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Valley is winning the clean air war

By Seyed Sadredin

Any objective and honest discussion about San Joaquin Valley air quality must start with an expression of gratitude to Valley businesses, farmers and residents for their large investment toward clean air, and an acknowledgment that those sacrifices have paid off in substantial improvements in air quality in the past 20 years.

The facts are impressive and a source of pride to all of us who live and work in the Valley:

- Air pollution from Valley businesses and farms has been reduced by over 80 percent.
- The Valley has seen the cleanest winters and summers on record over the past four years.
- 2011, the air basin had just three days of one-hour ozone violations, compared to 56 days in 1996.
- We have reached federal attainment of standards for coarse particulate matter (PM10).
- The northern counties of the air basin are very close to attaining the current eight-hour ozone standard.
- Valley-wide, the number of days with Unhealthy air quality has dropped significantly and the number of days with Good air quality has increased.

Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on your perspective, we still have a long ways to go in our journey toward clean air. Latest science has compelled the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to impose more stringent health-based standards that will be extremely difficult for the Valley to meet.

The fact that we have already employed virtually all available control technologies and strategies on pollution sources within the Valley puts us at a critical juncture as we attempt to craft our latest "air quality management plan" for submittal to EPA.

We are going through the public process to prepare a plan for attaining the latest federal standard for fine particles (PM2.5) and we need input from all businesses and residents.

We cannot afford to follow the one-size-fits-all approaches often prescribed by the federal government or special interest advocates. We need to follow the latest and best science and deploy a good dose of common sense.

For instance, the latest science indicates that reducing Volatile Organic Compounds or ammonia will do little to help reduce particulate or ozone concentrations in the Valley. This is due to the Valley's characteristics relating to chemistry and speciation of the pollutants, and our meteorology. These are the key pollutants that are emitted from large dairies in the Valley. Therefore, suggesting new controls on dairies as the "silver bullet" for air pollution problems is analogous to suggesting that we treat a patient who is having cardiac arrest with a perfumed acne medicine. Getting rid of the dairies will make some parts of the Valley look better and smell better. But it will do little to reduce particulates and ozone that have deadly health impacts.

Valley businesses and farmers (including dairies) are already subject to the toughest air regulations in the nation. We cannot meet the federal standards on the back of businesses alone. Further reductions in emissions require significant advancement in technology and active participation by Valley residents in reducing pollution from our day-to-day activities. Over 80 percent of our particulate and ozone problems in the Valley come from mobile sources of emissions. Trucks are the largest source of air pollution in the Valley and 50 percent to 60 percent of truck traffic in the Valley is pass-through with no business stops in the Valley.

There is no other region in the nation that faces a more difficult task in meeting more stringent air quality standards. However, we can meet these standards if we develop a plan that adapts the Valley's clean air strategy to prioritize those factors that most effectively address public health needs. Toward that end, we should pursue a multi-faceted strategy as follows:

- Investment in research and development of new and cost-effective clean air technologies
- Prioritize measures that reduce pollutants with greatest impact on public health
- Consider episodic measures that reduce key pollutants in locations with greatest impact on public health
- Hold our neighboring regions accountable for their contribution to the Valley's air pollution
- Pursue land-use approaches that minimize growth in vehicle miles traveled
- Public investment in partnership with the private sector to expedite deployment of cleaner trucks, vehicles and technologies
- Public participation in reducing pollution from daily activities

In short, we have to follow the science and be strategic with our limited resources. We have great faith in this course, and in our mutual efforts, to take us the rest of the way.

Sadredin is the executive director and air pollution control officer of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control

Second test at gun shop shows no airborne asbestos

By Denise Ellen Rizzo,
Tracy Press, Friday, Aug. 31, 2012

A second environmental test for asbestos at the former 11th Street gun shop has proven to be negative for airborne asbestos, according to city officials.

At the request of building owner George Papadakis, a test was conducted by Oakdale-based Bovee Environmental Management, Inc. on Aug. 14 at 22 East 11th St. The test report states the areas examined for airborne asbestos were the building's flooring, ceiling and various walls.

In areas chosen by the owner, air samples were taken for an hour in the front and back of the building, according to the Bovee report. Those samples were then tested using a process called transmission electron microscopy that counts asbestos airborne fibers collected from the clearance samples to determine a representative asbestos fiber concentration level of the regulated area.

Bovee officials ruled in their report that no asbestos structures were detected, and the building could be reoccupied.

The testing came in wake of the former tenant of the building, Rick Hedrick of Tracy Shooting Supplies informing city officials that he was told the building had airborne asbestos.

Hedrick said he hired Sierra Environmental Testing and Consulting, Inc. of Woodbridge to test the building on June 8 and their tests came back positive for asbestos inside the building. The report stated the company collected three samples of building materials and found asbestos in the wallboard/joint taping compound and ceiling tile texture.

Hedrick said he became suspicious after he developed breathing problems and closed his shop in mid-June. He said he thought the problem might have been related to a roof leak from 2002, and he said inspectors told him there was airborne asbestos in the building.

City officials were notified of the alleged hazard by Hedrick, and Tracy Code Enforcement Manager Ana Contreras said they had considered a vacate order for the building in early August. She said that changed after she talked to testing officials at Sierra who informed her that they never tested for airborne asbestos.

Contreras said on Thursday, Aug. 30, that the reports by Bovee and Sierra speak for themselves and the city has closed their investigation into the matter.

"No further action will be taken on the part of the city," she said. "However we have established internal

control in the event the property owners remodel or do construction within the building that may prompt an asbestos concern.”

Contreras said the building’s owners will have to notify the city with the normal permitting process prior to construction. If they do apply for city permits, she said they will also have to undergo the permit process by the San Joaquin County Air Pollution Control District to address any disposal requirements of materials with asbestos content.

Hedrick said he had no comment regarding the latest testing conducted on his former rental space.

After numerous attempts for an interview, the property owners’ son Nathaniel Papadakis stated in an e-mail to the Tracy Press on Aug. 29 that the family is declining to comment at this time.