

Air quality alert issued for Valley

By Paula Lloyd / The Fresno Bee
Tuesday, Oct 27, 2009

An air quality alert is in place across the central and southern San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the alert due to blowing dust caused by the windy weather conditions. The alert, affecting Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings and Tulare counties and the Valley portion of Kern County, will end about midnight.

Exposure to particle pollution can aggravate lung disease and heart problems, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis and increase the risk of respiratory infections, the Air Pollution Control District said.

High winds snarl Valley's west-side traffic Traffic accidents, delays and power outages in Valley.

By Jim Guy and Ashley Testa / The Fresno Bee
Wed. Oct. 28, 2009

Wind and blowing dust made for some treacherous driving conditions Tuesday, contributing to a number of traffic collisions and delays throughout the central San Joaquin Valley.

Kings County saw wind gusts of up to 43 mph, according to the National Weather Service. Wind speeds reached 30 mph on Fresno County's west side, while gusts hit 27 mph in the city of Fresno.

Blowing dust caused low visibility in parts of the Valley and resulted in some road closures.

After a collision involving a big rig Tuesday morning, the California Highway Patrol closed Avenue 7 1/2 at Road 9 to the Avenue 7 intersection in Madera County. The road was closed for more than seven hours before reopening about 8 p.m. The driver of the truck and at least two other people were reported to be injured. CHP officers were advised to use masks and goggles at the scene because of the heavy blowing dust.

In Kings County, CHP officers called for a Lemoore Naval Air Station water truck to water down a ponding basin because of blowing dust. The CHP said the basin was on the Avenal Cutoff just west of Highway 41. Visibility was near zero at times on Kansas Avenue between Avenue 10 1/2 and Highway 41.

Near Buttonwillow in Kern County, winds forced the closure of State Route 119 from Interstate 5 to State Route 43. The road reopened about 6:30 p.m.

An air quality alert was in place Tuesday for Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings and Tulare counties and the Valley portion of Kern County.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the alert due to blowing dust caused by the windy weather conditions. The alert ended about midnight.

In Fresno, police reported malfunctioning traffic signals at several locations in the city.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. reported 28 wind-related power outages scattered across Fresno County, affecting about 3,215 customers.

The National Weather Service issued wind warnings for the Sierra Nevada. An overnight low temperature of 22 degrees was forecast for Yosemite National Park. Tioga Pass through the park remained open.

Fresno's high Tuesday was 66 degrees with an overnight low of 39 expected. Today's high in Fresno is forecast to be 63, with an overnight low tonight of 41.

For this morning's road conditions, call (800) 427-ROAD.

Blowing dust prompts health warning tonight for Tulare, Kings and portions of Kern counties

Staff Reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2009

Strong winds have prompted a health warning from local air pollution officials for Tulare, Kings, and portions of Kern counties.

The health warning will be in effect through midnight tonight because of unhealthy amounts of blowing dust that may contain high concentrations of particulate matter.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems including respiratory infections, triggering asthma and acute bronchitis, aggravate lung disease and has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmia, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Residents in areas with blowing dust should stay inside and should reduce prolonged exposure, heavy exertion, and strenuous activities.

Information: Valley Air District regional offices:

Fresno, 559-230-600

Modesto, 209-557-6400

Bakersfield, 661-392-5500

Update: Highway 119 open to traffic again

Taft Midway Driller, Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2009

Taft, Calif. - Highway 119 is open again after being closed for more than six hours because of blowing dust.

The highway was closed between Highway 43 (Enos Lane) and I-5 from about 11:30 a.m. to 6:20 p.m.

The closure was near the site of a blinding dust storm two weeks ago that caused a multiple vehicle crash that killed three people on I-5 just north of Highway 119.

Today's dust storms came as part of a dry cold front moving through the area.

The National Weather Service had issued a blowing dust advisory for the Southern San Joaquin Valley through 11 p.m. tonight but said in a mid-afternoon update that the winds were easing.

Colder weather will follow in the wake of the winds with overnight lows dipping into the low 40s tonight and Wednesday.

Check taftmidwaydriller.com for updates on road conditions.

Gusting winds, dust prompt health warnings

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2009

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health warning for wind-blown dust today. The warning, in effect through midnight, recommends that people with respiratory and heart diseases take precautions such as staying indoors. Children and older adults are advised to avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion outside. The winds are expected to peak in strength in the evening and diminish Wednesday morning.

Dust prompts pollution warnings

By The Record

Stockton Record, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

STOCKTON - State air pollution officials warned Tuesday afternoon that blowing dust may produce unhealthy air throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

Short-term exposure to small particles of pollution such as dust can trigger asthma attacks, bronchitis and respiratory infections, the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) said.

People with heart disease could face a greater risk of heart attacks, the district said, citing the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The warning was in effect overnight. Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure to the air as well as strenuous activities, the district said.

Gusts of up to 45 miles per hour were reported Monday at Stockton Metropolitan Airport, with sustained winds of up to 35 mph.

The winds appeared to intensify throughout the day.

The National Weather Service said it will remain blustery on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley today, with the strong winds gradually diminishing.

Wind kicks up dust, fells branches

Bee Staff Reports

Modesto Bee, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

Leaning power poles. Downed trees and branches. Tumbleweeds. Clouds of dust.

All were reported Tuesday throughout the Northern San Joaquin Valley while sustained winds reached 30 mph and peaked in 50 mph gusts. The gusts didn't have the same impact as the record rainstorm on Oct. 13, but Tuesday's wind led to spotty power failures and kept city workers chasing downed tree limbs.

The Modesto Fire Department received 22 calls in a 3½-hour span from the morning into the afternoon, according to Battalion Chief Dan Hinshaw. The department called in extra staff to contend with calls from residents.

California Highway Patrol officers reported the wind kicked up dust "like a fog" on Highway 140 in Merced County.

In Stanislaus County, power poles leaned precariously on Highway 165 near the Merced County line and on West Keyes Road just north of Crows Landing Road, the CHP Web site reported.

There also was a "huge tumbleweed" in the northbound lane of Highway 99 near Turlock.

All events at Rainbow Fields sports complex were canceled Tuesday.

Valley air district officials are cautioning those with breathing problems to take special care because the winds cause an uptick in particulate matter.

The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) issued a health cautionary statement through Tuesday evening. Exposure to particle pollution can cause health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections, officials said.

The National Weather Service expects the winds to continue blowing strongly today, but not to Tuesday's level.

Wal-Mart foes target Merced distribution center plan in suit Groups contend not enough is being done to mitigate impacts.

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

Wal-Mart distribution center opponents said Tuesday they found flaws in the environmental review and will file a lawsuit demanding more be done to minimize the center's impact.

"We should be commended for picking up the torch that has been dropped," Merced Sierra Club Chairman Rod Webster said.

The case will be filed either today or Thursday in Merced County Superior Court. Sacramento attorney Keith Wagner, who represents the opponents, is still finishing up his arguments. A copy of the appeal was unavailable.

The lawsuit will probably call on the city to make Wal-Mart do more to reduce air and water pollution.

The Merced City Council voted to approve the project last month after three years of studies and six hours of public debate. During the meetings, supporters outnumbered opponents roughly by a 2-1 margin.

The acrimony surrounding the project, which subsided in the past month, will swell once more.

Merced County Jobs Coalition President Doug Fluetsch said it's the city's job -- not the opponents' -- to decide whether a project has been properly reviewed. "There are a handful of people in Merced who want to ruin it for everybody else," he said. "It makes me sick."

Opponents, Fluetsch said, were penalizing every unemployed person in Merced because they're delaying the 1,200 jobs that will be created by the 1.2-million-square-foot distribution center.

Merced City Attorney Greg Diaz said the environmental impact report is solid. "This (impending lawsuit) is not unexpected," he said. "We anticipate a vigorous battle on both sides."

The city's legal bills will be paid by Wal-Mart, a requirement of the project's approval. The city hasn't yet hired a firm, though it's been in talks with Rutan & Tucker.

No lawsuit brought under the California Environmental Quality Act can stop a project. It only causes delays.

Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth chairman Tom Grave said the case could be wrapped up in two months if Wal-Mart is willing to negotiate.

If not, it could drag on in the court system for a year or more. The case could go before Presiding Judge John Kiriara, Judge Carol Ash or a visiting judge.

Grave said more needs to be done to reduce pollution from the diesel trucks that will cycle through the complex between Child and Gerard avenues.

The attorney will argue air quality impacts weren't properly addressed by EDAW, the firm that analyzed the project. Grave said EDAW improperly relied on standards set by the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

As with any part of an environmental lawsuit, the argument is fairly technical. The gist is that one project may not be deemed significant for air pollution if fewer than 10 tons a year of each kind of emission is released.

But several insignificant projects taken together could lead to major impacts on the Valley's already poor air, which is what worries opponents.

Grave said he'd like to see Wal-Mart only use its hybrid big rigs in Merced and also force its third-party contractors to use cleaner diesel trucks.

MARG has been accused of being a front for special interests outside the community. Grave said that's not the case. The attorney, he said, is working pro bono. He may be able to recoup his fees if the group prevails in court.

Grave said MARG's membership includes Merced Associated Democrats, the Merced/Mariposa Teachers UniServ Council, the Sierra Club and the Merced-Mariposa Central Labor Council.

Wal-Mart's spokesman was unavailable for comment, though the company has expected that the project would be challenged in court.

Strong winds buffet Calif. causing power outages

Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2009

Los Angeles, CA (AP) -- Fierce winds buffeted areas up and down California on Tuesday, toppling trees, downing power lines and causing scattered power outages in the Los Angeles region.

Gusty winds affected some flights at Los Angeles International Airport, and one flight was diverted to another airport, Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Allen Kenitzer said. Pilots of two other flights had to make a second attempt to land successfully, he said.

Some 23,000 Los Angeles Department of Water and Power customers were without electricity by 9 p.m. Tuesday due to downed lines and blown transformers, DWP spokeswoman MaryAnne Pierson said. About 16,000 Southern California Edison customers, from beach communities in the south to foothill neighborhoods in the San Gabriel Valley, lost electricity, spokesman Gil Alexander said.

Both DWP and Southern California Edison have deployed extra crews to repair lines.

City and county fire officials said no injuries have been reported, but there have been scattered reports of property damage.

TV footage showed a Jack in the Box sign blown to the ground in North Hollywood and a huge tree blown onto a church in South Los Angeles.

Strong northerly winds developed behind a cold front that swept into Northern California overnight and headed southward, the National Weather Service said.

A low pressure system associated with the front was unseasonably strong, meteorologists said.

Gusts in northern Los Angeles County hit 70 mph, the weather service said. Swirling winds swept an urban potpourri of fallen leaves and fast-food wrappers across one downtown Los Angeles business plaza.

Dust and ash from the 250-square-mile Station Fire burn area in the Angeles National Forest darkened the sky over foothill suburbs northeast of Los Angeles.

Pasadena Fire Department spokeswoman Lisa Derderian said it appeared "almost smoke-like."

Blowing dust cut visibility in parts of the San Joaquin Valley and air quality alerts were issued in a half-dozen counties for particulate pollution. Airborne dust also cut visibility to as little as a mile in the state's southeastern corner.

Gale warnings or small craft advisories were posted along the state's 1,100-mile coast, and wind advisories or warnings were posted from Redding in the upper Sacramento Valley, about 195 miles north of San Francisco, all the way south to the Mexican border.

Red flag warnings of fire danger due to winds and low humidity were issued for the Santa Monica Mountains above the Malibu shoreline, the inland region east of Los Angeles, to the south throughout Orange County, and in southeastern desert areas.

A lower-level fire weather watch was in effect along western San Diego County south to the border.

Shuttle shopping to downtown Pleasant Hill

By Elisabeth Nardi, staff writer

Contra Costa Times, Wed., October 28, 2009

A new public-private partnership will help make it easier for Contra Costa Centre employees to go on some shopping sprees over the holiday season.

A new shuttle started Oct. 20 for the more than 5,000 employees who work at the center, which surrounds the Pleasant Hill BART Station. The shuttle, paid for in part by the center and by the transportation assistance service 511 Contra Costa, will operate four days a week.

From 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, it will make runs to downtown Walnut Creek. During those same hours on Thursdays and Fridays, it will make trips to downtown Pleasant Hill and stop at The Crossroads shopping center.

The shuttle is not open to the public, just for people working in the Contra Costa Centre. Service ends Dec. 30. The pilot program will determine if workers in the ever-growing transit village would use such a shuttle.

Lynn Osborn Overcashier with 511 Contra Costa said her agency's interest is to cut down on "cold starts," when a car is started more than an hour after its last use. She hopes that by providing the service workers will choose the shuttle instead of their own cars.

"Our mission is to reduce air pollution and vehicle miles traveled "... and encourage people to not drive alone," she said.

The center provides the shuttle and 511 Contra Costa is hiring the driver, spending about \$15,000 for the program, she said. Overcashier estimates there will be seven to nine trips a day.

Local businesses are getting in on the action, too. Pleasant Hill merchants have been working to offer discounts for those who use the shuttle and patronize their restaurants and stores.

Originally, the shuttle was just going to run to Pleasant Hill. Officials there lost out on a grant, which could have created a permanent shuttle or bus service from the Pleasant Hill BART Transit Village to the downtown.

After that loss, Pleasant Hill was still interested in getting workers to the city because there aren't that many services at the center, said Kelly Calhoun, Pleasant Hill's economic development manager.

They want to use the pilot holiday shuttle to measure demand for such transportation for center workers.

"Our hope really is that we can do this as a trial period to assess the demand and maybe (it's) something we could look at potentially (doing permanently) in the future," she said. "Of course, funding is always the biggest issue."

City leaders hope the shuttle is good for both business and the environment.

Walnut Creek City Councilwoman Cindy Silva said at a recent council meeting that she heard about Pleasant Hill's shuttle and thought Walnut Creek should get in on the shopping action. She hopes that Walnut Creek businesses will also offer some incentives to center workers.

Walnut Creek already has the Free Ride bus, which runs from Walnut Creek BART and makes stops downtown. Overcashier said that could be used by employees from Contra Costa Centre who take the shuttle and then decide to shop all afternoon. They could jump on the free ride, then take BART back to the Pleasant Hill station if the free shuttle has stopped running.

Deal struck on Great Lakes ship pollution

By John Flesher, AP Environmental Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

Traverse City, Mich. (AP) -- Congressional negotiators reached a deal Tuesday that would effectively exempt 13 ships that haul iron ore, coal and other freight on the Great Lakes from a proposed federal rule meant to reduce air pollution.

The Lake Carriers' Association, which represents the 55 U.S.-flagged vessels that operate on the lakes, had asked for at least a partial exemption from rules proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency that would require large vessels operating within 200 miles of a U.S. coast to use cleaner — and costlier — fuel and improve engine technology.

Negotiators in Washington approved the exemption as part of a natural resources spending bill. The measure could be voted on in the House as early as Wednesday.

"This compromise will allow EPA to go ahead with a new clean air rule without sinking the Great Lakes fleet — and all the jobs it creates in the region," said Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

The rules are designed to reduce emissions of airborne contaminants blamed for smog, acid rain, respiratory ailments and possibly cancer. Large ships are leading producers of nitrogen and sulfur oxides and tiny contaminated particles that foul the air near ports and coastlines and hundreds of miles inland, the EPA says.

Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, a Washington-based advocacy group, said he was disappointed that Obey and Rep. Jim Oberstar, a Minnesota Democrat and chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, had sided with the shippers in talks with the Obama administration.

"They deservedly have a stellar record and reputation on environmental issues, but departed in this case to work essentially behind closed doors for a special interest fix for a favored industry," he said.

The industry group said the regulations would ground 13 aging steamships while forcing 13 others to use fuel 70 percent more expensive than the present blend. The added cost to Great Lakes shippers — about \$210 million — would be passed to their customers, said Jim Weakley, president of the shipping association.

"We're very grateful that we've got some breathing room," Weakley said after the deal was announced. "It's a good balance between the environment and the economy."

The original rules would damage not only shippers, but Great Lakes industries that rely on them — including steel and auto manufacturers already battered by the economic downturn and foreign competition, said Rep. Candice Miller, a Michigan Republican.

Some officials in Alaska say the rules could deter visits to their ports by cruise ships, which are important to the state economy.

As written, they would require ships by 2012 to burn fuel with sulfur content not exceeding 1 percent, or 10,000 parts per million. In 2015, the limit would drop to 1,000 parts per million.

The 13 Great Lakes steamships are powered by a type of marine fuel that carries about 30,000 parts per million of sulfur.

"It's among the filthiest fuel known to mankind — literally the sludge at the bottom of the barrel after the refining process," O'Donnell said.

Under the compromise, the steamships will be exempt. Most were built in the 1950s and can't be switched to low-sulfur fuel without risking explosions, Weakley said.

Mothballing them would be self-defeating because much of the cargo would be switched to trucks or trains, which emit more pollution than ships, said Phil Linsalata, spokesman for Warner Petroleum, a marine fuel company in Clare, Mich.

The deal also will allow the 13 ships that use a mixture of fuels to apply to the EPA for waivers. It directs the agency to evaluate the rule's economic effect on Great Lakes shippers and report in six months.

The EPA rule would apply within 200 miles of a U.S. coast. Weakley said that unfairly singles out Great Lakes vessels because they're always within that zone, unlike ocean freighters.

Clean-air and health advocates urged the EPA to stand by its proposed rules, scheduled for final approval in December.

"Air pollution is not confined to state boundaries," Arthur Marin, director of a group representing northeastern state air quality agencies, said in a letter to Congress. "Through long-range transport in the atmosphere, pollutants emitted in domestic waters, such as the Great Lakes, affect air quality in the Northeast."

EPA estimates the regulations would prevent up to 33,000 premature deaths over the next two decades and hundreds of billions in medical costs.

Obama says momentum growing for climate-change legislation

At a Florida solar farm, the president urges lawmakers to pass a measure that limits carbon emissions. Critics call his visit a public relations exercise.

By Christi Parsons, staff writer
L.A. Times, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

Reporting from Arcadia, Fla. - President Obama declared Tuesday that a "consensus is building" around climate-change legislation and characterized opponents as preoccupied with the past instead of a "clean-energy future."

Standing on the edge of a large solar-power plant here, Obama urged the Senate to pass a measure that caps carbon emissions and to set aside arguments that it would harm the economy and cost jobs.

"The closer we get to this new energy future, the harder the opposition is going to fight, the more

we're going to hear from special interests and lobbyists in Washington whose interests are contrary to the interests of the American people," Obama said.

As he spoke to Florida Power & Light employees, the sun was glinting off acres of the utility's solar panels behind him. "It's a debate between looking backwards and looking forward," the president said.

The visit coincided with an announcement by the Obama administration that it will invest \$3.4 billion in stimulus funds to modernize the nation's energy grid. About 100 private companies and utilities will receive grants of as much as \$200 million each to help build a nationwide "smart grid" meant to improve energy delivery and boost the use of renewable energy sources. Glendale and Burbank each received a \$20-million grant to install smart meters to better track water and electricity use.

Obama administration officials said the projects also would create tens of thousands of jobs in the near future, while modernizing the way Americans feed their need for energy.

But as Obama made his way to the field, and then later as he headed toward his third political fundraiser in two days, critics complained that the president was taking a public relations tour on behalf of his economic stimulus program.

"He's on what appears to be a PR swing to try to boost up his own popularity to move legislation and policies that the American people don't want, don't need," said Rep. Connie Mack (R-Fla.).

At Obama's side in Arcadia stood Lewis Hay III, chairman and chief executive of the FPL Group, which owns the plant. Though he was a major political contributor last year to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Obama's opponent in the presidential election, Hay was clearly in Obama's corner Tuesday. At one point he said the president had "done more to promote renewable energy than anyone."

The Arcadia plant is not a recipient of the grants that Obama announced Tuesday, though company officials say they expect to apply for money under another part of the stimulus act later this week.

Still, Obama pointed to the plant as emblematic of the clean-energy economy that he hopes to spur with this program and others. "Building this 21st century energy infrastructure will help us lay a foundation for lasting growth and prosperity," he said.

Also Tuesday, five administration officials appeared before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to urge passage of climate legislation.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu told the committee that the United States had stumbled in the clean-energy race and that, to catch up, Congress must enact comprehensive energy legislation that puts the first-ever limits on greenhouse gases blamed for global warming.

"The United States . . . has fallen behind," Chu said. "But I remain confident that we can make up the ground."

Republicans expressed concern about the cost of the measure, which would create a system for buying and selling energy permits.

"This is something the American people can't tolerate, and I don't think they will," said Sen. James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.).

Obama wrapped up a two-day tour of political and policy events in Florida, heading to Old Dominion University in Virginia to stump for Democratic gubernatorial candidate R. Creigh Deeds.

Early season storm sweeps dust, snow across West

By Matt Joyce, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post and other papers, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

CHEYENNE, Wyo. -- A major early season cold front brought gusting winds and cool temperatures to the Southwest and prompted warnings of heavy snowfall and blizzard conditions in parts of Wyoming and Colorado.

Forecasters with the National Weather Service predicted two days of snow starting overnight for Cheyenne and the northern Colorado Front Range. The storm could bring 12 to 18 inches of snow, as well as blizzard-like conditions, to the Cheyenne area through Thursday.

"It's a major early season storm," said Mike Weiland, National Weather Service meteorologist in Cheyenne. "The results are going to be quite a bit of snow and a fairly long duration snow event."

The weather kicked up heavy winds and dust on Tuesday in Nevada, Arizona and California.

Blowing dust was blamed for unhealthy air quality throughout the San Joaquin Valley in California. Regional officials urged residents with asthma and other respiratory ailments to stay indoors and limit outdoor activity.

To the east, thick, gray clouds hung over the Las Vegas Strip just before sunset, and weather officials said gusts had been measured at 47 mph at nearby McCarran International Airport. The front pushed high temperatures down into the high 30s and 40s Tuesday in northern Nevada, about 25 degrees cooler than the day before.

In Arizona, the mountains that surround Phoenix vanished in a gray haze. Several traffic accidents were blamed in part on low visibility.

The front brought snow to northern Utah, where snow along the Wasatch Front slowed some morning commuters in and around Salt Lake City.

Weiland said the storm was moving southeast over east-central Nevada and west-central Utah on Tuesday evening. Forecasters predicted the storm would move to the Four Corners before heading east and northeast to the High Plains through Thursday.

In Colorado, 8 to 14 inches was forecast for the Front Range and 5 to 10 inches in the Denver area. Up to 2 feet was possible in the northern Colorado Front Range foothills and the Laramie Range in southeast Wyoming.

United Airlines and Frontier Airlines, which both have hubs in Denver, were relaxing some fees for changing travel plans in light of the storm forecast.

Winter storm warnings were posted for southeast Wyoming, most of Colorado and parts of Nebraska and Utah.

Cheyenne already has had a snowy October, with 14 inches so far. The average for the month is 3 inches.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation was urging its plow drivers to rest up ahead of this storm, agency spokesman Bruce Burrows said.

"The skier in me is saying, 'Yeah, bring it on,'" Burrows said. "But it is challenging for our folks."

Whether highways remain open depends a lot on the wind. In Wyoming, large storms often kick up strong winds that cause constant drifting over roads.

"A lot of snow we can deal with pretty well. If the wind comes up, it makes it very difficult to keep up, even with our best technology and our best efforts," Burrows

Mo. smelter downplays EPA concerns about lead

By Cheryl Wittenauer, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post and other papers, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009

ST. LOUIS -- The Doe Run Co. on Tuesday downplayed the extent of lead contamination at properties near its Herculaneum lead smelter, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stood by tests showing many neighboring homes had tainted soil.

The agency said Monday that recent tests revealed high levels of lead in the soil of 129 residential properties - or more than a third tested - within a mile of the smelter.

Soil remediation had already been done at about 100 of the 129 properties during the past decade under previous EPA orders. Long-term or repeated exposure to lead can affect the blood and other organs, central nervous system, and harm human reproduction or development.

Doe Run spokeswoman Barb Shepard said the company was "surprised" by EPA's announcement, adding "we were coming to different conclusions from the data."

The company said only 29 of the nearly 400 properties tested had an average level of contamination that exceeds EPA standards for concern, a dramatic improvement over 2001 test results.

But the EPA didn't buy that argument, saying the contamination was "unacceptable" and could result in enforcement action.

"There are places (on the properties) where lead levels are below the threshold and where lead levels are above," EPA spokesman Chris Whitley said. "But to say there's not a problem using averaging defies reason."

Regional acting EPA Administrator William Rice said Doe Run has taken steps in recent years to reduce lead emissions but its efforts have fallen short.

"EPA intends to work with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to correct this problem by requiring Doe Run to implement a comprehensive, permanent solution to address this persistent problem," he said.

Doe Run said it will work with the agency and residents to resolve the problem.

"We met with our neighbors last week to share the results of the findings," smelter manager Gary Hughes said. "We'll be working with residents and EPA on what needs to be done on each individual property. We want to make sure residents know we care about their families and their concerns, and we'll be keeping the lines of communication open as we work through the process with EPA."

Doe Run's lead smelter in Herculaneum has operated since the late 1800s and is the largest smelter of its kind in the U.S.

During the past 30 years, EPA has cited the company for air emissions, elevated blood lead levels in children, elevated lead levels in yards, and lead dust in homes. Doe Run has bought out 130 residential properties near the smelter since 2002.

The company said it offered to buy 14 of the 29 properties where the average level of lead exceeded EPA standards for concern, but the owners declined to sell.

The EPA suspected last summer that properties were being contaminated again and, in July, ordered Doe Run to sample and test the driveways and yards of homes within a mile of the smelter, Whitley said.

The two primary sources of lead contamination at Herculaneum are smelter emissions and material blown from trucks, he said. The EPA wrote Doe Run earlier this month, saying it had failed to wash, cover, and secure trucks that haul ore and raw material from mines in southern Missouri to the smelter. Doe Run has not yet responded to the claim.

Herculaneum resident Larry O'Leary, who is part of a community advisory group working on the lead problem, said Tuesday he wasn't surprised by the test results but hadn't realized the severity of the problem.

O'Leary gave Doe Run credit for having its emissions meet ambient air quality standards for lead this year. "But on balance," he said, "we have the challenge of truck contamination."

W.Va. intends to issue coal-to-gas plant permit

The Associated Press

In the Washington Post and other papers, Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2009

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection is seeking comment on its preliminary decision to issue an air pollution permit for a planned coal-to-gasoline plant in the southern coalfields.

New York-based TransGas Development LLC announced in December it planned to build the plant in Mingo County near Wharnccliffe. The facility is expected to turn 3 million tons of coal a year into methanol that would then be converted into as much as 756,000 gallons of gasoline a day.

"Based on our review, we have concluded it will meet all state and federal air quality requirements," said Joe Kessler, who is reviewing the permit for DEP's Office of Air Quality.

A legal ad announcing DEP's intention was published Tuesday in the Williamson Daily News, Kessler said. The agency will accept comments on its planned action until Nov. 30.

A TransGas spokesman did not immediately respond to a call Tuesday. In December, however, company president Adam Victor said he believed he could obtain financing for the \$3 billion project.

If built, the plant would create about 1,200 construction jobs and about 350 full-time jobs in Mingo County, where September's unemployment rate was 10.7 percent.

Randall Harris, project development director for the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority, said efforts to control emissions would make it a minor source of air pollution.

"This proves that clean coal can be done," he said.

The DEP also considers the plant a minor pollution source because its releases of carbon monoxide, particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and volatile organic compounds fall below state pollution limits.

By declaring the project a minor pollution source, Kessler said, it is spared the burden of conducting the computer modeling required of major pollution sources.

According to the company's Web site, TransGas has been in the energy consulting business for 30 years and has developed co-generation plants in New York.

Proposed Avenal power plant awaits approval

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2009

First proposed in February 2008, a Houston, Texas-based company's plan to build a 600-megawatt power plant in Avenal still awaits a green light from California.

That decision might take several more weeks, according to state energy officials.

The California Energy Commission has completed a final staff assessment, but one of its subcommittees has yet to issue a recommendation on the project.

It was initially expected that the presiding officer of the commission subcommittee handling the project would release a recommendation by September. Officials this week said the ruling is now likely to come in November.

"They are still working on the proposed decision right now, but I don't know when it's going to be released," said Percy Della, commission spokesman. "I don't think it's going to be this month -- probably early next month."

Della, however, cautioned that it is "only speculation and not carved in stone."

Avenal Power Center, LLC, hopes to build a natural gas-fired generator on 25 acres just south of the Fresno County line and about six miles from Avenal's residential and commercial areas.

If licensed, the \$530-million power plant will begin construction in April 2010. If everything goes well, the plant will be in full operation by June 2012, according to the Energy Commission.

The commission says the plant is designed to make efficient use of resources and minimizes impact on the environment.

The city of Avenal will provide water to the plant from its wastewater treatment plant next to the site, and the plant will recycle water to the maximum extent possible through the use of "zero-liquid discharge system," according to the commission.

The project would be connected to the Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s transmission grid through a line traversing farmland to the Gates Substation in Fresno County, but the substation would need to be expanded to accommodate the project.

In June the commission released the final staff assessment. In the document, engineers concluded that the project, as well as its mitigation measures, meet laws and regulations in all aspects of environmental impact. Following an environmental justice screening analysis, the document also concluded that the project would not cause any significant adverse effect on socioeconomic impacts on the surrounding communities.

Opposition groups beg to differ.

The San Francisco-based Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment was one of several organizations that questioned the validity of the assessment.

The group argued that the commission staff failed to adequately analyze the project's air quality impacts, impacts on greenhouse gas and cumulative health impacts from exposure to pollutants

emitted from not just the Avenal power plant but other industrial operations nearby, such as Waste Management's Kettleman Hills hazardous waste landfill.

In a formal reply issued in August, the commission staff defended its position and denied the San Francisco center's claims.

Meanwhile, the federal Environmental Protection Agency is doing its own permitting process for the project. The EPA held a public information meeting last month and two public hearings this month.

Community advocates complained that the timing of the hearings was unfair to nearby residents because they were also dealing with the highly controversial proposal by Waste Management to expand its hazardous landfill in Kettleman Hills around the same time.

U.S. EPA officials say the Oct. 15 hearing, which did extend the comment period, was an attempt to accommodate such complaints.

Once the Energy Commission subcommittee's recommendation becomes available, the public will have 30 days to review it and submit comments.

A final decision on the project will be made at a subsequent public hearing held at a regular commission meeting. The date for that meeting is pending.

[Sacramento Bee editorial, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009:](#)

In growth-averse Davis, 'yes' on P

When the city of Davis doesn't build enough housing to accommodate its work force, the rest of the region suffers. It means more traffic, more air pollution and more stress on people who have to commute long distances to work in Davis.

Wildhorse Ranch, the small housing development Davis voters are being asked to approve Tuesday, will not provide all the housing Davis needs, but it is a step in the right direction and deserves a "yes" vote.

If approved by Davis city voters, Measure P would rezone 26 acres on the city's northeastern boundary from agricultural to residential. That would allow landowners to build Wildhorse Ranch, a 191-unit residential development with 40 apartments, 78 attached town houses and 73 single-family detached homes.

Opponents say Davis is growing fast enough and that this development, on the outer edge of the city, would lead to more sprawl. Wildhorse Ranch proponents counter that this is a small, compact development within city limits, surrounded on three sides by housing. It includes apartments that would be affordable to people of low and very low incomes, and design features that will conserve water and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In this debate, proponents have more than made their case. Anywhere else in the state, Wildhorse Ranch would be hailed as a model.

The development's 40 affordable apartments are designed to be completely accessible to people with disabilities. Developers routinely receive subsidies to build such housing, but Wildhorse Ranch developers are not asking for any. All housing in the development will occupy only 13 acres of the 26-acre site. The rest will be filled with buffer zones planted in trees and green space. Every housing unit, including the apartments, will have solar panels and other energy efficiency features.

None of this satisfies opponents. They say the Davis region already has more than 2,000 new housing units approved through 2013, including enough low-income units to satisfy state affordable housing targets.

But those calculations include West Village, a housing development set to be built on university-owned land in Yolo County, not in the city of Davis. Moreover, the bulk of the new housing in West Village, more than 1,000 units, will be for students. The rest, 475 houses, will be available to university employees only.

Davis needs housing for non-university middle- and low-income workers, teachers, police officers, retail clerks and plumbers. It needs to embrace well-planned projects that are sensitive to Davis' quality of life.

That's why, on Tuesday, the The Bee recommends a "yes" vote on Measure P.

[Letter to the Sacramento Bee, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009:](#)

High-speed rail cuts pollution

Pollution has become a major problem in our society and a leading factor of this has been the carbon emissions from cars. Slowly but surely our world is ending because of the fossil fuels and the gases that are emitted into the atmosphere each minute. These gases are eating at our ozone layer.

Traveling far distances in cars increases the amount of pollution, whereas a high-speed rail would minimize that. Instead of separate cars traveling to the same destination, high-speed rail allows for a bundle of people to travel in a single train. Eight hours' worth of gas vs. two in a fast train: Which is more efficient?

Rubeena Sachdev, Davis

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., Oct. 28, 2009:](#)

Circle of stupidity

Much was explained by a few articles in your Oct. 23 paper. On one page was a story about our government's scientists expressing alarm over the manner in which global warming is impacting the arctic. Among other things, they are particularly shocked by the rapid loss of older ice that had been undisturbed for thousands of years.

Then, on another page, you report that the number of Americans believing in global warming has dropped 20 points in three years, even in the face of mounting scientific evidence.

Perhaps our willingness to turn a blind eye to legitimate science, to our own detriment, explains the third article about the huge market of suckers willing to buy bogus, often contaminated products to protect themselves from the flu.

The circle would have been complete if only you had included a story on the many fools who swallowed Glenn Beck's swill that the flu shot is part of an Obama conspiracy of some sort. We have met the enemy and it is indeed us.

Jeffrey W. Eisinger, Fresno

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses experts say that global cooling is not happening. Global warming continues to grow increasing temperatures. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Expertos desmienten que haya un enfriamiento global

Terra, Wednesday, October 28, 2009

La Tierra sigue calentándose, y no enfriándose como aseguran algunos escépticos del calentamiento global, según un análisis de las temperaturas mundiales tomadas por estadísticos independientes.

La revisión de años de datos sobre temperaturas fue efectuada a pedido de la Associated Press. Las versiones sobre un supuesto enfriamiento han estado circulando en Internet impulsadas por un nuevo libro y artículos periodísticos.

Los expertos, que revisaron dos juegos de datos sobre temperaturas, no hallaron indicios de que las temperaturas estuvieran declinando.

Y las cifras del gobierno estadounidense demuestran que la década que concluye en diciembre será la más calurosa en 130 años de recolección de estadísticas.

Los escépticos basan su afirmación en que a partir de 1998, un año inusualmente caluroso, las temperaturas han bajado en lo que consideran una tendencia al enfriamiento.

Pero desde 1998 las temperaturas bajaron, subieron, volvieron a bajar y ahora están subiendo nuevamente.

Los registros de la oficina meteorológica británica y datos de satélite usados por los expertos afirman que 1998 fue el año más caluroso.

Pero datos de la Administración Nacional del Océano y la Atmósfera de Estados Unidos (NOAA) y la NASA revelan que el 2005 fue más caluroso que 1998.

"Los últimos diez años representaron el período de una década más caluroso de los registros modernos", dijo el director de vigilancia climática de la NOAA Deke Arndt.

"Aunque se analice la tendencia durante esos diez años, la tendencia será positiva, lo que significa calurosa".

Los estadísticos dicen que los altibajos de la última década repiten la variabilidad aleatoria en los datos tal como se viene registrando desde 1880.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses President Obama designates \\$200 million to Florida for clean energy projects.](#)

Obama destina \$200 millones para proyectos de energía en la Florida

John Dorschner

El Nuevo Herald, Wednesday, October 28, 2009

Florida Power & Light está recibiendo \$200 millones en fondos de estímulo federal para proveer a más de la mitad de sus clientes con "contadores inteligentes" durante los próximos dos años para ayudarlos a bajar sus facturas eléctricas, anunció el martes el gobierno de Obama.

El subsidio es uno de 100, por un total de \$3,400 millones, que el gobierno federal está entregando en la "mayor inversión nunca hecha para una red eléctrica más inteligente, más fuerte y más segura", dijo el martes el presidente Barack Obama tras visitar una nueva planta solar de FPL en Arcadia.

Obama elogió a FPL por haber construido la mayor planta de generación fotovoltaica del mundo, diciendo que la misma ahorrará 575,000 toneladas de emisiones de gases de invernadero durante los próximos 30 años, aunque señaló que la red del sistema en general necesita ser mejorada porque "todavía usa una tecnología que ya tiene un siglo. Eso malgasta demasiado energía, nos cuesta demasiado dinero, y es demasiado vulnerable a cortes y apagones".

Los contadores inteligentes, que fueron introducidos en Broward en un programa piloto del 2007, tienen chips inalámbricos que envían información a la cual los consumidores tienen acceso a través de un panel energético en sus hogares, por internet o por teléfono.

De esa manera, los consumidores pueden vigilar su uso de electricidad día tras día y hora tras hora. Ajustando equipos como los calentadores de agua y los aparatos de aire acondicionado, los consumidores pueden con el tiempo aprender a bajar sus facturas eléctricas.

Reducir el uso de electricidad significa menos producción de los gases de invernadero que según los expertos son la causa del calentamiento global. Estas medidas "verdes" han sido una prioridad para Obama en el reparto de fondos bajo la Ley de Recuperación.

A los fondos de estímulo, que se deben gastar durante los próximos dos años, se sumará una donación de \$378.3 millones de la propia FPL para dar contadores a 2.6 millones de consumidores, según la compañía.

En total, FPL planea instalar contadores inteligentes a sus 4.5 millones de consumidores durante los próximos años. El costo total será de \$800 millones, y FPL asumirá el resto del costo.

Parte de los fondos de estímulo se destinarán a "construir una red más inteligente que pueda detectar problemas potenciales y se reconfigure automáticamente para minimizar los cortes", de acuerdo con una hoja informativa de la FPL.

Días atrás, FPL prometió a los reguladores federales que mejoraría la operación de su red luego de pagar una multa de \$25 millones debido a que un simple error de un trabajador en la calle causó un enorme apagón para casi un millón de consumidores.

FPL estimó que durante los próximos dos años el proyecto, llamado Energy Smart Florida, creará más de 6,000 empleos --contando directamente a los que instalan los contadores y reconfiguran la red eléctrica e indirectamente a los que fabrican los equipos. Algunas grandes corporaciones nacionales, incluyendo a General Electric, se han involucrado activamente en este campo.

La propuesta original de FPL se centraba en proteger el condado Miami-Dade con una red eléctrica inteligente. En abril, el alcalde de Miami Manny Díaz celebró una conferencia sobre la nueva tecnología en la que participaron los principales ejecutivos de General Electric y Cisco Systems. En su solicitud posterior por fondos de estímulo, FPL expandió su propuesta a todo el estado.

El martes, el alcalde Díaz calificó el subsidio de \$200 millones de "una noticia extremadamente alentadora. Estoy que no quepo en mí de entusiasmo".

A nivel nacional, los 100 proyectos fueron seleccionados de 400 propuestas, de acuerdo con el Departamento de Energía de EEUU. Los mayores subsidios fueron de \$200 millones -- entregados a FPL y varias otras compañías. Se espera que inversiones privadas de \$4,700 millones complementen los pagos de estímulo federal. En total, el gobierno de Obama espera que la conversión a redes eléctricas inteligentes cree "decenas de miles de empleos".