

Mass., 10 states agree to low carbon standard

The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, January 6, 2009

BOSTON—Connecticut, Massachusetts and nine other Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states have agreed to create a low carbon fuel standard to reduce greenhouse gases.

Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles on Monday said the states will come up with a single standard that would apply to the entire region, creating a larger market for cleaner fuels and the development of clean energy technologies.

Low carbon fuel standards require reductions in the average greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy. It can apply to fuel used for transportation, but also for home heating fuel.

Fuels that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions include electricity and biofuels.

The other states that are part of the initiative include New York, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Clean construction vehicles pass soot test

By Pat Brennan

O.C. Register, Tuesday, January 6, 2009

The demonstration was simple, if stark: on one handkerchief, black soot from the exhaust pipe of a diesel excavator; on the other ... well, nothing.

Federal, state and regional smog regulators used the “clean hanky” test at the Puente Hills Landfill on Monday to show off newly retrofitted construction equipment — tractors, bulldozers, earth movers — that use cleaner-burning engines and diesel soot filters.

They fired up two excavators, one with a regular diesel engine, the other with the retrofits. Wayne Nastri, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s administrator for the Pacific southwest region, stood atop the vehicles with his handkerchiefs, holding one to each exhaust pipe (left; photo courtesy U.S. EPA).

Diesel soot isn’t just ugly. It is listed as a toxic air contaminant, and is believed to boost cancer risk for people exposed to it.

That would be most of us in coastal Southern California, especially along freeway corridors. The \$500,000 cost to retrofit 29 vehicles, including those showcased Monday, was drawn from a \$700,000 settlement of EPA enforcement actions against refineries owned by Chevron and Valero for alleged air-quality violations, according to the state Air Resources Board.

The regulators say the vehicles are part of a statewide effort to cut diesel emissions. A 2007 regulation requires that 180,000 such vehicles, classified as off-road vehicles, be replaced with cleaner-burning equipment in the construction, mining, airport support and other industries.

The goal is to cut fine-particle diesel emissions by 74 percent, and smog-forming nitrogen oxides by 32 percent, by 2020, from what those emissions would have been without the new rule.

That will eventually mean an estimated 4,000 fewer premature deaths statewide, and a savings of \$18 billion to \$26 billion in health and other costs, the regulators say.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Tuesday, January 6, 2009](#)

Valley air cleaner due to no-burn days

When they imposed stricter regulations last fall, officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District warned there would be more days that residents would be prohibited from using their fireplaces. That's proven to be the case, big time.

Since Nov. 1, the air district has called 18 no-burn days in Stanislaus County, compared with only one in 2007-08. Merced County has had 17 and San Joaquin County 13. The season runs through February.

The increase has prompted some complaints, as evidenced in letters to The Bee. But it's also gotten plaudits from people who realize the restrictions are helping to reduce the levels of PM 2.5 (small particulate matter) and therefore reducing the health risk to people with asthma, emphysema and other respiratory ailments.

There's also some confusion about the changes. The air district not only lowered the threshold for no-burn days but also switched from a three-stage alert system (no restrictions, burning discouraged and burning prohibited) to two stages -- "burn cleanly" and "no burning." It's as if the traffic lights are always yellow or red, never appearing to be green.

Adding to the potential confusion: Sacramento County has four stages, and Sacramento TV stations show those on their reports.

More important than the labels are the reasons for the fireplace restrictions -- to continue to improve the valley's air quality. Already, the valley has recorded a decrease in PM 10, larger particulate matter. But the smaller particulates, the soot from wood burning, remains the leading contributor to pollution during the winter months. In the fall, the biggest contributor is dust, much of it from nut harvests.

Other than occasional coughing, the average healthy person probably does not notice a high-pollution day. But people suffering from asthma, emphysema or other respiratory problems or heart disease can be forced to stay indoors and some can even end up in emergency rooms.

Pollution is almost always worse to the south. Kern County, the farthest south, has had 30 no-burn days this season.

The air district forecasts the burn designation a day ahead. Then on the actual day, it measures air quality to determine whether the forecast was accurate. For Stanislaus, 16 of the 18 no-burn forecasts have proven accurate, meaning the high particulate count warranted the no-burn designation. Eleven of the 47 days that burning was allowed actually turned into high-pollution days, suggesting that the district should have called more no-burn days.

A recent study by a scientist formerly with California State University, Fresno, and now with the air district suggests that the wood-burning bans could prevent as many as 50 premature deaths in the Fresno area each year and 30 in Bakersfield. His study did not look at the north valley.

As we've said many times, improving the air quality in the valley is a long-term effort that requires action and sacrifices by all of us. Wood-burning restrictions are one of the sacrifices -- but worth it.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register editorial, Tuesday, January 6, 2009:](#)

Wood-fire rules have desired effect

Forced cutbacks in fireplace use across the San Joaquin Valley are having the desired effect. A new study attributes curtailed wood-burning in fireplaces to the saving of as many as 80 lives a year.

That's good news for the immediate effect: Cleaner air and greater prevention of unhealthy respiratory conditions.

It also affirms a strategy that public health agencies are often criticized for: Enforced regulation of conditions that improve public health will work if they are allowed to.

As much as we all bristle under the imposition of regulations, in many cases they are the only tools that will improve difficult environmental and health problems. In future years, that could mean regulating machines, transportation and other conveniences we have come to take for granted in modern America.

The reduction of wood-burning in the San Joaquin Valley in winter time is a good example of how a public health/environmental regulation has come full circle.

When it was proposed just a few years ago as a voluntary practice to reduce wood-burning in stoves and fireplaces, public reaction was negative. Wood fires in stoves and hearths were considered Valley traditions, not to mention vital appliances to some folks who used them as a primary heat source in winter. Many people saw even the voluntary practice as unnecessary government interference and a further step to control people's lives.

It was clear from the evidence, however, that smoke from wood fires when an inversion layer exists in the San Joaquin Valley air traps harmful gases and soot and other particles that are deleterious to breathing.

Those with respiratory conditions can be severely affected, even lethally so. The smoky air exacerbates conditions such as asthma, especially in young children and the elderly. Continued exposure can contribute to conditions that kill people.

Despite the unwelcome reception the voluntary guidelines received, gradually the public got it. People could begin telling the difference almost immediately between the smoggy, smoke-drenched nights in winter when fireplaces burned freely and the much cleaner, fresher air when those fires were curtailed. Gradually more people have been complying with these regulations.

The regulations became more binding after a while. For instance, fireplaces and stoves were limited in new construction. Retrofitting pollution-reducing fireboxes was required to resell homes.

Most of the compliance with the new regulations, however, has been virtually voluntary. After all, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District does not have the enforcement capacity to cite homeowners for violations every time somebody lights up on a "no-burn" night.

Even without the "fireplace police," though, the regulations are getting results. A study showed 50 fewer respiratory deaths per year in Fresno and about 30 fewer per year in Bakersfield. Yes, this is unscientific, and there is no telling how many of those saved lives are attributable to fireplaces and not other air-pollution mitigation programs. But the study does indicate that we are beginning to turn the corner in the Valley on how we regard our individual and collective regard for the environment.

Sound environmental practices typically require the sacrifice of our personal interest for the collective good: We make the sacrifice to separate and recycle our trash or keep our thermostats set to a higher temperature to reduce the strain on the resources that we collectively share. We are willing to forego the cheery winter fire to reduce the noxious effect on the air we all breathe. We put up with our homes being a little warmer in summer so we can all avoid blackouts.

Improving our environment and our quality of life will continue to require both a change in thinking as well as a change in habit. Will we continue to have the will to do both? At least in the case of wood-burning, we've shown we are willing to take some tangible steps so that we all benefit. It will be good to remember those lessons in years to come.

[Merced Sun-Star editorial, Tuesday, January 6, 2009:](#)

Our View: Valley debate over density

Old habits of urban sprawl are no longer sustainable in the region.

The debate over new rules for development in the Valley is dividing those who favor a small shift toward greater densities from those who favor a bolder approach.

The debate isn't over yet, but it signals how far we have to go to change our conventional thinking in the effort to halt urban sprawl.

The context of the debate is the planning process known as the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint, which has been in the works for two years now. Two proposals have emerged that set goals for density in residential development. One calls for an average of 18 people per acre of new development; the other for 31 people per acre. The current average in the Valley is around 13 people per acre.

Some officials are saying the higher figure isn't right for the Valley, with its tradition of suburban living and its large rural expanses. Others believe the higher figure is necessary for the future of the Valley because of concerns about the environment, traffic congestion and the loss of farmland to development.

Looming over the whole process is the recently enacted Senate Bill 375, the landmark law that requires local governments to make greenhouse-gas reductions a consideration in their planning efforts. SB 375 ties access to state transportation funds to compliance with California's greenhouse-gas initiative.

We're concerned that some in this debate aren't facing certain realities. We really have no choice but to raise the densities of urban development in this region.

The historical pattern of endless sprawl is no longer sustainable. It exacerbates the Valley's already poor air quality. It requires infrastructure expenses that we can no longer afford. It robs us of precious farmland that can never be replaced. It stretches out increasingly expensive commutes and it contributes to our indefensible dependence on imported oil.

And are officials willing to gamble on losing state transportation dollars?

The argument is often made that Valley residents aren't in the market for such dense urban dwellings. But Valley residents rarely have the opportunity to make that choice; such developments are not common in the region.

Nor does a higher density figure -- even 31 people per acre -- mean the end of suburban lifestyles. We're talking about an average here. Urban housing often reaches levels much higher than 31 people per acre, meaning lower densities would still be possible in some areas, so long as the average is met.

The regional blueprint process is coming up on a new phase, with a public "summit" meeting scheduled for Jan. 26 at the Fresno Convention Center. That's the time to settle the debate over housing densities.

But one thing is certain: They will have to go up. The Valley can't go on with a status quo that robs us of farmland, congests our roads and highways and fouls our air.

[Letters to the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, January 6, 2009:](#)

'Ban saved 30': I'm not buying it

Great news, 30 people didn't die, thanks to the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control Board, as reported in "Burning ban saves valley lives, study says," (Dec. 30, Page B-2). Really? How do they know? What 30 people were slated to die due to those nasty fireplaces that keep us warm? I want the names of those 30 people.

Then the article said that millions in health costs have been averted due to the strict rules of the valley air board. Really? The article failed to mention the increased cost to consumers because

we now have to pay PG&E. The article did not question the numbers. Remember, a lot of people moved out of the state due to the financial crisis, so maybe there were fewer deaths due to a lower population?

Don't accept numbers thrown at you from government agencies that are accountable to no one. I work at a funeral home that handles 600 to 700 cases a year, and I file death certificates. I have yet to see one with a cause of death due to fireplace burning. There are many external influences that bring on death, not just fireplaces.

Brian Six, Oakdale

More 'hilarious hippy nonsense'

I'd like to present some data that contradicts research cited in "Burning ban saves valley lives, study finds." My experimental evidence showed conclusively that smoke from burning wood is composed primarily of carbon dioxide, which, unless you stick your head directly into a fireplace, is harmless and has been breathed in and out by homo sapiens since we were selected as a species. My data was compiled by a research group formed last night at the gun club, where my colleagues concurred that the idea our fireplaces were killing us is hilarious hippy nonsense.

Steve Taylor, Oakdale

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses eleven states decide on new limit for air pollution levels. California's plan is to reduce 10% of air pollution by 2020. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Acuerdan once estados nuevo límite a la contaminación del aire

By Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, January 6, 2008

Once estados del oeste del país acordaron ayer unificar su límite a la contaminación del aire. El convenio, basado en un tope que había establecido California obligará a las refinerías a reducir niveles de carbono contenidos en los combustibles que ofrezcan para consumo público. El plan de California reducirá en diez por ciento la contaminación del aire para el año 2020, y se espera que con el acuerdo el objetivo se alcance en toda la región oeste.

El gobernador de California, Arnold Schwarzenegger informó en breve comunicado de prensa que aplaude la decisión conjunta, pues reduce las emisiones que ocasionan el cambio climático y al mismo tiempo impulsa el uso de nuevas tecnologías contra la contaminación.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the Department of Motor Vehicles joins the fight against air pollution. Fees will be applied to owners of vehicles that fail their smog checks.](#)

Se alía el DMV a la lucha contra la contaminación

By Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, January 5, 2008

El Departamento de Vehículos Motorizados, el DMV de California se unió esta semana a la lucha estatal contra la contaminación del aire al poner en vigor por lo menos dos nuevas leyes que multarán a infractores.

La primera de las multas es para los propietarios de vehículos que fallen en pasar pruebas de emisiones de gases contaminantes, conocidas como "pruebas del smog".

El DMV concederá 60 días para arreglar vehículos reprobados pero sólo a los que hicieron la prueba y fallaron. El permiso costará 50 dólares y ese dinero es para combatir la contaminación. Aparte, los residentes del valle de San Joaquín en California deberán pagar seis dólares

adicionales al renovar permiso anual o tenencia, también para reunir fondos contra la contaminación.