

## **Valley air cleaner this summer**

By Christine Bedell, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

A cooler-than-usual June and efforts to clean the valley's air are combining to make breathing a little easier this summer.

Not since 2005 has the San Joaquin Valley violated a key national air standard fewer days at this point in the year.

We stood at 50 exceedances of the so-called 8-hour ozone rule Monday, down from 65 in 2008 and 64 in 2007, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Weather has a lot to do with our air quality conditions but evidence suggests more than just a meteorological fluke is in play here, said Scott Nester, air district director of planning.

Yes, June was cooler than normal and there were 10 or 11 fewer days over the standard than is typical, he said.

But peak ozone concentrations didn't change from June to July, suggesting efforts to clean the air have played a role, too, Nester said.

"Emissions are doing down," he said. "That's what the San Joaquin Valley air district wants."

And there's also the economic downturn. Fewer goods are being moved and fewer miles are being driven, which could also be helping clear our air, Nester said.

Other air districts in the state are generally seeing air improvements, he said, also suggesting the economic climate is having an effect.

Ozone is an invisible gas formed when pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants and other sources chemically react in the presence of sunlight.

It's the main ingredient of smog and can damage lung tissue and aggravate breathing problems.

From the "Who knew?" file, really warm temperatures like those we saw last week can improve air conditions.

When temperatures get over about 105 degrees, the inversion layer rises and the concentration of ozone close to the valley floor tends to stabilize, and not continue to climb, Nester said.

Bakersfield is the second most ozone-polluted city in the country after Los Angeles, according to the American Lung Association's 2009 State of the Air rankings. We stood there the year before, too.

### **OZONE RULE VIOLATIONS AS OF JULY 26**

2009: 50

2008: 65

2007: 64

2006: 65

2005: 47

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

## **\$22M will help rid Oakland Port of dirty diesel**

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

OAKLAND, Calif.—Environmental regulators are helping to clean up or replace polluting diesel trucks at the Port of Oakland under a new \$22 million program.

The announcement Tuesday by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, California Air Resources Board and the Port of Oakland will outfit about 800 dirty trucks with filters and replace another 200.

Officials say it is important to reduce toxic diesel emissions in West Oakland, where cancer rates are three times higher than elsewhere in the region.

Diesel particulate matter is the top air pollutant in the state and can cause asthma and reproductive harm.

## **State regulators have required that high-polluting trucks be banned from the port by Jan. 1.**

### **Money flowing to upgrade Port of Oakland trucks**

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

OAKLAND — Owners of 1,000 diesel trucks that use the Port of Oakland will get \$22 million in government grants to clean up or replace their vehicles in a program to reduce health risks from soot in West Oakland air, a team of clean-air regulators announced Tuesday.

Government budget problems in the past year had threatened to sidetrack much of the money.

In the end, the port and state, federal and regional clean-air agencies teamed up to commit the \$22 million to help clean the air, and to ease the risk of economic disruption that could occur if the vehicles are not upgraded with fine-particle filters by a Jan. 1 state ban on dirty trucks entering ports.

"This is a new beginning in efforts to clean the air in West Oakland," said Margaret Gordon, a Port of Oakland commissioner and West Oakland resident, at a news conference held as diesel trucks rumbled by en route to the fifth busiest container port in America. "This is about clean air. It's also about making money so we can move ahead to clean the air."

The money will provide grants of about \$15,000 per truck to install fine-particle filters on about 800 truck models built from 1994 to 2003, and grants of as much as \$50,000 to replace each of some 200 trucks built in 1993 or earlier.

The trucks, most privately owned, will not be allowed in the shipping facility after Jan. 1 unless they take the required measures.

To illustrate the difference in soot spewed by old trucks with and without filters, air pollution regulators on Tuesday placed white handkerchiefs over the smokestacks of two trucks and fired up the engines for about five seconds.

The handkerchief from the truck with a filter still looked fairly clean; the cloth from the unfiltered truck showed a solid black circle. The vehicles were of a similar make and age, but the filter on one trapped 85 percent of the fine particulates, officials said.

"This soot is what West Oakland residents find on our windowsills and inside our houses," Gordon said. "This is why so many children have asthma in West Oakland."

Lifetime residents of West Oakland face a three-times-higher risk of getting cancer than the rest of the Bay Area, according to a study last year by state and regional clean-air agencies.

Port trucks are only a part of the problem, as train and ship exhaust and pollution from freeway traffic also showers soot, regulators say. But cleaning up diesel trucks is the fastest way to improve air quality around the port, said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "It will have immediate effects."

The port and the regional air district each chipped in \$5 million for the grants. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided \$2 million in federal economic stimulus funds. The California Air Resources Board allocated \$10 million from state transportation bonds approved by voters in 2006.

Applications for the clean trucks grants can be obtained at the OT411 Trucker Information Center, 11 Burma Road, Oakland, or downloaded at [www.baaqmd.gov/goods](http://www.baaqmd.gov/goods).

## **San Mateo seeks input on general plan**

By Mike Rosenberg, San Mateo County Times

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

SAN MATEO — The city has released the first update to its general plan in two decades and is asking residents to help further shape the document, which is designed to guide the community through future redevelopment.

The plan includes several major proposals, including the goal of increasing housing opportunities while maintaining the character of existing neighborhoods. It also calls for beautifying and improving El Camino Real, strengthening downtown, and concentrating development near transit and transportation corridors.

The plan, released Monday on the city's Web site, [www.ci.sanmateo.ca.us](http://www.ci.sanmateo.ca.us), has seven lengthy sections, plus appendices, and is by no means a light read. However, the document will have far-reaching implications for the next 10 to 20 years and affects nearly 16 square miles, including some unincorporated areas and Bay waters.

It outlines policy on land use, transportation, housing, human health, air quality, noise, aesthetics, climate change and more. The plan is meant to guide policymakers as they contemplate individual projects; it was last updated in 1990.

Other goals of the plan include developing a strategy to reduce traffic congestion, increasing open space and recreation opportunities and improving design quality.

The planning commission will host a meeting on the plan Aug. 25, and comments will be accepted through Sept. 10.

## **UK families win fight over birth defects**

By Jill Lawless, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

LONDON, United Kingdom (AP) -- Britain's High Court on Wednesday ruled in favor of a group of young people, born with deformed hands and feet, who say pollution from a former steelworks contributed to their disabilities.

Eighteen claimants aged between 9 and 22 sued a local authority, claiming their pregnant mothers were exposed to a stew of airborne toxins from the disused British Steel plant at Corby in central England.

A judge ruled that Corby Borough Council was liable for the deformities in all but two of the cases.

The huge steel plant, one of the largest in western Europe, closed in 1980 and the 680-acre (275 hectare) site was redeveloped.

The council denies there is any link between the dismantling of the plant and cleanup of the contaminated land, and birth defects in local children, including missing fingers and deformed hands and feet.

Judge Robert Akenhead, however, said there was a "statistically significant" cluster of birth defects in Corby between 1989 and 1999 that could have been caused by toxins on the steelworks site.

The judge ruled that the council was guilty of "negligence and breach of statutory duty" to residents during the cleanup operation.

Akenhead said the negligence "led to the extensive dispersal of contaminated mud and dust over public areas of Corby and into and over private homes, with the result that the contaminants could realistically have caused the types of birth defects of which complaint has been made by the claimants."

The judge said the issue of whether the air pollution did in fact cause the defects would be decided later.

Outside court Audrey Barfield, whose 13-year-old son Dylan South is among the claimants, said she was "absolutely over the moon" at the ruling.

"We knew that we were right," said Barfield, whose son had to undergo daily physiotherapy on his deformed foot for the first five years of his life and still experiences pain.

"We still have a long drawn-out process to go through. We will have to see where we go from here," Barfield said.

Corby Council chief executive Chris Mallender said he was "very disappointed and very surprised" by the verdict.

"Our position has always been that there was no link between the reclamation work that was carried out in Corby in past decades and these children's birth defects," he said. "That is still our position."

He said the council would take time to consider its next move.

"We need time to reflect on this. We're not saying that we will appeal, we will not say that we will not accept the judgment," he said.

The plaintiffs' lawyer, Des Collins, called on the council to compensate the families as soon as possible.

## **U.S., China end talks with smiles but no progress on climate change** **President Obama is pushing for an agreement by December, but China resists committing to limits on greenhouse gas emissions. Chinese officials also express deep concern over the U.S. budget deficit.**

By Jim Puzzanghera and David Pierson, staff writers  
N.Y. Times, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

Reporting from Washington and Beijing -- Relations between the United States and China are getting cozier as their battle against the global recession has drawn them closer together. But things aren't quite so warm when it comes to some hot-button topics, particularly climate change.

U.S. and Chinese officials ended two days of high-level talks in Washington on Tuesday still at loggerheads on the issue, a top priority for President Obama. Global warming got little attention during the Bush administration.

China is resisting a push to commit to targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to open its market to U.S. clean energy technology.

"China and the United States are different in their stages of development, national conditions and historic footprints, so I think they should shoulder different responsibilities in tackling climate change," Zhang Guobao, president of China's National Energy Administration, told reporters.

It's just one of several areas in which U.S. and Chinese interests are at odds despite all the smiles and signs of mutual respect before the cameras as the Obama administration hosted its first Strategic and Economic Dialogue.

Chinese officials, for instance, expressed deep concern about the ballooning U.S. budget deficit because of fears that the inflation that could follow would erode their huge investment in Treasury securities.

Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner said the Obama administration shared their concern. He and several top economic officials, including Federal Reserve Chairman Ben S. Bernanke, assured the Chinese that they would rein in the deficit as they scaled back the stimulus and bailout programs.

"Our central banks have moved very aggressively to provide support and provide liquidity to markets. That basic strategy, I think we agree, is the necessary path to recovery," Geithner said. "But China, like the United States, understands that as we see recovery take hold, we're going to need to reverse those exceptional actions."

The two nations have time to work out tensions over the deficit, as well as human rights, nuclear proliferation by Iran and North Korea and the need to make the Chinese economy less dependent on exports to America. But the U.S. and China are approaching a deadline for progress on climate change. U.S. officials hope to have an agreement with China in time for an international climate change conference in December in Copenhagen.

"We're slogging ahead," said Todd Stern, the Obama administration's special envoy for climate change. "There is a lot of ingrained and embedded perspective on this issue that goes back now for 15 years. And . . . I'm not going to kid anybody; I don't think it's easy. But I do think that we will get there."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the two nations -- the world's largest producers and consumers of energy -- agreed to "enhance cooperation on climate change, energy and the environment." China helped move the process forward by explaining what it was willing to consider and what investments it already was making in clean energy, "which I'm not sure is as fully appreciated in our country as it needs to be," she said.

With more green technology, China believes it will be better positioned to compete in an increasingly environmentally minded marketplace. Despite huge gains in solar and wind technology, China still needs know-how in areas such as carbon capture, waste-heat recovery and concentrated solar.

Beijing contends that the U.S. should share the technology if it truly cares about limiting climate change.

But American manufacturers worry that the transfer of research and development will lead to cheaper Chinese products flooding the market. That concern was addressed in a provision of the House climate bill that prevents imports of such products from nations that fail to sign emission caps.

"China is obviously very quick to copy global standards and even emerging technologies," said Ron Mahabir of Asian Cleantech Capital in Singapore.

China, like the U.S., knows that no international climate-change treaty will work without its participation. That has given Beijing leverage at the negotiating table as it calls for more financial support and greater commitments on the part of the developed world to cap emissions.

The gulf in expectations is dramatic. Beijing wants industrialized countries such as the U.S. to cut pollution by 40% below 1990 levels by 2020. The climate-change bill in the U.S. Senate would achieve only a 4% cut over that period.

But it is its right, China contends, to urbanize and raise living standards for its people to levels long enjoyed by the West. Such large-scale urbanization, which China is undergoing, increases prosperity and economic growth but results in greater energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

The promise of prosperity is also the basis of Beijing's legitimacy, making talk of limiting economic growth exceedingly sensitive, experts say.

But there is also reason for optimism on climate change, said Jin Jiaman, a Chinese environmental policy advisor and executive director of the Global Environmental Institute.

If anything would spur the sides to reach consensus on climate change, she said, it's the potential for new business from emission controls and energy recycling technology.

"China is willing to cooperate with the U.S. and the rest of the global community," Jin said. "There should be a way . . . where both sides can benefit from business and both can get economic benefits. I believe they'll find a way to move forward this way."

U.S. and Chinese officials said the two days of talks were designed to get to know each other and the new American priorities.

In welcoming the large China delegation Monday, Obama quoted Chinese philosopher Mencius. Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo went one better: He quoted Obama himself, pronouncing in English, "Yes, we can," to the idea the two nations could build a relationship based on "mutual respect, harmonious coexistence, cooperation and win-win progress."

The talks followed trips to China this year by Clinton, Geithner and a joint trip by Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke this month that was focused on climate change.

Jeremie Waterman, director of China policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said the Obama administration has avoided the rocky start to relations with China experienced by the Bush and Clinton administrations.

Waterman was encouraged by the high level of officials China sent for the talks. And though he acknowledged challenges to completing a climate-change agreement, particularly by December, he was optimistic that U.S. and Chinese officials were on the right path.

"We are generally in a good place in terms of the start that the two sides have gotten off to," he said.

## **Gut Check**

### **The Meat of the Problem**

By Ezra Klein

Washington Post, Commentary, Wednesday, July 29, 2009

The debate over climate change has reached a rarefied level of policy abstraction in recent months. Carbon tax or cap-and-trade? Upstream or downstream? Should we auction permits? Head-scratching is, at this point, permitted. But at base, these policies aim to do a simple thing, in a simple way: persuade us to undertake fewer activities that are bad for the atmosphere by making those activities more expensive. Driving an SUV would become pricier. So would heating a giant house with coal and buying electricity from an inefficient power plant. But there's one activity that's not on the list and should be: eating a hamburger.

If it's any consolation, I didn't like writing that sentence any more than you liked reading it. But the evidence is strong. It's not simply that meat is a contributor to global warming; it's that it is a huge contributor. Larger, by a significant margin, than the global transportation sector.

According to a 2006 United Nations report, livestock accounts for 18 percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. Some of meat's contribution to climate change is intuitive. It's more energy efficient to grow grain and feed it to people than it is to grow grain and turn it into feed that we give to calves until they become adults that we then slaughter to feed to people. Some of the contribution is gross. "Manure lagoons," for instance, is the oddly evocative name for the acres of animal excrement that sit in the sun steaming nitrous oxide into the atmosphere. And some of it would make Bart Simpson chuckle. Cow gas - interestingly, it's mainly burps, not farts -- is a real player.

But the result isn't funny at all: Two researchers at the University of Chicago estimated that switching to a vegan diet would have a bigger impact than trading in your gas guzzler for a Prius (PDF). A study out of Carnegie Mellon University found that the average American would do less for the planet by switching to a totally local diet than by going vegetarian one day a week. That prompted Rajendra Pachauri, the head of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to recommend that people give up meat one day a week to take pressure off the atmosphere. The response was quick and vicious. "How convenient for him," was the inexplicable reply from a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune Review. "He's a vegetarian."

The visceral reaction against anyone questioning our God-given right to bathe in bacon has been enough to scare many in the environmental movement away from this issue. The National Resources Defense Council has a long page of suggestions for how you, too, can "fight global warming." As you'd expect, "Drive Less" is in bold letters. There's also an endorsement for "high-mileage cars such as hybrids and plug-in hybrids." They advise that you weatherize your home, upgrade to more efficient appliances and even buy carbon offsets. The word "meat" is nowhere to be found.

That's not an oversight. Telling people to give up burgers doesn't poll well. Ben Adler, an urban policy writer, explored that in a December 2008 article for the American Prospect. He called environmental groups and asked them for their policy on meat consumption. "The Sierra Club isn't opposed to eating meat," was the clipped reply from a Sierra Club spokesman. "So that's sort of the long and short of it." And without pressure to address the costs of meat, politicians predictably are whiffing on the issue. The Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill, for instance, does nothing to address the emissions from livestock.

The pity of it is that compared with cars or appliances or heating your house, eating pasta on a night when you'd otherwise have made fajitas is easy. It doesn't require a long commute on the bus or the disposable income to trade up to a Prius. It doesn't mean you have to scrounge for change to buy a carbon offset. In fact, it saves money. It's healthful. And it can be done immediately. A Montanan who drives 40 miles to work might not have the option to take public transportation. But he or she can probably

pull off a veggie stew. A cash-strapped family might not be able buy a new dishwasher. But it might be able to replace meatballs with mac-and-cheese. That is the whole point behind the cheery PB&J Campaign, which reminds that "you can fight global warming by having a PB&J for lunch." Given that PB&J is delicious, it's not the world's most onerous commitment.

It's also worth saying that this is not a call for asceticism. It's not a value judgment on anyone's choices. Going vegetarian might not be as effective as going vegan, but it's better than eating meat, and eating meat less is better than eating meat more. It would be a whole lot better for the planet if everyone eliminated one meat meal a week than if a small core of die-hards developed perfectly virtuous diets.

I've not had the willpower to eliminate bacon from my life entirely, and so I eliminated it from breakfast and lunch, and when that grew easier, pulled back further to allow myself five meat-based meals a month. And believe me, I enjoy the hell out of those five meals. But if we're going to take global warming seriously, if we're going to make crude oil more expensive and tank-size cars less practical, there's no reason to ignore the impact of what we put on our plates.

[O.C. Register blog, Wednesday, July 28, 2009:](#)

### **Warming could worsen wildfire, air pollution in western U.S.**

posted by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

Even moderate global warming could mean a 50 percent increase in land burned by wildfire in the American West — bringing with it a worsening of air quality, a new study says.

The heaviest hit would be the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountains, although Southern California, including Orange County, also could see a significant increase in fire frequency by 2055, according to the study led by Jennifer Logan of Harvard University's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

"Other people have done work on what might happen with fires in the Southwest," Logan said. "They haven't taken the step we took to look at the effects on air."

The scientists used long-term data on areas burned by wildfire in the western U.S. from 1980 to 2000. They matched the data to weather conditions, then used a computer climate model to project trends in wildfire burning into the future.

The model assumed a moderate global-warming scenario, with rapid economic growth and a balance between fossil and alternative fuels that leads to a 3-degree Fahrenheit rise in temperature by 2050.

The scientists also used an atmospheric chemistry model to learn how fires would alter air quality.

One kind of smoke particle called an organic carbon aerosol was predicted to increase by 40 percent on average over the next half century, the study said.

The report, "Impacts of climate change from 2000 to 2050 on wildfire activity and carbonaceous aerosol concentrations in the western United States," was published on the Web by the Journal of Geophysical Research - Atmospheres, published by the American Geophysical Union.

Logan said she hopes to focus future work on the Southwestern U.S., including Southern California.

While modeling of regional climate effects can vary, Michael Prather, Earth System Science professor at UC Irvine, says the study does a good job of laying out the factors that could lead to the kinds of changes described.

"The key issue is that climate models predicting regional climate are not very good yet," he said. "They don't agree. All this has uncertainties, but the causal chain they do is very nice — it's the best we've got."