

[Manteca Sun Post, Guest Commentary, Thursday, August 9, 2007](#)

Valley air is getting better to breathe

By Seyed Sadredin, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is better than it has ever been in recorded history. With tough regulations, innovative measures and investment by businesses and residents, air pollution has been reduced significantly throughout the valley.

Despite this tremendous progress, the valley's pollution-retaining geography and meteorology make meeting new, federal ozone and particulate standards a challenge that is unmatched by any other region in the nation.

After reducing valley smog by 80 percent since the 1980s, eliminating the remainder will not be cheap and cannot happen overnight. On April 30, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board adopted the first eight-hour ozone plan in California.

This overarching and comprehensive plan is designed to help the valley attain cleaner air, as measured by the federal smog standard, as expeditiously as practicable. The regulatory cost to businesses will be about \$20 billion. The board members should be commended for their courage, resoluteness and commitment to clean air.

In fact, an objective assessment of the board's work on air quality gives valley residents a great deal to be proud of. A child born today in the valley breathes air that is 80 percent cleaner than it was 25 years ago and that now meets the federal standard for particles 10 microns and smaller. The valley is the only "serious" non-compliant area in the state to meet the standard for airborne particles of this size, and it did it five years ahead of the federal deadline. The valley also is on track to meet the one-hour ozone standard by 2010, making it the only "extreme non-attainment" area in the state on track to do so.

The district's recently adopted plan to meet the new federal, health-based ozone standard is the first of its kind in the nation. Under the plan, 50 percent of the valley's population will live in "attainment" areas — that is, areas without any recorded violations of the air-pollution standard — by 2015; that number will increase to 90 percent by 2020.

Undisputed analysis by experts shows that even if money were no object and we ignored all logistical constraints, the technology available today and in the foreseeable future could not reduce smog-forming emissions enough for these areas to attain the clean-air standard any sooner than 2023. In this situation, the only option provided under federal law is to seek an "extreme" designation and incorporate future technology when it becomes available — thus, the proposed deadline of 2023.

All local measures that can be adopted by the air district will be in place by 2010. As a result, every area in the valley will see significant, steady reductions in ozone concentrations and the number of days above the standard.

The measures contained in the ozone plan also will help the valley meet the federal standard for fine particles by 2015. (Fine particles are 2.5 microns and smaller.) This makes the valley the only non-compliant area in the state on track to meet this standard by the deadline. Doing so will eliminate more than \$3 billion per year of the estimated \$3.1 billion annual health-related costs attributed to airborne particles in the valley.

With public health as the foremost priority, the air district's governing board also acted to seek other innovative and creative strategies to clean the air. These measures, which focus on alternative modes of goods- and people-movement, as well as alternative fuels and energy, will require broad support from the public, as well as business and government.

About 80 percent of our smog-causing pollutants come from mobile sources over which the air district has no jurisdiction. More than ever, we will need the state and federal government to do their fair share for the valley by providing funding and regulatory assistance to reduce emissions from cars, trucks and locomotives.

By any objective measure, the plan adopted by the air district is a comprehensive effort that leaves no stone unturned to bring the valley into attainment with federal air-quality standards as quickly as possible. Those who champion clean air are invited to join us on this challenging but fulfilling journey to cleaner air in the valley.

n Seyed Sadredin is executive director and air pollution control officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Clean air activists protest EPA chief's Fresno visit

in the Modesto Bee, Thursday, August 9, 2007

FRESNO, Calif. — Clean air advocates and other environmentalists called for an end to the San Joaquin Valley's chronic pollution problem and demanded to be included in a rare meeting between city leaders and the chief of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The group that met with EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson on Tuesday was described as a small working group convened to discuss the region's air quality.

"We had to keep the numbers at something that was going to be productive, but also represented the interests of everyone in the Valley," said Spencer Pederson, press secretary to Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, who invited the EPA chief.

Also attending were Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, congressional staff, members of the California Air Resources Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, a Fresno allergist, and a program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association.

Outside the offices of the Council of Fresno County Governments, about 40 people protested being kept out of the gathering.

Johnson "didn't take a minute of his time to listen to those voices most affected by air quality and water quality issues here in the San Joaquin Valley - and that is simply not acceptable," said Liza Bolanos, coordinator for the Central Valley Air Coalition. The organization has 165 members in the San Joaquin Valley.

Big West refinery likely to be fined

Group missed deadline to meet smog regulation

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Aug. 9, 2007

The Big West of California refinery on Rosedale Highway missed a deadline to install controls to reduce its smog-forming emissions and will likely be fined.

A hearing board for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Wednesday denied the refinery's request for extra time to comply with the regulation.

An air rule adopted in 2003 required businesses that operate boilers, steam generators and process heaters to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by June 1.

Nitrogen oxide is the primary ingredient in smog, which is present at unhealthy levels throughout most of the San Joaquin Valley.

Big West officials blamed the delay on problems caused by its takeover of the facility from Shell in 2005.

Because Shell initially planned to shut down the refinery, it offered transfers to most of the professional staff, said Bill Chadick, Big West's health, safety and environmental director. Big West was left to rely on contractors and "green" staff who lacked experience with the refinery's equipment.

It wasn't until recently that staff discovered Shell had provided incorrect information about a piece of equipment, which snarled plans to implement the controls, Chadick said.

But hearing board chairman Hollis B. Carlile said Big West was responsible for information about the equipment and for meeting the regulation deadline.

"That's life," Carlile said. "You've got to set your people up and know what's going on."

Big West had already upgraded some 20 other pieces of equipment but ran into a snag on the last piece, Chadick said.

The air district hearing board had previously granted the company a one-month emergency extension to correct the problem.

The extension expired at the end of June and the refinery continued to operate the equipment, which supplies crude to the refinery.

Shutting it down, refinery officials told the board, could have affected production of fuel and created volatility in the local fuel market.

However, to compensate for the extra emissions created by the one piece of equipment, Big West cut back the emissions coming from other equipment.

"We have more than mitigated the amount we've put out" since the extension expired, Chadick said.

Still, the five-member hearing board unanimously rejected the request for more time.

Chadick said the company has fixed the problematic equipment and will be in compliance with the rule by mid-September.

But the refinery will likely be fined for not meeting the extended deadline of July 1, said Brenda Turner, an air district spokeswoman.

At least one other company in the district did not meet the deadline, but that company was granted an extension, Turner said.

The district regulates eight counties from Kern to San Joaquin County.

Arrest made in Day fire

Homeless man faces 12 years in prison if convicted in blaze

BY JASON KOTOWSKI, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Aug. 9, 2007

The Day fire brought Frazier Park and nearby areas to a standstill. Many residents fled the area as smoke and ash filled the sky. Businesses suffered.

But the U.S. Attorney's Office has announced that someone will finally be held accountable for the massive blaze that began Sept. 4, 2006, burned more than 162,000 acres and cost millions of dollars to fight.

Steven Emory Butcher, 48, was arrested Monday after being indicted on eight charges, including two counts of starting fires that created embers that caused wildfires.

Butcher, who is homeless, faces a maximum penalty of 12 years in prison and \$530,000 in fines, along with restitution for fire suppression and damage to natural resources, Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph O. Johns said. Firefighting costs were more than \$78 million and the damage to natural resources will easily top that figure, Johns said.

While the fire never actually entered Kern County, it had a profound effect on some of the county's southernmost residents.

Kristen Rodriguez, owner of Frazier Park Nursery Florist & Feed, said the town shut down for days as residents left because of the [horrible air quality](#) and the danger that the fire would continue to creep closer.

"It was so smoky out here it was hard to breath," Rodriguez said. "I bought masks at a hardware store and passed them out to shop owners near me."

Rodriguez, who lives in Pinon Pines, eventually closed up shop and stayed home for several days waiting for conditions to improve. She didn't evacuate because firemen were stationed outside her home.

"I figured if the firemen left I would get out," she said.

Frazier Park resident Brad Kramer said he's glad Butcher is in custody so he can't do any more damage. Kramer said his wife stayed with family outside Frazier Park for several days during the fire. He stayed home with seven dogs, a duffel bag packed in his car in case he had to make a speedy getaway.

"Fortunately we didn't lose any property, but it scared the hell out of my wife," Kramer said.

Butcher also is accused of causing the 2002 Ellis fire that burned 70 acres in Piru Canyon, where the Day fire also began, according to the U.S. Attorney's office. He was one of 10 people and companies charged in relation to wildfires that burned hundreds of thousands of acres of national forest land across Southern California.

None of the cases accuse the defendants of arson.

Kern County Fire Capt. Doug Johnston said he was happy to hear Butcher and others were indicted for destruction they're accused of causing.

"This is going a long way to put the message out that we're going to hold people accountable for what are termed 'accidents,'" Johnston said.

While the people charged may not have intended to start fires, it doesn't excuse their negligence, Johnston said. Californians need to be aware that fire is something they need to be exceptionally careful with because the climate is right for a small blaze to quickly spark out of control, he said.

"There's no excuse when there's millions of dollars in property damage and, in some instances, people dying," Johnston said.

Johns, the assistant U.S. attorney, said Butcher's arrest should help bring closure to those who lost structures to the Day fire. He hopes the charges brought Monday help educate the public about fire safety and the consequences of flouting regulations.

Johns declined to comment on other news organizations' reports that Butcher is mentally ill.

A magistrate judge in a federal court in Los Angeles has ordered Butcher to be held without bond pending further hearings. His next court date is scheduled for Monday.

Story so far

- Sept. 4, 2006: The Day fire began in Piru Canyon. Within six days, it burned more than 15,000 acres in the Los Padres and Angeles National forests.
- Sept. 11-12: The fire closed Interstate 5 and burned nearly 20,000 acres.
- Sept. 18: More than 80,000 acres were burned and more than 2,000 firefighters battled the blaze. The Ventura County Sheriff's Office issued a recommended evacuation for Lockwood Valley Road between Highway 33 and Frazier Park Road. Highway 33 was closed from Fairview to Wheeler Gorge and Pyramid Lake, Hungry Valley State Recreational Area, Oak Flat area, Golden Hill Road and Smoky Bear Road at Interstate 5 also were closed.
- Sept. 23: The fire was 40 percent contained and had burned 120,816 acres.
- Sept. 26: Emergency personnel recommended residents in Pine Mountain Club and surrounding areas evacuate.
- Sept. 27: The fire had burned nearly 149,000 acres.
- Sept. 30: The fire was 87 percent contained and had burned more than 162,000 acres.

- Oct. 2: The blaze was fully contained. It burned more than 162,000 acres and cost more than \$78 million to fight.
- Aug. 6, 2007: Steven Emory Butcher, a homeless man, was arrested on suspicion of starting the Day fire.

Valley partnership to meet in Hanford

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Aug. 8, 2007

A Valley partnership tasked by the governor to address the region's pressing issues will meet this week in Hanford to discuss a range of topics, including high-speed rail, [air quality](#) and water supplies.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley will first hold a special session on the high-speed rail initiative Thursday at the Hanford Civic Auditorium's West Wing, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Thursday's session will be followed by a regular full-board meeting on Friday, when the partnership discusses the three priority issues identified for the Valley: air quality, water supply and transportation. Friday's meeting will be from 9 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

Both meetings are open to the public.

"This is a way of making sure that Sacramento won't forget us," said Hanford City Councilwoman Marcie Buford, one of 26 board members for the partnership. "This is a tool for us to achieve an equal footing to the Bay Area and Southern California so we can get our share of the taxes we pay.

The partnership was created by the executive order of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2005. It reports back to him with specific ideas on how to improve the Valley economy and enhance the quality of life by addressing unemployment, air quality and infrastructure.

The biggest single project is bringing up the quality of Highway 99 between Bakersfield and Sacramento.

For Kings County, the key projects include the widening of Highway 198 between Hanford and Visalia.

In March, the partnership distributed \$2.5 million in the form of seed grants to organizations from various sectors to jumpstart work in education, housing and transportation among other priority areas set by the partnership.

Port names new maritime chief

New Oakland director has received recognition for fighting air pollution

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, August 9, 2007

The Port of Oakland has tapped a Long Beach container terminal operator executive to run the port's maritime operations.

The Port Commission on Tuesday named James Kwon, chief executive officer of Total Terminals International, to be the port's new maritime director.

Commission President Anthony Batarse praised Kwon's experience in international trade and the ocean carrier industry in a statement issued by port management at the end of the day Tuesday.

One of the new director's first tasks will be to work on ways to cut air pollution caused by ships and trucks at the port. In 2005, the Port of Long Beach recognized Kwon and Total Terminals, which ran facilities in Oakland, Long Beach and Seattle, for retrofitting trucks that work within the port with equipment to cut diesel emissions.

Kwon replaces Wilson Lacy, who resigned as maritime director in March after holding the post for 21/2 years. Since then, Joseph Wong, executive director of port operations, has overseen maritime operations. In his new job, Kwon will report to Wong.

The port's newest executive will guide the facility's growing container traffic, which added up to the equivalent of 1.2 million 40-foot containers in 2006.

Beijing's path to big show unlikely to run smooth

By Nick Mulvenney

Washington Post, Thursday, August 9, 2007

BEIJING (Reuters) - Beijing's Olympic countdown extravaganza suggests China is likely to put on a spectacular show next August, but the run-up also illustrated that the next 382 days are unlikely to be trouble free for the hosts.

Beijing awoke to blue skies and sunshine on Thursday, but the images of heavy smog carried by the world's media in the preceding week will be hard to shift.

"My concerns, which I believe are the concerns of everyone, are the climate and the environment and especially the air environment," International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Jacques Rogge said soon after arriving in Beijing on Monday.

Two hazy grey days later and Rogge was conceding that some endurance events at the Games would have to be postponed if the air quality was not up to scratch.

Rogge said Beijing organizers had promised to close factories and take 1.3 million of the city's 3 million cars off the roads from August 8 to 24 next year.

If the Chinese government was hoping for a wholly positive image dividend from the Games, it will have been disabused by the stream of critical reports from human rights and media freedom pressure groups released over the last week.

There have also been a series of complaints worldwide about the safety of Chinese food and drugs.

Even as the celebrations in Tiananmen Square were winding down, six western activists, who on Tuesday had unveiled a banner at the Great Wall calling for a "Free Tibet," were deported to Hong Kong after two days in detention.

China is often criticized in the West for its harsh rule of the Himalayan region it occupied in 1950.

There are more demonstrations to come and not all of them in places where the Chinese authorities will have control over events.

"Tibetans and their supporters have vowed more protests during the torch relay next year," read a statement released by Students for a Free Tibet.

The torch relay will visit 20 cities around the world from March next year and will include an attempt to take the Olympic flame up Mount Everest, which sits on the border between Tibet and Nepal.

SPECTACULAR VENUES

With 21,600 media accredited for next year's Games and up to half that number expected to turn up to report from the city without IOC credentials, the Beijing Games promise to be the most intensely scrutinized Olympics in history.

There is little doubt the visitors will see spectacular venues and opening and closing ceremonies the equal of any in Olympic history.

Wednesday's countdown ceremony was a blizzard of color and glitz punctured with fireworks. Celebrities from movie star Jackie Chan to internationally renowned pianist Lang Lang took the stage to show their support.

Off Tiananmen Square, where troops crushed pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989 with huge loss of life, police needed reinforcements to keep out the uninvited masses who were hoping to catch a peak of the show. The operation was more messy than dangerous.

That the people were there at all, though, was a reminder that hosting the Olympics is not just a Communist Party project but a huge source of pride for most of the world's most populous nation.

"It has been a century-long dream for the Chinese to host an Olympic Games," top Communist Party official Wu Bangguo said in a speech at the ceremony. "With these Games, the Chinese will have better understanding and cooperation with the rest of the world."

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, Aug. 9, 2007:](#)

Public loses when it's locked out of meetings We all have a stake in better air quality in the Valley.

Organizers of a visit by the head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency blundered badly when they excluded the public from a meeting on Valley air quality issues between the agency chief and a number of interest groups. They should know better.

Ostensibly, the aim was to keep the meeting smaller and more manageable. That's a reasonable desire. But the media were kept out, which meant news reporters couldn't be the eyes and ears for the public. A media presence at such a meeting can provide important nuances, the tone and texture of debate and discussion, that can't be gleaned from dry news releases or stage-managed press conferences.

And it wasn't exactly a media circus. A handful of media members, including a Bee reporter, sought to sit in on the meeting. That's hardly a mob.

In the end, the desire for secrecy backfired. Instead of a fully fleshed-out report on the discussion between EPA boss Stephen Johnson and various other participants, the organizers got news stories about the protestors who gathered outside the meeting to complain that their needs and problems aren't being addressed. Now that's great public relations work.

The question that's left in the minds of many is, "What are they trying to hide?"

Nothing, perhaps. But the doubts will remain. And others will chafe at the implication, intentional or not, that the people who gathered to meet with Johnson believe they can provide all the answers, they can take care of the air quality problems in the Valley, and the rest of us needn't worry our little heads about anything. Condescension is not leadership.

Neither is leaving the unavoidable impression that certain interests are welcome at the table when important discussions are held and decisions are made, but everyone else must wait outside -- and then only be given what the movers and shakers want them to know.

We were told, in its aftermath, that the meeting had produced progress, commitments on the part of the EPA, good vibes and a general warm fuzziness. How nice. And how much better it would have been to have heard that first-hand.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Wednesday, August 8, 2007](#)

Peter Schrag: Corn, ethanol and other subsidized stupidities

By Peter Schrag - Bee Columnist

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi must welcome the heat she's getting for wobbling on the farm and energy bills. Having caved in to Detroit on fuel economy standards and compromised with Midwest agro-plutocrats on crop subsidies for millionaires, she's shown that she's more a pragmatic Baltimore pol like her father than a knee-jerk San Francisco liberal. That'll serve her well.

Both the farm and the energy bills won approval in the House in the past couple of weeks. Both are monuments to waste, stupidity and policy distortions going back generations -- longer in the case of the ag subsidies.

Pelosi says she hopes the Senate energy bill, which contains a sharp increase in fuel economy requirements -- from roughly 25 miles per gallon to 35 -- for cars and trucks, will prevail over the House version when the two are reconciled. She said it almost the same day that we learned that for the first time ever foreign models were outselling Detroit.

More significant, maybe, is the fact that the farm law -- and agricultural policy generally -- is morphing into an energy program. The bill, HR 2419, which calls itself the "Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2007," has oodles of incentives for the development and transportation of renewable fuels.

The link is corn -- already subsidized to the tune of billions -- since corn is the source of ethanol, which refiners are now required by federal law to mix into almost everybody's gasoline. The theory is that gas blended with ethanol doesn't emit greenhouse gases in the same concentrations as regular gas, and that it reduces dependence on imported oil. In fact, it does little of either.

Nor does the theory calculate the impact on food prices or the environmental impact of growing the corn and producing the ethanol, not only in greenhouse gas emissions from farm equipment, but from the trucks, ships and trains that haul the ethanol (nearly all of which comes from Midwest corn) for delivery to refineries.

Because of its corrosive qualities, it can't be shipped through pipelines. The farm bill passed the other day contains a string of programs aimed at developing pipelines for ethanol transport. But that may never be economically feasible.

Corn cultivation also requires enormous quantities of water and fertilizer that generate polluting runoff into rivers and groundwater. And while ethanol does reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it also generates smog-producing pollutants such as nitrous oxide (NOX) that have a wide range of health and environmental effects.

Since the feds subsidize corn ethanol (a 51 cents tax credit for every gallon of ethanol blended into gas) in addition to the regular multibillion-dollar corn subsidy, and since Congress protects corn ethanol with hefty tariffs to prevent the import of cheaper Brazilian ethanol, ethanol, as Sen. Dianne Feinstein complains, enjoys a triple subsidy. Some \$600 million annually comes from highway funds.

Every major presidential candidate, even John McCain, who once called ethanol "highway robbery," has been to Iowa, the nation's leading producer of corn, to cheer for ethanol. Given the fact that most experts believe that the future of bioenergy lies in "cellulosic" technology -- ethanol from biomass, switchgrass and various forms of ag waste -- the cheers for corn ethanol are far more political than they are scientific.

When California moved its presidential primary to Feb. 5, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger saw it as a chance for Californians to challenge candidates on their vows to Iowa voters -- he mentioned ethanol in particular. Most of our political seers seem to believe that rather than diminishing the clout of the traditional early primary and caucus states, the glut of February primaries is likely to increase their influence. Still, it might give Californians a chance to be heard. We're the ones paying the price.

Last week, the University of California energy experts at Berkeley and Davis whom Schwarzenegger commissioned to develop a California "low carbon fuel standard" issued a cautiously optimistic report indicating that California could reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fuel by 10 percent by 2010. The goal, though ambitious, they said, was possible.

But one of the report's two authors, Alex Farrell, director of Berkeley's Transportation Sustainability Research Center, also acknowledged that their assignment was only to look at fuels, not at engine design, fuel economy or broader policy changes.

And it's there -- in improved transit, in tolls and other forms of demand management on roads and bridges, in higher fuel taxes -- that the real possibilities lie. Classic economic liberals, people we call conservatives, argue that if government didn't meddle so much, the market would take care of the problem.

But attaching a cost to depletion of the ozone is virtually impossible. So is costing out the foreign policy consequences of empowering hostile foreign governments with our petrodollars. We all seem to want to check global warming and our energy dependence on Venezuela, Nigeria and the Middle East. The question is: What are we really willing to pay for that, and how soon?