

San Joaquin Valley on pace for clean-air record

Ozone violations down, so far, this summer.

By MARK GROSSI - The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, July 24, 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 Ebbeling, 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 percent 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 said. "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."

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, July 24, 2009:](#)

Desalination benefits

Kudos to Leonard Goldberg [letters July 18] for chiding environmentalists by proposing one imaginative solution (desalination) to two crises: our water shortage and rising ocean levels. But its benefits don't end there.

Desalination uses two to five times more electricity than groundwater pumping or shipping surface water, so throw in a half dozen new power plants. Presto! Our impoverished energy companies are revitalized.

China's moribund steel industry will also rebound by supplying the pipe needed to get the water over the mountains. Since desalination produces one to three gallons of toxic brine (twice as salty as seawater) per gallon of pure water, Coalinga's Blue Hills Toxic Waste Dump will thrive. And who knows? Maybe all the boiling water these plants dump back into the ocean will create perpetual mini El Ninos that bring rain to drought-stricken areas.

At the very least, we can hope that the new power plants' additional air pollution will speed global warming. That way the ice caps will melt faster, the oceans will rise more and desalination will actually prove to be self-sustaining.

All this and more for a price only 20 times higher per acre foot of water than we now pay. Take that you pesky environmentalists!

J.W. Stover, Fresno

[S.F.Chronicle editorial, Friday, July 24, 2009:](#)

Warming, pollution, development threaten bay

San Francisco Bay is more than just a body of water. It's the lifeblood of our region, providing our most striking geographical feature, our biggest economic engine, even our name.

For most of the past century, the bay was overtaxed and underappreciated. Canneries used it as a dump. Local jurisdictions pumped raw sewage into it. Many of the heavily industrialized businesses that used to thrive here allowed it to wash away their toxic chemicals and pollutants. Cities and counties filled it so that they could build more houses and add to their tax base. By 1961, when three determined Berkeley women

founded a nonprofit organization named Save the Bay, the entire bay was at risk of shrinking into oblivion.

Fortunately, that's no longer the case. After many years and many battles, Bay Area residents have a much better understanding of the bay's crucial impact on our quality of life. Every year, thousands of local volunteers dedicate their time and effort to cleaning and restoring the bay. Development along the shoreline is carefully scrutinized by the state-supported Bay Conservation and Development Commission. And the bay's shrinkage has been halted - for now. The bay is roughly 40,000 acres larger now than it was in 1961.

But the bay's new era has brought new challenges. The Bay Area's tremendous economic dynamism - and tremendously high cost of living - translates into continued development pressure on all sides of the bay.

There is pollution - an estimated 464 pounds of mercury is loaded into the bay annually from the Central Valley alone. The Bay Conservation and Development Commission may fall victim to state budget cuts. And climate change will cause the bay to rise many feet in the coming decades, threatening residents and wildlife.

"Our quality of life depends on the bay and its health," said Florence LaRiviere, a bay activist since the 1960s and co-founder of Citizens' Committee to Complete the Refuge, a bay preservation group. "The people of the Bay Area have fought for many years to preserve it, but those values are still under threat."

In 2009, there are two kinds of threats: short-term and long-term. In the short-term, increased environmental awareness hasn't stopped developers from wanting to pave over the bay with new, sometimes massive, construction projects. A good example is the proposed development at the Cargill salt ponds in Redwood City.

The huge project would pave over Cargill's salt-making operations, which sprawl over 1,433 acres on the edge of Redwood City. Cargill's plan is to build a small town - 12,000 housing units, 25,000 residents, schools and playing fields. It has the support of the City Council, but environmentalists rightly point out that the site was once wetlands and that it will be subject to flooding in the coming decades. The construction plan will be below sea level - and scientists expect the bay to rise as much as 16 inches by 2050.

Smaller developments make big impacts, too. There's a pending development plan for the Patterson Ranch area in Fremont - at around 1,500 homes, it's much smaller than the Redwood City proposal. But it's one of the few remaining nesting and foraging areas for important migratory birds that add to the bay's biodiversity.

In the long-term, the one-two punch of climate change and the state's chronic budget shortfalls mean it's only going to get more difficult, more expensive and more important to protect the bay. Local governments, strapped for cash, may be tempted to let developers fill in the bay with new houses, leaving later administrations to worry about sea rise. Protection agencies may not have the money or the personnel to defend the bay from dumping.

All this means that local residents will have to recommit themselves to its defense.

"The most crucial thing is making sure that we don't start building on lands that are going to be underwater in 100 years," said Arthur Feinstein, a board member of Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge. "The problem is, the state is broke now." The problem is, the state is likely to be broke for a long time to come.

That's why the bay needs the local community more than ever. We never could afford to take it for granted, but in the months and years to come, it will have to become a top priority. The nine counties will have to find new ways to cooperate on questions of development, pollution, water quality and restoration. Local citizens will have to take on a bigger role in protecting the bay from all of these threats.

It won't be easy. But the fate of the bay is too important to be left to chance.

The major threats

Development: The biggest long-term threat to the bay. Infill development shrinks the bay, causing havoc to wildlife and air quality, but even careless development on the fringes can have a big impact. The paving of wetlands removes a natural protection against sea level rise.

Trash: The San Francisco Bay Water Quality Control Board estimates that there are three pieces of garbage along every foot of tributary.

Chemical pollution: Mercury runoff remains the largest threat to fish and wildlife in the bay, and pesticides are a growing problem.

Climate change: Scientists predict that the bay will rise by as much as 16 inches by 2050.

Oversight: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had recommended turning the Bay Conservation and Development Commission into a regional entity rather than a state one. That plan was not in the budget deal reached this week, but the financial problems at the state and local levels still could result in cutbacks on regulators.

[Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Letter to the Editor, Friday, July 24, 2009](#)

Clean energy

California has long been the nation's leader in clean energy and renewable resources. This summer should be no different. California can triple its use of clean energy like solar and wind

power by mandating that utilities get at least 33 percent of their energy from renewable resources by 2020.

Doing so is critical to solving global warming and reducing smog pollution. It is also a great way to create jobs and rebuild our economy. Britain's plan is for 40 percent of electricity to come from renewable sources, throughout the nation, by 2020. They're setting a great example for the rest of the world, and it's the very least we can do as Californians to follow in their steps. Legislators in Sacramento should embrace clean energy and prove that we are still the nation's clean energy leader, for the sake of the environment as well as the economy.

Raymond E. Lawrence, Livermore

[Tri-Valley Herald, Contra Costa Times and Modesto Bee, Commentary, Friday, July 24, 2009](#)

Cold shoulder to climate 'urgency'

George F. Will: Syndicated columnist

UNFORTUNATELY, CHINA'S president had to dash home to suppress ethnic riots. Had he stayed in Italy at the recent G-8 summit, he could have continued the Herculean task of disabusing Barack Obama of his amazingly durable belief, shared by the U.S. Congress, that China — and India, Brazil, Mexico and other developing nations — will sacrifice their modernization on the altar of climate change. China has a more pressing agenda, and not even suppressing riots tops the list.

China made this clear in June, when its vice premier said, opaquely, that China will "actively" participate in climate change talks on a basis of "common but differentiated responsibility." The meaning of that was made clear three days later at a climate change conference in Bonn, where a Chinese spokesman reiterated that his country's priority is economic growth: "Given that, it is natural for China to have some increase in its emissions, so it is not possible for China in that context to accept a binding or compulsory target."

That was redundant: In January, China announced that its continuing reliance on coal as its primary source of energy will require increasing coal production 30 percent in the next six years.

In Bonn, even thoroughly developed Japan promised only a 2 percent increase of its emission-reduction obligations under the 1997 Kyoto agreement. Japan's decision left Yvo de Boer, the slow learner who is the U.N.'s climate change czar, nonplussed: "For the first time in my two and a half years in this job, I don't know what to say."

Others did. They said: On to Italy! The Financial Times reported, "Officials are now pinning their hopes" on the G-8 summit.

Which has come and gone, the eight having vowed to cut emissions of greenhouse gases 80 percent by 2050, which is 41 years distant. As is 1968, which seems as remote as the Punic Wars, considering that more than half of all living Americans were born after 1966. If you do not want to do anything today, promise to do everything tomorrow, which is always a day away.

Still, sternly declaring that they will brook no nonsense from nature, the eight made a commitment — but a nonbinding one — that Earth's temperature shall not rise by more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit over "preindustrial levels." That is the goal. Details to follow. Tomorrow.

Explaining such lethargy in the face of a supposed emergency, the G-8's host, Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, said the eight should not burden themselves as long as "5 billion people continue to behave as they have always behaved." Actually, the problem, for people who think it is a problem, is that the 5 billion in the developing world are behaving in a new way. After centuries of exclusion from economic growth, they are enjoying it, which is tiresome to would-be climate fixers in already prosperous nations.

The fixers say: On to Copenhagen! There, in December, the moveable feast of climate confabulations will continue. By which time China alone, at its current pace, probably will have brought on line 14 more coal-fired generating plants, each of them capable of providing all the electricity needed for a city the size of San Diego. Last Sunday, India told visiting Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton that there is "no case" for U.S. pressure on India to reduce carbon emissions.

The costs of weaning the U.S. economy off much of its reliance on carbon are uncertain, but certainly large. The climatic benefits of doing so are uncertain but, given the behavior of those pesky 5 billion, almost certainly small, perhaps minuscule, even immeasurable. Fortunately, skepticism about the evidence that supposedly supports current alarmism about climate change is growing, as is evidence that, whatever the truth about the problem turns out to be, U.S. actions cannot be significantly ameliorative.

When New York Times columnist Tom Friedman called upon "young Americans" to "get a million people on the Washington Mall calling for a price on carbon," another columnist, Mark Steyn, responded: "If you're 29, there has been no global warming for your entire adult life. If you're graduating high school, there has been no global warming since you entered first grade."

Which could explain why the Mall does not reverberate with youthful clamors about carbon. And why, regarding climate change, the U.S. government, rushing to impose unilateral cap-and-trade burdens on the sagging U.S. economy, looks increasingly like someone who bought a closetful of platform shoes and bell-bottom slacks just as disco was dying.

[Washington Post commentary, Friday, July 24, 2009:](#)

What Palin Got Wrong about Energy

By Barbara Boxer and John Kerry

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin put the global warming debate front and center last week with a plea to avoid the "personality-driven political gossip of the day" and focus more "on the gravity of . . . challenges" facing our country.

We share her hopes for a substantive dialogue. But we want to put facts ahead of fiction and real debate ahead of rhetorical bomb-throwing.

Palin argues that "the answer doesn't lie in making energy scarcer and more expensive!" The truth is, clean energy legislation doesn't make energy scarcer or more expensive; it works to find alternative solutions to our costly dependence on foreign oil and provides powerful incentives to pursue cutting-edge clean energy technologies.

Palin asserts that job losses are "certain." Wrong. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and American Clean Energy and Security legislation will create significant employment opportunities across the country in a broad array of sectors linked to the clean energy economy. Studies at the federal level and by states have demonstrated clean energy job creation. A report by the Center for American Progress calculated that \$150 billion in clean energy investments would create more than 1.7 million domestic and community-based jobs that can't be shipped overseas.

Palin seems nostalgic for the campaign rally chant of "drill, baby, drill." But she ignores the fact that the United States has only 3 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, while we are responsible for 25 percent of the world's oil consumption.

In fact, the governor's new refrain against global warming action reminds us of every naysayer who has spoken out against progress in cleaning up pollution.

Whether it was the debate over the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Superfund law or any other landmark environmental law, one pattern has always been clear: Time and again, pessimists -- often affiliated with polluting industries -- predicted job losses and great costs to taxpayers. Each time, our environmental laws have cleaned the water we drink, the air we breathe and the communities we live in at far lower cost than initially expected.

Take the acid rain program established in the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990. The naysayers said it would cost consumers billions in higher electricity rates, but electricity rates declined an average of 19 percent from 1990 to 2006. Naysayers said the cost to business would be more than \$50 billion a year, but health and other benefits outweighed the costs 40 to 1. Naysayers

predicted it would cost the economy millions of jobs. In fact, the United States added 20 million jobs from 1993 to 2000, as the U.S. economy grew 64 percent.

The carefully crafted clean energy bill that we will present to the Senate, building on the Waxman-Markey legislation passed by the House, will jump-start our economy, protect consumers, stop the ravages of unchecked global climate change and ensure that the United States -- not China or India -- will be the leading economic power in this century.

By creating powerful incentives for clean energy, it will create millions of jobs in America -- building wind turbines, installing solar panels on homes and producing a new fleet of electric and hybrid vehicles.

It will also help make America more secure. A May report by retired U.S. generals and admirals found, "Our dependence on foreign oil reduces our international leverage, places our troops in dangerous global regions, funds nations and individuals who wish us harm, and weakens our economy; our dependency and inefficient use of oil also puts our troops at risk."

We do not charge that Palin wants to keep sending hundreds of billions of dollars overseas annually to import oil from countries that, in many cases, are working to harm Americans and American interests around the world -- or that she wants another nation to lead the way to the innovative clean energy solutions that will be eagerly gobbled up by the rest of the world. But those would be the tragic results of the do-nothing policies she has espoused. Our nation's approach to energy must be balanced and must provide incentives for all the available clean energy sources to help reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

We are already working every day in the Senate to pass legislation that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, create millions of clean energy jobs and protect our children from pollution. We respectfully invite Gov. Palin to join that reality-based debate -- one that relies on facts, science, tested economics and steely-eyed national security interests. Our country needs nothing less, and our planet depends on it.

Barbara Boxer, a Democrat from California, is chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. John F. Kerry, a Democrat from Massachusetts, is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, July 23, 2009:](#)

Going greener in Yosemite

By Mark Grossi

Yosemite National Park today unveiled four new hybrid (electric/diesel) tractors that will be used to pull open-air trailers of visitors in popular Yosemite Valley Floor Tours.

Officials said the new tractors will reduce emissions by 85% and get eight times better mileage than the previous propane-powered vehicles.

The new tractors -- costing \$150,000 apiece -- complement the park's fleet of 16 hybrid shuttle buses (also electric/diesel) used in Yosemite Valley and Wawona.

In case you've never been to Yosemite Valley, the photo, taken by Yosemite spokesman Erik Skindrud, gives you an idea of what they look like.

Approximately 70,000 Yosemite National Park visitors take the Yosemite Valley Floor Tour each year.