lawsuit in Placer County and marked one of the largest settlements to the state air board.

At issue were four of the Redding-based company's sawmills in the Sierra foothills that investigators said violated state air pollution control regulations.

Specifically, the company falsified reports, failed to report emissions, exceeded emission limits and failed to operate and maintain air pollution control equipment, according to a joint investigation by the board, the California attorney general and the Placer County Air Pollution Control District.

In one instance, a sawmill in Lincoln discharged soot, causing a nuisance to nearby homes. The other mills were located in Quincy, Loyalton and Susanville. The last two have since closed for unrelated reasons, board spokesman Dimitri Stanich said.

"The cumulative effects of numerous small, scattered air violations can compromise air quality just as much as larger, more visible violations," board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said in a statement.

In a June statement announcing the settlement, Sierra Pacific spokesman Mark Pawlicki blamed the violations on employee misconduct. He noted that the company reported the violations to government officials.

"Rather than undergo the great expense of a two-month-long trial, it seemed a much better approach for us to use the money to resolve the dispute and invest in improved equipment that would benefit the people of the state by reducing emissions and improving air quality even more," he said.

The company paid the fine on July 18. In addition, Sierra Pacific has spent \$17 million at its Lincoln plant to replace a turbine and boiler, according to the air board.

## **News briefs from around Kentucky at 5:58 a.m. EDT**

The Associated Press

in the Sacramento Bee, Monday, August 6, 2007

ASHLAND, Ky. -- Citizens in this eastern Kentucky town are breathing easier these days - literally.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved a state request to remove Boyd County from a list of counties unable to meet the eight-hour air quality standard for ozone.

The county was placed on the list in 2004 after failing to meet the standard between 2001 and 2003. The standard is based on ozone levels in an eight-hour period.

Boyd County joins Christian County and the Louisville area, which were taken off the non-attainable list in the last two years.

"Getting taken off the list means the air quality is improving," said state Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet spokeswoman Lona Brewer. "It definitely shows the air quality is better than when those original findings were made."

Getting off the list could also prove to be an economic benefit for the area. Businesses who work in areas on the list face tighter regulations and the permit process becomes difficult for companies looking to relocate to the area.

## **Australia to Go to Olympics at Last Minute**

By STEPHEN WADE, The Associated Press  
Washington Post, August 7, 2007

BEIJING -- Australian athletes will stay away the Beijing Olympics until the last minute, hoping to avoid air pollution and food problems in the Chinese capital.

Australian IOC member John Coates, after meeting Tuesday with heads of other Olympic delegations and Beijing organizers, called Beijing's choking pollution "a prevailing worry for most of us."

"We will be not recommending a long period in China before the games," Coates said, a day before the countdown clock reaches one year until the games open. "That only is going to increase the possibility of respiratory or gastric illness \_ particularly if you are not living in the village."

Coates, also president of the Australian Olympic Committee, said his athletes would be going to China four or five days before their first events.

"They (Chinese organizers) are very, very conscious of it," Coates said. "They knows it's a concern to the IOC. All we can do is trust that they will do everything possible."

He said Beijing officials told him that plans were in place to ban vehicles from Beijing's streets, perhaps as early as next week. That would coincide with several weeks of test events in Beijing.

"They said cars will be coming off the road for a trial period," Coates said.

Tuesday was another smog filled day in the Chinese capital, greeting IOC president Jacques Rogge and hundreds of Olympic officials on hand for Wednesday night's celebration in Tiananmen Square.

"It certainly doesn't look too good here in downtown Beijing," Coates said.

Coates said he was less concerned about food safety next year.

On Monday, Beijing officials said global positioning satellites and other high-tech devices would be used to ensure food safety at the Beijing Olympics.

"The IOC pays very special attention to the quality of food in the Olympic Villages," Coates said. "We don't expect that to be a problem, but we will still be advising our athletes to eat in the village, not in local food stores. Be careful with bottled water and take every precaution."

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2007:](#)

### **Governor flexes fuel**

He was briefly on the General Motors payroll as a celebrity product endorser, but Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's affection for Hummers seems never to have lapsed. The tough-guy chief executive and the wide-bodied pseudo-tank, manufactured by GM, might have been made for each other.

Almost four years into his tenure in Sacramento, the governor still enjoys a good relationship with the automaker. Just how good is a question that some, including state Sen. Dean Florez, would like answered.

Florez wants to know why changes were made to state contract bids that ultimately benefited General Motors, which has donated tens of millions of dollars to both the governor's political campaigns and his non-profit foundations.

The inquiry is fallout from a *San Jose Mercury News* article that looked into the purchase of state vehicles, specifically GM cars and trucks, for an alternative-fuel fleet. The contract specifications for the fleet were worded in such a way that they could only have been met by General Motors.

However, the GM fleet -- capable on running on a mix of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline -- has been running exclusively on gasoline for more than two years. Why? Because there's only one fueling station in the state -- in San Diego -- that dispenses that particular fuel mix, and it's not even a station that contracts with the state. As a result, the governor's much-ballyhooed "green" fleet isn't coming close to meeting its "greenest" potential. In fact, in many cases the fleet would have fared better, in terms of emissions, by sticking with its older vehicles.

Why, Florez wants to know, was such a fleet even purchased?

Good question.

In light of all this, what are we to make of GM's \$15 million donation to Schwarzenegger's non-profit, after-school youth program known as After-School All-Stars?

Another good question.

Folks in the governor's office are offended by the implication. They say federal laws forced them to buy thousands of alternative-fuel vehicles they can't fill with cleaner fuels, at least not until more alternative-fuel stations come on line. They're working on getting one in Sacramento -- rather suddenly, it turns out.

Florez and others point out that state governments can apply for waivers if federal clean-fuel requirements get ahead of the market, as is the case in California. Why wasn't that done?

Aides to the governor point out that Schwarzenegger has been making life difficult for GM on another front. His push for a federal waiver that would force GM and other automakers to comply with tougher tailpipe emission standards in California represents one of GM's harshest corporate challenges at present. What kind of back scratching is that?

Just the same, Florez wants to see documents explaining how the flex-fuel fleet purchase came about.

"We don't think we are barking up the wrong tree," says Florez, who chairs the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality.

It's now the governor's duty to point us all in the direction of the correct tree.

[Bakersfield Californian, Talk of the Town Blog, Saturday, Aug. 4, 2007:](#)

### **Polluted air: denial or acceptance?**

A new survey shows more than two-thirds of Kern County residents view air pollution as a major problem and a threat to their health. Some have called this a change in mindset locally, from the days when many were in denial about our unhealthy air. Do you agree?

While you're at, here's a sample of poll questions. How would you have answered?

1. Would you say air pollution is a big problem, somewhat of a problem or not a problem in your region?
2. Do you or does anyone in your immediate family suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems?
3. Has air pollution gotten better or worse locally in the past 10 years?

-- Stacey Shepard, Californian environment reporter

posted by samheath on Aug 2, 2007 at 06:34 AM

The pollution is worse and will only get worse as profits continue to trump clean air and water.

posted by adampayne on Aug 2, 2007 at 08:17 AM

I grew up here, and agricultural dust combined with the oil extraction process have always meant pretty crummy air. Yes, you could see the mountains on a pretty regular basis, but any trip back from Los Angeles always meant being confronted with the ugly brown haze sitting over the entire

southern valley. The air pollution has gotten much worse, and days like the last couple where the humidity mixes in the atmosphere makes breathing a real chore. It is depressing that the major industries in the area still work on the sack and pillage method, as Sam mentioned in his post, and two chemical fires from improper disposal methods by a local manufacturer sees the company at fault still refusing to comply with local environmental law. Dean Florez has been the lone voice of sanity in trying to make the major polluters accountable. I'm with Senator Florez all the way regarding the amount of time these businesses have had to comply with the law, and their failure to meet the standards means their actions must now be regarded as criminal. There are no more excuses, either meet the standards or go away!

posted by Nancyll on Aug 2, 2007 at 08:22 AM

Population growth = more cars, more industry, more pollution. The growth here isn't the only thing that factors into our terrible air you know. As the cities to the north of us grow, they pump more pollution into the air and that is sent our way by the prevailing winds. As we've all noted time and again...it comes into our area and is trapped at the base of the mountains. Another thing is that even when it rains in Wasco, it rarely rains in Arvin so we see little of the "shower" we need to clean the air for a day or two so we can see the mountains.

When we (us older folks) remember seeing the mountains every day, the population was only 50-70 thousand souls. And guess what? The refineries were pumping all sorts of pollutants into the air on a daily basis. I grew up across Rosedale Highway from the big Signal/Tosco refinery and it belched flames, odor, and smoke regularly. There's no way they get away with that now.

Go back and look at pictures of Bakersfield in the 50's before we had an explosion of growth. You aren't going to become a large city without paying some dues. And in our location, we're paying dues for not only our own growth, but growth all up the valley to Sacramento.

posted by robbwillis on Aug 2, 2007 at 08:23 AM

More people = more pollution. The San Joaquin Valley Air District's job amounts to applying microscopic bandages to a very large whale.

posted by Nancyll on Aug 2, 2007 at 08:30 AM

TJ..when I was growing up it was beautiful. The mountains looked close enough to touch. There was no brown haze coming back down the grapevine and we always said that going TO the southland was like running into a wall of smaze/smog. No way did we ever dream we would see it coming and going.

posted by tkozy on Aug 2, 2007 at 08:42 AM

1957 Bakersfield was less than 30,000.

And all the talk was about the future. When Bakersfield, Oildale, Rosedale, Greenfield, Edison and Pumpkin Center would all be one big town.

posted by Nancyll on Aug 2, 2007 at 09:04 AM

Well TK, I guess they're getting their way. I think we all wanted bigger, badder and better for shopping and eateries but with that growth comes a high price. If I had my way, we'd have kept it they way it was. Oil and agriculture supported us 'po folks and anyone who wanted a high mucky muck job could commute. Oh wait...hey do that now. hehe.

The price isn't only in pollution. It's in distance to travel across town, lousy city planning, gazillions of stop lights, traffic, and too much to name. Growth is NOT always a good thing and uncontrolled growth is a disaster.

It shouldn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you have a city and several small towns crammed into the end of a valley, you're going to have air problems. If one researches that sort of thing and THEN moves here...what can I say. As the old story goes, you knew what I was when you moved here.

posted by GordonDelano on Aug 2, 2007 at 09:16 AM

I echo all of the comments above. I lived more than 70 years in Bakersfield. I have fond memories of the town it used to be. It has been many years since it deserved the motto being used by the powers that control the destiny of the town. "BAKERSFIELD, LIFE AS IT SHOULD BE" It's obvious that the politicians equate bigger is better and they get more bucks in their pocket from special interests. Their concern for our health is only superficial. Anybody that doubts that statement has their head in the sand.

With some regret, my wife and I moved away from Bakersfield 4 1/2 years ago because of respiratory problems. Asthma and the onset of emphysema. We moved to the mountains where is blue and without pollution for relief. We both breathe much better now and should have done it years ago. My doctor described to me an experience he had during his time studying to be a doctor. His instructor of a class focusing on the human lungs showed them a lung from a non-smoker that lived in the Los Angeles basin. The air quality in Bakersfield and L.A. are on an equal par. The inner lining of the lung was a horrible dark color and the amount of damage such as you would find in the lungs of a smoker living in an area where there is little air pollution. He had lived in L.A, and realized then the risk he was subjecting himself to. He now lives in the community I now live in. Far less lucrative for a doctor than L.A. or Bakersfield but much safer.

One more comment. In spite of the comment from the AIR QUALITY BOARD THAT THE AIR QUALITY HAS IMPROVED, IT WILL ONLY GET WORSE.

posted by antiextremism on Aug 2, 2007 at 11:44 AM

Perhaps if they held the same standards to the Bay area, it might help considering that their pollution ends up in Arvin.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2007:](#)

### **Bringing back trolleys**

**Streetcars could again be clanging about Fresno avenues someday.**

Streetcars are an old idea whose time has come again. The city is proposing a two-mile line to connect downtown Fresno with the Tower District. That's a great start.

But making such projects work is much more complicated than simply laying tracks and waiting for people to climb aboard. Such systems work when they are part of a complex mix of residential, commercial and recreational developments, built with higher densities than is the norm in Fresno. That's part of a philosophy called "transit-oriented development" that's rapidly catching on in dozens of American cities.

It means creating neighborhoods where transit, goods and services, jobs and amenities, such as parks, are all within easy walking distances. It means moving away from the pattern of the past half-century, with massive shopping centers set back from major streets and surrounded by acres of asphalt for cars. It means connecting streets rather than closing them or building cul-de-sacs. It means getting developers, planners and lenders on the same page.

Mostly it means connecting people to the places they want to go. As proposed, building two miles of rail line between downtown and the Tower -- at a cost estimated at \$60 million -- would do little to relieve commute congestion or downtown parking issues, for instance. But a system that eventually reaches all parts of town would be an attractive option for many who must go downtown but live in other areas. It would also cost much more -- but then, so will gasoline in the years ahead.

Streetcar lines today, as they did decades before, share the streets with cars and buses. That's different from light rail lines such as BART. Such a system likely lies in Fresno's future, but streetcars can have a more immediate effect.

Transit systems can have a tremendous positive effect on air quality, something that should be part of the calculus of cost if Fresno moves ahead with a trolley project.

When officials from Fresno visit Portland, Ore., tomorrow to examine that city's transit-oriented development, we hope they'll notice that Portland has already spent more than \$100 million on its system -- but some \$2 billion in new development has been spawned along the lines, with multi-story buildings housing shops, offices and restaurants on ground floors, and living quarters above.

That's the kind of environment -- the "24-hour neighborhood" -- favored by the so-called "creative class," young professionals who want a more intense urban lifestyle than the suburbs can provide. Such people are recognized, here and elsewhere, as essential for economic development in the 21st century. It makes sense for Fresno to join the 60 or more cities nationwide that are moving in this direction.

[Washington Post Column, August 7, 2006](#)

## **In Support of the Congestion Charge**

By Cameron Munro

Special to [washingtonpost.com](#)'s Think Tank Town

The congestion charge on motorists in central London has been held up as a model across the globe for cities looking to reduce the traffic jams that tie up their streets and highways. The charge has brought substantial benefits to those who live and work in London -- whether they drive or take mass transit -- and it could do the same in traffic-clogged cities in the United States.

London drivers are charged the equivalent of \$16 per day for traveling into the center of the city between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays. They can pay the charge by phone, on the Internet and in many stores. They can even set up accounts so they don't have to remember to pay the charge every day they travel into the zone.

There is simply no other measure as effective in quickly reducing traffic as congestion charging. The theory of congestion charging was established by transportation planners and economists as far back as the 1950s. But only recently -- in cities like Singapore, London and Stockholm -- has the theory been put into practice. It has been demonstrated to be as effective at controlling congestion in reality as in theory.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's proposal for congestion charging in downtown Manhattan will be studied by a New York State commission. If congestion charging goes into effect in New York City and is as successful there as it has been in London, other congested cities across the United States might adopt similar plans. Perhaps Washington -- with some of the worst traffic congestion in the United States -- will consider such a system in the future.

London's congestion charge, which began in 2003, doesn't need big toll plazas. Instead, the system is enforced using some 700 cameras across 200 sites in the charging zone.

In addition to providing an efficient and accurate means of checking whether drivers have paid the charge, the data provided by the cameras has also been crucial in investigating the foiled car bomb attempts in central London in June and previous terrorist incidents and crimes.

London anti-terrorist police investigating the June attempted attacks were quickly able to trace the movements of the suspects, allowing them to be apprehended before they could flee the country or commit other atrocities. This security benefit would be welcomed by many in Washington who are concerned about possible terrorist attacks on America's capital city.

Congestion pricing in London has been a major success on many fronts. It has cut the amount of traffic driving into the charging zone by 21 percent and reduced traffic congestion by 30 percent. These benefits were obtained immediately after the charge was introduced in 2003 and have been maintained since. At the same time, there has been no discernible increase in traffic around

the congestion charge zone. In fact, there has been a decrease in traffic along the key routes leading to the zone.

Life for those working and living inside the London zone has improved through the reduction in traffic and lowering of dangerous pollution, which exceeds accepted health standards in central London and many U.S. cities.

While road traffic is not the only contributor to the poor air quality in these cities, it plays a very substantial role. The congestion charge in London has resulted in a reduction of dangerous nitrogen oxide emissions of 8 percent and a cut in particulate emissions of 7 percent. This is despite an increase in the number of buses on the road, which emit more particulate matter than gasoline-fueled cars.

Congestion charging is about smarter use of our roads. It would encourage motorists to consider mass transit for their journeys where it is viable, as is certainly the case on the Metro system in the Washington area. Congestion pricing would also encourage motorists to travel at less crowded times of the day and to consider changing their travel patterns. For example, instead of making a special trip to the mall, more drivers would instead schedule their journeys to do this on the way home from work.

And, of course, for those who choose to continue to drive in the most congested periods they would experience faster and more reliable journeys because there would be fewer cars on the road. So you get what you pay for.

The revenues raised from congestion charging can be used to improve the transit system, to increase capacity and improve service reliability and coverage. In London this has meant major improvements to the bus network.

Opponents to congestion charging have argued that it is just another tax -- and that it is unfair because drivers already pay enough in taxes. The problem is that the current system of road taxes does not reflect when and where we choose to drive.

Economists refer to this as a problem of supply and demand. In most markets, balance between supply and demand is achieved using price. Airlines charge a higher price for flying during the busiest times, electricity costs more when demand is highest in many places, and so on. This link between demand and supply is missing from the way we currently pay for the roads. The result is an unmanaged system where congestion is bad and getting worse.

Opponents also argue that congestion charging would be unfair to the poor. But this assumes that the current system is equitable, which it is not. Everybody pays the same fuel taxes and it's the very poorest who most are exposed to the danger of road traffic, accidents, fumes and the noise. That's not fair. Congestion charging would reduce the negative impacts of traffic on those without cars and provide revenue to expand choice for everyone, for example by improving the rail and bus networks and holding down fare increases.

*Cameron Munro is an analyst at RAND Europe, a nonprofit research organization, where he has conducted studies on congestion pricing in London.*