

District sets list of air quality goals

By Alex Breitler

Srockton Record, Friday, Jan. 20, 2012

After a challenging year for air quality in the San Joaquin Valley, officials on Thursday approved a list of goals for 2012, including more air-quality stations, cleaner vehicles and new alternatives for burning agricultural waste.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says pollution has declined 80 percent from factories and businesses, and 60 percent from mobile sources such as cars and trucks since 1980.

Still, the Valley is out of compliance with federal air-quality standards, and it remains one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation.

We've been reminded of that lately - first, last summer, when levels of harmful ozone spiked in August. And again, more recently, when stagnant weather conditions in December and early January triggered numerous bans on fireplace burning.

Among the 2012 goals for the air district is pushing the state and federal governments for money to install more air-quality monitoring instrumentation. Those stations will generate real-time air-quality information, which residents can receive via email or text message.

"We think this is an important tool to get information to protect public health in the Valley," said Tom Jordan, a senior policy adviser at the district.

Officials also plan to urge the federal government to take a new approach when implementing the law by looking at the risk individual pollutants pose to certain areas as opposed to a broader reduction rule. Upcoming standards could result in drastic emission reductions targets that aren't possible with existing technology, the district warns.

Vehicles are a big part of the problem, and the number of miles driven in the Valley has increased more than 300 percent over the past three decades. The air district wants to encourage the state to develop stricter clean-vehicle standards.

The plan also calls for construction of more biomass facilities to take agricultural wood waste and generate energy.