

Air quality takes a costly hit on 110-degree day

By Mark Grossi

Fresno Bee, Thursday, August 25, 2010

This week's sudden heat wave, along with back-to-school traffic, has caused an ozone spike that air officials had been hoping to avoid this summer -- and as a result, Valley businesses will owe a \$29 million dirty-air penalty next year.

The air monitor in Parlier on Tuesday measured 141 parts per billion of ozone, well above the federal one-hour threshold of 125 ppb and the Valley's highest reading of the summer.

If there had been no violations of the one-hour standard this summer, the penalty would have been postponed at least a year.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had feared that added traffic from the opening of school would push the ozone levels over the threshold. Over the past two weeks, many Valley school districts have resumed classes; Clovis Unified students returned to class Monday.

"Our fears were verified," said executive director Seyed Sadredin. "We've had the same meteorological conditions earlier in the year, and we didn't have a problem."

The high heat continued Wednesday, with Fresno recording 110, tying a record for this date set in 1931, according to the National Weather Service. It was the hottest day of the year so far. But it didn't necessarily mean there was another one-hour ozone violation.

When temperatures approach 110 degrees, a strong updraft sometimes forms as hot air rises. It pulls ozone away from the Valley floor and actually improves air quality. Air-quality readings for Wednesday won't be available until today.

Another triple-digit maximum is forecast today for most of the Valley, followed by a 20-degree-plus dip in temperatures for the weekend.

Fresno's expected high for today is 105, with overnight temperatures expected to dip to 66, according to the weather service. The Valley should return to normal temperatures for this time of year Friday, with highs in the mid-90s. Cooler temperatures are expected to prevail over the weekend, with highs only into the 80s.

Wednesday's heat led to power outages for more than 3,000 Pacific Gas & Electric Co. customers in south Fresno, said spokesman J.D. Guidi. The outages began about 4:45 p.m. and ended at 8:18 p.m., he said.

The heat bakes gases and fumes coming from vehicle exhaust, gasoline, dairies and other sources to create corrosive ozone, which can cause lung problems such as asthma attacks.

The pollution for Tuesday's violation in Parlier probably came from the Fresno-Clovis commutes earlier in the day. The California Air Resources Board's website showed Parlier's ozone peaked between 3 and 4 p.m.

Officials say Parlier, a city of about 14,000, does not have the vehicle traffic to create such a high concentration of ozone. Instead, a combination of factors must occur -- a hot day, light breezes and a large pollution plume coming from the metropolitan area upwind.

"It was a perfect storm," said David Lighthall, science adviser for the air district.

The Valley had not recorded any one-hour violations this summer until Tuesday. The air district governing board in October will need to discuss a plan to collect the money. Businesses from Stockton to Bakersfield are responsible for paying.

But since most ozone-making pollution comes from vehicles, officials are considering a \$10 increase in vehicle registration fees to cover most of the \$29 million penalty.

The Valley has never achieved clean-air status for the one-hour standard, or short-term peak in ozone, nor has it ever met the eight-hour standard.

The Valley has violated the eight-hour standard more than 60 times this summer.

Still, because of a cool, breezy May and June, the Valley is on pace to have its lowest number of eight-hour violations on record.

Air District to fund charbroiler emission controls

Business Journal, Wednesday, August 25, 2010

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is offering help for businesses with charbroilers to cut down on their emissions.

Launching today, the Char Broiler Incentive Program (CHIP) will make \$500,000 in funding available for the purpose of retrofitting commercial char broilers, which can spew both harmful particulate matter and volatile organic compounds (VOC).

Applications will be taken for eight weeks for the program while around five to 10 projects will ultimately be selected based on their ability to reduce VOC emissions by 86% and particulate matter under 10 microns (PM10) by 83%. Devices will also be judged for having a HEPA filtration system, an electrostatic precipitator, a wet scrubber and a thermal oxidizer.

The program is part of the Air District's efforts to advance new emission technologies at sources throughout the Valley. More information about the program can be found [here](#).

Chain-driven charbroilers are regulated under existing Rule 4692 requiring those who cook 875 pounds or more of meat per week to install emissions control equipment.

Power plant up for public review

By TP staff

Tracy Press, Wednesday, August 25, 2010

A power plant that could be built within sight of Mountain House is up for public review.

Until Sept. 27, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District will accept feedback about the proposed 200-megawatt plant that would rise 2½ miles from the community's western border. The district is in the process of deciding whether or not to issue the plant's developer a license to go forward with the project.

The proposed Mariposa Energy facility would burn natural gas intermittently throughout the year as a "peaker" plant, instead of being online full-time. It would, at its highest output, generate enough electricity to power an estimated 200,000 homes.

Despite its proximity to Mountain House and location on the eastern side of the Altamont Hills, the plant would be located in Alameda County. Therefore, any pollution it produces falls under the scrutiny of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, not the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, even if its emissions end up wafting over the Central Valley.

According to Bob Sarvey, who has scrutinized several power plant proposals for Alameda County's small slice of the valley flatlands, that's a problem. The Bay Area district, he says, has much less stringent rules than the San Joaquin Valley district, which means the valley's already heavily polluted air will become even worse.

"There's a lot of proposals out there still to build along the San Joaquin County border, and I'm definitely not in favor of that," he said.

The Mountain House Community Services District board has also opposed the plant, voting in November 2009 to become an intervener in the project.

Mariposa Energy officials have pledged to mitigate any pollution issues where they arise, not in Alameda County, and pollution tests projected for the plant's maximum 4,000-hours-a-year level indicate that the risk to the nearby downwind communities should be negligible.

They also have said that the plant's location has been carefully chosen — because of nearby infrastructure as well as to minimize any potential impacts on San Joaquin County residents.

Mariposa officials have also said that the plant will generate as many as eight full-time jobs once it is up and running, which could be in 2012 if all goes according to plan.

Information about the project is available at www.baaqmd.gov, and feedback from the public will also be accepted through the website.

State orders removal of hold-open gas-nozzle latches

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Aug. 26, 2010

That handle-latch that keeps the gasoline flowing while you're washing your windows or checking the oil? In some stations throughout the Valley, it isn't there anymore.

The state fire marshal has ordered gas stations with a particular brand of gas nozzle to remove the hold-open latches from their non-diesel pumps. The order covers about 3,000 stations using Vapor System Technologies-brand gas nozzles.

About 30 percent of the gas stations in California use the nozzles, said Julie Hutchinson, a spokeswoman for Cal Fire. Since May, she said, 13 incidents of equipment malfunction have been reported.

"We've had accidents where the nozzle hasn't turned off while it is filling up the gas tank, and we've had people sprayed with gas as they have taken the nozzles out of the cradle at the pump," she said.

"This is more than just getting gas on you and needing to change your shirt. These are incidents where people have had gas sprayed into their eyes and needed to go to the hospital."

The nozzles can be identified by the letters VST on the handle. State officials are trying to get the word out about the change.

Gas station owners report that some customers are using water bottles and other objects to keep nozzles open.

Jose Salas, a cashier at the Akers Texaco Station in Visalia, said that two months ago the nozzles were replaced at his station and at the company's other Visalia location, a Chevron station on Walnut Avenue. There have been no complaints from customers, he said.

"I haven't heard anything," he said. "The company came out and changed the nozzles for free and no one has said anything to me about it."

State officials are urging customers to take the following steps when using a VST-brand gas nozzle:

- Insert the nozzle into the gas tank before selecting the grade of gasoline
- Do not insert any type of foreign object (gas cap, water bottle, etc.) in the handle to keep the gas flowing
- Do not use the hold-open latches on VST nozzles.

Gas station owners using VST nozzles have until Oct. 15 to remove the hold-open latches.

Schools say students won't be exposed to extreme heat, bad air quality

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2010

A cooling center is open today in South Hanford and local school officials are reassuring that students won't be exposed to extreme heat, as triple-digit heat lingers in Kings County and the rest of the Valley through Thursday.

"When there is excessive heat, the students meet inside for P.E.," said John Sousa, superintendent and principal at Kit Carson School. "When it's orange [signifying unhealthy air], we don't get to play strenuous games."

Many schools like Kit Carson use the air-quality flag program to notify teachers, students and parents about the ambient air quality every day. They restrict or discourage outdoor activities and adjust physical education on poor air-quality days, which often go hand in hand with hot temperatures. For example, an orange flag corresponds to the level in the air-quality index that is unhealthy to sensitive groups; red means unhealthy for everyone.

The Hanford Elementary School District, too, has a similar action plan in place to protect students' health on bad air days associated with heat.

"On days when it goes over 100 degrees, the air quality typically reaches the unhealthy level. When that happens, students with asthma and other respiratory problems won't be allowed outdoors," said Gerry Mulligan, facilities director for the district. "When it's red, which is unhealthy for everyone, we make indoor areas accessible so the schools will have either indoor games at cafeterias or make classrooms available for pencil P.E. instead of a physical P.E."

Kings County residents are in for a roller coaster ride of heat, cool weather and normal summer weather all within the next six days, according to weather forecasters.

In response to consecutive days of triple-digit highs, Hanford Fire Chief Tim Ieronimo announced Tuesday the activation of the city cooling center set up at Coe Park Hall, 543 S. Douty St. Ieronimo said the cooling center will be open again today from 1 to 8 p.m. and possibly on Thursday, if the temperature lingers above 100.

The National Weather Service says today may be the hottest day of the current streak of heat. A near-record-level high temperature of between 104 and 109 is forecast for the area, said Jeff Barlow, meteorologist for the National Weather Service forecast center in Hanford.

A large area of high pressure, which has been over the Southeastern United States all summer has shifted westward over California, bringing hot weather to the Valley while cooling the East Coast, Barlow said.

"We're getting a taste of what the South and Southeast part of the United States has been experiencing all summer," he said.

The good news is that relief may be in sight for Kings County residents who have been enduring this off-again, on-again heat wave.

A large area of low pressure over the Gulf of Alaska is dropping down to the Pacific Northwest, bringing cold air from Canada with it, Barlow said.

Friday's high is expected to be 96. Then the temperature is expected to drop dramatically to a high of 87 for Saturday and 83 for both Sunday and Monday.

This unseasonably cool weather will also be short lived, as the normal range of summer temperatures return to the region after Monday, Barlow said.

[Modesto bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, August 26, 2010](#)

On a clear day you could see Yosemite

The article about a proposed plan to restore historic vistas in Yosemite (Aug. 17, Page B-1) caught my eye. This could be a great idea for Yosemite, but it would be an even better idea down here in the valley.

A century ago, before smog became the ugly and unhealthy reality that it is today, the Yosemite Valley could clearly be seen — if you stood in the right spot — from up to 150 miles away. For example, this is how El Capitan Way, off Highway 99 in Delhi, got its name: It aims directly toward its namesake landmark. Even today, one may get a day that is clear enough, creating a delightful opportunity for a souvenir photograph.

Deb Bennett, Livingston