

Modesto Bee Editorial, Sunday, Dec. 16, 2012

Our View: It's not just fireplaces Restrictions part of much larger plan to clean valley air

Some local residents are fuming over a proposal to further restrict fireplace use in the San Joaquin Valley. They see it as another example of government infringing on their freedoms and as an economic hardship.

Here's what some of these fired-up opponents may not know:

- This is only the latest of many steps to reduce ozone and particulate pollution in the valley over the last two decades. The mandates have come in five overlapping phases.
- Valley air is significantly cleaner than it was — the number of days where the valley's air contains more pollutants than levels set by the federal government has been reduced by 85 percent.
- Despite the improvements, the valley was hit with a \$29 million fine because we had too many violations of the federal ozone standard in 2010. Vehicle owners are now paying off that fine via a \$12 per year surcharge on their DMV registration.
- Valley farmers and businesses have shouldered nearly all of the regulations and expense of clean air improvements so far, with more than 500 new regulations imposed on them since 1992 at a cost of \$40 billion. The rules affect every manner of business, from service stations to dry cleaners to drive-through restaurants.

Consider, for instance, ag burning. Orchard prunings used to be disposed of through burning; now most are chipped. Approximately 80 percent of ag burning has been eliminated.

- The standards that the air district is trying to meet were not set by current politicians but are the result of the 1970 Clean Air Act and amendments adopted two decades later.

We think that understanding all these things puts a little different perspective on the fireplace restrictions, which are part of a larger plan that the air district board of directors is scheduled to vote on Thursday.

Approval of the plan will lead to another process of establishing timelines and other details to implement the plan. The changes in fireplace rules wouldn't be effective until the late fall and winter of 2016-17. These would be stricter than the current "Check Before You Burn" practices, which include daily updates, by county, on when it is OK to use a wood-burning fireplace or stove.

Air quality standards are confusing. Regional air quality districts — of which ours is the largest in the state — are required by the Environmental Protection Agency to produce plans detailing how the standards will be met. By the time the deadlines for the plans approach, the EPA issues a new set of standards and a new deadline for compliance. In short, the finish line moves just before a runner breaks the tape.

The new fireplace rules, which could double the number of no-burn days in Stanislaus County, from about 36 to 74, are essential to meet the more stringent air standards, according to Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director. There are other strategies in the plan as well, but none are getting as much attention as the plan to limit the use of wood-burning fireplaces.

What are our recommendations regarding fireplaces?

1. The air board should adopt the new plan, with a modification that eases the restrictions for those who have already converted to cleaner burning stoves, which emit only a small fraction of the particulate matter that open-hearth wood fires do.
2. Step up the education efforts to explain to valley residents how much has been accomplished and how much business, including agriculture, has already done. Individual residents have neither understood the success nor felt the pain to this point.
3. Beef up the promotion and incentives for people to convert their fireplaces to gas and to convert their wood-burning stoves or replace them with those that use pellets.

4. Make sure that people understand that these rules only apply to wood-burning fireplaces, not to those that burn natural gas. Most newer homes have gas fireplaces, which generally provide more ambience than heat.

5. Inform people about the risks associated with wood burning, both inside and outside their home. The tiny particulates can harm sensitive lungs, aggravate asthma and cause lung cancer. The accumulation of particulate matter is worse when there isn't wind in the valley — think of fog, with toxins. Ozone pollution — generated largely by fuel-burning vehicles and equipment — is a warm-weather problem.

6. Let residents know that while this is a health issue, it also has a direct impact on their pocketbooks. Every valley resident who owns a vehicle is paying the DMV surcharge. The only good news out of this is that the money is being reinvested in the valley air district for incentives and other programs rather than going to the federal government.

DECISION TIME

- Who: The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board, consisting of one elected supervisor from each of the eight counties (San Joaquin south to Kern); five elected council members selected by cities in the district; two public members appointed by the governor. Stanislaus Supervisor Bill O'Brien is the current board chairman; Ceres Mayor Chris Vierra is among the city representatives.

- What: The board's monthly meeting.

- When: Thursday, 9 a.m.

- Where: 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno. People also can attend the videoconference at the Modesto regional office, 4800 Enterprise Way, off Kiernan Avenue. The session also will be webcast. Go to <http://is.gd/iuIP3A> for the link.

- For more information: The proposed plan that includes fireplace restrictions is available at <http://is.gd/bAc9iR>.

VALLEY TO CONGRESS: GIVE US A BREAK HERE

In testimony before Congress on Nov. 29, Seyed Sadredin, executive officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, asked for amendments to the Clean Air Act. Some of his key points:

- Many areas in the nation, such as the San Joaquin Valley, have already implemented very costly and stringent clean air measures that have exhausted the limits of available or foreseeable control technologies.

- Attainment deadlines should consider natural environment, technology, economic feasibility, and pollution that comes in from other regions and countries.

- Most stationary sources in the San Joaquin Valley are already equipped with the best available equipment to reduce emissions. The only options available to valley businesses to reduce or avoid the fees would be to curtail production or go out of business — which would have devastating consequences for the valley.

- There's a chaotic transition, with new standards and implementation plans always rolling in, leaving everyone confused.

- Vehicles contribute about 80 percent of the total NOx emissions, the significant precursor to both ozone and PM2.5, but the air district has limited control over these mobile sources.

- New standards should be aggressive but also achievable.

The complete transcript of his testimony is available at www.valleyair.org, under the "Need To Know" menu.

Manteca rolls out hybrid garbage trucks

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Dec. 15, 2012

Two new hybrid garbage trucks will be put into commission in Manteca on Monday.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District provided grant funds for their purchase.

The two residential garbage trucks are the first in California to feature Parker's RunWise Advanced Series Hybrid Drive System, the city said in a news release.

The RunWise technology is on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency National Clean Diesel Campaign's Emerging Technologies List. The trucks can provide up to 50 percent in fuel savings and lower carbon emissions and brake wear while improving vehicle performance.

The two hybrid trucks not only will save the city money in terms of maintenance costs, but will reduce carbon emissions by up to 110 tons in one year — the equivalent of removing a total of nearly 20 midsize cars from the road, or planting as many as 2,600 trees and letting them grow for 10 years, the city reported.

EPA tightens standards for soot pollution

By Matthew Daly, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, Dec. 14, 2012

WASHINGTON -- In its first major regulation since the election, the Obama administration on Friday imposed a new air quality standard that reduces by 20 percent the maximum amount of soot released into the air from smokestacks, diesel trucks and other sources of pollution.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said the new standard will save thousands of lives each year and reduce the burden of illness in communities across the country, as people "benefit from the simple fact of being able to breathe cleaner air."

As a mother of two sons who have battled asthma, Jackson said she was pleased that "more mothers like me will be able to rest a little easier knowing their children, and their children's children, will have cleaner air to breathe for decades to come."

Announcement of the new standard met a court deadline in a lawsuit by 11 states and public health groups. The new annual standard is 12 micrograms per cubic meter of air, down from the current 15 micrograms per cubic meter.

The new soot standard has been highly anticipated by environmental and business groups, who have battled over the extent to which it would protect public health or cause job losses. The EPA said its analysis shows the rule will have a net benefit ranging from about \$3.6 billion to \$9 billion a year.

A study by the American Lung Association and other groups said the new standard will save an estimated 15,000 lives a year - many in urban areas where exposure to emissions from older, dirty diesel engines and coal-fired power plants are greatest.

Soot, or fine particulate matter, is made up of microscopic particles released from smokestacks, diesel trucks, wood-burning stoves and other sources and contributes to haze. Breathing in soot can cause lung and heart problems, contributing to heart attacks, strokes and asthma attacks.

Environmental groups and public health advocates welcomed the new standard, saying it will protect millions of Americans at risk for soot-related asthma attacks, lung cancer, heart disease and premature death.

Dr. Norman H. Edelman, chief medical officer for the American Lung Association, said a new standard will force industries to clean up what he called a "lethal pollutant." Reducing soot pollution "will prevent heart attacks and asthma attacks and will keep children out of the emergency room and hospitals," Edelman said in a statement. "It will save lives."

But congressional Republicans and industry officials called the new standard overly strict and said it could hurt economic growth and cause job losses in areas where pollution levels are determined to be too high. Conservative critics said they feared the rule was the beginning of a "regulatory cliff" that includes a forthcoming EPA rule on ozone, or smog, as well as pending greenhouse gas regulations for refineries and rules curbing mercury emissions at power plants.

Ross Eisenberg, vice president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said the new soot rule is "yet another costly, overly burdensome" regulation that is "out of sync" with President Barack Obama's executive order last year to streamline federal regulations.

The soot rule will "place many promising new projects - and the jobs they create - into permit limbo," Eisenberg said.

A letter signed by one Democratic and five Republican senators said the EPA rule would "impose significant new economic burdens on many communities, hurting workers and their families just as they are struggling to overcome difficult economic times."

New air pollution standards restrict soot particles

The Environmental Protection Agency, announcing the limits, predicts that they could save on healthcare costs from respiratory ailments.

By Neela Banerjee, staff writer

L.A. Times, Friday, Dec. 14, 2012

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration announced a new air pollution standard Friday that would bring about a 20% reduction in microscopic particles of soot emitted by coal-fired power plants and diesel vehicles that contribute to haze and respiratory ailments.

The new limit, fought by industry and welcomed by environmentalists, marks the first time the Environmental Protection Agency tightened the soot standard since it was established 15 years ago.

"These standards are fulfilling the promise of the Clean Air Act," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "We will save lives and reduce the burden of illness in our communities, and families across the country will benefit from the simple fact of being able to breathe cleaner air."

Fine particles from burning fossil fuels can penetrate deep into the lungs and lead to heart attacks, acute asthma and premature death, according to the EPA. The new limit that the EPA set for an annual average of airborne fine particles in a given jurisdiction is 12 micrograms per cubic meter, down from 15 micrograms, a standard established in 1997.

The new standard will have a particular impact on California, due to problems from the burning of diesel fuel. According to the EPA's regional office of the Pacific Southwest, seven California counties may not meet the new standard by 2020: Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Imperial, Kern, Merced and Tulare. Still, over the last decade, soot levels have been cut by almost 50% in the Los Angeles area and almost 30% in the San Joaquin Valley, the office said.

Industry attacked the standard as onerous and of dubious benefit to public health — and a sign of more regulation in the future.

"We fear this new rule may be just the beginning of a 'regulatory cliff' that includes forthcoming ozone rules, the refinery sector rules, pending greenhouse gas regulations for refineries," said Howard Feldman, director of regulatory and scientific affairs at the American Petroleum Institute, the oil industry's main lobby. "It makes no sense to risk economic harm when the public health necessity of these regulations is ambiguous at best."

Recent research by the Harvard School of Public Health has shown that reducing fine particle pollution even by small amounts can lead to an increase in life expectancy.

The EPA estimated that by 2030, the reduction in soot "from diesel vehicles and equipment alone" could prevent up to 40,000 premature deaths and 4.7 million days of work lost due to illness. The agency estimates that it would cost industry \$53 million to \$350 million annually to comply with the new standard. But it estimated the annual savings in healthcare and other costs to be around \$4 billion to \$9.1 billion.

Right now, 99% of U.S. counties are in compliance with the new standard, the EPA said. Of the remaining, many of them will be in California, the EPA said. States have until 2018 to submit their plans to meet the new standards and then until 2020 to comply. Moreover, they could ask for an extension until 2025 "depending on the severity of an area's fine particle pollution problems and the availability of pollution controls," the EPA said.

The new soot limit is the result of a lawsuit brought by several East Coast states, led by New York, against the EPA. Soot pollution in the East is largely from coal-fired plants. California's high levels of soot can be traced to diesel-fueled transportation on its roads and its ports, which can make it harder to meet the new standards.

Paul Cort, a California-based lawyer with the environmental law and advocacy group Earthjustice, said in an email, "We don't have coal power plants in California. The big targets will have to include transportation — trucks, ports, trains — but even that will probably not be enough. These areas are going to have to really look across all industries to find the pollution reductions (a little here, a little there) that will be needed to meet this new standard by the deadline of 2020."

New EPA soot rules could impact California's Central Valley

Central Valley Business News, Friday, Dec. 14, 2012

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Saying it is reacting to a court order, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has finalized an update to its national air quality standards for harmful fine particle pollution, known to technicians by its shorthand, PM2.5.

The rules set the annual health standard at 12 micrograms per cubic meter. By 2020, 99 percent of U.S. counties are projected to meet revised health standard without any additional actions

Counties that might not include three San Joaquin Valley counties – Kern, Tulare and Merced -- plus Los Angeles County and other parts of Southern California.

The announcement has no effect on the existing daily standard for fine particles or the existing daily standard for coarse particles (PM10), which includes dust from farms and other sources), both of which remain unchanged.

"We will save lives and reduce the burden of illness in our communities, and families across the country will benefit from the simple fact of being able to breathe cleaner air," says EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson.

Fine particle pollution can penetrate deep into lungs and has been linked to a wide range of serious health effects, including premature death, heart attacks, and strokes, as well as acute bronchitis and aggravated asthma among children.

A federal court ruling required EPA to update the standard based on best available science. The agency says it has met the court's order with Friday's announcement.

It is expected that fewer than 10 counties, out of the more than 3,000 counties in the United States, will need to consider any local actions to reduce fine particle pollution in order to meet the new standard by 2020, as required by the Clean Air Act. The rest can rely on air quality improvements from federal rules already on the books to meet this new standard.

The standard was proposed in June. The EPA says it is consistent with the advice from the agency's independent science advisors, is based on an extensive body of scientific evidence that includes thousands of studies – including many large studies which show negative health impacts at lower levels than previously understood, and follows extensive consultation with the public, health organizations, and industry.

Stubborn blaze burns at Tulare County recycling company

By Eddie Jimenez and Lewis Griswold, staff writers

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Dec. 13, 2012

Tulare County fire crews were putting out the final hot spots of a fire at a plastic recycling business near Terra Bella that burned a 90-foot by 40-foot building to the ground earlier Thursday.

The two-alarm fire at the Tuff Stuff Products plant, which makes plastic tubs, was reported at 12:52 p.m. The plant, which is two miles west of Terra Bella on Road 256 and Avenue 96, was evacuated and no one was hurt.

Tulare County Fire Department Battalion Chief Mike Green said crews put the fire out around 6 p.m. Crews planned to stay at the plant to put out any remaining smoldering spots through midnight and possibly into this morning.

The building was part of the shredding and compacting operations at the recycling plant, Green said.

The cause of the fire is unknown and an investigation will begin this morning, he said. The preliminary damage estimate was thousands of dollars, officials said.

The fire erupted in a large pile of plastic pipe and sheeting hauled in from farms to be recycled, the fire department said. The business recycles plastic to make a variety of plastic tubs, according to the company's website.

Because the fire involved plastic, foam was injected into the water stream. "That plastic is tough to extinguish; it has a tendency to smoke and flare up again," he said.

A problem for firefighters, however, was that the only hydrant in the area was at the fertilizer plant next door, Green said. Firefighters drove water tenders to the nearest fire hydrant a mile away, filled up and drove back to dump water into a portable tank, he said.

No homes are in the area and the fire was far enough from Terra Bella that the black smoke was not expected to pose a threat to residents, Green said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Thursday it was monitoring the fire but did not expect the smoke to create an air pollution problem.

One issue with plastics fires is that runoff mixed with the melted plastic can contaminate groundwater, but it's unknown whether that will be a problem in this case, Green said.

[Merced Sun-Star, Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Dec. 15, 2012](#)

Our View: Pair working against valley on rail funds

No place in California stands to reap the rewards of high-speed rail more than the San Joaquin Valley.

That is why the opposition of House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, and Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock, is so puzzling. At a one-sided House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing last Thursday -- where the California High-Speed Rail Authority was not invited to testify -- the two made it clear they want to kill future federal funding for high-speed rail in California.

This is despite the state and federal government already committing more than \$6 billion in state and federal money to complete the first phase of the project -- the 130-mile high-speed "backbone" in the valley from Merced to Bakersfield.

The state Legislature in July approved a bill to issue the first bonds from voter-approved Proposition 1A, including \$2.6 billion for the 130-mile stretch in the valley and \$1.9 billion to improve intercity and regional rail across the state, including the Capitol Corridor.

Congress already awarded \$2.952 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and \$945 million from the Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriation bill to the California high-speed rail project. The

state and the U.S. Department of Transportation already have signed legally binding contracts. There is no precedent for rescinding already obligated funds.

Five firms have been short-listed to prepare bids for the 65-mile Merced to Fresno stretch, with dirt flying by July. The Fresno to Bakersfield section also is moving.

McCarthy and Denham should be lining up to support this first phase for their communities. Far-thinking people and organizations, from Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin to CSU Bakersfield, realize the value of high-speed rail. As the site of the state's only major north-south highways (Interstate 5 and Route 99), the valley is home to some of the worst air quality in the nation. It also has high poverty and is rapidly losing farmland to sprawling urban development.

High-speed rail can improve quality of life in a number of ways:

Relieving traffic congestion on roads and at airports.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions -- including net zero emissions during construction.

Providing better connections with the economies on the coast.

Focused development around rail stations and existing communities, rather than sprawling into farmland.

The fact is, CHSRA's business plan calls for no new federal money before 2015.

The next phase would connect Bakersfield with Palmdale, providing a passenger rail connection between central California and Los Angeles. That link would be key to triggering enough ridership to operate the system profitably, thus allowing the state to auction off the route to a private operator.

McCarthy and Denham should be working to accelerate that, not blocking it.

You'd think that McCarthy and Denham would be stopping Republicans in the nation's capital from treating the San Joaquin Valley as "nowheresville" -- though its eight counties are home to 4 million people, a population larger than half of the states in the nation.

If McCarthy and Denham don't want federal dollars to be a primary source of funds for building post-2017 phases, they ought to promote other sources -- instead of denigrating a project that will help their region and put California at the forefront of the national transportation network of the future.

[Fresno Bee and Sacramento Bee editorial, Sunday, Dec. 16, 2012:](#)

We need these new rules on soot emissions

Fifth-grader Jaxin Woodward was diagnosed with severe asthma as an infant. She takes medication daily to control her symptoms.

But, as Woodward told U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulators who were in Sacramento last summer to gather testimony about proposed new emission standards, asthma "is only part of who I am. I love running!"

"I run in our community 5K and fun runs and around my home and at school because it is the biggest part of who I am," she added. "I am a runner!"

On Friday, the EPA did the right thing for Woodward and everyone else in the world who breathes. The agency issued tough new standards that will force power plants, diesel vehicles, manufacturers and other polluters to reduce their soot emissions.

The fine particles regulated under the tighter new standards, tiny gritty bits of toxic smoke, metals and soot, can penetrate deep into airways and embed in lungs.

They can trigger lung and heart disease, and, in kids like Woodward, asthma attacks. Fine-particle pollution leads to premature death.

Opponents of the new standard warned that it will make it harder and more expensive for businesses to expand or build new plants, that it will add to the jobless rate.

The EPA's financial analysis refutes those claims. Because of previous steps taken by federal regulators to cut pollution, 99% of U.S. counties are projected to attain the new standard without taking any additional action. Fewer than 10 counties of more than 3,000 across the nation will have to take corrective action.

By 2020, when the standards go into effect, only seven counties are expected to be out of compliance. Significantly, all of those are in California.

The tougher standard is a money saver. It will create a huge net benefit for public health and the economy. The health benefits alone are estimated to save the economy anywhere from \$4 billion to \$9 billion annually in fewer hospitalizations and lost work days, among other things.

Meanwhile, the cost of implementation is expected to range between \$53 million and \$350 million.

Of course, the benefits to runners like young Jaxin Woodward are incalculable.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Dec. 14, 2012:](#)

Polluting our air

I went outside on a recent evening and the smell of burning wood took my breath away. It breaks my heart to think of how we are polluting our air with our fireplaces.

Please, people, have a heart. There are little ones with asthma who deserve better than this. If you are cold, put on an extra sweater. The life you save may be that of someone you love.

Linda Hummel-Quinn, Fresno