

Smog: How fast does a storm clear the air?

By Mark Grossi

Smog Blog, Fresnoebee.com, Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2009

A caller said he was curious about how fast the air cleans up when a storm whips through the Valley.

I have no idea -- does it take minutes, hours, days? I will ask around the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

My guess is that it would depend on the storm and your location in the Valley.

I checked the monitor readings reported on the California Air Resources Board site. I looked at the California Avenue site in Bakersfield, a southern Valley city with particulate matter issues.

Between noon and 1 p.m. Saturday, the hourly reading was 62 micrograms per cubic meter of air. The standard is 35.

It dropped to 31 in the next hour. By the 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. hour, it was in single digits.

On the other hand, a windy day in the dusty southern Valley can quickly push the particulate levels up.

Solar system helps power Warmerdam Packing operations

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Jan 27, 2009

The Obama administration wants U.S. residents to rely more heavily on renewable energy like solar and wind power. Warmerdam Packing LLC in Kings County is already there. Electricity-generating solar panels -- 6,600 of them -- cover the rooftops of most of the huge buildings that make up this sprawling complex on Excelsior Avenue, west of Hardwick.

They generate just under a megawatt of electricity, which is enough to power 800 average American homes, according to Wikipedia.

Sometimes it's enough, and sometimes more than enough, to power the packing sheds and storage facilities at Warmerdam that process a million and a half boxes of fruit a year.

Bill Warmerdam, owner of Warmerdam Packing, had the system installed early last year.

Warmerdam gets three different credits to offset the cost: A federal tax credit of 30 percent, a reimbursement from Pacific Gas and Electric of 26 cents per kilowatt-hour of electricity generated and an exemption from property taxes on the \$7.9 million he spent on the system.

Warmerdam gets to use all the solar energy he can muster to fuel the blowers, coolers and machinery, and when he generates more electricity than he can use -- and this happens fairly often -- the excess goes onto the grid.

Warmerdam gets the energy credit, and uses it whenever the solar panels don't kick out enough electricity to meet his needs.

When all is said and done -- including the finance charges on the loan he took out to buy it -- he said power costs less per month than it did before he put up the array.

"It's a no-brainer," he said.

The panels have cut his annual power generation costs from \$300,000 to approximately \$100,000, he said.

Overall, they've met 59 percent of the total electricity he's used since the system was installed.

With the incentives, the panels will mostly pay for themselves in five years, he said.

This is the first time the panels have been placed in a packing shed in the area, according to Fred Montgomery, a salesman from Garland Energy Systems who sold the system to Warmerdam.

Other farmers have showed an interest in Warmerdam's solar operation.

Garland recently installed a similar system at the Elkhorn Dairy in Tulare County, Montgomery said. Solar panels have recently become less expensive, creating an added incentive, he added.

"They're becoming more and more popular," Montgomery said.

Montgomery said he expects incentive programs from solar power to be extended by the Obama administration, which he called "very green."

"I guess every farmer really is an environmentalist. We deal with the environment in everything we do," Warmerdam said when asked if he considered himself to be an environmentalist.

"But you have to be reasonable," he added.

Duraflame sues over fireplace restrictions

By Mike Taugher - Contra Costa Times

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, January 28, 2009

The maker of popular manufactured logs filed a lawsuit in Contra Costa Superior Court over new fireplace restrictions.

Duraflame Inc., based in Stockton, said its logs burn cleaner than wood and should not have been subject to new regulations passed to reduce soot in the Bay Area.

In a news release, a Duraflame spokesman said the Bay Area Air Quality Management District ignored information showing its logs burn cleaner than wood, "leaving us little choice than to correct the deficiencies in this rule through the courts."

But air district spokeswoman Lisa Fasano said regulators decided to restrict all sources of fireplace and woodstove burning, which together make up 30 percent to 40 percent of soot emissions.

"We need to reduce all the particulates inventory until we can bring our air quality within federal health standards," Fasano said.

The rule passed in July bans fireplace and woodstove burning on designated Spare the Air nights. There are normally about 20 such nights from Nov. 1 to Feb. 28. This year, just eight Spare the Air nights have been called.

No fines have been issued but the district has sent out 120 warning letters to residents who violated the ban. Fasano said violators could face fines ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars.

The lawsuit seeks to exempt manufactured logs from the Spare the Air burning restrictions and also from a requirement that logs be labeled with information warning purchasers that use of the log could be restricted in the Bay Area. The label also would include a phone number and Web site for Bay Area customers.

Duraflame spokesman Chris Caron said requiring a Bay Area-specific label for a product that is widely distributed will create big logistical problems. That, and the process used by Bay Area regulators in crafting the rule, is why the company sued Bay Area regulators and not other California air districts that have passed similar rules, Caron said.

Last month, the Bay Area was one of dozens of regions around the country identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as not meeting standards for extremely fine particulates.

Fine particulate air pollution, less than 1/30th the width of a human hair, can penetrate deeply into the lungs and be absorbed into the blood. Health officials consider it harmful and sometimes deadly. It can aggravate asthma and has been linked to heart attacks.

Duraflame sues air board over burning limits

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, January 28, 2009

The nation's top seller of artificial logs is suing the Bay Area air-quality agency, alleging that it has improperly banned the burning of the popular logs in fireplaces and wood stoves on winter Spare the Air days.

In its suit, filed Monday in Contra Costa County Superior Court, Duraflame Inc. of Stockton charges that the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's new regulations failed to quantify the emissions coming from artificial logs that the company and other firms make.

The air district also should have shown how banning the burning of artificial logs would reduce airborne particle pollution, the suit said.

The Bay Area rules, which took effect Nov. 1, prohibit burning all combustible materials on winter Spare the Air days in the nine counties. Eight no-burn days have been declared this winter.

Air districts in Sacramento, Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley had imposed similar bans before the Bay Area.

Regulators say the restrictions are needed to meet tougher standards under the federal Clean Air Act. Officials say such burning releases soot and tiny droplets as well as toxic chemicals that pose health problems when inhaled.

During peak burning days, as much as 80 percent of the fine particles in outdoor air come from wood-burning, according to the California Air Resources Board.

Studies show that fine particles contribute to heart and lung problems and increase the number of cases of asthma among children, hospital visits and lost work days.

Lisa Fasano, spokeswoman for the Bay Area air district, said the agency cannot comment on pending litigation but has received the lawsuit and is reviewing it.

Under the agency's regulation, the burning of all combustible materials is banned in an effort to reduce fine particulates in the air, she said.

All manufactured logs, including Java-Logs, which are made of coffee grounds, and Duraflame's logs, which are made from sawdust and plant-derived waxes and fibers, are banned under the rule as well as wood and pellets.

Chris Caron, vice president of brand development at Duraflame's corporate headquarters, said regulators should have calculated the portion of emissions released by manufactured logs and shown how prohibiting their burning would help the air district meet the law.

The suit also challenges the portion of the regulations that require manufacturers of logs to attach a label saying that use of the product and other solid fuels may be restricted by law at times and giving a toll-free informational number.

Labeling its logs just for the Bay Area is a burdensome task and hasn't been proven to reduce air pollution, Caron said. The company's annual sales nationwide are more than \$100 million.

Duraflame hasn't taken legal action against other air districts. The company says it has a good relationship with the San Joaquin Valley air district, which promotes its product on so-called "clean burn" days.

Caron said he did not know whether the Bay Area's ban hurt sales of Duraflame logs because the weather was milder than usual during the winter holidays.

Since the ban began, the air district has issued 115 warning letters to households violating the no-burn alert. The district's 70 inspectors enforce the no-burn rules. Repeated offenders can receive fines of \$2,000.

Wilmington crowd protests proposed truck expressway

Freeway foes who fear cancer risk from the project question data used to support the plan as a regional benefit.

By Louis Sahagun

L.A. Times, Wed., January 28, 2009

More than 100 people gathered at Banning's Landing Community Center in Wilmington on Tuesday night to express their concerns about a proposed truck expressway that will increase cancer risks in a neighborhood that for years has felt overwhelmed by massive port expansion projects.

The Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority has offered to install -- free of charge -- high-efficiency air filtration systems in eight modest homes on East Robidoux Street that computer models indicate would face cancer risks above the South Coast Air Quality Management District's "significant cancer risk" threshold of 10 people per million.

But opponents questioned the data used to support the Transportation Authority's promises of a regional benefit in the Wilmington area due to trucks being diverted onto the \$687-million Schuyler Heim Bridge and State Route 47 Expressway Project.

"We're challenging their numbers," said Jesse Marquez, executive director of the Coalition for a Safe Environment and a lifelong Wilmington resident. "We believe the health risks are significantly worse than what they are saying.

"They say only eight houses are at significant risk, but there are about 86 houses within 700 feet of the same proposed source of toxic diesel truck emissions," he said.

The meeting was held so that project engineers could explain the health effects that would be generated by replacement of the unsafe Heim Bridge spanning the Cerritos Channel and construction of the proposed four-lane, 1.7-mile-long elevated expressway that would move about 20,000 trucks a day from Terminal Island to warehousing facilities and distribution centers in the South Bay area.

The engineers had their work cut out for them. Over the weekend, opponents went door-to-door in neighborhoods on the east side of the 10-square-mile community, about 20 miles south of Los Angeles, and distributed more than 1,000 fliers -- in English and Spanish -- urging residents to fight the project designed to accommodate future growth at the nation's largest port complex.

Of particular concern is the projected "significant cancer risk" from diesel emissions -- a known carcinogen -- in two hot spots: the houses on the north side of East Robidoux Street and a lone house in Carson, a few miles away, said John Doherty, chief executive of the Transportation Authority. Health risks elsewhere, including homes next door to the targeted residences, would be below the significance risk level, Doherty said.

In any case, it remained unclear whether Transportation Authority officials would pay homeowners in the impact zones to run their air filtration systems day and night, and maintain them year-round. "Beyond that, this is going to strip property values in the area overnight," said David Pettit, a senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

USC health professor Andrea Hricko called into question traffic volume projections used to support Transportation Authority claims that the project will enhance mobility on local freeways by diverting 5% to 8% of their port-related big rigs.

For example, she said, the data shows that the volume of trucks at nearby Elizabeth Hudson

School would nearly double by 2030 compared to 2003 if the project is not built, and also nearly double if it is built.

"Can someone please provide an explanation," she asked, "of how this demonstrates a reduction in traffic volumes and cancer risk in the project areas as a benefit of building the SR-47 Expressway?"

Conn. firm says artificial turf no health threat

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, January 28, 2009

CHESHIRE, Conn.—A Connecticut firm has concluded that artificial turf made from crushed rubber does not pose any health risks, but an environmental group is questioning the methodology and the firm's objectivity.

Concerns have been raised across the country about the safety of artificial turf made from crushed tires because of the industrial chemicals it contains.

Cheshire-based Milone & MacBroom Inc., an engineering, environmental and landscape architecture firm, studied synthetic turf so it could inform clients about any safety issues, said Vincent McDermott, a senior vice president at the firm.

Milone & MacBroom's clients have included Yale University and other schools that have installed artificial turf fields, as well as schools that have opted for natural grass fields. The firm release the study's findings last month, and it found no health risks.

"At this point, based on the data we have before us, we are not going to say to stop using this product because of health problems," McDermott said. "What we published is really totally unbiased, in my opinion."

Nancy Alderman of North Haven-based Environment and Human Health Inc., is questioning Milone & MacBroom's conclusions and the firm's objectivity. The nonprofit group, which includes doctors, has concerns about artificial turf's effect on children's health and says more studies are needed.

"I think it's important to know that they are installers of those fields," she told the New Haven Register.

Milone & MacBroom's study focuses on whether synthetic fields become excessively hot in the summer, whether they affect air quality and whether the materials leach from the turf and affect water quality.

The firm found that artificial grass blades reached 156 degrees on a hot summer day, but the air 2 feet above the field was only 1 to 3 degrees above the air temperature. The firm noted that artificial fields aren't usually played on in the middle of summer.

The firm also tested levels of toxic chemicals benzothiazole and 4-tert-octylphenol and found "no detectable concentrations of either compound." It also found only "a very low concentration" of volatile nitrosamines in one location.

Alderman said Milone & MacBroom should have tested several other compounds, and the firm's air samplers took in only 75 liters per hour while people breathe in 1,000 liters per hour.

"The samplers were simply too small," she said.

The firm also found that crushed rubber has the potential to leach metals, but at concentrations under limits established by state environmental regulators.

"From a liability point of view, if I found there was a water problem I'd want to know about it because I'm not about to recommend something I know is bad," McDermott said.

The state Department of Environmental Protection is planning its own study of synthetic turf fields, and state lawmakers are debating a proposal to ban any new artificial fields until that study is done.

Information from: New Haven Register, <http://www.nhregister.com>

Gore urges action on economy, global warming

By DINA CAPPIELLO - Associated Press Writer
Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, January 29, 2009

WASHINGTON—Former Vice President Al Gore urged lawmakers Wednesday not to let the economic crisis get in the way of addressing global warming.

Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Nobel Peace Prize winner said Congress should pass President Barack Obama's economic stimulus package as a first step to bringing greenhouse gases under control.

But Gore also pressed for "decisive action" on a bill to cap heat-trapping gases, saying that it is needed for the U.S. to take a leading role in negotiations on a new international climate treaty later this year.

The Bush administration pulled out of the last treaty, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, because of the lack of participation by developing countries. Negotiations on a new agreement are scheduled for December in Copenhagen, Denmark.

It was the first time Gore appeared before Congress since March 2007. Since then, the recession has deepened and the U.S. has waged two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A Democratic-controlled Congress and Democratic President have raised hopes for passage of a climate change bill.

Gore—whose book on global warming, "An Inconvenient Truth," became an Oscar-winning documentary—said the recession and wars should not cause another delay.

"We must face up to this urgent and unprecedented threat to the existence of our civilization at a time when our country must simultaneously solve two other worsening crises," Gore told the panel.

Gore's appearance comes amid signs that the Democratic-controlled Congress and Obama administration plan to act quickly on climate change—domestically and internationally. It comes days after Obama signed orders that will boost the fuel efficiency of the nation's cars and trucks and could allow states to limit emissions of greenhouse gases from exhaust pipes.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton also named a special climate envoy this week to lead U.S. negotiations on a new international treaty. She picked Todd Stern, a former White House assistant who was the chief U.S. negotiator at the Kyoto talks.

[Tracy Press, Guest Commentary, Tuesday, January 27, 2009](#)

Ellis approval was a bad decision

By Terry Ronneberg

Recently, the City Council unanimously approved the development of Ellis, a 2,250-home subdivision for the southwest side of town. This was a huge mistake, for there are a host of concerns that were ignored by our City Council and, therefore, were not mitigated when they approved this project.

Not the least of these ignored concerns is the damaging impact of allowing this Ellis development to be built in an area that will restrict future airport expansion and improvement. By limiting future

municipal airport expansion, we will have halted an as-of-yet unrealized economic asset. During this time of economic difficulty, our City Council should encourage economic growth and not limit our airport as a potential economic engine.

Furthermore, the council has ignored safety and noise issues caused by airplanes flying low over Ellis. To mitigate these challenges, there should be an appropriate amount of land set aside as a noise and safety buffer. Otherwise, there will undoubtedly be many homeowners unhappy about the noise caused by aircraft flying so close to their homes.

Yet another huge issue ignored by our City Council relates to the problem of natural gas transmission lines running beneath this proposed Ellis development. These are the same gas transmission lines (which are as of now essentially unmitigated) that were largely responsible for the demise of the Schulte Sports Park about a year ago. In fact, there potentially could be larger safety concerns with these gas transmission pipelines as they could adversely affect (by a leak or explosion) the 2,250 homes and their inhabitants.

The building of the much-anticipated aquatics center at Ellis is a mistake for the following reasons: The aquatics center where it is proposed won't be in an area that is centrally located and easily accessible to children and their parents, and the city will discover the annual maintenance outlay for this facility will be too expensive to be properly maintained.

Many of us are aware that the city is understaffed and, in the future, it may face employee layoffs and furloughs. More homes are not needed at this time, especially during these times when people are facing foreclosures and home prices have fallen by 30 to 40 percent.

Additionally, I believe what we need is more economic development, which provides jobs in order to prevent long commutes, thus allowing families to spend more time in family-oriented activities rather than commuting on stressful, overcrowded highways. Another benefit of having jobs close by is that it will reduce traffic and auto emissions, thereby making our area more livable and enjoyable.

• *Terry Ronneberg, a 37-year resident of Tracy, is a retired water resources coordinator for the city.*

[In the Tri-Valley Herald, Letter to the Editor from San Mateo County Times, Wednesday, January 28, 2009](#)

Meek will get the slow lane

ONCE AGAIN, our bureaucrats have shown their disdain for those of low means.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission has proposed designating high-occupancy toll lanes on four-lane stretches of northbound and southbound Highway 101.

Apparently, there are way too many workers clogging our freeways during commute hours. Some were able to move into carpool lanes to alleviate traffic and reduce emissions and congestion by placing more people in each car.

But, alas, the affluent are still unable to go about their very important business quickly enough.

The MTC has found the solution; the affluent will be able to join carpoolers in the diamond lanes without having to actually burden themselves with passengers or reduce traffic or emissions. All they have to do is spend some of their abundant wealth on a device that will allow them to travel in style, for a fee.

That ought to keep those pesky workers out of the way because the financially challenged won't be able to afford to get out of the gridlock on our freeways. Truly, the meek shall inherit the slow lane.

Bob Stine, San Mateo

[Sacramento Bee, Letters to the Editor, Wednesday, January 28, 2009](#)

Clean air and job cuts

Re "Big firms cut workers as recession spreads" (Page A1, Jan. 27): Why is Caterpillar laying off 20,000 workers? How about the fact they are leaving the truck engine manufacturing market due to too many emission control regulations that seem to change on the whim of bureaucratic dreamers. Yeah, we're going to get clean air all right, even if it does cost 20,000 highly skilled tax-paying employees their livelihood.

Hang on folks, there's more to come. The clean air gang is going to achieve their agenda even if it does kill the economy. As for plug-in cars: All of you gee-whiz folks, wait until you get the bill when electricity providers are required to install a second meter so the state can collect a road tax from you based on how much juice you are using. Don't forget: There is no free lunch, and if there was, you wouldn't be able to eat it all.

– Gary Smith, Sacramento

Science in the driver's seat

Re "Order to force new era on cars?" (Page A1, Jan. 27): California has consistently led the way when it comes to global warming and clean energy initiatives, but our efforts were stymied by the Bush administration. After being stuck in reverse for eight years when it comes to clean energy and global warming policy, President Barack Obama's announcements Monday have taken America from zero to 60 in six days.

From here on, science and not special interests will be in the driver's seat in America. With the waiver reconsideration, California can look forward to cleaner cars and cleaner air. It is exciting that Obama is taking seriously protecting our environment and at the same time creating jobs.

– Jeremy Mills, Sacramento

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the merging of automobile industries will create adjustments and will begin to create less polluting vehicles. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Coyuntura actual propicia a convenios con la industria automotriz

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Por lo menos dos organizaciones ambientalistas nacionales opinaron por separado que es momento de convenir con la industria automotriz sobre mejores modelos que reduzcan la contaminación del aire.

El Concilio de Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y la Asociación de Científicos Preocupados por el ambiente opinaron que el control a la mayor fuente de contaminación, los vehículos motorizados, está avanzado por iniciativa del presidente Barack Obama, y porque las automotrices han acordado que buscarán diseños menos contaminantes.

Por lo menos dos de las principales automotrices, Ford y General Motors acordaron reducir emisiones en próximos modelos, como parte del paquete de rescate financiero de esas empresas. Las dos compañías planean aumentar rendimientos entre 26 y 36 por ciento en siete años.