

Learn about refinery expansion plans at workshops

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Aug. 28, 2008

Three public workshops have been scheduled to provide information on the proposed Big West of California refinery expansion.

The workshops are scheduled for:

6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at Discovery Elementary School, 7500 Vaquero Ave.

6 to 8 p.m. Sept. 9 at Caroline Harris Elementary School, 4110 Garnsey Lane.

6 to 8 p.m. Sept. 16 at Columbia Elementary School, 703 Mondavi Way.

The meetings are designed to get community input on the project, according to a notice released Wednesday by the Kern County Planning Department.

Big West has applied for a conditional-use permit and zone variance to build a \$700 million expansion to boost gasoline and diesel output at the facility. A revised environmental impact report on the expansion was made public in late June and will go before the county Planning Commission on Sept. 25.

It will then be forwarded to the Kern County Board of Supervisors for final approval.

While the period for accepting written comments on the report has ended, the county planning department will continue to accept them up until the Board of Supervisors' vote.

However, only those received by Sept. 9 will be considered in the planning department's recommendation on the project.

Record-skimming heat

The Valley gets more 100-degree days in a summer of roller-coaster weather.

By Charles McCarthy / The Fresno Bee
Thursday, Aug. 28, 2008

The last days of summer will not go quietly.

One-hundred degree temperatures are forecast today through Saturday as Central San Joaquin Valley residents prepare to celebrate the season's last holiday. But hope is on the way -- cooling coastal breezes that may lower temperatures by 10 degrees are expected by Sunday, just in time for Labor Day.

For now the heat is on, with 103 degrees forecast today by the National Weather Service in Hanford, just 5 degrees below Fresno's record for Aug. 28 set in 1924. Friday's high is predicted to hit 105 degrees, nearing the Aug. 29 record of 109 set in 1915.

"It's going to sit over us," senior weather service forecaster Jeff Barlow said about this week's high-pressure lid that's keeping the Valley heat on until Sunday.

The roller-coaster change in temperatures has been a trend this season.

"We're seeing more extremes in temperature variability," Barlow said of the weather.

NWS records show that on July 4 this year, Fresno experienced a below-normal 90 degrees. Six days later, on July 10, it was a sizzling 112 degrees. The following morning's low temperature was 82, topping the old record of 80 set on July 11, 1896.

But by July 20, Valley residents were waving goodbye to that short heat wave. Ocean breezes dropped the daily high temperature to 89 degrees.

Four days later, the roller coaster had returned Fresno's temperature to 102 degrees.

On Saturday, the NWS expects the latest high-pressure area to begin sliding away, allowing its clockwise wind flow to spread tropical moisture with possible thunderstorms over the Sierra.

Today's reading above 100 degrees will be Fresno's 37th this season. The NWS yearly average of 100-degrees or above readings in Fresno is 36.

If temperatures of 105 or higher are reached in the next few days, the city of Fresno will open its 10 public cooling centers. City spokeswoman Patti Miller said a decision will be made Friday whether the centers be open this weekend.

The city of Visalia will open its Transit Center at 425 E. Oak Ave. for the community's use from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. today through Saturday. All the city's bus routes eventually lead to the Transit Center, where there's ample seating, vending machines and restrooms, community relations manager Nancy Loliva said.

Fresno Unified School District spokeswoman Susan Bedi said Wednesday that there are no plans to send pupils home early, but during high heat, sports requiring exertion like football and distance running are limited with frequent shade breaks. Football practices are conducted without pads and scheduled before 11 a.m. or after 7 p.m. Temperatures higher than 105 degrees trigger a Stage 5 alert with cancellation of games and practices.

Air quality in Fresno and Tulare counties is rated unhealthy today by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The air is unhealthy for sensitive groups in Madera, Merced and Kings counties.

Cal Fire is urging caution lest fires ignited in dry and hot conditions add to the 1.3 million acres burned already this year.

Manure power to the people

Bessie may soon be generating more than milk

Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor
Manteca Bulletin Thurs., Aug. 28, 2008

Got cows?

San Joaquin County has well over 110,000 of them.

And if the South San Joaquin Irrigation District after examining its options decides it pencils out, the cows in this end of the county might just start producing more than milk.

The SSJID board on Tuesday instructed staff to evaluate a proposed methane digester project that would turn dairy manure into electricity.

It is part of the SSJID commitment to do whatever in its means to reduce the electrical bills of the people they serve in Manteca, Ripon, Escalon and the surrounding farmland as well as expand its 100 percent green energy portfolio.

The SSJID in partnership with the Oakdale Irrigation District is adding more hydroelectric generation on the Stanislaus River. They also have put in place a solar array farm - the largest of its kind on the West Coast - that generates power to help run the surface water treatment plant to free up energy to power 88.8 homes a day.

The solar farm, on a typical day in May, reduced pollution to such a degree that it was the same as taking 202.2 cars off California's roads every day.

The SSJID board is exploring a proposal to use an Organic Systems Recovery anaerobic digester for the Brasil & Son Dairy that operates a 2,850-head herd to reduce their electrical bill and help clean up water quality issues involving manure run-off.

If it proceeds, the SSJID would own the digester, lease land it would sit on from the dairy and then sell the electricity back to the dairy at an overall energy cost that would be lower than without the digester.

The dairy farm would have a sizeable dent put in its annual \$60,000 PG&E bill.

Besides evaluating the feasibility of the digester project, the SSJID would have to obtain permission from the Local Area Formation Commission to sell electricity to the dairy using the dairy's own manure that its cows generate.

The SSJID is already planning on revisiting the retail power issue with LAFCo in a bid to assume control of the PG&E retail system serving Manteca, Ripon, and Escalon with the goal of reducing consumer power costs 15 percent across the board.

It has already helped the Lathrop Irrigation District - which serves the 11,000-home River Islands at Lathrop project - set up a retail power concern that will have rates 28 percent lower than PG&E's.

Several candidates have emerged in the Nov. 4 election that are sympathetic to the efforts of Stop the Power Grab - an organization encouraged by PG&E to fight the SSJID plans to enter the retail power businesses.

The group focuses on eminent domain as a cardinal sin but doesn't mention the fact PG&E uses it at a much higher rate as a quasi-public agency than most public jurisdictions in California.

Stop the Power Grab supporters contend that SSJID ultimately will use eminent domain to take over the retail system from PG&E in a bid to lower rates by 15 percent.

It's going to be a scorcher

By William Brand - Oakland Tribune

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, August 28, 2008

"It's hot. I'd guess it's about 95 degrees outside this office," an East Bay Regional Park District ranger at Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area said.

The ranger was wrong. At 5 p.m. Wednesday, it was 102 degrees in Livermore, not a record by any means. But it was the highest temperature recorded in the Bay Area on Wednesday by the National Weather Service. Even in Oakland it was 88 degrees, and Hayward recorded a high of 92. Pacifica was the cool spot at 78 degrees. It was 83 in downtown San Francisco.

There's more hot weather to come, Weather Service meteorologist Steve Anderson said. There won't be serious cooling until Saturday.

The high temperatures and a stubborn, hot wind blowing out of the Central Valley caused the Weather Service to issue a red-flag fire warning for the East Bay hills, the South Bay and North Bay.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District, meanwhile, declared today the second straight "Spare the Air Day." Unfortunately, there will be no free transit; funds have run out for that effort to entice commuters out of their cars.

But the air board urges residents to drive less, consider telecommuting, working from home instead of driving to work. "Concentrations of ground-level ozone pollution are forecast to be unhealthy today," according to the air board. "Hot temperatures and light winds will combine to produce poor air quality for the entire Bay Area."

Air board spokeswoman Kristine Roselius said the forecast today is for smoggy air in the South Bay and moderately poor air for the East Bay. Unhealthy air means people, especially the elderly, should stay indoors or limit outdoor activity, she said.

Although there's no free transit, Roselius said the air board hopes people will heed the Spare the Air warning and limit their driving, avoid unnecessary trips and take mass transit, if possible.

In Oakland, the fire department has started patrols in high-fire-danger areas in the Oakland hills.

It's the low humidity and the offshore winds from the northeast that cause concern, Weather Service meteorologist Larry Smith said.

"During the day, humidity can often drop to between 11 (percent) and 21 percent," Smith said.

But Tuesday night it only brought the humidity up to 18 percent to 29 percent.

The same conditions are expected to continue.

Firefighters remain on high alert. A sparking cable started a grass fire Wednesday morning besides I-680 in Fremont. But firefighters, alerted by the California Highway Patrol, had it out in a few minutes.

The red-flag warning also is in effect for the Sacramento Valley as far north as Shasta County and south into the Central Valley and the surrounding foothills and the Sierra, said Daniel Berlant, spokesman for the California Department of Forestry.

"We urge everyone to be cautious," he said. "We have the ... Labor Day weekend coming up and lots of people will be going into the hills and the mountains. We're asking people to be cautious and remember that any kind of spark can cause a wildfire," he said.

Berlant said the only fires that remain unchecked in California are fires caused by lightning in national forests in Siskiyou and Del Norte counties. They're far from habitation and not really aggressively burning, Berlant said. "They most likely won't be put out until it rains."

One of the coolest spots in the East Bay was Robert Crown Memorial State Beach in Alameda.

A ranger there said it was 85 degrees shortly before 5 p.m. with 36 percent humidity.

"We've got a good number of people out here enjoying themselves," he said. The beach is open from 5 a.m. until 10 p.m. daily.

Spare the Air Day as temperatures climb

Henry K. Lee

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, August 27, 2008

Grab those bikes and stow those lawn mowers - today is a Spare the Air Day because of the hot, still weather that's in store for much of the Bay Area.

While air quality officials are urging people to take public transit, there won't be any free rides.

Forecasters for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District called a Spare the Air Day because they expect temperatures of at least 100 degrees in the inland regions of the Bay Area, with minimal winds.

"We have a high-pressure system that's in place over the Bay Area, and temperatures will be building over the next couple of days," air quality district spokeswoman Kristine Roselius said Tuesday.

Ozone levels are expected to be high in the South Bay and the East Bay, Roselius said.

During Spare the Air days, residents are asked to take transit, minimize driving, turn up the thermostat on their air conditioners and avoid using aerosol sprays or gas-powered lawn mowers.

Free rides on transit on Spare the Air Days - a strategy that's been used in recent years - aren't being offered this year. Air quality and transit officials offered only one free-transit day this year, on June 19.

The Thin Green Line

The Body Count

By Cameron Scott

S.F. Chronicle blog, Wed., Aug. 27, 2008

A new study in *Environmental Health Perspectives* offers what I think is the first-ever data on increased visits to emergency rooms during heat waves, which are expected to become more frequent and more severe as climate change unfolds.

We need to know how much effect climate change will have on health and mortality: The bigger the effect, the more money it will cost to handle, and, ultimately, the more humanitarian and political chaos the climate is likely to cause.

Unfortunately, studies of the likely health impacts are in their infancy. Even estimates of death rates are difficult to come by. California officials first estimated that the July 2006 heat wave killed 140 people, but an AP analysis of county data later found 250 deaths.

The new study found that the same two-week heat wave saw 16,166 excess ER visits and 1,182 excess hospitalizations in California. The study doesn't prove that the visits were caused by the heat wave, but finds that the number of visits was well above that of a control period of the same length.

The mother of all studies in this area is one conducted by Stanford scientist Mark Jacobson, which was able to pinpoint cause and effect. It found that for each degree Celsius that we allow the climate to change (our actions now will determine the severity of climate change), 20,000 deaths per year will result worldwide from air pollution alone. The storms that can wipe out tens of thousands at a clip were not included.

Deaths, however, don't cost as much as illness to the governments that will ultimately determine how much we allow temperatures to rise before we act. Massive public health problems will get their attention right quick. One can only hope that there are people in Sacramento and Washington reading *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

One-Third of Schools Built in Air Pollution Danger Zones

Washington Post Monday, August 25, 2008

MONDAY, Aug. 25 (HealthDay News) -- More than 30 percent of U.S. public schools are within a quarter mile of major highways, which puts them in the "air pollution danger zone," says a University of Cincinnati study.

Previous research has shown that proximity to major highways and pollutants spewed by vehicles can increase school children's susceptibility to respiratory diseases later in life.

In this new study, the researchers examined data on more than 8,000 schools with 6 million students in Atlanta, Boston, Cincinnati, Denver, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Memphis, Minneapolis and San Antonio.

"This is a major public health concern that should be given serious consideration in future urban development, transportation planning and environmental policies," principal investigator Sergey Grinshpun, a professor of environmental health, said in a new release from the university.

He noted that school-age children spend more than 30 percent of their day at school.

"For many years, our focus has been on homes when it comes to air pollution. School attendance may result in a large dose of inhaled traffic pollutants that -- until now -- have been completely overlooked," Grinshpun said.

New schools should be located well away from major highways, he suggested.

"Health risk can be mitigated through proper urban planning, but that doesn't erase the immediate risk to school-age children attending schools that are too close to highways right now," Grinshpun said. "Existing schools should be retrofitted with air filtration systems that will reduce students' exposure to traffic pollutants."

The study will be published in the September issue of the *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*.

[L.A. Times editorial, Thursday, Aug. 28, 2008:](#)

California bill attacks sprawl

The groundbreaking legislation would help meet the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions through smarter regional planning.

The number of miles Californians drive is growing almost twice as fast as the state's population, as housing developments sprout farther and farther from commercial centers. Not only does this urban sprawl put upward pressure on gasoline prices, it creates freeway gridlock, worsens air pollution and makes fighting global warming next to impossible. California lawmakers have tried and failed for decades to bring sprawl under control, but they may finally be on the verge of success.

SB 375 from Sen. Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), who last week was elected the next president pro tem of the state Senate, marks the first time any state has attempted to tie greenhouse gas reduction to transportation funding and regional land-use planning. The bill's details are complex -- primarily because in the two years Steinberg has been trying to get it through the Legislature, he has rewritten it five times in an attempt to overcome opposition from builders and municipal governments -- but its main thrust is to provide incentives for regional planners to impose "smart growth." That means building denser housing close to urban centers and public transportation corridors, so people don't have to commute as far.

The bill has the backing of environmental groups, builders and municipal governments. It's opposed by some California business groups and many Republican lawmakers, who claim that it would limit choices for consumers who would rather live in suburban ranch houses than urban condominiums. They couldn't be more wrong. The bill wouldn't eliminate suburbs or do away with single-family homes with big backyards, but it would provide more choices for people who are forced to live far from their workplaces because they can't afford a home in the city.

It would do this by directing metropolitan planning organizations (there are 17 in California, including the Southern California Assn. of Governments, which covers Los Angeles and five surrounding counties) to meet targets set by state air regulators to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To hit these targets, they would have to draw up transportation and land-use plans that encourage smart growth. Local governments could still approve any new development they wanted, but those meeting the regional group's smart-growth seal of approval would be first in line for state transportation funds and be exempt from a lot of regulatory red tape.

The bill has been passed by both houses of the Legislature and now awaits a housekeeping vote in the Senate. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger should sign it once it lands on his desk.

[In the Hanford Sentinel, Editorial, Thursday, Aug. 28, 2008](#)

Another View: Tarnished gold

From the Los Angeles Times

Juan Antonio Samaranch, the former head of the International Olympic Committee who helped engineer Beijing's successful bid to host this summer's Games, was quick to dub the extravaganza "the best Olympics ever" as the proceedings closed on Sunday. Such pronouncements are as subjective as a gymnastics score, but it's beyond question that China can say it has hosted the most expensive Olympics ever and, quite possibly, the most rigidly controlled.

Historians might debate the latter point. Adolf Hitler's 1936 Berlin Games were just as much an international propaganda campaign as the 2008 event, carefully choreographed to demonstrate the glory of the Third Reich. But even Hitler couldn't control the weather. Chinese leaders, terrified that [Beijing's lung-blackening air pollution](#) would cast a pall over the city's image as well as its skies, directed the Weather Modification Office (yes, there really is such an agency) to seed clouds throughout the Games so that rainfall could flush away the filth. Yet rain wouldn't do during

the opening and closing ceremonies at the open-air Bird's Nest stadium, so hundreds of rockets were fired into the clouds to chase them away.

In the end, China got precisely what it paid more than \$41 billion for. It won far more gold medals than any other nation, persuaded world leaders to attend the Games despite their misgivings about Beijing's horrific human rights record both domestically and abroad, and announced with a clamor as loud as the 2,008 drummers who performed at the opening ceremony that it is a rising power that should command respect.

Yet what planners in Beijing miscalculated is that no matter how well you teach performers to smile, the strain behind the lips is still detectable. The near-hysterical drive by Chinese leaders to put on the biggest, most spectacular sporting event ever, and to engineer a generation of Chinese medalists regardless of the financial or human costs, is rather more disconcerting to the outside world than convincing. If it was Beijing's intention to prove China's greatness via the Games, what it has demonstrated instead is the fragility of its ego.

British officials are no doubt wondering how they can possibly top the spectacle of Beijing when London hosts the Summer Games in 2012. They shouldn't even try. The British have nothing to prove, and it will be refreshing to watch an event in which athleticism matters more than image. The London Olympics will probably be messier and less awe-inspiring than the Chinese Games, but it's a good bet they'll be more fun.