

Blustery weather expected to continue most of today in Valley

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, April 15, 2009

Tuesday's blustery weather will stick around for most of the day today.

A strong dry storm hit the Valley Tuesday, with gusts of more than 40 mph, making driving difficult over the Grapevine and Pacheco passes and along Highway 99.

Blowing dust can also irritate heart and lung problems, prompting a warning from Tulare County health officials to limit outdoor activity.

Valley affected

The wind storm downed trees around Visalia, hampered firefighting efforts in Porterville and blocked roadways in western Kings and Fresno counties.

By midafternoon Tuesday, weather stations were already recording gusts of up to 53 mph in Tulare and 46 mph in Visalia.

In Kings County, off-ramps at Highway 198 and the Avenal cutoff were closed Tuesday afternoon from blowing dust.

To the southwest along Highway 5, visibility was down to 500 feet, the California Highway Patrol said.

Dust also reduced visibility along Highway 99 south of Kingsburg near Traver Tuesday afternoon.

Scott Borgioli, the chief meteorologist with Weather Ag.com, said rush-hour traffic on Tuesday was met with a constant 30 mph wind.

"But it's hit and miss with the blowing dust," he said.

Today, the winds will die down around sunset, with a warming trend taking over for the rest of the week. By Thursday the mercury will rise to the mid-70s, the National Weather Service reported. Temperatures will remain below normal overnight, dipping into the 30s tonight. By this weekend, the temperatures should be in the mid-80s.

Health Tips:

- Avoid outdoor activity.
- Avoid vigorous exercise, especially if you have asthma, or a breathing-related condition.
- Stay indoors as much as possible, with windows and doors closed.

Driving Safety Tips:

- Visibility deteriorates very quickly during a dust storm.
- Be prepared to pull off the road if visibility deteriorates.
- Switch the air conditioning intake to "recirculate."

Source: Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency

High winds expected throughout Valley

By Jim Guy

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, April 15, 2009

A wind advisory for the eastern half of the central San Joaquin Valley continues today from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., the National Weather Service said.

Drivers also are warned to watch for blowing dust and strong winds on Valley's west side and for high winds in the Kern County mountains and deserts.

Northwest winds of 15 mph to 35 mph are likely into the early evening. The winds are expected to die down around sunset.

Today's air quality is expected to be moderate throughout the Valley.

Dust storms predicted across San Joaquin Valley

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, April 14, 2009

FRESNO, Calif.—The National Weather Service is predicting that wind gusts of up to 54 mph could create dust storms across the San Joaquin Valley Tuesday.

Sustained winds could be in the 20-to-40 mph range, weather forecasters predicted.

Drivers on the west side of the Valley should be aware of the potential danger into the evening.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says the particulate pollution that will be kicked up could cause health problems, including asthma attacks and bronchitis, in people with compromised respiratory systems.

The Weather Service predicts the winds will last through Wednesday.

Global warming could impact local ag industry

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Kings County's \$1.7 billion-a-year ag industry could be in for tough times, if predictions in a recent University of California climate change report come true. The report on global warming, announced last week, forecasts reduced snowpacks, less water available for agriculture, saturation of the air with carbon dioxide, more fertilizers needed to keep plants alive and worsening problems with insect pests.

For Kings County's valuable tree fruit crops -- pistachios, almonds and stone fruit -- the report predicts fewer chilling hours in the winter, leading to lower yields.

Tree crops need a certain number of cold hours in the winter months in order for the fruit to "set."

Warming temps may also help transform the San Joaquin Valley into more of a desert than it already is.

The effect could push the effective range of some crops further north, said Steve Jackson, a tree grower in southwestern Kings County.

Jackson said that fewer chill hours in the winter will result in less predictability about the amount of fruit and nut production each year.

"I hope it is not as much as the prediction says," Jackson said.

Global warming could also lead to more restrictive rules for dairies, which have been regulated for air pollution since 2004.

They will face more scrutiny under California's landmark greenhouse gas-reduction law, passed in 2006.

UC Davis researchers suggest that changes in feed mixture and extending the lifespan of milk cows could help cut greenhouse gas emissions from dairies, most of which come from cows chewing their cud and belching.

Still, Kings County farmers and agricultural officials declined to panic.

"Really all that we can say is that farmers would have to adapt, like with any other issue," said Diana Peck, Kings County Farm Bureau executive director.

Peck noted the increasing water conservation in recent years. Valley farmers have managed to boost productivity with less irrigation water.

"I think that's just evident, that farmers are adaptable," Peck said.

But the scientists involved in the report suggested that there will be major hurdles to overcome.

One prediction is that more and more precipitation will fall as rain, overwhelming reservoirs and forcing water to be released at times when agriculture can't use it.

At least two local growers, after reading the report, argued that it makes a good case for building more reservoir capacity.

"We've got to capture as much and retain as much water as we can, whether it be for agriculture or for population," said Steve Nash, a Selma dairy owner.

"If their projections are correct and the climate is indeed warming, then this report makes the best argument I know of in favor of building water storage, reducing regulatory barriers on agriculture and investing in genetic technology," said Dino Giacomazzi, a dairy operator near Hanford.

He also argued that if the government starts regulating greenhouse gas emissions more heavily -- as California is expected to do under landmark legislation passed in 2006 -- farmers should get credit for growing crops because they remove carbon dioxide from the air.

Carbon dioxide is a leading greenhouse gas said to be contributing to global warming.

Like Peck, Giacomazzi expressed confidence in the ability of Valley growers to adapt to whatever comes down the pike.

"California farmers are the most advanced and innovative in the world. They have and will continue to adapt to changes in markets and government regulations, and will adapt in the future even if that change comes from the sun," he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Environmental groups to seek congressional help on clean-truck program Clean-air advocates will ask lawmakers for help in revising laws after a federal court ruled many of the provisions of the port cleanup plan unconstitutional.

By Louis Sahagun and Ronald D. White
L.A. Times, Wednesday, April 15, 2009

Only a month ago, officials at the nation's busiest port complex believed the landmark clean-truck program -- a \$1.8-billion strategy to slash toxic diesel emissions by phasing out 17,000 old, dirty big rigs -- had survived its toughest challenges and was on its way to becoming a model for green growth.

But many of the program's key provisions were declared unconstitutional by a federal appeals court.

The ruling stunned a coalition of backers led by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Now, a week before a federal trial that will determine whether those provisions can be implemented, coalition leaders said they planned to seek congressional action -- regardless of what happens in court -- from potentially sympathetic lawmakers.

"If we lose the provisions, there won't be much of a clean-trucks program left," said Melissa Lin Perrella, a spokeswoman for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "So, Plan B is looking at legislative options."

Nick Wiener, a campaign coordinator for Change to Win, a Washington-based labor organization, agreed.

"We need to talk to our friends in Congress and see what our options are," he said. "We've come this far, and we are not going to give up because there are crummy laws."

The coalition has yet to meet with any member of Congress on the matter.

But options under consideration include seeking an amendment to the Federal Aviation Administration Act, which prohibits governments from regulating price, route or service of a motor carrier.

The American Trucking Assn. cited that federal law in its request for an injunction halting implementation of the clean-truck program provisions.

Of particular concern is a new rule at the Port of Los Angeles that prohibits drivers from being independent contractors, a provision sought by Villaraigosa and the Teamsters.

The rule was designed to place the burden of buying and maintaining the new trucks on companies instead of low-paid drivers.

But some maritime experts think the efforts of environmentalists, union leaders and the Port of Los Angeles went too far in demanding concessions that force companies to employ the formerly independent owner operators.

"They tried to unionize the system, basically," said Asaf Ashar, a research professor with the National Ports and Waterways Institute's Washington, D.C., office, which is affiliated with the University of New Orleans.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals urged U.S. District Judge Christina Snyder to grant the trucking association's request for an injunction halting implementation of that provision and others.

Snyder is expected to rule on the request April 27.

Meanwhile, the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and their smaller northern neighbor Port Hueneme on Tuesday became the last three ports in the nation to enforce a new ID card that everyone in the U.S. who has port business must show in order to get to work.

Port officials said the implementation of the federal Worker Identification Cards was launched smoothly, with cargo moving without delays.

David Freeman, president of the Los Angeles Board of Harbor Commissioners, offered a similar assessment of the 2-year-old clean-truck program, which he said was "far exceeding expectations."

He declined to comment on talk of seeking help from Congress to preserve the controversial provisions.

As for the impending court trial, he said: "Sure, we're concerned about possible injunctions on certain features of the program. But the heart of the program, which is to clean up the air, is already a roaring success."

Industry's approval of stadium complex challenged

L.A. Daily News, Wednesday, April 15, 2009

The city of Walnut filed court papers today challenging the City of Industry's approval of a stadium complex.

The petition filed in Los Angeles Superior Court alleges the project, which would be built near the interchange of the Pomona (60) and Orange (57) freeways, was given the green light without an adequate environmental impact report.

Industry city officials hope to lure a National Football League team to the site.

As approved, the stadium would exacerbate unhealthy air quality and traffic congestion in the region while diminishing the quality of life in Walnut, according to the complaint.

Industry City Manager Kevin Radecki was not immediately available for comment on the petition, which also names Majestic Realty Co. and its president, Edward Roski Jr., as defendants.

Project proponents maintain a stadium would spur economic growth in the region, while Walnut city officials maintain that their community and others, including Diamond Bar, would have to endure significantly more traffic, noise and air pollution.

The project would also force Walnut to pay more to provide traffic improvements, fire service and police protection, according to the city's petition challenging the adequacy of the EIR.

Study: Spammers scourge to inbox and environment

By Jordan Robinson - AP Technology Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, April 15, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO -- There are plenty of reasons to hate spammers. Add this to the list: They're environmentally unfriendly.

A report being released Wednesday by security company McAfee Inc. finds that spammers are a scourge to your inbox and the environment, generating an astounding 62 trillion junk e-mails in 2008 that wasted enough electricity to power 2.4 million U.S. homes for a year.

The "Carbon Footprint of E-mail Spam Report" estimated the computational power needed to process spam - from criminals tapping their armies of infected PCs to send it, Internet providers transmitting it, and end users viewing and deleting it.

The report concluded that the electricity needed to process a single spam message results in 0.3 grams of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere - the equivalent of driving 3 feet in a car.

"While the spam that arrives in any individual's inbox may create just a small puff of (carbon dioxide), the puff multiplied by millions of users worldwide adds up," McAfee wrote. McAfee relied on data generated by energy and environmental consultancy ICF International Inc. to reach its greenhouse gas estimates.

The report found that almost 80 percent of spam's greenhouse emissions come from the energy that PCs consume while users are viewing, deleting, or sifting through spam looking for legitimate messages.

McAfee says it takes users about three seconds to view and delete a spam message. Although most spam doesn't get through because of sophisticated spam filters, people spend a lot of time - 100 billion user-hours per year - dealing with the messages that do land in inboxes, McAfee estimates.

The findings are significant because most e-mail is spam. The latest figures from Microsoft Corp. show that unwanted messages account for 97 percent of all e-mail.

There is one area, however, where spammers might claim the environmental high ground.

Spammers need to limit the size of their attachments to evade detection, so their messages wind up consuming much less energy than legitimate e-mail. McAfee's report estimates that the emissions from processing a single piece of legitimate e-mail are around 4 grams of carbon dioxide - 13 times spam's emissions - because users linger on them longer and attach bigger files.

PROMISES, PROMISES: Plug-in cars goal hard to hit

By Ken Thomas - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, April 15, 2009

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama's campaign pledge to put 1 million plug-in hybrid cars on the road by 2015 is fraught with difficulties, from technical and engineering hurdles to the realities of the economy and the price of gasoline.

It took eight long years to get 1 million hybrids on the road in the United States, and even a White House task force says one of the leading new plug-in cars being developed is too expensive to gain popularity any time soon.

Obama's goal could help revitalize the struggling U.S. auto industry and begin shifting motorists away from the gas pump. But to many, it's overly optimistic.

In this March 19, 2008 file photo, a Chevy Volt is on display during the Chevrolet news conference at the New York International Auto Show in New York. President Barack Obama's promise to put a million plug-in hybrid cars on the road by 2015 is fraught with problems, from engineering hurdles to the realities of the auto market and the economy.

"The economics won't make sense for the majority of Americans in the next several years," said Brett Smith, who studies plug-in hybrids at the Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Center for Automotive Research.

Plug-in hybrids allow motorists to drive a limited number of miles on battery power before the engine switches over to run on gasoline or other fuels. A driver can plug the car into a conventional wall outlet at night and be ready to go electric again in the morning.

The cars could dramatically reduce gasoline use because many commuters drive less than 40 miles a day.

Obama last month toured a California electric car facility where he announced \$2.4 billion to develop advanced batteries and electric cars. The administration has said the vehicles would play a role in its goal to reduce dependence on foreign oil, cut greenhouse gas emissions and create "green" jobs.

"Even as our American automakers are undergoing some painful adjustments, they are also retooling and reimagining themselves into an industry that can compete and win," Obama said in Pomona, Calif.

During his campaign, Obama promised \$4 billion in tax credits to automakers to revamp their plants to build plug-ins, and a \$7,000 tax credit for consumers who buy early versions of the cars. He even pledged to convert the White House vehicle fleet to plug-ins within a year, as security permits, and require half of the cars bought by the government to be plug-in or all electric by 2012.

To automakers, battery makers and utilities, the pledge was akin to one made by President John F. Kennedy generations ago. "That's a 'Go to the moon' kind of goal," said Nancy Gioia, Ford's director of hybrid vehicle programs. She said it would demand "unparalleled collaboration" among the government, the industry and academia.

Automakers are already committed to plug-ins and electric vehicles. Toyota Motor Corp. will produce a few hundred plug-in Prius hybrids later this year as a test fleet, General Motors Corp. plans to release an extended range electric plug-in called the Chevrolet Volt in limited numbers in

late 2010, and Nissan Motor Co. is planning to sell an all-electric car next year. Chrysler LLC, Ford Motor Co. and Daimler AG are all developing plug-ins and electric cars.

But numerous questions remain about the cars. One of the biggest hurdles is whether their large lithium ion batteries are ready for mass production. Some analysts have pegged the cost of the batteries at \$1,000 per kilowatt hour, which could add about \$16,000 to the cost of a first-generation Volt and thousands of dollars to a plug-in Prius.

Lithium ion batteries have been used commonly in cell phones and laptop computers, but the auto industry needs to ensure that the batteries will remain long-lasting and safe. Automakers have partnered with utilities and universities to develop recharging stations and a common way of communicating between the vehicles and the electric grid.

None of the major automakers has made a firm commitment on the mass production of plug-ins - building 100,000 vehicles a year or more - that would be required to meet Obama's goal.

"It certainly is a difficult challenge to achieve that goal," said Tony Posawatz, GM's vehicle line director for the Volt. GM has not released production figures for the Volt, but Posawatz estimated it would be in the "tens of thousands" of vehicles by 2015.

"It's not readily obvious, based on the product plans that have been communicated, that the 2015 objective aligns with what is currently on the books," he said.

Conventional gas-electric hybrids account for less than 3 percent of the car market and it took about eight years to get 1 million hybrids on the road in the United States, according to automotive consulting firm R.L. Polk & Co.

Obama's own auto industry task force, which is trying to help GM and Chrysler emerge from the crisis that left them needing \$17.4 billion in government loans, casts doubt on the Volt in a March 30 report which says while the car "holds promise, it will likely be too expensive to be commercially successful in the short term." GM has not announced pricing for the Volt, but it's expected to cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

Current fuel prices also are an issue; \$2-a-gallon gas gives consumers few incentives to spend thousands of dollars extra for a hybrid or even more for a plug-in. It would take years for the fuel savings to outweigh the price premium.

The industry will also need a smooth transition for plug-ins to take off. Any hiccups along the way could hurt the vehicles' image.

"They've got to be commercial-ready," said Tom Stricker, Toyota's director of technical and regulatory affairs. "You do risk having a negative response from the consumer if the technology doesn't meet their expectation in terms of durability, cost and performance."

[MediaNews editorial in the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, April 15, 2009:](#)

Port of Oakland must get serious about cleaning the air

The Port of Oakland commissioners, after more than two years in the making, adopted a master plan for reducing the toxic pollution the port creates in a variety of ways. But at a time when residents of neighboring communities continue to become ill and die from the port's bad air, the commissioners ushered out a weak report that barely addresses the tough issues.

Years after numerous calls — ranging from residents to the state air board — for the Port of Oakland to cut emissions, what the commissioners gave us in response was a poor effort.

The report outlines a number of goals the port wants to reach, but there are no solid commitments as to how these goals will be achieved. And a decision on the worst polluters of them all — diesel emissions from trucks, ships and trains — has been put off.

Examples appear throughout the executive summary of the Maritime Air Quality Improvement Plan where the term "goals" appears several times, a clever disguise so port commissioners aren't on the hook for failing to reach commitments.

The summary delineates the role the port — with a collaboration of agencies, tenants, business and community stakeholders — "will play in achieving the plan's air emissions and health risk reduction goals."

For on or near shore the port sets a "goal" of reducing diesel particulate matter that causes cancer by 85 percent, a reduction of 85 percent of sulfur oxides, and 34 percent oxides of nitrogen between 2005 and 2020. "Goals" are also made for offshore emissions. But port commissioners are vague about how they will reach these goals and offer no clear-cut course. The port plans, for example, to combat diesel particulate matter and nitrogen through pilot projects and says there will be further monitoring and reporting.

Thankfully, the board commissioners put \$5 million back in the mix to fund grants for trucks to install diesel soot filters. It is money that they should have never taken off the table in November (citing the poor economy).

Other than that, all this plan does is to buy more time for port tenants, ships and trucks as the air gets worse. The health impacts from truck pollution alone is \$153 million a year, with 18 premature deaths annually.

The pollution problem is greatest in West Oakland, which registers scores of asthma and bronchitis cases. But other areas of Contra Costa and Alameda counties are being affected. We have to change course immediately.

Goals are not enough. The Port of Oakland commissioners need a clear-cut plan to cut emissions by 2020.

Like ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach, the Oakland port commissioners must enact container fees so freight owners can bear the cost.

Port commissioners need to get serious and clean up the air.