

Fresno fined for diesel breach

By Paula Lloyd and George Hostetter
Fresno Bee, Wednesday, August 19 2009

State air regulators have fined the city of Fresno \$49,500 for violating California diesel emission regulations. As part of a settlement, the city has agreed to spend up to \$1 million to buy as many as 20 cleaner off-road diesel vehicles by March 2011.

The state's Air Resources Board said last week that the city had not been testing, measuring, recording and maintaining records on emissions from its diesel fleet.

The settlement requires the city to send workers who inspect the fleet to diesel education courses, to upgrade its recordkeeping and submit inspection records to the Air Resources Board for the next four years.

City officials "went through extraordinary steps" to resolve the violations and work on a settlement to reduce emissions, air board chairwoman Mary D. Nichols said in a statement.

Fresno Assistant City Manager Bruce Rudd said city employees had retrofitted diesel vehicles with devices that eliminated exhaust smoke. Since there was no smoke, Rudd said, the employees assumed there was no need to conduct smoke tests.

Rudd said the city settled to avoid higher legal costs. He said that the city retrofitted the diesel vehicles before it was legally required to do so.

The city had already budgeted funds to modernize its vehicle fleet, Rudd said, and the settlement will merely accelerate those purchases.

Diesel exhaust is a source of fine particulate matter, which can lodge deep in the lungs and increase the risk of asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory diseases.

Calif. regulators fine Fresno for diesel fleet

The Associated Press
In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, August 18, 2009

FRESNO, Calif. -- California air regulators have fined the city of Fresno nearly \$50,000 for failing to measure emissions from about 190 diesel tractors, garbage trucks and other heavy-duty trucks.

As part of a settlement announced Tuesday, the California Air Resources Board also ordered the city to spend up to \$1 million to buy new, cleaner vehicles.

Regulators said city employees failed to test, measure, record, and maintain records for their on-road fleet's diesel emissions from 2006 to 2007.

Most of the vehicles that were not tested were retrofitted with exhaust-capturing devices, which led technicians to believe they did not need to monitor emissions, Assistant City Manager Bruce Rudd said.

As part of the settlement, city officials also pledged to improve record keeping, train employees and retire up to 20 off-road vehicles by 2011.

Diesel exhaust is a major source of fine particulate matter, which sinks deep into the lungs and is closely linked to respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

8 airlines to use renewable synthetic diesel for ground equipment

Rentech Inc. of L.A. will sell as much as 1.5 million gallons each year of its RenDiesel fuel to Alaska, American, Continental, Delta, Southwest Airlines, United, UPS Airlines and US Airways.

By Tiffany Hsu

L.A. Times, Wednesday, August 19, 2009

Eight major airlines have agreed to use renewable synthetic diesel fuel for their ground service equipment at Los Angeles International Airport starting in 2012.

Rentech Inc. of Los Angeles will sell as much as 1.5 million gallons a year of its RenDiesel fuel to Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Southwest Airlines, United Airlines, UPS Airlines and US Airways.

The airlines are all members of the Air Transport Assn. of America Inc., which announced the deal Tuesday along with Rentech. Financial details weren't disclosed.

"This is a real milestone for the company and a real milestone for the airlines that promotes getting alternative fuels off the ground," said Rentech Chief Executive D. Hunt Ramsbottom. "This offers a secure, domestic supply that will take the volatility out of their prices . . . and it's clean."

The company plans to start operations at a plant in Rialto in late 2012 and will then begin sending fuel to Aircraft Service International Group, which will dispense the fuel to airlines for their luggage carts, food trucks and other operations.

The diesel will be produced from "green" waste such as yard clippings and will have minimal greenhouse gas emissions and a small carbon footprint, Rentech said.

The company also has a \$90-million plant in Colorado making small quantities of synthetic jet and diesel fuel and a larger project in development in Mississippi that would produce as much as 30,000 barrels a day of the fuels to operate aircraft.

"That's really the issue the airlines are looking for," Ramsbottom said.

Tuesday's LAX deal is a positive development for notoriously polluting airlines and airports, said V. John White, executive director of the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies in Sacramento.

"It's a result of the signal that's being sent to the market by the volatility and steady increase of oil prices mixed with the need to take action on climate change," he said.

The renewable-diesel model could be easier for airlines to adopt than other clean energies because it can be used with existing infrastructure, White said. But in some cases, biodiesels have actually caused higher emissions of smog-creating oxides and nitrogen.

"We can't have that trade-off of increased air pollution for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions," he said. "We need to have reductions in both."

Rentech is looking into expanding its diesel business to other airports. Executives said several other airlines intended to either buy fuel from the company or join the agreement.

**'The Clunkers of the Power-Plant World'
Old Coal-Fired Facilities Could Escape New Rules**

By Kari Lydersen

Washington Post Monday, August 17, 2009

CHICAGO -- The twin smokestacks of the 85-year-old Crawford Generating Station are a familiar backdrop in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago. It's a largely Mexican immigrant community where children play in the street, families congregate on stoops and pushcart vendors sell corn cobs within blocks of the plant and its large coal pile.

Six miles away in another crowded neighborhood sits a second plant, the Fisk Generating Station, built in 1903.

They are among the nation's fleet of aging coal-fired power plants, a handful of them in the heart of urban areas, including Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee and Alexandria, where the Potomac River Generating Station has long stirred controversy.

Many public health and environmental advocates say too little attention has been paid to facilities such as Fisk and Crawford -- "legacy" plants grandfathered in under the 1977 Clean Air Act and largely exempted from its requirement that facilities use the best pollution-control technology.

"Those are the clunkers of the power-plant world," said Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. "What we're dealing with here is the Cuban auto fleet -- a bunch of facilities built in the 1950s and early 1960s that are continuing to be rebuilt over and over. That's not the way the law was intended to work."

Advocates hope the climate-control legislation pending in Congress would force these plants to close. But they also warn that, depending how various aspects of the bill play out, it could instead motivate companies to increase their reliance on archaic plants.

If a climate-change bill drives up the cost of opening new plants, but provides free emissions allowances or potential carbon offsets for existing facilities, companies could have an incentive to squeeze even more power out of their old plants, many of which are running well below capacity.

Some environmental groups are urging the Senate to include in its version of the legislation provisions to prevent that. But the legislation passed by the House in late June -- known as the American Clean Energy and Security Act -- mandates a 50 percent carbon reduction by 2025 for new plants, but puts no site-specific carbon-reduction requirements on existing facilities.

Eric Schaeffer, executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project and former director of the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Regulatory Enforcement, said the new legislation is widely viewed as a panacea. "But by establishing requirements for new plants and then effectively exempting the old ones," he said, "you create the same disconnect that has created problems under the Clean Air Act."

But Dan Riedinger, spokesman for the Edison Electric Institute industry group, said power companies will probably close their oldest plants if a cap is put on carbon, since it would be least efficient to invest in carbon capture or other greenhouse-gas-reduction technology at those plants.

A climate bill, he said, "will have a big impact on the older fleet of power plants."

Public health advocates say these urban power plants can pose a threat to local residents, with ozone-forming compounds and particulate matter exacerbating respiratory and cardiac problems. A 2001 study by a Harvard School of Public Health professor suggested that the two Chicago plants could cause 41 premature deaths and 550 emergency room visits per year.

For years, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Chicago city councilmen, and national and local groups have tried to force Midwest Generation, the Edison International subsidiary that owns Fisk and Crawford, to install modern technology to catch particulate matter and remove sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide.

Two weeks ago, several environmental groups -- including Urbaszewski's organization as well as the National Resources Defense Council, the Environmental Law & Policy Center and the Sierra Club -- said they will sue the company for violating federal standards on particulate matter. Two years ago, the EPA filed a notice asserting that the company's six Illinois plants violated these and other standards.

Midwest Generation spokesman Doug McFarlan said the company is being targeted unfairly because of "heightened sensitivities" around the Chicago plants. He said Midwest Generation's plants release less particulate matter than most plants, many of which are not cited by the EPA.

McFarlan said the company has also responded to local concerns by shrinking the size of Crawford's coal pile and by reducing dust blowing off barges that transport its coal. Since buying the plants a decade ago, it has reduced emissions by as much as 60 percent, he said.

"We really believe we have demonstrated environmental responsibility at those plants," McFarlan said. "We don't hide the fact that there are emissions from our plants, but there are lots of other sources, too, other industries and cars and trucks going through there with emissions much closer to the ground."

Environmental groups hope their lawsuit will spur the EPA to move faster in addressing the company's notice of violation. If an agreement between EPA and the company is not reached, the Department of Justice could sue the company.

"We don't mind people urging us on -- we feel the urgency ourselves," said George Czerniak, head of air enforcement for EPA Region 5, which includes Chicago.

In 2006, Midwest Generation made a deal with the state to reduce emissions at its plants. Mercury controls were installed last summer. The company must install scrubbers at Fisk by 2015 and at Crawford by 2018. McFarlan said company officials have not decided whether they will install the expensive machinery or shut the plants down.

The parent company supported the House-passed legislation. And in anticipation of a climate bill capping greenhouse gas emissions, Midwest Generation is shifting its focus to renewable energy, including construction of a 240-megawatt wind farm in central Illinois.

NRDC staff attorney Shannon Fisk said Midwest Generation's renewable-energy efforts may reduce total carbon emissions, but will not do anything to help neighbors of the Chicago plants.

"These are two dinosaurs in the middle of a large city," he said. "They should have cleaned up decades ago. Running those plants is inexpensive for the company, but it's very expensive for public health."

Dealers Wary of Getting 'Clunked'

By Miles Shuper

Valley Voice Newspaper, Wednesday, August 19, 2009

Tulare County - Area auto dealers say business is good, thanks to the federally funded "Cash for Clunkers" program but have little good to say about the task of ensuring they will get paid for the deals they have made.

Even though potential buyers of cars seeking to receive \$3,500 or \$4,500 for their gas guzzlers don't qualify, new vehicles are being sold as potential buyers are flocking to dealerships. Meanwhile, dealers are being cautious by not disabling the traded-in "clunkers," until receiving confirmation the deals qualify for the federally funded vouchers. It seems to be an issue of dealers getting "clunked" if they disable a clunker's engine and the deal falls through.

Serpa Automotive Group in Visalia has about a half dozen "clunkers" sitting in a back lot. Two have been disabled while the others await confirmation, a process which no one seems to like.

Rhonda Loogman, business manager at Serpa Kia on Ben Maddox Way, continues to be frustrated with getting the cumbersome required documentation accepted through the online system of the federally funded program. "It's a real pain in the butt," she said, explaining it takes about two hours per vehicle, then having to make repeated attempts to get through due to a "server down, contact administration" message on the computer screen.

Ed Dena's General Motors dealership in Dinuba also has several "clunkers" ready to be disabled and sent to the junk yards. Dena said he and his staff "continue to keep our fingers crossed that we get our money." None of the several local dealers contacted have received a federal voucher.

Dena also expressed frustration in getting trade-in deals verified through the "clunkers," saying he has been handling the task himself rather than having to train others in the difficult process.

The program proved so popular that the first \$1 billion allocated for it was used up in just six days. Last weekend, President Barack Obama signed legislation adding another \$2 billion to the program. Officials are hopeful that will carry Cash for Clunkers through most of August.

Area wrecking yards already have received a few clunkers which yield from \$50 to \$125 or even \$150 per vehicle to the dealers.

Clunker engines must be permanently disabled with certified verification documents.

Tony Loogman, parts and service coordinator at Serpa, said the engines are disabled by draining all the oil then pouring about two quarts of a liquid glass and water solution into the engine and running the engine up to 2,000 rpms until the engine seizes, a process which takes one to two minutes. When the vehicle fails to start, after at least an hour of cooling, the car is declared dead.

One local wrecking yard owner, who didn't want to disclose his name, said he doesn't remove parts, but simply crushes them for scrap. The going price for most scrap metal, he said, is about \$125 per ton, a price which has rebounded from a low of about \$15 a number of months ago, dropping from a high of about \$300 several years ago. He does not expect the current price to change much due to the influx of "clunkers."

Del Beames of Budget Auto Parts in Visalia says he only deals with used auto parts at his business, opting not to deal with the scrap metal facet of auto wrecking.

Overall he thinks the "Cash for Clunkers" program is a good idea but doesn't like having the government involved.

Clash at China smelter after 100s of kids poisoned

By Christopher Bodeen, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post Monday, August 17, 2009

BEIJING -- Police clashed with residents of two neighboring villages in northern China where nearly all the children were poisoned by lead apparently from a nearby smelter, reports said Monday, the latest sign of growing anger over China's rampant industrial pollution.

Several hundred villagers tore down fences and blocked traffic outside the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. in Shaanxi province after news of the poisoning emerged last week, state media and villagers said. Fighting between angry parents and scores of police broke out Sunday, and trucks delivering coal to the plant were stoned.

No immediate word on injuries or arrests was available. Local officials, police and people at the company refused to confirm the reports.

China's breakneck economic development has left much of its soil, air and waterways dangerously polluted, and environmental showdowns with outraged residents are growing. Authorities routinely pledge to close down polluting industries, but often back down because of their importance to the local economy.

At least 615 out of 731 children in two villages near the Dongling smelter have tested positive for lead poisoning, which can damage the nervous and reproductive systems and cause high blood pressure, anemia and memory loss. Lead levels in the children were more than 10 times the level considered safe by China.

Air quality tests done near the smelting plant in Shaanxi found unusually high lead levels, according to the official Xinhua News Agency, although officials say groundwater, surface water, soil and company waste discharge all meet national standards.

Li Li, a resident of Gaozuitou village, located about half a mile (1 kilometer) from the plant, said in a telephone interview that her two daughters began developing blotchy skin, yellowing hair and memory problems as far back as January, but doctors had been unable to explain the cause.

After word broke last week of the lead contamination, Li said she took the girls, aged 9 and 12, in for tests and both were found to have high levels of lead.

Some people have already sent their children to schools farther away, said Li, 36, who said her cabbage and tomato crops have withered as well.

"You can see how bad the pollution is, but we don't have any money. Now, I sleep badly and I can't eat well either," Li said.

Local officials plan to relocate all 581 households living within 1,600 feet (500 meters) of the factory in the next two years, according to Xinhua.

It was unclear whether the plant had been closed and what its future might be.

In a separate report Monday, Xinhua said a chemical company boss in central China was sentenced to ten years in jail on Friday for criminal environmental negligence after his plant illegally dumped chemicals into a river in central China's Jiangsu province.

Earlier reports said the Biaoxin Chemical Company in Yancheng city had been illegally dumping chemicals in the Xiangyanggang River since 2007. An investigation was triggered after the plant discharged a massive amount of phenol in February this year, forcing two water plants to shut for three days and cutting water supplies to at least 200,000 people. Phenol is used to make products such as air fresheners, medical ointments, cosmetics and sunscreens.

Biaoxin's chairman, Hu Wenbiao, filed an appeal with the Yancheng Intermediate People's Court on Monday, Xinhua said.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Tuesday, August 18, 2009:](#)

Brighter days ahead for Mirant power plant site

The Mirant power plant in Potrero Hill has been a blight on the city for decades. The plant is outdated and toxic, with turbines that still run on diesel fuel and an old-fashioned cooling system that's poisoning the bay.

But even though everyone in the city knew it needed to go, it seemed like it was here to stay.

That's why City Attorney Dennis Herrera's agreement with the owner Mirant Corp. to permanently close the plant by the end of 2010 is nothing short of a miracle. Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, who has spent years working for the plant's closure, is introducing legislation today that asks for the supervisors' approval for the settlement. No responsible city official would even dream of voting against it.

"The bottom line is that the power plant will be closed," said Maxwell in a meeting with our editorial board on Monday. "Getting anything else out of this deal doesn't matter to me."

But there are a few other things that the city will get out of this deal: at least \$1 million for pediatric asthma programs in the surrounding community, and about \$100,000 in legal fee reimbursements. In exchange, Herrera will drop all pending lawsuits and permit review challenges so that the company can continue operating through 2010. Mirant will also get an expedited permit review when it comes time to redevelop the site.

A site, we might add, which has been rezoned to prohibit housing.

Even if the supervisors approve the deal, it faces another potential hurdle. The California Independent System Operator is a little nervous about "reliability," so the city and the Public Utilities Commission will have to reassure it that the new Transbay Cable, which should be coming online next year, will be reliable enough to merit closing the Potrero plant. (It shouldn't be a tough sell - the new cable will be able to move hundreds of megawatts, more than enough to fill the gap.)

Much credit for this success should also go to Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier and Mayor Gavin Newsom, who recognized the danger of a dreadful 2008 "solution" that involved building fossil fuel-burning plants in exchange for shutting the Potrero one, and stood firm against it. Now that we have a real solution, their resistance looks visionary.

[Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald guest commentary, Wednesday, August 19, 2009:](#)

My Word: Russell City Energy Center is an environmentally responsible path to economic success

By Bill Quirk

The Russell City Energy Center will improve the environment, stimulate the Bay Area economy and provide revenue to the city of Hayward and Alameda County. Russell City Energy Center is a 600-megawatt power plant that Calpine expects to begin building in 2010 and complete in 2012.

The plant will be built on 19 acres adjacent to Hayward's Sewage Treatment Plant, on land already zoned for industrial use. It is close to existing natural gas pipelines and other important infrastructure, but away from homes and schools.

For me, it is the environmental impacts of the plant that are most important. As a physicist at NASA and Lawrence Livermore Lab, I began studying climate change in the 1970s. It's taken 30 years, but the U.S. is finally taking this threat seriously.

We all look forward to the day when we can have pollution-free energy that will not generate greenhouse gases. In the meantime, however, we need a bridge to the day when we have such technology and infrastructure in place.

The Russell City plant is just such an interim step. I support the project because it will preserve the Bay Area's air quality by replacing power generated by plants that produce nearly twice the greenhouse gases and up to 10 times the amount of other pollutants.

The Russell City plant will also save energy. The high efficiency of this plant means that it will use 40 percent less natural gas than the old plants it will replace.

In a time when drought threatens, we also need to think about conserving water. The plant will use 100 percent recycled wastewater, thus preserving water resources and preventing 4 million gallons of treated sewage water from being discharged into San Francisco Bay each day.

The Russell City plant will provide an economic stimulus by producing hundreds of good-paying local jobs while easing the strain on the Bay Area's overburdened power grid. More than 600 union construction jobs will be created.

This project will produce \$30 million in one-time sales tax revenue, of which about \$3 million will go to the city of Hayward. Additionally, the project will generate \$4 million annually in new

property tax revenue, of which the city of Hayward will receive about \$800,000, enough to put five more police officers on the street.

Lastly, Calpine has pledged \$10 million toward the construction of a new Hayward public library — a resource long overdue in our community.

I encourage you to support this project as I do. I am confident that the environment and economy of Hayward will benefit from the Russell City Energy Center and I hope you will join me in welcoming the project into our community.

Bill Quirk is a member of the Hayward City Council.

[O.C. Register blog, Tuesday, August 18, 2009:](#)

Study: Cut smog in North America, save lives in Europe

posted by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

If you've ever wondered how interconnected the world really is, a new study offers a hint: Cutting smog levels in North America could actually save as many lives in Europe as here at home — perhaps more.

It's one of several surprising findings in a study by atmospheric scientists, including one at UC Irvine, that combined computer models of the atmosphere with health statistics to assess how a major pollutant, ground-level ozone, might affect other nations in the northern hemisphere — and how their pollution might affect us.

For the most part, cutting ozone output had the biggest effect on death rates inside each of the regions studied — North America, East Asia, South Asia, and Europe. Overall, more than 30,000 lives a year could be saved worldwide if each of the four regions cut their ozone output by 20 percent, the study found.

The one exception was North America. As much as 76 percent of the deaths avoided by cutting ozone production would occur outside North America. Europe could benefit the most because of higher population levels and higher death rates, and because more smog flows to Europe from the North American continent than in the opposite direction.

For example, death rates from cardiopulmonary disease alone — only a portion of overall pollution-related deaths — would drop by an estimated 900 per year in North America, but by 1,100 in Europe.

"I think this is a wakeup call," said UC Irvine atmospheric modeler Michael Prather, one of the authors of the report. "This is one atmosphere, and we are making a mess of it."

Much depends, however, on the assumptions put into the model, Prather said. Changing the math slightly, so that pollution deaths are only counted after a certain exposure threshold is reached, makes the lopsided gains by Europe disappear.

Still, all versions of the modeling suggest that cutting ozone in one region of the globe would likely benefit people far away, even in countries that produce comparatively little of the pollutant.

Scientists have known for years that dust and air pollution can be transported around the world — for example, pollution from China being detected on the U.S. West Coast. But most are isolated or incidental; the new study tries to pin down more precisely how ozone flows among major regions of the planet.

Ground-level ozone, a lung irritant that can make conditions like asthma worse, is produced when nitrogen oxides, much of it from car exhaust, and other contaminants are cooked by sunlight.

The study, "Intercontinental Impacts of Ozone Pollution on Human Mortality," with lead author Susan Casper Anenberg, was published last week in *Environmental Science and Technology*.

[Letters to the L.A. Times, Wednesday, August 19, 2009:](#)

Bumps in the road for clunkers

Re "Too bad for clunkers," Aug. 13

Nothing has changed in Washington when it comes to Congress and lobbyists. The "cash for clunkers" program was a great idea that was good for people, our environment and the auto companies. But somehow the lobbyists for the Specialty Equipment Market Assn. convinced Congress to put age limits on trade-ins. Money talks, and the poor and middle class lose.

Many people who have cars older than 25 years need a cash infusion so that they can purchase a more economical car that is more fuel-efficient and produces less pollution. So not only are the car collectors being protected, they are given the OK to pollute. Something is wrong with this picture.

Debbie Wright, Rancho Santa Margarita

When I first heard the clunker cutoff was 1984, I thought that meant the vehicle had to be older than that. I rushed down to trade in my 1979 Dodge van that gets a whopping 8 miles per gallon. The dealer said, "Sorry, it's too old." I said, "That doesn't make sense." He said, "That's right, it doesn't."

Why exclude older cars from the clunker program? The lobbyists' argument is malarkey. Anyone with a true classic or antique is not going to junk it for \$4,500. This would have been the perfect opportunity to help people rid themselves of their older, smoky gas-guzzlers -- the true clunkers.

Ryall Wilson, San Diego

I hardly think that the older vehicles making up a tiny portion of the total vehicle fleet make a significant difference in air quality when compared with industrial and other forms of pollution.

That leaves the new puritans' and regulators' resentment of the fun hot rodders and classic-car enthusiasts have with automobiles as the primary motivation to regulate the sport out of existence. After all, saving the planet is serious business that doesn't leave room for freedom, self-expression or fun.

Mac Bernd, Arlington, Texas

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the editor, Wednesday, August 19, 2009](#)

Clunkers could instead help poor

Cash for Clunkers is just another payoff to the automakers.

If the government really wanted to take gas-guzzling polluters off the street, wouldn't the following have been done? (1) The ability to trade in these vehicles for motorcycles – less pollution, better gas mileage. (2) Recycle the non-polluting vehicles for gross polluters – the government says it wants to help the working poor, thus the poorly thought-out medical insurance bill.

If government really wanted to help, it would allow the working poor who cannot afford to buy a new vehicle nor afford to keep up the vehicle they have to trade them in for one of the vehicles that passes a smog test and gets better mileage than the vehicle they have, and then scrap their gross-polluting vehicles.

Folks, this isn't about taking vehicles off the road – it's about making money and selling cars.

– Robert Hasapis, Sacramento