

Smog: Traffic may trigger bouts of asthma for kids

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com., Wed., Feb. 18, 2009

Live near a busy street? Do you have a child with asthma living in your home? If you answer yes to both questions, you should know about a new study from UC Irvine.

Asthmatic children between the ages of 1 and 3 needed repeated hospitalization if they lived near pollution emissions from traffic, according to Dr. Ralph J. Delfino.

He and colleagues studied records for 2,768 children from two hospitals in northern Orange County. Read about it [here](#).

I've heard lots from people who doubt research, the media and the whole idea that there's really an air quality problem here. Please, feel free to comment on this research too.

I wonder how many of the doubters have an asthmatic child under the age of 3.

Pittsburgh school buses to be made to run cleaner

The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald, Wed., Feb. 18, 2009

PITTSBURGH—Some diesel powered school buses in Pittsburgh will soon be running cleaner.

Pittsburgh Public Schools' second largest school bus contractor is retrofitting 50 older buses to reduce diesel emissions and limit children's exposure to potentially harmful pollution.

W.L. Roenigk will equip its buses with exhaust filters and closed crankcases to cut exhaust up to 90 percent and prevent seepage into the buses. Kathy Lawson, a policy associate with the nonprofit Clean Water Action, says diesel exhaust contains fine particulates that are known to cause cancer.

The Allegheny County Partnership to Reduce Diesel Pollution is providing nearly \$6,900 per bus.

Pittsburgh uses approximately 400 school buses and officials are calling on other companies to follow Roenigk's lead.

EPA May Reverse Bush, Limit Carbon Emissions From Coal-Fired Plants

By Steven Mufson and Juliet Eilperin, staff writers

Washington Post, Wed., Feb. 18, 2009

The Environmental Protection Agency will reopen the possibility of regulating carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, tossing aside a December Bush administration memorandum that declared that the agency would not limit the emissions.

The decision could mark the first step toward placing limits on greenhouse gases emitted by coal plants, an issue that has been hotly contested by the coal industry and environmentalists since April 2007, when the Supreme Court ruled that carbon dioxide should be considered a pollutant under the Clean Air Act.

The industry has vigorously opposed efforts to regulate those emissions, asserting that the policy should be set by Congress. Moreover, technology for capturing carbon dioxide emissions is expensive and virtually untested.

Environmental groups, however, say that building new coal plants with conventional technology locks in additional greenhouse gas emissions for the entire 30-to-40-year lifetimes of the power plants, making it difficult to slow climate change. They have been urging the Obama

administration and state governments to use the Supreme Court ruling to block air pollution permits for new coal-fired power plants and to rely on renewable energy and energy-efficiency measures to meet power needs.

In response to a Sierra Club petition involving a permit for a coal plant in Bonanza, Utah, EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said yesterday that the agency would take a new look at the issue and solicit public comment. Jackson added that the memorandum issued by her predecessor, Stephen A. Johnson, two months ago should not restrict states weighing air pollution permits for new coal plants.

"It couldn't be a bigger turnaround from what the Bush administration tried to force on them at the last minute," said Josh Dorner, a spokesman for the Sierra Club, noting that the EPA's Environmental Appeals Board had ruled in November that utilities needed to take carbon dioxide emissions into account when applying for permits. "It . . . throws all these projects up in the air. A coal plant was already a bad bet for ratepayers and investors, and now it's a huge gamble."

In a carefully worded letter, Jackson said any authority considering whether to grant an air pollution permit to a coal-fired utility "should not assume the [Johnson] memorandum is the final word on the appropriate interpretation of the Clean Air Act." But she did not issue a stay on the Bush administration memorandum.

Coal industry advocates found some hope in that distinction, saying Jackson's move may not signal a push for new regulation. Washington lawyer Jeffrey R. Holmstead, a former EPA official in the Bush administration, said, "It's kind of a clever procedural move that allows the Obama folks to say that they are distancing themselves from the Johnson memo without changing anything. It says they need to go through a rulemaking process to figure out how they are going to regulate carbon."

John Stowell, vice president for environmental policy for Duke Energy, one of the nation's largest utilities, said he "wasn't surprised" by the announcement. Industry officials expect the federal government to impose a cap on greenhouse gas emissions, he said, and are hoping that Congress will adopt an economy-wide plan rather than relying on the executive branch to target specific sectors.

"It serves as a reminder that it's coming, but we still expect it to be done through the legislature and not the regulatory process," he said, noting that Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.) and others have signaled that the committees they chair will pass climate legislation by the end of the year. "They're all saying it's urgent. The president's saying it's urgent -- 'We're going to get it done this Congress.' And I believe them."

Jackson's letter could prompt some state authorities to reassess how they grant air pollution permits to new plants. LS Power plans to build the 1,590-megawatt White Pine Energy Station in Nevada, and state officials recently issued a document warning that if Johnson's memo were withdrawn or revised before the permit had been issued, they would "suspend further action on the permit application until that application is made consistent with EPA's revised position."

Vicki Patton, deputy general counsel for the Environmental Defense Fund, an advocacy group, said the new administration had sent a broad message to utilities: "They're signaling clearly that the government is fundamentally rethinking the policy of an appropriate approach to regulating global warming from new coal plants."

Tough New York City law cracks down on idling cars

By Sara Kugler, The Associated Press

in the N.Y. Times, L.A. Times and other papers, Wed, Feb. 18, 2009

NEW YORK -- The fumes from idling taxicabs and delivery trucks can be so bad outside city schools that teachers race to close their classroom windows at certain times of the day to protect their students.

A new law seeks to cut that pollution by giving vehicles just 60 seconds to idle in a school zone.

The measure signed into law this month cuts the allowed idling time from three minutes to one minute around schools, and gives more city agencies the power to issue violations. It also requires an annual violations report so officials can track enforcement.

Councilman John Liu, lead sponsor of the bill, said the law was not only intended to reduce pollution in school areas -- helping the city's high child asthma rates -- but was also meant to improve public awareness about idling throughout New York City.

There is no federal anti-idling law, but about 30 states and dozens of municipalities have their own measures, typically limiting time to around three to five minutes. New York City's three-minute law has been in place citywide since 1971, but advocates say it is rarely enforced or advertised.

Fines range from \$220 to \$2,000 for repeat offenders. A city official testified in 2003 that just 325 idling violations had been issued the previous year. In 2007, there were just 526, and all but 10 of those were for diesel-fueled vehicles, meaning that there is very little enforcement of passenger car idling.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office is planning a public awareness campaign about idling later this year, with advertisements for radio, bus stops and billboards. The city says the goal is to target drivers and remind them about the laws.

Officials are also planning to microtarget enforcement by using data from the city's 311 hot line, where citizens can call to make an idling complaint. Over the past two years, the hot line has received 4,600 such complaints.

A new report by the Environmental Defense Fund estimates that idling cars and trucks produce 130,000 tons of heat-trapping carbon dioxide each year in New York City, contributing to global warming. The group believes the one-minute idling limit next to schools is the toughest such law in the United States.

The report also calculates that idling vehicles in the city produce 940 tons of smog-forming nitrogen oxides, 24 tons of soot particles and 6,400 tons of carbon monoxide each year. Those are pollutants associated with a number of health risks, including asthma.

In New York City, the child asthma rate is particularly bad. According to the health department, asthma is the most common cause of hospitalization for children 14 years and younger, and is a leading cause of missed school days in the nation's largest school district of 1.1 million pupils.

"In an urban canyon, there's no place for the fumes to go except into the windows of our school buildings," said Rebecca Kalin, director of Asthma Free School Zone.

School buses had long been singled out as major contributors to asthma-aggravating pollution throughout the city. In 2003, the New York State Attorney General's office found that many school buses were idling for 20 minutes, despite the three-minute law.

The following year, the attorney general sued several bus companies for breaking the law, and in 2007, the state law was strengthened even further to crack down on buses.

Advocates say school bus idling is slowly improving. Parents are also getting better about idling when shuttling their children to and from school.

Now, Kalin said, the main problems are vehicles that have nothing to do with the school but are simply idling nearby, like delivery trucks and general street traffic.

The school zone created by the law encompasses all streets that immediately border public and private schools.

The new law is a welcome reprieve for parents, children and teachers at P.S. 18 in the Bronx, which is located on a main thoroughfare, near a major expressway and across from a hospital. Cabs are known to idle outside the hospital all day while delivery trucks make stops at nearby stores.

"They just sit there and park, with the vehicle still on," said Carmen Nieves, parent coordinator for the school. "The idea of one minute -- it's fabulous. It will be great if it works."

SoCal ports to start collecting environmental fee

By Daisy Nguyen, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wed., Feb. 18, 2009

LOS ANGELES—The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach plan to begin collecting cargo container fees on Wednesday to help finance an ambitious clean-air initiative after a three-month delay and despite opposition from the federal agency that regulates the ports.

The so-called environmental fee would be used to help finance the Clean Trucks Program, which aims to reduce air pollution from trucks that haul cargo through the nation's busiest port complex by 80 percent within five years.

The program was launched last October by banning trucks built before 1989 from entering the ports. The ports offered truckers financial assistance to encourage them to phase out their 1989 and later models and replacing them with newer, cleaner-running models that will meet tougher federal emission standards by 2012.

A fee charging up to \$70 per container would help pay for the new vehicles. To accelerate compliance, the Port of Los Angeles offered a \$20,000 incentive for every truck that meets the 2007 federal standard for heavy-duty trucks.

But collection was delayed after the Federal Maritime Commission filed a lawsuit claiming that parts of the plan interfere with interstate commerce, increase cost to shippers and hamper competition.

The commission's review of a fee collection agreement with terminal operators took 90 days and decided not to halt the plan. During that period, the ports were blocked from charging the fees, losing roughly \$15 million a month in fees.

Additional funding from the state was also put on hold as California lawmakers wrestled over a budget proposal to close a \$42 billion deficit.

Meanwhile, dozens of trucking companies counting on the subsidies had placed orders for new trucks.

Mike Fox, owner of a 450-fleet truck company based in Rancho Cucamonga, said the port of Los Angeles' incentive program prompted him to spend \$6 million on 40 new diesel trucks last year. He said he'd like to order 80 more this year, but that plan has been stalled because the fee collection has not begun.

"The last couple of months were horrible in the financial market, so the incentive made it possible for us to buy those trucks," Fox said. "Without the fees, there's no financial reason to go out and buy new trucks. It doesn't make sense."

Port officials said the fees are needed to help truck companies willing to participate in the program.

"These guys have gone out and bought new trucks. In this difficult economic climate, if we didn't help them out, some of them would be put in jeopardy," said Capt. John Holmes, director of operations at the port of Los Angeles.

[Contra Costa Times editorial, Wed., Feb. 18, 2009:](#)

Pull the plug on power-plant emissions rule change

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION did the right thing in slapping a 90-day suspension on an 11th-hour Bush administration policy that had forced a change in power-plant emissions regulations. Now it should do the right thing and rewrite those regulations altogether.

In the waning days of his administration, President George W. Bush had issued a directive that had forced the Environmental Protection Agency to change regulations on power-plant emissions, which we believe would ultimately threaten the environment.

In a MediaNews editorial last year, we urged Bush to act wisely. But, not surprisingly, he decided it was more important to cozy up to the power companies, thus, the new, lesser pollution controls were put in place.

It didn't take long for the Barack Obama administration to announce that the rule would be delayed 90 days so it could be re-evaluated.

We hope and expect that Obama will do more than that and will rewrite a rule that we believe had a disregard for our environment.

The Clean Air Act requires older plants with new equipment to install pollution technology if their emissions increase. The Bush rule change allowed plants to measure emissions on an hourly basis rather than a total yearly output. That meant plants could actually run for more hours, increase the output of emissions while staying within the threshold without having to add pollution controls.

Essentially, the Bush rule change was an end-run around the Clean Air Act.

Industry groups that represent much of the U.S. electric power industry love the concept. They argue that they can't perform upgrades without violating anti-pollution laws under current rules. Maybe it's time to change the way they do their upgrades.

The emission plan actually lost some momentum when the Justice Department said it would no longer fight to uphold another Bush plan for controlling mercury emissions from power plants. Courts have found that plan, with very little surprise, violated the Clean Air Act.

We urge the Obama team to closely examine Bush's power-plant emissions rule. We think they will find it to be flawed and that it will actually increase the emissions that cause soot and smog.

After careful study, we urge the Obama administration to do what's right for our long-term environment and health. We think that means pulling the plug on Bush's plan.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Wed., Feb. 18, 2009:](#)

Burning rules are illogical

On Feb. 2, the Valley Air District advertised \$750 rebates for swapping out "old, polluting woodburning" devices for cleaner pellet or EPA Phase II certified wood stoves, devices that are not permitted during "episodic wood burning curtailment."

Regulations amended on Oct. 16, 2008, reduced the threshold for non-burn days approximately 40 percent, giving residents 15 days to make alternate heating arrangements before wood-burning restrictions began Nov. 1.

Our home is equipped with an archaic central heating system that has not been used since we switched to heating with a renewable source (wood) nearly 19 years ago. Because the central system is present, the air district denied our request for an exemption to the restrictions.

Why doesn't the air district offer a rebate for the purchase of an efficient new central heating system? Then we could go back to using clean-burning dinosaur fuel instead of renewable trees. The district has a responsibility to embrace the big picture, not just target those who lack the critical mass to challenge the regulations.

Roxanne Lemos, Modesto

[Letter to the Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, February 18, 2009:](#)

The recent Times article, "Oakland port truck pollution burdens public health," describes the economic burden on the Bay Area caused by air pollution at the Port of Oakland.

Obviously, air quality at the Port of Oakland is a major issue. Nearby residents have some of the highest incidences of lung cancer in the region. Also, children living near the port have an asthma rate seven times higher than the California average.

The Port of Oakland needs to adopt a clean trucks program such as the one at the Port of Los Angeles. By abolishing the independent-operator system and requiring trucking companies to hire truckers as employees, this program shifts the financial burden of meeting emission standards to the big companies who are actually responsible for the pollution.

A viable solution exists to solve the problems faced by residents and truckers at the Port of Oakland. Implementing a clean trucks program will improve air quality and provide good jobs. Now it is up to the port commissioners to act.

Katherine Lockwood, Berkeley

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses solar energy used for cooking. The prototypes used are an arrangement of solar panels that replace a gas or wood burning device. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Energía solar para cocinar

Los prototipos evitan la quema de gas o leña y con ello la emisión de contaminantes.

Funcionan con un arreglo de espejos para allegarse calor

El Universal, Wednesday, February 18, 2009

¿Le apetecería cocinar con aceite automotriz? No, sus alimentos no tendrán un raro sazón, evitará usar gas LP o electricidad y, en consecuencia, muchas de las emisiones contaminantes que contribuyen al calentamiento global.

Un invento diseñado y probado por expertos del Departamento de Ingeniería Eléctrica del Centro de Investigación y Estudios Avanzados (Cinvestav) puede hacer eso sólo con una pequeña ayuda externa: energía solar.

Se trata de una estufa solar urbana que con 610 espejos planos concentra el calor del astro en un punto focal, lo cual permite aprovecharlo en aplicaciones domésticas como calentar agua, cocinar alimentos o incluso climatizar el ambiente.

El dispositivo —que capta energía solar en promedio 300 días al año— integra una tubería por donde circula aceite de desecho empleado en automotores y que transfiere el calor capturado hacia cuatro hornillas donde es posible cocinar sin emitir un gramo de CO₂ a la atmósfera.

“Proponemos reusar aceite del parque vehicular. Con esto evitaríamos la contaminación del suelo, del subsuelo y los mantos freáticos o que los talleres (mecánicos) lo tiren a la coladera y vaya a contaminar los ríos, con lo cual se cierra un círculo ambiental muy interesante”, explica su inventor, el ingeniero José Antonio Urbano Castelán.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses in Mexico City a bike race is canceled due to high levels of concentrated pollution in the air.](#)

Paseo ciclista en DF se cancela por precontingencia ambiental

El Diario, Sunday, February 15, 2009

Ciudad de México— Luego de que el viernes se declaró la etapa de precontingencia ambiental por las altas concentraciones de contaminantes, este domingo la calidad del aire en el noreste de la ciudad se mantiene en niveles malos, con 105 puntos Imeca.

La Comisión Ambiental Metropolitana (CAM) informó que desde las 24:00 y hasta las 8:00 horas la concentración de partículas suspendidas menores a 10 micras (PM10) osciló entre los 101 y los 105 puntos del índice Metropolitano de la Calidad del Aire (Imeca) en la región noreste.

Por lo anterior, las autoridades recomendaron a la población a evitar actividad física al aire libre y usar lo menos posible el automóvil.

En el resto de las zonas del valle de México las PM10 alcanzaron rangos entre los 68 y 80 puntos, es decir, con una calidad de aire regular.

El ozono, en cambio, disminuyó a niveles buenos al ubicarse entre cinco y 18 puntos del Imeca, luego de que este contaminante se ubicó en 180 puntos en el Suroeste el pasado viernes, razón por la cual la CAM determinó establecer la etapa de precontingencia.

La víspera este contaminante se ubicó en 168 puntos a las 17:00 horas, por lo que se mantuvo la precontingencia para este domingo y se suspendió el paseo dominical "Muévete en Bici" que se realiza en Paseo de la Reforma y su ruta alterna de Iztacalco.

Por ello, continúa la restricción para circular a todos los vehículos particulares con placas de otras entidades y del extranjero, que no cuenten con holograma "Cero" o "Doble Cero" de verificación vehicular desde las 5:00 hasta las 11:00 horas.

La CAM detalló que el dióxido de nitrógeno y azufre, así como el monóxido de carbono tuvieron concentraciones menores a los 29 puntos de la escala y que será este domingo a las 17:00 horas cuando anuncie si continúa la precontingencia.