

Is Central Valley importing bad air from China?

Monitor near coast will help UC scientists track Asian pollution.

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tues., June 28, 2011

Air-quality scientists have long suspected some of the San Joaquin Valley's notorious brown haze comes all the way from places like China -- taking an amazing wind-blown trip. Now it's time to find out.

Years ago, researchers confirmed plumes of east Asian forest fires, airborne dust, industrial pollution and vehicle exhaust float high in the atmosphere to California and the rest of the West.

Now, on a mountain ridge east of Big Sur, scientists will set up a monitor to capture gases, specks of soil and bits of ash that have been carried thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean. The site is in a direct line with the heart of the Valley.

If such pollution is coming into the Valley, it might eventually ruin chances of meeting increasingly stringent federal standards, says the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The Valley already is among the dirtiest air basins in the country, struggling to meet standards over the next decade.

Local officials have no control over international pollution. In the future, as local pollution is mostly controlled, such pollution might become the difference between healthy and unhealthy air, officials say.

If the pollution prevents the region from achieving air-quality standards, federal officials should consider granting the Valley clean-air status, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the local air district.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would have to make a policy decision at that point, federal officials say.

But that issue won't be settled without years of research and discussion.

The district's governing board on June 16 decided the research would start now, approving \$130,000 for scientists from the University of California at Davis to monitor Asian pollution for 12 months.

In the next few months, scientists will set up an air-quality sampling station at an observatory owned by the Monterey Institute for Research in Astronomy, an independent, nonprofit group.

The observatory is on Chews Ridge, which is more than 5,000 feet high. Scientists have found wind-blown Asian pollution at 3,200 feet and above, so Chews Ridge should easily be high enough to get good samples, said atmospheric scientist Anthony Wexler, one of the Davis researchers involved.

Researchers say the pollution could drop to ground level in downdrafts as it moves beyond the coastal range.

The pollution might also drop lower in the atmosphere as layers of air mix together.

But those issues are not involved in the research beginning near Big Sur. Scientists simply are trying to find out whether the pollution is headed to the Valley.

Wexler, who has measured air pollution in China, said there is plenty of pollution coming from Asia. He said many governments focus more on economic development than the environment.

"The air quality in many places is incredibly bad," he said. "It's not just coal-fired plants or dust storms from the eastern deserts. The industrial and traffic emissions are huge."

Like detectives, scientists will look for fingerprints in microscopic specks of debris to figure out the source of the pollution. The chemical makeup of a particle can be linked to the location on Earth where it was formed.

Scientists can bolster their analysis by using an online tool to track the wind and the trajectory of the pollution back to its source.

Connected to the specks, scientists probably also will find ozone, which would add to the summertime ozone problems in the Valley, Wexler said.

How much would be too much pollution from Asia? Wexler said science can't answer that question yet.

He said, "The questions go like this: First, is it a problem? How often is it a problem? To what degree is it a problem? We're just starting on those questions because there is no research on this at all for the Valley."

Court: Calif. can proceed with cap-and-trade plan

The Associated Press

In the Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Mon., June 27, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO -- A state appeals court has ruled that California can move ahead with its plan to limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, refineries and other sources.

California's 1st District Court of Appeal on Friday overruled a San Francisco judge who in May ordered the California Air Resources Board to stop work on its cap-and-trade program.

The plan was set to start in January, and officials have been developing rules, oversight and reporting requirements for this key piece of California's landmark global warming law.

The program gives polluters permits that allow them to emit specified amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Earlier this year, the lower court judge ruled that the board had failed to properly consider alternatives to the program.

[Merced Sun-Star Commentary, Tuesday, June 28, 2011:](#)

Mike Lynch: Don't mix Valley, coast in legislative districts

In 2005, the Modesto-based Great Valley Center asked the San Joaquin Valley congressional delegation to direct the Congressional Research Service to conduct a formal study of the economic and social indicators of the region.

The study concluded that our eight-county region was "one of the most economically depressed regions of the United States." In fact, in 2000, the San Joaquin Valley had "substantially higher poverty rates than the rest of the country and California." We were even more impoverished than Appalachia.

The San Joaquin Valley is also one of the fastest growing, most diverse, and most environmentally and economically challenged parts of California and the nation.

The eight counties of the valley -- Kern, Tulare, Fresno, Merced, Madera, Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Kings -- constitute one air quality control district, and we fail to meet air quality standards. That is why our schools have asthma warning days.

Too often, the San Joaquin Valley has been considered the "crazy aunt in the attic" who did not meet the state's Bay Area-LA- Hollywood image.

State policy reflected that bias. When California adopted tougher rules on pollution from automobiles, Bay Area cars were exempt, even though the emissions of those cars blew into the valley and became the valley's problem. Bay Area businesses are held to less stringent and less costly air quality standards than those required in the valley, making job development easier over there, and once again leaving us with the job of cleaning up the mess.

Clearly, the valley needs elected representatives who can stand up for us.

That is why the valley embraced the notion of an independent commission to draw the new state legislative apportionment lines. At a minimum, we figured the valley would have representation that would match its numbers and its unique circumstances.

Instead, in its state Senate map, the California Citizens Redistricting Commission proposes to rip the heart out of the San Joaquin Valley by merging all of Merced County and half of Stanislaus with areas on other side of the Coast Range.

Merced and Stanislaus counties have more in common with Sacramento and Riverside counties than with Santa Clara and Monterey counties.

Even the agricultural industry is different on the two sides of this thrown-together district. Air quality issues are different; transportation issues are different; produce moves to market on entirely different routes. The interests of one side will often be in conflict with those of the other, making the senator's job almost impossible to perform.

Only one major road links the two halves of this district. If it were to be blocked for any period of time, it would be easier for the people of Merced and Stanislaus to get to Los Angeles than to the other half of their Senate district to see their representative.

The numbers don't lie. By any measure -- economics, agriculture, diversity, health, air quality, educational opportunity and environment -- Merced and Stanislaus counties should be in San Joaquin Valley districts. Santa Clara, Monterey and San Benito counties are not part of the San Joaquin Valley.

It is almost as if the commission waited to do the valley last, so that it could be configured in ways to resolve problems elsewhere.

In fact, on the commission's Web site, the Central Coast is listed as part of the Central Valley. With all due respect to the commission, the Central Coast is not part of the Central Valley.

The commission has a tough job, but there is an easy fix: Keep the heart and soul of the San Joaquin Valley in valley districts. Merced and Stanislaus County should not be in a Senate district that includes Monterey and Santa Clara counties. The mountains of the Coast Range are a barrier in more ways than just topography.

Let the valley be the valley.

Lynch is an independent public policy and political consultant located in Modesto. He was chief operating officer at the Great Valley Center at the time of the Congressional Research Service study of the San Joaquin Valley. Before that he was chief of staff to Assemblyman and then Rep. Gary Condit.