

Air board OKs new plan

Activists say strategy to clean up soot, debris will take too long, may not work.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, May 1, 2008

The regional air board Wednesday adopted a new cleanup plan for soot and chemical debris that cause early death for more than 1,000 Valley residents each year -- but activists say it will take too long and might not work at all.

The fine particles would drop to safe levels by 2014, officials said. The plan tightens rules on fireplace burning, glass-melting furnaces and even commercial charbroilers.

But the cleanup relies on pollution reductions expected from a proposed diesel truck rule that state officials have not even passed yet.

About 15 activists lined up outside the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District headquarters to demonstrate, and in the board room, some wore air masks.

They said that for months, they have been suggesting other options, such as advanced pollution-control technology on farm diesel engines or filters on wine fermentation tanks. The options would speed up the cleanup by at least a year, and they would be a safety net if the state's diesel rule does not produce the reductions officials anticipate.

Air officials said they have included every available measure. They said oil, farming and other industries Valley-wide are expected to pay a total of \$20 billion over the next six years for new equipment and technologies.

"We did not leave anything off the table," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director.

The Valley has one of the state's worst problems with fine particle pollution, called PM-2.5, which is at its highest levels in fall and winter. Some of the specks come from fires and vehicles, but much of the Valley's PM-2.5 problem occurs when chemicals combine in the air.

Oxides of nitrogen -- NOx -- from vehicles combine with plumes of ammonia coming mostly from dairies to form a chemical speck called ammonium nitrate, which accounts for nearly half the region's PM-2.5.

The Valley's biggest source of NOx is diesel trucks. The state's new diesel rule could be passed in the next year, but it has met with a lot of industry opposition. The rule's reductions are not supposed to begin until 2014, the same year the district projects completion of the PM-2.5 cleanup.

That worries health activist Kevin Hamilton, a respiratory therapist.

"We are buckling under the weight of visits to clinics for lung problems in this Valley," he said.

PM-2.5 specks are so small that 30 or 40 of them could fit across the width of a human hair. They easily pass through the lungs into the bloodstream. They can trigger asthma attacks and heart problems, and they cause early death. The state estimates PM-2.5 causes more than 1,000 people to die prematurely each year in the Valley.

Engineer Alvin Valeriano, a former air district employee, said he estimates the district could achieve the PM-2.5 standard by 2012 or 2013 -- if it pushes for new technologies.

District officials said they are studying the suggestions and will use them as they become feasible. But there are problems with some of the ideas, such as switching diesel farm pumps to electric power, they said.

"Many farmers have no access to the electricity for their pumps," Sadredin said.

After the board meeting Wednesday, activists said they had been ignored.

"Once again, our local air district is delaying clean air," said Catherine Garoupa, community organizer with Madera Coalition for Community Justice.

The confrontation in the board room resembled last year's fight between activists and the district over the Valley's ozone plan, which the board also approved in a split vote. At the time, board newcomers Henry T. Perea of Fresno and Raji Brar of Arvin voted against the ozone plan. They sided with activists who said the plan would delay healthy air.

This year, Perea and Brar were joined by Dr. John Telles, the newest district board member, as the dissenting votes. Gov. Schwarzenegger this month appointed the Fresno cardiologist to the board as a health expert.

"Is there a possibility this plan could fail?" Telles asked. "We need more contingency measures in case that happens."

But the plan was supported by seven county supervisors -- representing Fresno, Madera, Kings, Tulare, Kern, Stanislaus and San Joaquin -- and a city council member from Ceres in Stanislaus County.

Board member Ronn Dominici, a Madera County supervisor, said the district must meet a federal deadline this month to approve a plan or face sanctions that include the possible loss of \$2 billion in road-building funds. He said improvements will be made as they become available.

"This plan has to go forward," he said.

Air regulators approve cleanup plan

Approval by 8-3 vote should bring valley into compliance with federal pollution standard by 2014

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, May 1, 2008

San Joaquin Valley air regulators Wednesday approved a plan to clean up tiny specks of dust, soot and chemicals that create fine particulates, a form of air pollution considered most damaging to human health.

Its cleanup measures largely target diesel trucks and industrial plants but could also increase the number of days when residential wood burning is prohibited.

Kern County could see up to 30 no-burn days during winter months compared to about 12 this season under the current rule.

The plan will bring the valley into compliance with a federal pollution standard by 2014. It was approved in an 8-3 vote by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Governing Board. Board members Raji Brar, an Arvin councilwoman, Fresno City Councilman Henry Perea and Fresno physician John Telles opposed the plan.

Clean air advocates who spoke during a public hearing before the vote criticized the air district for not including stricter measures in the cleanup plan. They raised the same concerns a year ago when the air district board voted on a controversial smog cleanup plan.

Many of those speaking against the plan were community organizers in Arvin and Lamont who said neighborhood committees consistently rank air pollution as their biggest concern. Arvin has experienced some of the highest levels of air pollution in the nation in recent years.

Air District Executive Director Seyed Sadredin said scientific studies by the air district showed the advocates' suggestions for further reducing PM 2.5 wouldn't work.

Sadredin said the current plan is one of the toughest in the nation.

"This plan has every control you can imagine," he said.

PM 2.5 occurs in the valley in wintertime and is considered the most harmful air pollutant. In addition to triggering asthma attacks and lung ailments, the tiny particles can pass through the lungs and into the bloodstream, where they can clog arteries.

Doctors have documented trends that show an increase in deaths from lung diseases, heart attacks and strokes on days when fine particle pollution is high.

A 2006 Cal State Fullerton study estimated particle pollution costs valley residents \$3.2 billion annually in doctor's visits, lost productivity and early death.

Heavy-duty diesel trucks are the largest source of PM 2.5. Other major contributors include burning of forests, orchards and agricultural fields and industrial machinery burning liquid fuel and natural gas.

Critics say air board dragging its feet on improvements

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, May 01, 2008

FRESNO -- The regional air board Wednesday adopted a new cleanup plan for soot and chemical debris that causes early death for more than 1,000 Valley residents each year -- but activists say it will take too long and might not work at all.

The fine particles would drop to safe levels by 2014, officials said. The plan tightens rules on fireplace burning, glass-melting furnaces and even commercial charbroilers.

But the cleanup relies on pollution reductions expected from a proposed diesel truck rule that state officials have not even passed yet.

About 15 activists lined up outside the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District headquarters to demonstrate, and in the board room, some wore air masks.

They said that for months, they have been suggesting other options, such as advanced pollution-control technology on farm diesel engines or filters on wine fermentation tanks. The options would speed up the cleanup by at least a year, and they would be a safety net if the state's diesel rule does not produce the reductions officials anticipate.

Air officials said they have included every available measure. They said oil, farming and other industries Valleywide are expected to pay a total of \$20 billion over the next six years for new equipment and technologies.

"We did not leave anything off the table," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director.

The Valley has one of the state's worst problems with fine particle pollution, called PM-2.5, which is at its highest levels in fall and winter. Some of the specks come from fires and vehicles, but much of the Valley's PM-2.5 problem occurs when chemicals combine in the air.

Oxides of nitrogen -- NOx -- from vehicles combine with plumes of ammonia coming mostly from dairies to form a chemical speck called ammonium nitrate, which accounts for nearly half of the region's PM-2.5.

The Valley's biggest source of NOx is diesel trucks. The state's new diesel rule could be passed in the next year, but it has met with a lot of industry opposition. The rule's reductions are not supposed to begin until 2014, the same year the district projects completion of the PM-2.5 cleanup.

That worries health activist Kevin Hamilton, a respiratory therapist.

"We are buckling under the weight of visits to clinics for lung problems in this Valley," he said.

PM-2.5 specks are so small that 30 or 40 of them could fit across the width of a human hair. They easily pass through the lungs into the blood stream. They can trigger asthma attacks and heart problems, and they cause early death. The state estimates PM-2.5 causes more than 1,000 people to die prematurely each year in the Valley.

Engineer Alvin Valeriano, a former air district employee, said he estimates the district could achieve the PM-2.5 standard by 2012 or 2013 -- if it pushes for new technologies.

California's farm belt plan to cut air pollution criticized

By GARANCE BURKE, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post, Contra Costa Times, and other papers Thursday, May 1, 2008

FRESNO, Calif. -- Environmentalists say a new plan to clean up the soot-laden air in California's farm belt would fail to adequately regulate agricultural sources of pollution.

Critics of the plan unfurled white prayer flags Wednesday outside the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's meeting in Fresno to illustrate the premature deaths they say are associated with the valley's polluted air.

California's farm belt has some of the highest levels of airborne dust, smoke and soot in the country.

The district's governing board voted 8-3 in favor of a plan that could keep families from using their fireplaces for up to 35 days each winter and require local employers to make a portion of their workers car pool.

The plan is meant to comply with standards set in 1997 under the federal Clean Air Act. More rigorous standards were adopted in 2006.

Air quality advocates said the plan should have done more to regulate dairies, wineries and diesel pumps on farms, which are among the many sources of air pollution.

"I'm disappointed about these plans we get presented. I know we can do better," said board member Raji Brar, who voted against the plan, along with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's appointee to the board, cardiologist John Telles. "I just really think we get caught up in the politics and who our friends are."

Farmers speaking at the meeting warned that a stricter plan would have risked job losses in the valley, the nation's most productive region for fruits and vegetables.

"When you get rid of employment and you get rid of businesses, then you have very bad health problems," said Manuel Cunha, a citrus grower who heads the Nisei Farmers League, a group of 1,000 area growers.

If the California Air Resources Board sanctions the plan, it will head to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for final approval.

But the district likely will have to approach the issue again soon, since the EPA plans to address the valley's compliance with the 2006 standards later this year.

"We want to go beyond this," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director. "In our view, we've put in this rule everything we could think of."

Valley showing some progress

By Barbara Anderson

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 1, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley again failed to make the grade on an annual air-quality report card released late Wednesday, but it won praise for reducing smog levels in some areas.

Valley regions routinely rank among the smoggiest places in the nation in the American Lung Association's State of the Air report card.

That streak continued in the 2008 report, the ninth since the grading began. Bakersfield retained its rank as the second-smoggiest city behind Los Angeles. Visalia-Porterville remained in third place. The report card rates ozone pollution, the main ingredient in smog.

The Valley also flunked again for particle pollution, tiny specks of dust, soot and chemicals that plague the Valley on foggy winter days.

Fresno County now ranks third among the nation's counties for short-term particle pollution and 10th dirtiest for long-term exposure to soot. Last year it was the fourth worst for short-term pollution and the 15th most polluted year-round.

But positive changes also were noted in the 2008 report card.

Fresno-Madera improved to fifth-smoggiest city from fourth. Merced moved from sixth worst to 17th smoggiest. And Hanford-Corcoran's rank changed from the 13th most-polluted city to 24th place.

The report said Fresno "marked a remarkable decline in high ozone days since a peak in 2001-2003, showing a drop of two-thirds" in the metro area.

"None of us can claim 'mission accomplished,' but we have made significant progress," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District. The district adopts plans and enforces regulations to clean the air.

State and local efforts to improve air quality are making a difference, said Bonnie Holmes-Gen of the American Lung Association of California.

"The public should be pleased to hear that there has been a very significant drop in ozone days," she said during a Wednesday teleconference in Los Angeles.

But Holmes-Gen said improvement doesn't mean Fresno's air is clean. "You're still receiving an 'F,'" she said. "The air is unhealthy."

Ozone, the main ingredient in smog, can irritate and scar lungs. Breathing ozone can trigger asthma attacks. Research suggests long-term exposure can hamper lung development in children, and short-term exposure can shorten lives.

Exposure to tiny pollution particles has been linked to premature deaths, increased heart attacks, strokes and asthma attacks.

Local air-quality activists said the 2008 report card shows work remains to be done in the Valley to protect the public's health.

"That a good chunk of our cities in the Valley are in the Top 10 most-polluted cities should be a huge wake-up sign," said Liza Bolanos, coordinator for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a partnership of health and environmental organizations working toward clean air in the Valley.

"We're talking not only about the health of people in the San Joaquin Valley, but we're talking about lives," Bolanos said.

The fight for clean air "doesn't end until everyone is breathing clean air, and that's certainly not the case in most of the places in the Valley today," said Nidia Bautista, community engagement director with the Coalition for Clean Air, a statewide advocacy organization.

The lung association used air-quality data collected by government agencies for the years 2004 to 2006 to grade cities and counties.

Rankings for ozone and short-term particle pollution for an area were arrived at by a weighted average calculated from the Air Quality Index, a government health-based rating system for different levels of air pollution.

The lung association grades do not reflect a new federal Environmental Protection Agency ozone standard adopted in March. The grades, however, include an EPA 24-hour standard for fine particles that was revised in September 2006.

Grades for long-term pollution were measured using annual violations of federal air quality standards.

Valley plan for cleaner air OK'd

Critics say restrictions not aggressive enough

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Thursday, May 1, 2008

FRESNO - A plan to reduce the most dangerous of the San Joaquin Valley's air pollutants was approved Wednesday, even as critics - some wearing respiratory masks over their faces - called for a more aggressive approach.

The plan includes tougher restrictions on industry, farms and residents. It would require upgrades of factory boilers and internal combustion engines.

It could also trigger more wood-burning restrictions for Valley residents during the winter and would require only the cleanest water heaters and furnaces to be installed in homes.

REPORT CARD

While San Joaquin Valley air cops on Wednesday debated new rules to reduce levels of harmful particulate matter in the air, the American Lung Association issued its annual State of the Air report. Here's how San Joaquin and some neighboring counties fared:

- San Joaquin: F for ozone; F for short-term particulate matter, passing grade for annual PM
- Calaveras: F for ozone; A for short-term PM; passing grade for annual PM
- Amador: F for ozone; no data for PM
- Sacramento: F for ozone; F for short-term PM; passing grade for annual PM
- Stanislaus: F for ozone; F for short-term PM; passing grade for annual PM
- Tuolumne: B for ozone; no data for PM

Officials say the plan by 2014 will allow them to meet standards for tiny pieces of soot whose width is less than 3 percent of a human hair. This particulate matter, known as PM2.5, lodges in the lungs and worsens existing health problems.

The nearly 700-page document by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District relies too heavily on a separate state plan to clean up heavy-duty trucks on the highways, critics told air board members. That plan has yet to be approved.

"I'm ashamed that I live in an air basin where the agency responsible for protecting us ... does not take the responsibility to do so," said Jenny Saklar, an environmental health assistant with the Fresno Metro Ministry. She wore a black shirt that said, "got asthma?"

Dozens of witnesses testified of health effects from air pollution seen in their own families.

"I was just at the doctor's yesterday with my 5-year-old son," Valley resident Maria Arevelo said through an interpreter. "They diagnosed him with asthma. My 10-year-old daughter also has asthma.

"They can't play outside. And they ask me, 'Mom, why can't I go outside?' "

Air district board members said the plan is a starting point. They hope it won't take the full six years to meet the standard.

"This is the beginning of our journey to clean air," said Raymond Watson, a Kern County supervisor.

Three board members voted against the plan, including a health specialist who was recently appointed.

San Joaquin County's particulate matter problem is not as severe as the south Valley's. However, residents here are subject to the same rules and regulations as those more polluted locations.

And, according to another air quality advocacy group, San Joaquin County's air, while cleaner, is still a danger.

The American Lung Association in its annual State of the Air report on Wednesday slapped San Joaquin County with two F grades, for ozone and particulate matter pollution.

Last year, the county got a C for ozone and an F for short-term particulate matter.

Then again, not all Fs are alike.

San Joaquin County's failing grade was based on 11 high-ozone days over a three-year period. During that same time, Riverside County saw 206 high-ozone days. It, too, earned an F.

Hispanic Chamber business expo is Friday

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, May 1, 2008

The Tulare Kings Hispanic Chamber of Commerce annual business conference, this year titled "Solutions 2008," starts at 9 a.m. Friday at the Visalia Convention Center.

There will be presentations by local experts to talk about solutions for housing, the environment and business, as well as speakers to discuss issues of concern to the business community in Tulare County.

An anti-gang panel discussion is planned, to be moderated by Manuel Alvarado, programs manager with the Great Valley Center in Modesto.

Panelists include: Carlos Mendoza, Small Business Administration; Willie Gallegos, Real Estate Connection; and [Sayed Sadredin, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

Informational booths will cover topics including foreclosure counseling, in English and in Spanish, identity theft, immigration, voter registration, passport information and access to business capital.

Also scheduled to attend is a representative from the county tax assessor's office to provide information on having property reassessed.

Conference registration is 11:30 a.m. to noon.

The lunch and keynote speakers are scheduled from noon to 1:30 p.m.; booths can be viewed from 1:30-5 p.m.

Tickets are \$50 per person, but admittance to the expo is free to the public after 2 p.m.

Blueprint survey results released

Survey: 37 percent want land-use-density increase of less than 25 percent

BY HILLARY S. MEEKS

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Thirty-seven percent of participants in a series of recent meetings desire no more than a 25 percent increase in Tulare County land-use density by 2050.

The surveys were conducted during four meetings held by the Tulare County Association of Governments. The results will contribute to a blueprint that incorporates public input and feedback from cities, association director Ted Smalley said.

The blueprint will be taken to the association's board May 19. If approved, it will be combined with the blueprints of seven other San Joaquin Valley counties - Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin and Stanislaus - for a regional plan.

"The state wants regions to look at the big-picture issues that a county might not look at by itself," said Elizabeth Wright, associate regional planner for the association. "Everyone is talking about globalization, and now regions are important, not so much cities and counties."

Land use isn't usually in the association's purview, but ties into the association's job of coordinating transportation plans in the county. Density determines what kind of transportation will be best for the area, Wright said.

One house per quarter acre might be considered low density, Smalley said. Placing townhomes on the same piece of property could represent high density, he said.

While the blueprint has no regulatory authority, the state is more likely to award certain grants to counties and regions that create one, Smalley said.

Grants could be used for purposes such as mitigating air pollution, where both transportation and land use can play a role.

"Some of the cities have sent us comments on concentric growth," Smalley said. "And if it's done well, people can walk to the store. And with higher densities, you have a better chance of getting public transit."

Two concerns expressed by those who attended the meetings involved how prime agricultural land would be used and the quality of high-density dwellings. Smalley said many people equate high density with low-income housing, not realizing that high density can be something like new condominiums being built in Lindsay.

"The bottom line is, if you can get high-quality, high-density [homes], you will reduce the dependency on the automobile," he said.

The protection of agricultural land is always a concern in Tulare County, Smalley said. Filling in spots in existing cities - most likely with high-density housing - would help preserve ag land, he said.

The blueprint is funded by grants totaling approximately \$5.9 million. More than \$5 million came from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's office [and \\$750,000 came from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

District to build monitor

Station to watch county's air quality

Special to The Madera Tribune

Madera Tribune Thursday, May 01, 2008

A state-of-the-art air quality monitoring station will be built in Madera County this year according to Ronn Dominici, a county supervisor and member of the Valley Air District governing board. Dominici has long been a proponent of having a station within the county.

"Now we will know the facts," explained Dominici. "For too long we have relied on surrounding jurisdictions to measure our air quality. This monitoring station will give us the opportunity to learn exactly what is going on in Madera County in terms of air pollution and that will allow us to make more educated decisions about improving the quality of the air we breathe."

At the new site, the district will be deploying federally approved monitoring instrumentation for both fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and breathable particulate matter (PM10). Monitored data will be accessible as it is recorded using the district's Web site, www.valleyair.org. The monitors will be in an urban area of Madera County, because the highest PM2.5 concentrations and exposure generally occur in the valley's urban areas.

"This will be especially helpful to our schools and those individuals who are most sensitive to air pollution" stated Dominici. "Unlike before, now Madera County residents, especially those who live in the more populated areas, will be able to connect to the Internet and know right away what to expect when they step outside."

In addition to providing county residents with real time air quality data, these monitors will also be used by the district's air quality planners and atmospheric scientists in developing long-range air quality plans and in preparing daily pollution forecasts, and will help to more precisely inform the public of pollutant concentrations in Madera County. Data from the monitors is believed to be invaluable, contributing to improvements in Valley air quality. Localized monitoring will also enable more precision in the forecasts for the district's wood burning fireplace program.

The PM monitoring at the new site will supplement existing gaseous pollutant, meteorological, and photochemical assessment monitoring capabilities.

The district plans to begin construction during the 2008-2009 fiscal year, and bring the new monitors fully online by September 2009.

Modesto, Merced breathe a bit easier

Cities move down list of places with worst smog in U.S.

By KEN CARLSON

Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Modesto and Merced still are among the 25 cities in the United States with the most smog. But the brown stuff wasn't as thick from 2004-06, which moved the two cities down the national list.

Modesto went from 13th to 21st on the list, according to the American Lung Association's State of the Air 2008 report, released today. Merced dropped from sixth to 17th.

The Los Angeles area was the smoggiest, followed by Bakersfield, Visalia and Houston. Fresno and Sacramento were fifth and sixth, respectively.

The nation's oldest voluntary health organization issues the report card every year to call attention to the health hazards of breathing dirty air and to let people know which places in the United States have the least pollution.

Air pollution is known to cause serious health effects, especially in children, seniors and people with asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, heart disease and diabetes. Ozone pollution, or smog, has a corrosive effect on the lungs and causes irritation leading to coughing, wheezing and chest pain.

A second type of air pollution consists of soot, ash and chemicals that come from diesel- engine exhausts, residential fireplaces and agricultural burning. Breathing in the tiny particles over time, lungs become clogged like a home air filter that hasn't been cleaned in years, said Dr. Tony Gerber, an association volunteer and pulmonary specialist with the University of California at San Francisco Medical Center.

Cities and counties in California usually dominate the lung association's bad air lists. But there are exceptions. Santa Barbara and the counties of San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Santa Mateo and San Francisco are given credit for having some of the freshest air in the country.

Pittsburgh became the first city outside California to top one of the "most-polluted" lists in the annual report. It overtook Los Angeles as the place with the worst short-term particle pollution.

"We see improvements in some areas of the state, but the levels of ozone and particle pollution in California remain dangerously high," said Gwendolyn Young, board chairwoman of the American Lung Association. "Improvements don't mean the problem is solved."

Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties still received failing grades for smog and pollution caused by tiny soot particles.

According to the report, which looked at data from 2004 to 2006, the air quality in the Sierra foothills depended on where you live. The report gave Tuolumne County a "B" grade for ozone. Calaveras County got an "A" for having particle-free air, but an "F" for smog.

The 2008 report says efforts to clean the air appeared to achieve results in cities in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley. But it says more measures are needed to improve air quality scores in those areas.

On Wednesday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board approved a cleanup plan for the tiniest soot particles, called PM 2.5. The specks are so small that they can pass through the lungs and into the bloodstream, triggering asthma attacks and heart problems.

During a lengthy public hearing, clean air activists urged the board to include tougher measures in the plan, such as restricting truck trips, farm engines and other industrial activities on bad air days.

The board rejected the proposals because of federal laws preventing the restriction of interstate commerce, said district Executive Director Seyed Sadredin.

The plan will tighten fireplace-burning regulations in the next two years, meaning no-burn days probably will triple for Northern San Joaquin Valley residents in average years.

Sadredin said he expects the tighter rules will ban residential wood burning in the Modesto area 10 to 15 days a year. The district usually imposes the wood burning bans on bad-air days from late December through February.

"What we are finding out is that during the worst particulate season, when we look at our (monitoring), about 30 percent of the pollution comes from fireplace smoke," he said.

Another measure will require employers to encourage their employees to telecommute, carpool or use alternative transportation. Employers will be given targets to meet, Sadredin said.

Diesel trucks, over which the district has little authority, are the valley's biggest source of the PM 2.5 pollution. District officials are counting on the state to adopt diesel rules to dramatically reduce the pollution.

The plan forecasts full cleanup of PM 2.5 by 2014.

The Fresno Bee contributed to this report.

Bakersfield not breathing any easier Bakersfield again near top of U.S.'s worst air list

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Bakersfield was again ranked the second smoggiest city in America behind Los Angeles in the annual American Lung Association's State of the Air report released Wednesday.

The city held the same position last year and ranked No. 1 the nation in 2006.

Rankings are based on air quality in major cities from 2004 to 2006.

"We're never going to do well in this ranking," said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "Our air quality is improving but we still have a long way to go and we need everyone's help."

Turner said the good news is that Bakersfield had one of its best smog seasons in decades in 2007, a year not analyzed in the American Lung Association report.

Bakersfield also ranked fourth this year in a separate category for daily levels of particulate matter pollution, which occurs in winter months and is considered the air pollutant most harmful to human health. The city held the same spot last year.

The top five polluted cities list looks about the same as previous years. California cities generally top the list because its geography and climate make them prone to smog.

Candidate Q&A: Becky Maze

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, May 1, 2008

What should the Assembly be doing to ensure a dependable system of budgeting and revenue for the state of California?

A two year budgeting cycle gives more stability to state operations and reduces annual staff time in hearings and developing budgets. Every agency needs to be held accountable through performance or zero based (or a combination) budgeting methodology. California needs to dispose of excess property. There should be an incentive for agencies or departments to NOT spend their entire allotted budget especially in years when things are tight. Maybe an incentive of not cutting the next year's budget might work.

As an Assembly member, what can you do to protect the Valley's water as well as develop new sources?

Existing legal rights (either adjudicated or prescriptive) to water for individuals, associations, or agencies (mutual water companies, etc.) must be protected. There can be exchanges of water for quality purpose but not net quantity loss. There is no "new source" for water except what Mother Nature gives to us. We must be good stewards to make the best use of that quantity thru conservation, water banking and new above ground water storage. California needs a comprehensive water plan for statewide needs.

What is your position on the state's high-speed rail proposal?

Yes I support it. It is much needed in the Valley with the current and projected population. It will be a positive move [to reduce Valley air pollution](#).

What can be done to ensure that lawmakers propose significant legislation and not narrowly defined bills that are hard to enforce?

Any limitation put on types of bills that can be introduced short of the number of bills could be construed as limiting the 1st Amendment Right and limiting the ability of the legislator to represent their constituency. Legislators should evaluate the fiscal cost of the bill and if the legislation is a state mandate.

As an Assembly member, what is your position on reform of the state's prison system?

The prison system needs more accountability in the way the money is spent. What are the real needs and where is the waste? No early release of "low level offenders" (as proposed by the current governor) is acceptable. More Prison Industries Authority (PIA) working with inmates (level one or two) to get them working and being productive. Sheriff Joe in Arizona is a good example of unique ways to keep the prisoners busy. One of his latest ideas was to have the prisoners run the animal shelter and care for the animals.

Partisan politics has proved to be gridlock in Sacramento. What is your solution to this?

Building relationships and helping to educate those in the opposite party is essential. However, because of the overwhelming majority party dominance and their hard line motivation to institute their specific political agenda, there will be no real change until there is more equitable representation. Yet, let's not forget the make-up of the voting population of this state is approximately 43 percent Democrat and 34 percent Republican with an increasing number of

decline-to-state voters. In the assembly, the ratio is 60 percent Democrat vs. 40 percent Republican.

What are your positions on redistricting reform and term limits for legislators?

Redistricting is essential. Since the last redistricting cycle in 2000, no current seat held by either political party has changed even though millions of dollars have been spent on elections. Term limits need to be lengthened. Much history and knowledge has been lost with many excellent legislators being termed out. Prop 140 which established term limits, passed because of the long term control of the then current Speaker of the Assembly. A constitutional Amendment needs to pass limiting the term of leadership served by the majority and minority leaders in the state legislature.

Strong winds cause health concern through Wednesday

BY MARK RIVERA - Staff Reporter

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Gusty winds in the San Joaquin Valley have prompted local air-pollution officials to issue a health cautionary statement from Tuesday through Wednesday evening.

Winds in the Valley may produce areas of blowing dust through Wednesday evening, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control District. Blowing dust can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller, or PM10.

"Winds are creating areas of blowing dust today," said Gary Arcemont, Senior Air Quality Specialist with the district. "Take precautions to protect your health if you are in an area experiencing blowing dust."

Tuesday, wind speed was consistently around 20 mph and reached as high as 30 mph in gusts. Twelve of April's first 28 days had windy conditions. Winds for Wednesday are expected to be from the north-northwest at about 15 mph.

The Turlock Irrigation District reported no power failures or other damage caused by the strong winds Tuesday.

"Typically during wind conditions, the biggest issue we will see is damaged power lines caused by falling debris such as tree limbs," said Jill Gerue, Public Information Specialist with TID.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections, said the district. In people with heart disease, short-term exposure to particle pollution has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmias, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Residents throughout the Valley are advised to use caution through Wednesday evening. 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 should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

The Valley Air District covers eight counties including Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the San Joaquin Valley air basin portion of Kern. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call the nearest District office in Modesto at 557-6400, Fresno at (559) 230-6000, or Bakersfield at (661) 326-6900.

Merced's air is dirty, but news isn't all bad

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, May 01, 2008

Merced County received failing grades Wednesday for its pollution problems -- both in high ozone days and short-term particle pollution.

This report from American Lung Association of California's 2008 State of the Air came as no surprise to local activists, who have long been complaining about air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

"We've been on the 'Top 10' list on these categories for as many years as I've been doing this work," said Mary-Michal Rawling, program manager of the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition. "We're not going to jump off the 'F' list in one year. We live in a polluted air basin."

Merced was one of seven metropolitan areas -- including New York City, Detroit and Chicago -- that landed on two of the three pollution lists.

But some of the news was positive.

The county received a passing grade for its long-term particle pollution. And the city of Merced improved its standing on the list of people at risk in the 25 most ozone-polluted cities.

The city last year was listed as the sixth most polluted for ozone. It fell to 17 this year.

"We do see improvements in some areas of the state, but levels of ozone and particle pollution remain high," said Gwendolyn Young, board chairwoman of the American Lung Association of California. "We have more work to do."

Ozone is a gas that forms when sunlight combines with the burning of sources such as gasoline. Particulate pollution is a mix of tiny solid and liquid particles in the air, which can come from dust and motor vehicle exhaust.

"It's a deadly cocktail that chocks our lungs ... like a clogged home air filter that hasn't been changed in years," said Dr. Tony Gerber, a volunteer with the Lung Association. "Besides threatening health, it also contributes to global warming."

These pollutants can aggravate asthma, heart disease, contribute to strokes and cause premature death.

Lung Association report grades for short-term particle pollution -- measured each day between 2004-2006 -- and ozone pollution are based on the Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index. Long-term particle pollution was measured each year between 2004-2006, and its grading system was based on EPA violations.

Ozone was measured by an eight-hour standard.

Both Merced and Fresno counties saw improvements in their ozone standards this year. But that does not mean the air is clean, said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, senior policy director for the Lung Association.

"On the plus side," she added, "state and local efforts are making a difference. Levels are going down."

She attributed improvements to new engines and stronger emissions-control requirements in the Valley. The weather is also a factor -- summers have been cooler.

"If it's cooler, there's not as much ozone pollution," Rawling said. "We can just keep praying we have nice weather, or we could take some more aggressive measures to make sure (pollution) doesn't continue."

She made this statement from Fresno on Wednesday, where she and other activists awaited the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's decision on its PM-2.5 plan. The district held a hearing to consider passing this plan to fight fine particle pollution.

Clean air activists say its measures to control emissions will not be stringent enough. Controls should be as strong as in Los Angeles County, which has received much attention for its bad air, they say.

Los Angeles remains the top city in the nation for ozone and long-term particle pollution, according to the Lung Association's 2008 report. Pittsburgh, Pa., was at the top of the list for short-term particle pollution -- the first time a city outside of California has taken this ranking.

Fresno is fifth on the list for ozone, followed by Merced in 17th place and Modesto in the 21st ranking. Mariposa, Sacramento and San Francisco counties joined Merced County for an F grade in high ozone days and short-term particle pollution.

Cleaner cities included Santa Barbara, and Alexandria, La., for short-term particle pollution; Redding, and Cheyenne, Wy., for long-term particle pollution; and Salinas and Eugene, Ore., for ozone.

Winds prompt health, fire warnings

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Recent heavy winds have caused Cal Fire and the San Joaquin Valley Air District to send out warnings about health and safety hazards.

The Cal Fire Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit today is suspending hazard reduction open burning permits for Mariposa County. Escaped debris burns in the county have increased because of winds and dry conditions.

The air district on Wednesday sent Valley residents -- including Merced County -- a health warning regarding the dust blowing in strong winds.

The dust can contain unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter that can aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks, acute bronchitis and increase the risk of respiratory infections.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with exposure to unhealthy air quality. Seniors and children should avoid being outside in the dust for long periods of time or doing strenuous activities.

For more information, go to www.valleyair.org or contact the air district office at (209) 557-6400 or (559) 230-6000.

Easier does it

EPA says Valley meets federal air quality standards for coarse-particle pollution

Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Tuesday, April 29, 2008

Emissions vent from machinery at Granite Construction Company site off south Tracy Boulevard. Glenn Moore/Tracy Press

Coarse-particle pollution waned just enough in the Central Valley this past year to meet federal clean-air standards, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Decades of stringent regulations on Valley businesses have helped improve local air quality, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of The San Joaquin County Air Pollution Control District.

San Joaquin County, like most in the Central Valley, is a tough air basin to keep clean, Sadredin said. Surrounded by hills and far enough inland to miss out on those coastal breezes, the Valley is, in some ways, "even worse than Los Angeles," he added.

"Given the geography and stagnant weather conditions, cleaning the air here is tougher than in other places."

Plus, as the state's bread basket, agricultural polluters such as dairies and farms kick up a lot of chemicals and dirt in the air, Sadredin said. Since the early 1980s, the district has imposed

regulations that required businesses to change their fleets, reduce mileage and restrict emissions in any other way possible.

"Basically, it's like leaving no stone unturned," he said.

Being recognized as a district that meets at least one federally mandated clean-air requirement will give the air district leverage to further regulate emissions, Sadredin said.

"Hopefully this will give us more credibility to regulate because people will see that what we have been doing is working," he said.

Central Valley businesses will be required to spend \$20 billion in pollution-cutting measures during the next 10 to 15 years.

"These plans are basically a recipe of commitment to Valley businesses for the next decade of so," he said. "There's no silver bullet to this. It's just across-the-board regulations."

Some of the most effective emissions-cutting measures taken have been to warn people not to burn fires in their fireplaces on certain days and to urge farmers to plot those back-and-forth trips on the field to save gas and kick less dust up in the air, said Don Hunsaker, an air quality specialist from the air district.

"What we've done in the past four years or so has had a tremendous effect," he said.

Next, the district will need to tackle those finer-particle pollutants, Hunsaker said. The Central Valley drastically falls short of meeting federal clean-air requirements for smaller-particle and ozone pollution, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

But just because the Valley met one standard of three, that does not mean any standards will be relaxed, Sadredin stressed.

"This is just one thing," he said. "We still have a lot to do."

Emissions in the Valley have been cut by 80 percent since 1980, he said.

Three Bay Area counties get an F for fine particle pollution Contra Costa, Santa Clara and San Francisco counties get F grade for fine particle pollution

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Air quality in Contra Costa, Santa Clara and San Francisco counties each received an F grade because of high levels of soot and other fine particles on winter nights, the American Lung Association said Wednesday in its annual report on air pollution in America.

Alameda County fared better, getting a C grade in the rating system based on fine particle readings from government monitoring stations from 2004 through 2006.

The Lung Association said motor vehicles and wood fires in fireplaces are partly to blame for the dirty air. Fine particulates can trigger asthma attacks and cause a variety of lung and heart problems, especially among the young, the sick and the elderly.

"When you look at these failing grades, it tells us that particle pollution is a serious health problem for the Bay Area," said Linda Weiner, director of air quality outreach for the American Lung Association of California, a nonprofit advocate for clean air.

The report bolsters a plan by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to ban wood fires in stoves and fireplaces on bad air nights. Wood smoke is responsible for a third or more of the fine airborne particles on cold winter nights, according to air district estimates.

The Lung Association report examined the severity and frequency of air pollution during 24-hour periods that approached or surpassed federal air quality standards.

The nine-county Bay Area ranked as the 16th dirtiest region in the nation for soot, and fifth dirtiest in California, the Lung Association said.

Pittsburgh, Penn., was the dirtiest region in America for fine soot, overtaking Los Angeles.

"Los Angeles has made substantial improvements in bringing down its particulates," Weiner said. "It wasn't so much that Pittsburgh got worse, but L.A. got better."

The Lung Association gave Contra Costa and Alameda counties a C grade for ozone, the pungent ingredient in smog that can irritate eyes, throats and lungs. Santa Clara County received a D grade.

Pittsburgh surpasses Los Angeles as nation's sootiest city

By Noaki Schwartz, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, USA Today and other papers, Thursday, May 01, 2008

LOS ANGELES—A city outside California has for the first time been named the sootiest in the nation, one of the categories the American Lung Association uses to determine the most polluted cities in the country.

Los Angeles still took the all-around pollution title, though.

Pittsburgh overtook Los Angeles in the category that measures short-term particle pollution or soot. Los Angeles, the country's longtime soot and smog leader, has enacted aggressive measures to tackle sources of pollution, resulting in a substantial drop in particle pollution levels, said Janice Nolen, the association's assistant vice president of national policy and advocacy.

"It's not that Pittsburgh has gotten worse; it's that Los Angeles has gotten better," Nolen said. "If the trend continues, Pittsburgh will top two lists, and LA will only be leading the nation in ozone."

Still, Los Angeles held its own in two other categories measuring year-round soot levels and smog. And statewide, 26 of California's 52 counties with air quality monitoring stations got failing grades for having either high ozone days or particle pollution days.

The association's "State of the Air: 2008" report, being released Thursday, was based on air quality measurements reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by state and local agencies between 2004 and 2006. The study looks at three key pollution measures.

The eight metropolitan areas considered to be the nation's most polluted by every measure were Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Fresno, Visalia-Porterfield and Hanford-Corcoran, all in California; Washington-Baltimore; St. Louis; and Birmingham, Ala.

The cleanest cities were Fargo, N.D., and Salinas, Calif.

The rankings were based on ozone pollution levels produced when heat and sunlight come into contact with pollutants from power plants, cars, refineries and other sources. The lung association also studied particle pollution levels emitted from these sources, which are made up of a mix of tiny solid and liquid particles in the air.

The study found that about 42 percent of residents nationwide live in counties with high levels of particle or ozone pollution.

"When you think of the impact of ozone on our respiratory tracts, imagine putting acid right in your eye. It's that corrosive," said Tony Gerber, a pulmonary specialist and assistant professor at the University of California, San Francisco. "This corrosiveness causes severe irritation and leads to problems like asthma attacks, coughing, wheezing, chest pain and even death."

On the Net:

American Lung Association's State of the Air report: <http://www.stateoftheair.org>

Pittsburgh, Los Angeles Have Worst U.S. Air Pollution

By REUTERS

In the N.Y Times, Thursday, May 1, 2008

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Pittsburgh, a former steel-making center once known for its sooty skies, is the worst U.S. city for short-term particle pollution, the American Lung Association announced on Thursday.

It was the first time a city outside California topped any of the association's three lists for different kinds of pollution in its annual "State of the Air" report.

Greater Los Angeles was listed as the worst city for ground-level ozone -- also known as smog -- and year-round particle pollution. Pittsburgh had the second-worst year-round particle pollution, the association said.

The shift occurred because Los Angeles took action to clean up particle pollution, the kind of tiny bits that can be inhaled and lodge in the lungs, the association's Janice Nolen said in a telephone interview.

In Pittsburgh, the biggest source of particle pollution is a steel plant in nearby Clareton, Nolen said. There are plans to reduce that kind of pollution in Pittsburgh, but because the report uses data from 2004 to 2006, those changes are not evident in the current report, she said.

Overall, the report found 42 percent of U.S. residents, or nearly 125 million people, lived in counties with unhealthy levels of either ozone or particle pollution.

"We had seen some real improvement in a lot of areas in the first part of this century, but now we're seeing a leveling-off," Nolen said.

The earlier improvement was due in part to measures put in place to clean air pollution from power plants in the eastern United States, she said.

But other factors are pushing up pollution levels, including more electricity generation and an increase in the distances traveled by polluting vehicles, according to Nolen.

"Those kinds of things can add pollution and can make it harder to clean up the pollution that's already there," she said.

Ozone -- a gas that forms when sunlight reacts with emissions from motor vehicles, factories and power plants -- irritates the respiratory tract and can cause asthma attacks, coughing, wheezing, chest pain and premature death, the report said.

Short-term particle pollution, which affects over 81 million U.S. residents, involves sharp, brief rises in the level of sooty particles in the air, lasting from hours to several days. Those episodes can increase the risk of heart attacks, strokes and emergency-room visits for asthma and cardiovascular disease, and can increase the risk of early death.

Long-term particle pollution involves lower levels of pollution over longer periods of time, which can increase risk of hospitalization for asthma, damage lungs and increase the risk of premature death.

O.C. fails smog tests (again)

American Lung Association says county's ozone and particle pollution among worst.

By Pat Brennan

The Orange County Register, Thursday, May 01, 2008

California still leads the pack with the smoggiest cities in the nation, and Orange County received failing grades for three types of air pollution, the latest report from the American Lung Association says.

But the news isn't all grim. The state saw significant improvement in many areas, including the smoggiest – Los Angeles.

"You've come a long way, and made admirable progress," Janice Nolen of the Lung Association told L.A.-area reporters in a telephone press conference. "But I think you came from farther back. You have farther to go."

The region also received kudos from the association for aggressive smog control efforts, including the state smog check program.

Nationwide, air pollution appears to have leveled off since the advocacy group's last report in 2007. In the ranking of health risk from short-term exposure to fine particle pollution, Pittsburgh surpassed Los Angeles, Long Beach and Riverside for the No. 1 spot, the first time L.A. has been bumped from a top slot since the group began tracking particle pollution in 2004.

L.A., along with Long Beach and Riverside, still topped the lists for long-term particle pollution and ozone, both of which can damage lungs and worsen a variety of diseases.

The Lung Association tallies up statistics from smog monitoring equipment throughout the nation each year, and the new report covers the period from 2004 to 2006 – the most recent available.

Orange County tends to have lower pollution levels because of wind and geography. Most of our smog blows inland.

That didn't stop us, however, from landing high on some of the association's lists. Nationwide, Orange County made No. 14 on the list of the 25 counties with the greatest health risk from short-term exposure to fine particle pollution – that is, less than 24 hours.

Orange County also received failing grades for the number of days during which ozone and particle pollution violated federal air quality standards during the three-year study period.

In fact, since the group began tracking ozone pollution in 2000 and fine particles in 2004, Orange County has received straight Fs in all three categories, except for a "D" period for ozone in 2003 and 2004.

Ozone, cooked up by sunlight when fossil fuels are burned, is one of the most commonly measured pollutants. Fine particles, including soot, ash and dust, are getting more attention these days because they can work their way deep into the lungs.

The Lung Association's report says asthmatics and those with heart and lung disease are especially vulnerable to harmful health effects.

The group called for stepped-up control of ozone pollution, avoiding changes proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency that the group says would weaken the Clean Air Act, and stronger controls on coal-fired power plants, especially in the eastern United States.

The association's picture isn't perfect. The data come only from counties with air pollution monitors, but out of more than 3,000 counties nationwide, only 700 have such monitors. So much of the national map is a blank.

And not everyone sees the same picture. The association disagrees with the federal government on pollution standards – so much so it is suing to make the federal standards more stringent. That often leads to harsher assessments of health risk from the advocacy group than from the agencies that regulate smog.

Perhaps the biggest disconnect will become evident next year, during the Lung Association's next assessment. Federal ozone standards were tightened in March, but it was too late for the association's statistical analysis this time around.

That means the next assessment will probably appear much direr. But much of that will be because of stricter standards, not worsening pollution.

What's that smell? Class action seeks answer

West Berkeley residents demand end to toxic emissions from Pacific Steel facilities

By Doug Oakley

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, May 01, 2008

Rose Evans has lived in West Berkeley for 47 of her 79 years, but only recently did she figure out that the awful smell in the air might be coming from the steel plant down the street.

"Sometimes it smells so bad you start feeling sick, and your eyes start watering," she said. "I didn't know what it was until those people came along and left a flier on my doorstep."

The flier, left by community activists who are fighting Pacific Steel Casting, described the symptoms that she, her late husband, seven children and five grandchildren have experienced over the years: a dry cough, sore throat, itchy skin and a plain, old wretched feeling.

Now Evans is the lead plaintiff in a class-action suit against the company. She has lived two blocks from the plant on Camelia Street for 45 years.

The suit is seeking damages that probably will go "far into the millions," according to Berkeley attorney Timothy Rumberger. It seeks an end to the alleged toxic air emissions the plant puts out. In addition, it offers the company an alternative to fixing the pollution — relocation.

The class action is the fourth pollution-based lawsuit in 18 months the plant has had to answer.

It was sued by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for violating state emissions standards, by a nonprofit called Communities for a Better Environment for violating the federal Clean Air Act, and by nine neighbors who filed small-claims suits.

In all those suits, the plant has come to court-mandated settlements, and the firm has vowed to cut emissions as a result. The small-claims suit, in which neighbors won settlements ranging from \$1,500 to \$5,000, is being appealed.

A spokeswoman for Pacific Steel declined to comment on the current suit.

For its part, the company has invested millions in air filtration devices and even allowed community groups to sift through its scrap metal to weed out potentially dirty pieces that could cause air pollution when they are melted down.

In addition, it pays the city of Berkeley about \$1 million a year in taxes and fees on about \$100 million in yearly sales.

For all that, it continues to foul the air, activists say.

Rumberger said that so far he has more than 100 people who have joined the suit. It is open to anyone who lives downwind of the plant in an area roughly bounded by Second and Page streets, Kains and Marin avenues and Buchanan Street in both Berkeley and Albany.

"The focus of this suit is on the nuisance caused by the tremendous quantities of emissions that are not being contained on their site," Rumberger said.

Rumberger said he is submitting evidence of dangerous heavy metals pollution from Pacific Steel from a number of agencies and groups who have done air sampling around the plant in recent years. Those include: the California Air Resources Board, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Global Community Monitor and Pacific Steel's own health risk assessment that it was ordered to do by the state of California.

"One of the reasons a class-action suit has been delayed is because the science hasn't been there," Rumberger said. "I have to give credit to Global Community Monitor for getting a grant from the air district to do the air testing. Without that science, we didn't have the level of proof to go forward in court, and now we do."

Evans said she was happy to be lead plaintiff in the suit just to get rid of the smell. She has been breathing it for so long now, sometimes she figures she just gets used to it — until she goes somewhere else and breathes some fresh air.

Wilmington oil drilling project faces review

By Kristin Agostoni, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Thursday, May 01, 2008

Los Angeles zoning officials on Friday will conduct a review of a Wilmington oil drilling operation that has spurred complaints about noise, dust and trucks encroaching onto neighborhood streets.

The construction under way at the Warren E&P site on East Anaheim Street also has the attention of Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who said she urged zoning administrators to take another look at the company's permits after concerns last fall reached a "boiling point."

"I heard things (from residents) that really upset me," Hahn said. "I think for all of us, we were a little unaware of the magnitude of this project sitting in a residential area."

Since meeting with residents and company officials late last year, Hahn said Warren E&P has taken steps to curb overnight noise and cut down on the dust that was blowing into nearby homes, and that complaints have dwindled. But the councilwoman said she wants city officials to consider making some of the voluntary changes conditions of approval for ongoing construction.

"I think Warren E&P has been very proactive," Hahn said. "I just want that to be the permanent way they do business in Wilmington."

Friday's hearing before the city zoning administrator begins at 9:30 a.m. at the Wilmington Senior Center, 1371 Eubank Ave.

"We understand there have been concerns, and we always try to respond to peoples' concerns," said Bruce Berwager, the company's general manager. "We hope that the zoning administrator will grant us approval based on the efforts we've done to comply. ... We're not saying there haven't been issues."

The company's plans for slant drilling in Wilmington were approved in 2006 following a review by an associate zoning administrator. Warren proposed eliminating 56 oil derricks dotting the industrial community -- many of which sit next to homes -- and consolidate drilling in an area bordered by Anaheim and Opp streets, Eubank Avenue and Banning Boulevard.

Over the course of 12 years, Warren plans to drill 540 new wells -- 180 in each of the three project phases -- in five 12-foot-wide, 8-foot-deep drilling cellars, planning documents state. Of those, 372 would extract oil from the ground, while 168 would serve as water injectors, which are used to increase pressure and stimulate production.

The plans won praise from community leaders and they still have supporters, although some say they were caught off guard by the construction impacts.

Berwager said much of the dust has been eliminated since crews paved 90 percent of the site with asphalt. But the construction first required installing conduits underground so that oil can be shipped out via pipelines. Additionally, crews were placed on the streets to keep trucks from entering neighborhoods, he said, and street sweepers are circulating the area. Separately, the South Coast Air Quality Management District is spearheading an environmental analysis on the company's proposal to build a closed flaring system and operate microturbines that burn gas extracted from the underground wells and convert it to energy.

The AQMD, which was also called to investigate various complaints, last year issued Warren notices for operating a flare in violation of an existing permit and for failure to properly maintain a wastewater sump, said Mohsen Nazemi, deputy executive officer for engineering and compliance.

Those issues will be reviewed by the AQMD's hearing board, which will also hear an appeal from the group Communities for a Better Environment, which wants the agency to revoke the company's existing flaring permit, Nazemi said.

Jesus Torres, a community organizer for the group, contends residents have observed the open flare burning consistently -- a practice that causes property damage. "They get this oily residue on their cars, on their clothes, on their houses," he said.

After Hahn's office intervened, Torres said residents have watched the company make improvements.

But after conducting more than 60 interviews with nearby residents, Torres said, members of the group believe some people are experiencing health effects from the construction, such as breathing difficulties and elevated stress levels. He said the drilling has also left some residents with cracked windows and flooring.

"People never got a sense of what the project was going to be like," he said.

Others say the work, while a nuisance, will eventually lead to long-term improvements for Wilmington.

Donna Ethington, a resident and member of the Wilmington Neighborhood Council, said Warren has donated land to the community as open space, added landscaping around the construction site and will eliminate the need for trucks to drive into residential neighborhoods to service the old derricks.

"The construction is always disruptive - but when you look at the long-term, and what it's going to do, we can't survive without oil. They're going to remove all of the derricks all throughout the community. That's 56 locations that are right smack next to homes right now."

Warren E&P made headlines in January in connection with four oil spills in the area. The Los Angeles City Attorney's Environmental Justice and Protection Unit filed misdemeanor charges against the company and six employees, including Berwager, stemming from the spills last year.

Air quality in region given mixed reviews

San Diego Union-Tribune, Thursday, May 01, 2008

Air quality in the San Diego metropolitan area got mixed reviews in an annual assessment of air pollution nationwide that was released today by the American Lung Association.

The region is among several that showed decreasing short-term particle pollution, based on the most recent verified data. However, ozone – or smog – pollution in the San Diego area and some other spots increased, compared with the 2007 analysis.

Health advocates said California continues to lead the nation in air quality problems. "We see improvements in some areas of the state, but . . . improvements do not mean the problem is solved," said Gwendolyn Young, board chairwoman of the American Lung Association of California.

Local air quality grades can be viewed by visiting californialung.org and entering a ZIP code. The full report is at stateoftheair.org. Both sites were to be activated today. –M.L.

Sacramento gets 'F' again on air quality

By Ngoc Nguyen

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, May 1, 2008

About half of California's counties received a failing grade for high levels of smog or particle pollution in an annual air-quality report card released today.

The Sacramento region's air quality improved from previous years, but still received a failing grade on the American Lung Association's 2008 State of the Air report card.

Placer and El Dorado counties, which also scored "F's," had more polluted days than Sacramento County, public health officials said. Yolo County went from a "B" to a "C" this year.

Sacramento ranked 6th nationally among the nation's most ozone-polluted cities and 8th among urban areas on short-term (24-hour spikes) exposure to particle pollution - worse than New York City, Detroit and Chicago.

The city's ozone and short-term particle pollution levels worsened from those on last year's report card.

The grades reflect air quality data verified by the federal Environmental Protection Agency from 2004 to 2006.

"Too many people are breathing dirty air in Sacramento," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, policy director of the American Lung Association of California.

At a Wednesday press conference, Holmes-Gen pointed to heavy trucks and cars crossing Tower Bridge and zooming along nearby Interstate 5. Ninety percent of pollution comes from vehicle traffic, she said.

Ozone, or smog, is a gas formed when sunlight reacts with vapors emitted from the burning of fossil fuels. Particle pollution includes soot, ash and diesel exhaust, spewed into the air from the burning of fossil fuels and wood.

Larry Greene of the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District said the county's air quality has improved, but the gains are offset by a growing population and increased vehicle traffic.

Regional air quality managers curbed the burning of wood on days with high air pollution last winter. During the winter, wood burning in fireplaces and stoves accounts for 49 percent of soot and other particle pollution in Sacramento County.

Regional sources of pollution, such as wood or agricultural burning, account of spikes in 24-hour particle pollution, or "hotspots of pollution, said Holmes-Gen.

Efforts to improve air quality need to take into account the day-to-day sources of pollution, such as truck and bus diesel exhaust, along with seasonal source of pollution.

Twenty-four-hour spikes in particle pollution cause acute health effects, such as health attack, stroke, and asthma attacks, and an increase in emergency room visits.

Long-term pollution causes abnormal lung develop in children. Both cause lung damage, Holmes-Gen said.

She said cleaner vehicles and fuels and reduced vehicle traffic - through smarter land-use policies - are needed to clean up the air.

Lung Assn. rates Bay Area's air quality

Sabin Russell, Chronicle Medical Writer
S.F. Chronicle Thursday, May 1, 2008

Like a white-gloved Marine testing Bay Area air for cleanliness, the American Lung Association studied samples for soot and on Wednesday issued a reprimand - failing grades for San Francisco, Contra Costa and Santa Clara counties.

Bay Area air, washed by strong onshore breezes from the Pacific Ocean, is often quite clean. But due to periodic spikes of pollution - during those still air days that allow wood smoke and diesel exhaust to accumulate - the three counties have drawn straight Fs for five years running. Those grades are a measure of the number of days when fine particle pollution reaches unhealthy levels during a 24-hour period.

Alameda County air, on the other hand, is showing slow improvement. It earned only a C for sooty days in the most recent two report cards, but that compares to a D in 2006 and Fs in the two prior years.

"These are mixed results, but we really should be doing better," said Linda Weiner, director of Air Quality Advocacy for the American Lung Association of California.

The air quality report card also rates cities and counties throughout the United States for ozone levels - smog. Although the region fares much better than Los Angeles, the smoggiest city in the nation, Bay Area county ozone scores ranged from an A for San Francisco to Santa Clara's second consecutive D.

"These grades are really important," said Weiner. "Particle pollution and ozone are very bad for your health. Also, ozone and black carbon from soot have a contributory effect to the warming of the planet."

So cleaning up that smog and soot not only is good for your health, but might help slow climate change, she suggested.

Quality of air is as much a function of weather and geography as it is the behavior of those who pollute it. Los Angeles residents burn the same fuels as San Franciscans, but the warmer air stagnates in the bowl west of the San Gabriel Mountains, while strong Pacific Ocean breezes regularly clean the air in much of the Bay Area.

Because those breezes slacken for days on end many times a year, smog levels and particulate pollution in Silicon Valley too often can rival that of Los Angeles, clean air advocates say. And they insist that Bay Area residents need to do more for their own good, and that of their neighbors.

That is why the Bay Area Air Quality Management District has been holding public information sessions on proposed rule changes to limit burning of wood fires during "Spare the Air Nights," said district spokeswoman Lisa Fasano.

"It is incumbent on all of us in the Bay Area to know that we all share the air," she said. "Finer particle pollution lodges deep in the lungs, and it can reach into the bloodstream and effect heart health."

Although the proposal to limit fireplace and woodstove burning met with strong public opposition, Fasano maintains that much of that response was based on a misunderstanding that the proposal was an outright ban. "We'll be asking people not to burn on the seven to 20 nights a year in the winter season when the air is not moving around," she said. "And there will be exemptions for people who have natural gas or wood as their sole source of heat."

The proposal faces another vote by the Air Quality Management District Board, followed by a round of public hearings, before the rule would be implemented.

This year's report card on air quality in the Bay Area is part of a nationwide evaluation by the American Lung Association, which bases its study on local reports submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Bay Area's soot problem has propelled it into the ranks of the worst 25 regions in the country. Last year, it was the 15th worst region in the nation for that category of air pollution. This year, it is 16th, just one notch better than Cleveland.

The American Lung Association's annual report card rates air quality on three major measures: smog, sooty air days, and annual levels of particle pollution. The grades reported this year actually represent a rolling average for pollution levels measured in 2004 through 2006. It takes

time to gather and analyze the information, and an average is used so that one usual weather year does not skew the results.

Janice Nolen, vice president for national policy and advocacy at the association, said 125 million Americans live in areas with unhealthful levels of air pollutants - counties that earned at least one F.

One in 10 Americans - 30 million - live in the 18 counties nationwide that earned failing grades on all three measures. "Straight Fs," said Nolen. "Their air is dangerous to breathe."

Region's Air Still a Problem, Study Finds To Further Reduce Pollution, Residents Urged to Drive Less, Conserve Power

By David A. Fahrenthold, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post Thursday, May 1, 2008

The Washington-Baltimore region still has one of the worst air pollution problems in the country, ranking among the top 10 metropolitan areas for smog and soot, according to a report from the [American Lung Association](#).

The association's "State of the Air" report, to be released today, says air in this region remains contaminated by pollution that burns lung tissue and seeds it with harmful microscopic flecks. The Washington-Baltimore area was one of eight regions ranked among the worst 25 in three measures of pollution.

In the Washington area, officials say, the air is actually getting cleaner, resulting in fewer Code Orange and Code Red days than a decade ago. But experts say residents still aren't doing enough to reduce air pollution from the region's two largest sources of contamination: power plants and automobiles.

The region "has serious pollution problems, any way you look at it," said Janice Nolen, a spokeswoman for the lung association. "We've improved air quality, but we have a long way to go."

The Washington-Baltimore region has repeatedly appeared on the lung association's list of areas with bad air. The region's problems are not entirely homegrown: Some pollutants waft out of smokestacks in the [Ohio River](#) Valley and then drift here on westerly winds.

But the region's power plants and autos are still a main source for two kinds of harmful pollution: ground-level ozone and soot.

Ground-level ozone, or smog, is an irritant that forms when sunlight heats up a mixture of chemicals found in automobile exhaust and power plant smoke.

"Think of getting a bad sunburn on the surface of your lung," said Norman Edelman, chief medical officer at the lung association, in a conference call with reporters. "This process wreaks havoc on people who have preexisting lung disease."

Soot is made up of particles just microns wide. The lung association says those particles, also emitted by burning fossil fuels, can lodge in the lungs and even pass into the bloodstream.

Both kinds of pollution seem to be getting better here. Records kept by the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments](#) show Washington area soot levels have dropped since 2000. The number of days with unhealthy ozone levels fell from 48 in 1998 to 15 last year.

Local officials attributed the improvements, in part, to new filters on power plant smokestacks and the increased use of gas-electric hybrid cars by local governments. The study seemed to show that the Washington area was doing better than the Baltimore area: The city of Baltimore had the highest levels of soot in the region, and [Harford County](#), north of the city, had the highest ozone levels.

But officials said Washington area residents should pay attention to Code Orange and Code Red warnings and avoid exercising outside on days with unhealthy air. Already this month, the area has had two Code Orange days, when the air was considered unfit for people with existing health problems.

To improve the situation, officials said Washington area residents must learn to drive less and conserve electricity.

"We need to do more," said Joan Rohlf, an official who works on air quality at COG. "We have to keep working on this."

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 1, 2008:](#)

Move to local foods to save energy, clean up air

Living in the Valley, we are really privileged to have a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in what amounts to our own back yard. The San Joaquin Valley is one of the biggest agricultural suppliers in the world when it comes to grapes, oranges and almonds. Despite this statistic, most of our fruits and vegetables come from elsewhere. Whatever happened to the good, old fruit stands? It seems today that there are far fewer fruit

stands than when I was growing up.

One important factor that would arise from buying local foods is the amount of materials that would be spared. This would help our global-warming problems. Another key factor is that we would also start to improve air quality. One out of every five children will develop some type of asthma, due to living in the Valley.

With more fruit stands, we would cut down the many thousands of trucks that drive in and out of Fresno each and every day. It's time we start looking ahead, and find new ways to go green.

Michael Mendrin, Fresno

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Thursday, May 1, 2008](#)

Voucher program for lawn mowers needs fertilizer

It's obnoxiously loud, cantankerous, invariably messy, and each moment it's running, more lung-poisoning toxins are spewing into the air. So why would anyone want to keep using a gas-powered lawn mower?

Many would rather not -- especially if they can get a deal on something better. Over the past seven years, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board has been enticing people to trade in gas mowers by offering discounts on electric versions. It's a great gimmick and it's worked well, removing 6,057 of the little polluters since 2001. It's estimated that each gas mower puts about 87 pounds of carbon dioxide into the air each summer, meaning this summer alone the district will have prevented 527,000 pounds of the deadly gas from entering our air.

And that doesn't count any incidental help in keeping our water clean, because it's estimated that 17 million gallons of gas is spilled each year during refueling.

The 1,100 vouchers for this year cost \$148,500. Of that, Pacific Gas & Electric, four counties (Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Tulare) and Valley Clean Air Now contributed \$55,000. High-fives to all. The rest came involuntarily from "fees" collected from those who violated district air regulations.

The board started giving away vouchers on Earth Day, April 22. All 1,100 were gone within 36 hours. Each recipient has until May 31 to use his or her voucher, or someone on the waiting list will get it. In the past, being on the waiting list has paid off.

Even with a voucher, the Neuton mower will cost \$150 and your gas-powered trade-in, which must be dropped off at a recycling center. The new mower will be delivered.

Anthony Presto works in the air board's Modesto office and has coordinated this program since 2003. He said he is already making plans to improve it next year. We have a couple of suggestions.

First, the program isn't nearly big enough. In Tuesday's Bee, reporter J.N. Sbranti wrote that 83,000 new homes were built in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties alone over the past eight years. The 6,057 mowers spread from Bakersfield to Stockton were only a grass blade in the clipping bin. By comparison, the South Coast Air Quality Management District gave away 4,000 mowers last year and will give away even more this year. Our air is worse, so we need more mowers.

And though it sounds petty, some people resent paying full price for an electric mower when a few lucky neighbors get discounts. There ought to be a way for more people to participate. The air board wants more people to help in cleaning up the air, so let them. Expand this good program.

[In News & Notes Opinion in Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 1, 2008:](#)

News & Notes

Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 1, 2008

Air board advisory

Dirty air caused primarily by wind-whipped dust has prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health cautionary statement. The board suggests that all people limit prolonged exposure, strenuous activity or heavy exertion. Those with heart or lung diseases are advised to follow doctors' advice for dealing with poor air quality.

Get burn permits

Starting today, burn permits are required within Tuolumne and Calaveras counties, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection announced. Burning hours are 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. on permissive burn days. The combination of low fuel moistures and high winds generally leads to an increase of escaped debris burns. If dry conditions continue without relief, the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit will suspend burning within Tuolumne, Calaveras, eastern Stanislaus, and eastern San Joaquin counties by May 12, Cal Fire said. Before starting a debris fire, check burn day status by calling the local Air Pollution Control District with jurisdiction over your area.

Calaveras County, 754-6600

Tuolumne County, 533-5598

San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, 877-429-2876

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses tips that will help young children learn about how to be environmentally friendly. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Consejos para ayudar a los niños a cuidar el medio ambiente a una edad

El Observador, Thursday, May 1, 2008

"Al enseñar a nuestros niños a proteger el medio ambiente ayudará a reducir nuestra contribución al calentamiento global también ayudará a mejorar la salud y el bienestar de

nuestros niños en general", dijo Kris Perry, Directora Ejecutiva de Primero 5 California Perry ofrece a las familias los siguientes "10 Consejos Verdes" para enseñar a los niños a cuidar de su salud y la salud del planeta:

1. No Jueguen Mientras se Cepillan los Dientes: Enséñele a los niños a que cierren la llave del agua durante los dos minutos de tiempo que recomiendan los dentistas para cepillarse los dientes.
2. A Caminar: En lugar de irse en el auto, ¡caminen! Al caminar no sólo ayudarán a reducir la contaminación, sino que proveerá la oportunidad de hacer ejercicio para usted y su familia.
3. Lo Fresco es lo Mejor: Lleve a su hijo de edad preescolar a un mercado de frutas y verduras al aire libre y enséñele cómo elegir las frutas y verduras de la temporada para que disfruten de bocadillos saludables. Un mercado de frutas y verduras al aire libre es ecológico porque ofrece frutas y verduras frescas que no han sido transportadas desde muy lejos, y no están empaquetadas. ¡No se olvide de llevar una bolsa reciclable para llevar sus comestibles a casa!
4. Apaguen las Luces: Dígale a los niños que apaguen las luces al salir de la habitación y habrán las cortinas y persianas para dejar entrar la luz natural del sol. Apagar las luces ayuda a conservar la energía y reducir el costo en su factura de electricidad.
5. Recicle Una y Otra Vez: Enséñele a sus hijos el valor del reciclaje - el periódico, las revistas y el correo son sólo el comienzo. Incluso puede convertir esto en una actividad divertida y hacer un collage de fotos de periódicos y revistas.
6. La Jardinería es Divertida: A la mayoría de los niños les gusta jugar en la tierra. Convierta esto en una experiencia de jardinería divertida y siembren plantas y hierbas - solo necesita una pequeña caja de cartón. Lo que es aun mejor, las plantas ayudan a limpiar el aire en su hogar.
7. Jueguen al Aire Libre: Jueguen en familia al aire libre. Jueguen a la pelota o corran en vez de jugar con los juguetes electrónicos.
8. Ponga en Práctica su Talento: Saque al artista que lleva dentro y haga artesanías de objetos que tenía planeado tirar. Haga juguetes caseros de madera o hágalos ropa nueva a los muñecos de sus hijos de ropa vieja o sabanas.
9. Dígale No al Agua Embotellada: Es importante que los niños beban mucha agua diariamente. Para disminuir la basura, absténganse de comprar agua embotellada. Por el contrario, enséñele a su hijo cómo llenar de agua las botellas reutilizables y termos con agua filtrada de la llave.
10. Convierta los Quehaceres del Hogar en Actividades Divertidas: Los niños son científicos por naturaleza y les encanta experimentar con diferentes cosas, por lo tanto, muéstreles cómo mezclar el vinagre con el bicarbonato para crear un limpiador casero natural. No sólo se va a deshacer de las toxinas insalubres que contienen los productos de limpieza para el hogar, sino que convertirá una actividad de limpieza en un juego divertido para su hijo. ?