

Air quality event today at Irwin Street Inn

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, July 23, 2009

HANFORD — The public is invited to a free Healthy Air Living Chat, hosted by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, from 6 to 8 p.m. today at the Irwin Street Inn, 522 N. Irwin St.

Attendees have an opportunity to hear about new developments in the ongoing mission to clean up the Central Valley's air. The Hanford event is one of 15 Healthy Air Living Chats scheduled throughout the eight-county SJVAPCD air basin this summer.

Admission is free, and light refreshments will be served. Information: (559) 230-6000 or on-line at www.healthyairliving.com.

Valley ozone violations down despite heat

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Published online Wed., July 22, 2009

Despite a torrid heat wave and some stifling July pollution, the San Joaquin Valley might set a clean-air record this summer.

Those balmy, breezy days in June and early July have kept the number of ozone violations down to 45 thus far this summer - down from at least 60 during comparable periods in each of the previous three years.

And the high heat last weekend may actually have helped prevent unhealthy levels of ozone from spiking into more dangerous concentrations. But don't misunderstand: The air is still dangerously smoggy. Doctors warn people to avoid outdoor activities in the afternoon when authorities forecast unhealthy air, as they have for many days this month.

"Be smart about when you go outdoors during the heat," said Dr. William Ebeling, a Fresno allergist-immunologist. "Your outdoor activities should take place in the morning. Staying inside in the afternoon protects you from ozone."

The Valley led the nation last year in ozone violations with 127. The South Coast Air Basin was second with 119. No other metropolitan area in the country was even close.

Ozone is an invisible, corrosive gas that attacks the skin, eyes and lungs. It is known to trigger lung problems, such as asthma.

The Valley is an incubator for ozone, which forms best in sunlight, heat and the light breezes of an air basin surrounded by mountains, such as the Valley. Fumes from dairies, paint and vehicles combine with oxides of nitrogen from vehicles to create ozone.

Long, sunny, hot days make July one of the worst times for air quality. State records for the last decade show the Valley's air violated the ozone standard 93% of the days in July.

The Valley's cleanest summer on record was 2005 with 102 violations. Yet there were 29 bad July days that year.

Curiously, the highest July heat can prevent a big buildup of ozone and slightly improve conditions, said Shawn Ferreria, senior air quality specialist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

On days when the mercury rises to 110 and above, the heat creates a strong updraft that pulls ozone away from the Valley floor, as it did over the weekend.

That upward movement prevented the ozone from reaching much more dangerous levels closer to the ground, though the ozone still violated the federal health standard.

"With these high temperatures, you get a lot of air mixing and moving," Ferreria. "It kept the ozone in check."

The Valley would need cooler weather in either August or September to break the record for fewest ozone violations.

No one knows if there will be cool weather in August and September, but Ferreria said he is noticing some encouraging signs - a little less traffic and more people bicycling to work. He suggested people might be driving fewer miles, which would reduce ozone-making vehicle emissions.

Another sign: The Valley has not spiked ozone high enough to create a violation of the now-defunct one-hour standard. Even healthy people often feel the effects when the old one-hour standard is breached, experts say.

"We've been flirting with one-hour violations, but they haven't happened," Ferreria said. "Something seems to be going on, but nobody knows exactly what it is yet."

AG Brown offers to mediate dispute over stalled Chevron project in Richmond

By Katherine Tam

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, July 23, 2009

State Attorney General Jerry Brown is offering to help hash out a deal among Richmond, Chevron and environmentalists to resume construction at the local refinery, where about 1,000 workers have been laid off, but not everyone wants Brown at the table.

City officials and the environmentalists accepted Brown's offer; Chevron thinks settlement talks should continue without him.

"The parties agreed to private mediation, before a highly qualified mediator proposed by the plaintiffs and agreed to by Chevron and the city of Richmond," refinery spokesman Brent Tippen said Wednesday. "Chevron has invested significant time and effort in this mediation process and believes that the agreed-upon private mediation has the greatest likelihood for resolving this dispute."

Construction to replace the refinery's hydrogen plant, power plant and reformer to refine a wider range of crude stopped about two weeks ago under court order. A Contra Costa Superior Court judge ordered permits suspended until lingering questions in the project's environmental impact report are answered.

Chevron, the city and environmental groups have met multiple times to try to reach a settlement. The parties signed a confidentiality agreement and have been tight-lipped, but multiple sources say talks have reached an impasse.

It's not unusual for settlement talks to temporarily stop if everyone needs time to think about issues and solutions away from the bargaining table, Tippen said. He added that Chevron hopes talks can resume soon.

Brown made his offer at Tuesday night's City Council meeting before a standing-room-only crowd of more than 350, most of them union workers recently laid off from the Chevron project. The crowd greeted Brown's offer with a standing ovation as they pleaded to return to work.

"The sides aren't that far apart," Brown said. "Give me a call and I'll be here, and we'll get it solved."

The council voted unanimously to accept Brown's offer. Councilman Tom Butt hopes a high-profile political figure such as Brown, who is familiar with the issue, can move talks forward.

"It sure wouldn't hurt to give it a shot," Butt said Wednesday. "He's a plain-spoken person. He won't beat around the bush. That's what a good mediator does."

Mimi Ho, program director with the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, speaking on behalf of the environmental groups, said: "We are ready, willing and able to join Jerry Brown in settlement talks. The health of Richmond's community and workers are at stake."

Brown stepped into the fray in early 2008 when he penned three letters stating that the EIR is flawed and pushing for reductions in air and greenhouse gas emissions. Brown hired a chemist, who studied the project and concluded the refinery would be able to refine heavier, more contaminated crude, echoing a concern that environmental groups have raised about increased pollution.

Chevron has insisted that replacing old equipment makes the refinery safer and more efficient, and that it will continue to refine light to intermediate crude. It has filed an appeal to the state to overturn the earlier court ruling.

A divided City Council approved the EIR and the project with a host of mitigation measures intended to reduce impacts. The environmentalists argued that the measures don't go far enough; in September, the West County Toxics Coalition, Communities for a Better Environment and Asian Pacific Environmental Network sued the city and Chevron.

The Contra Costa Building and Construction Trades Council urged the parties Wednesday to let Brown in the negotiating room.

"Over 1,200 Building Trades men and women have been laid off, over 3,000 secondary jobs related to this project will be lost," the council wrote in a statement. "It is of the utmost importance that all parties act responsibly and reach a settlement as soon as possible. Our local Building Trades men and women and our local economy depend on it."

NASA flying low over Valley today, Friday

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

NASA's DC-8 flying laboratory is conducting low-level flights over the Valley as part of an Earth science experience for university students and educators today and Friday.

The aircraft may fly as low as 1,000 feet above ground and fly repeated paths to collect air samples in a corridor between Highway 99 and Interstate 5.

The undergraduate and graduate students are participating as part of NASA's Student Airborne Research Program.

Also aboard will be middle school and high school math and science teachers in NASA's Airborne Research Experience for Educators.

NASA doing low-level research flights over Calif

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, July 22, 2009

PALMDALE, Calif. -- A NASA DC-8 aircraft is conducting low-level research flights over California's San Joaquin Valley this week.

NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center says flights Wednesday and Friday may be at altitudes as low as 1,000 feet above the ground to collect air samples in a corridor between Highway 99 and Interstate 5.

A multinational group of university students and math and science teachers from middle schools and high schools are participating in the flights originating from Palmdale.

In addition to the air quality research over the valley, Friday's flight will observe the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and Monterey Bay.

EPA wants better monitoring of airborne lead

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, July 22, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The Environmental Protection Agency wants better information on how much lead is in the air of large cities and industrial areas.

The EPA proposed Wednesday an expansion of its monitoring for airborne lead levels in communities where harmful amounts of lead are most likely to be found in the air.

The agency said it has no plans to change the lead air quality standard, which was tightened last year. But EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said more monitoring may be needed to make certain that the tougher requirements are being followed. Exposure to even very low levels of lead in early life has been linked to damage to a child's IQ, learning disabilities and memory loss.

The EPA expects to issue the new requirements early next year.

AP: NYC mayor restricts idling, but his SUVs do it

By Sara Kugler, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post, N.Y. Times and other papers, Wednesday, July 22, 2009

NEW YORK -- Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has pushed an ambitious green agenda and cast himself as a national environmental leader, routinely runs afoul of his own anti-pollution policy by letting his official SUVs idle, sometimes for more than an hour.

In spot checks over the past week, The Associated Press timed idling periods for the mayor's city-owned SUVs, which shuttle him around the city or trail him when he takes the subway. The parked vehicles idled at least eight times for periods of 10 minutes to over an hour.

The mayor earlier this year strengthened the city's anti-idling law - which allows three minutes of idling - into what advocates call the nation's toughest and promised a public-awareness campaign. The bill limited idling to one minute in school zones and mandated education for taxi driver applicants.

"Those of us that want to leave a good life for our children, and want to have clean air for us to breathe, and clean water to drink ... it's incumbent on us to really carry the fight," he said at the signing.

Bloomberg's SUVs are exempt from the law because they are considered emergency vehicles, but the city is trying reduce idling, spokesman Stu Loeser said Wednesday.

The SUVs have devices enabling heat and radios to run without the engine. The devices don't allow the air conditioning to run, but the vehicles are supposed to be parked in the shade when possible, Loeser said. Nearly every time the AP noted the idling vehicles, temperatures were mild and they were parked in the shade.

"We're doing our best," Loeser said.

Bloomberg, who is running for re-election this year, sought to cast himself as a national environmental leader when he tested the waters for a possible presidential run last year.

He floated a plan to charge tolls on all vehicles entering Manhattan's most congested areas to lure more people to mass transit, wants the city's taxi fleet to go hybrid and partnered with former President Bill Clinton to retrofit city buildings to use less energy.

David Pettit, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's Southern California air program, said it's troubling when environmental leaders don't live the lifestyle they advocate.

"It doesn't paint a very good picture when you see this kind of thing," he said.

An Environmental Defense Fund report this year estimated that idling vehicles produce 130,000 tons of heat-trapping carbon dioxide each year in the city. They also emit smog-forming nitrogen oxides, soot and carbon monoxide, pollutants associated with a number of health problems.

Bloomberg's vehicles run on a blend of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline that reduces both emissions and fuel economy. The city's anti-idling law does not make exceptions for alternative fuel vehicles.

The mayor wants to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030. A study by his office found the city produced nearly 1 percent of the nation's greenhouse gases emissions in 2005.

Bloomberg recently admitted he had done little to reduce energy use at his Upper East Side mansion, other than turning off unnecessary lights and opening windows in warm weather. He only recently had his roof painted white, an idea he has advocated.

Other environmental leaders have been criticized for not doing what they ask of citizens. In 2007, Al Gore retrofitted his Nashville home to reduce an average \$1,200 monthly electric bill.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, credited with popularizing gas-guzzling Hummers before entering politics, has made over the two that he owns into more fuel-efficient models.

[Manteca Bulletin Commentary Thurs., July 23, 2009](#)

Manteca sets an example for Californians to 'go solar'

Willie Weatherford, Manteca Mayor

As a progressive, growing city, Manteca is leading the way in becoming a destination for energy efficient living. Despite the current economic climate and the rise in foreclosures across the region, forward-thinking home builders, businesses and residents are benefiting from the abundance of sunshine in Manteca to make clean renewable energy.

With more than 500 new solar homes in six communities, Manteca has become a flagship in the Greater Sacramento Region for supporting energy efficient living. For example, national home builder Standard Pacific Homes will be opening a new community here on Saturday, July 25. Montage II is Standard Pacific's second energy efficient solar community in Manteca, and the builder is sponsoring a community event that will help visitors learn more about the benefits of an energy efficient home – everything from buying a new home to small changes we can make every day that can help the environment while saving money.

Throughout California, there are more than 100 new residential communities that incorporate integrated solar panels and energy efficient appliances.

As part of the California Energy Commission's New Solar Home Partnership (NSHP), these builders – such as Standard Pacific, Woodside and Atherton, which have invested in Manteca – are laying down the foundation for a more cost and energy efficient future for Californians.

If one out of every 13 households in California was powered by solar energy, we could provide an additional 3,000 megawatts of renewable clean energy and reduce the output of greenhouse gasses by 3 million tons. That would be like taking one million cars off the road.

Whether you are taking the first steps in becoming more energy efficient or are already well on the way to leading a more eco-friendly lifestyle, I encourage all residents of Manteca to make a commitment to building a greener City for our community and for generations to come.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, July 22, 2009:](#)

Tobacco tax will save lives, cut medical costs

As a practicing physician for over 20 years in Kern County, I have seen many patients who have been affected by smoking -- including those who have never smoked -- and I want to do everything in my power to make sure that early detection of lung disease, cancer research and smoking prevention programs are growing in California.

SB 600, a bill authored by state Sen. Alex Padilla and co-sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association and other health organizations, does just that.

SB 600 would increase the cigarette and tobacco tax in California by \$1.50 per pack, a portion of which would go the tobacco control and lung cancer research, and would most importantly reduce the number of teen smokers. Smoking is the largest preventable cause of death in California, and

by reducing consumption through an increased tax, we can save hundreds of thousands of lives and millions of dollars in health care costs. It's about time that California increase the cigarette and tobacco tax.

SB 600 will not only save lives, but will keep nearly 361,000 kids from becoming addicted. In my years as a doctor in the San Joaquin Valley, where [air pollution](#) is higher and asthma more prevalent than other parts of the state, I understand the need to detect and treat emphysema, asthma, bronchitis and other lung diseases immediately, especially in children.

One in five children in the San Joaquin Valley have asthma, in Kern County alone there are over 20,000 cases of pediatric asthma and nearly double the amount of adult asthma cases. SB 600 will help to reduce the growth of those numbers by expanding the tobacco control program, deterring teens from starting to smoke and reducing the number of smokers.

California hasn't increased the tax on cigarettes and tobacco in 10 years, but the incidence of heart and lung disease and smoking related cancers continues to rise, claiming nearly 40,000 lives annually. SB 600 is projected to reduce youth smoking by 21 percent, cause nearly 190,000 current smokers to quit, prevent more than 165,000 premature deaths and save California \$8.1 billion in health care costs.

SB 600 will also help California get back on track by contributing \$1.2 billion to the state's general fund in the first year alone. The budget deficit in California has forced already existing health and education programs to be cut and in some cases, eliminated, but SB 600 would help close that gap by contributing to the general fund.

The funds not used for tobacco prevention can help save some of the vital health and education programs threatened by California's budget deliberations.

Big tobacco companies have paid hundreds of millions of dollars to avoid a tax increase in California- and they've gotten away with it for over a decade. Nine states (with both Democratic and Republican governors), Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Wisconsin, have enacted tobacco increases in 2009. There is no better time than right now to increase the tax; it will save lives, prevent tobacco addiction by our teens, reduce future health care costs and help balance the state budget. It's about time.

Ravi Patel, MD, is a board certified oncologist and founder of the Comprehensive Blood and Cancer Center. He lives in Bakersfield.

[O.C. Register blog, Wednesday, July 22, 2009:](#)

O.C. Fedex trucks go hybrid-electric

posted by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

Next time a Fedex delivery truck rolls by, check its side panel for a green logo. It might be one of 28 hybrid-electric trucks now being rolled out by the global delivery service in Orange County.

The company is sending 92 of the trucks to California as part of a worldwide push to increase its fleet of cleaner-burning vehicles, said Mitch Jackson, director of environmental affairs and sustainability.

"We're not only trying to make our operations more efficient, we're trying to find ways to transform transportation," Jackson said. "We feel electrification of a significant portion of surface transportation is the way to go."

The hybrid diesel trucks are 42 percent more fuel efficient than conventional diesel, the fuel used by most delivery trucks, he said. The new additions will mean a total of 264 hybrid electrics in Fedex's fleet of about 30,000 medium-duty delivery trucks worldwide.

While Fedex deployed some gasoline-electric hybrids last year in Southern California, these will be the first to run on diesel.

The company converted trucks that had been driven between 300,000 and 500,000 miles, Jackson said. The diesel engines will always be running, but at lower speeds on idle only; the electric motor will handle acceleration.

Globally, he said, "it's like taking 279 cars off the road every year."

Fedex hopes to push other businesses to convert their fleets to hybrid electrics, Jackson said.

"Right now, by and large, hybrids are being produced in fairly low volumes," he said. "The price premiums are higher for them than they would be if they were a widely available product. That's what we are striving for."