

District's annual promotional effort encourages responsibility, focuses on need to help environment

By Joseph Luiz

Hanford Sentinel, Sat., Dec. 22, 2012

LEMOORE — Kids all over the Valley are joining the fight to encourage people to clean up the environment.

Cinnamon Elementary School sixth-grader Haley Lorcás was chosen as one of 14 students to have their artwork promoting a cleaner environment featured in the 14-month San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's 2013 Healthy Air Living Kids Calendar. Her artwork, featuring a house amid a field of flowers, will be used for the month of January in 2014.

"I felt really good about the art. I'm really proud of myself," Haley said.

Haley's artwork was one of thousands of entries submitted to the air district over the past year to be chosen for the calendar. The calendar is provided to schools, businesses, churches and other organizations as a reminder of what can be done to help the environment. Artwork from students from every city in the Valley is featured.

"We try to represent the whole Valley and every age group, from kindergarten to 12th grade," said Ana Reyes, outreach and communications representative. "We wanted to provide a variety of great messages, although we focused a lot on artwork that encouraged emissions reduction and alternatives to driving."

With so many entries to comb through, Reyes said it was difficult to narrow it down to 14 pieces of art.

"We had so many great entries," she said. "It's great that the calendar is grabbing the attention of so many kids."

The majority of kids entered the air district contest throughout the year at organizations that receive the calendar. Haley applied through her church, the Lemoore Church of the Nazarene. To come up with the idea for the artwork, Haley said she spent some time thinking about the environment.

"I wanted to draw what would help the earth," she said. "I wanted it to be something friendly yet beautiful, with flowers blooming everywhere."

Although she said she was happy with the finished work, which took her about two days to complete, she didn't believe it would be chosen for the calendar. She was very surprised when she heard the news. Her mother, Kristen Lorca, said she was also pleasantly surprised.

"I think it's a total honor," Lorca said. "She was so excited and it came out great. I'm really proud of her."

Lorca said she's impressed with Haley's interest in environmental issues such as air quality. The key to improving the environment lies in the world's recycling system, Haley said.

"I think that if everyone recycled, the world would be a better and healthier place," she added.

She also enjoyed looking at other students' work and seeing how everything come together.

"The whole calendar came out great," Haley said. "I think the other artwork is very artistic. You can tell the students put a lot of time and effort into it."

Haley said she draws and paints often, with her subjects usually being landscapes, people and shapes. She said she enjoys art because it can be beautiful, yet also tell an interesting story.

"It brings anything you imagine to life," she said. "You can create anything you set your mind to."

Reyes said the air district will soon be taking applications for the 2014 calendar, which is always released in December. All submissions must be received by next October.

Check before you burn

The Visalia Times-Delta, Sat., Dec. 22, 2012

When it comes to residential wood burning in the San Joaquin Valley, there are two forecast levels: Wood-Burning Prohibited and Please Burn Cleanly.

The Check Before You Burn program runs each winter from November through February and restricts the use of residential wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates, in order to prevent the buildup of fine particulate matter.

There are two exceptions on days when wood-burning is not allowed. It's allowed if wood-burning is the residence's sole source of heat or if the residence doesn't have access to natural gas.

Wood-burning forecasts are issued each day, by county, which determines if open-hearth fireplaces, wood-burning stoves or inserts, or pellet stoves can be used. Tickets are issued for violations.

Wood-burning forecasts can be obtained by calling 1-800-766-4463, visiting www.valleyair.org, signing up for automated emails online or downloading the free Valley Air iPhone app. The forecasts are available at 4:30 p.m. each day.

Wood burning allowed in Tulare County for holiday

The Visalia Times-Delta, Tue., Dec. 25, 2012

Air quality in Tulare County is cooperating with the holidays. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District lifted the wood burning ban for Christmas Day and Dec. 26.

But be warned, to keep air pollution levels low it is illegal to burn trash, like Christmas gift packaging, magazines, newspapers and plastics, and officials suggest a manufactured fire log as a cleaner alternative to wood.

New regulations could cut down fireplace use in 2014

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Stockton Record and other papers, Sat., Dec. 22, 2012

FRESNO (AP) — Rules to help clean air in the San Joaquin Valley would cut down fireplace use earlier than initially proposed.

The Fresno Bee reports (<http://bit.ly/UVml7h>) that the valley's Air Pollution Control District agreed to implement the tighter wood-burning rules in 2014 — not 2016 as originally proposed. The board, however, will bring the regulations back for a final vote in 2014.

The newspaper says the restrictions could mean no fires at all in large cities such as Fresno and Bakersfield in the future.

The San Joaquin Valley and the South Coast Air Basin in Southern California have among the worst particulate pollution in the nation.

The goal of the new rules is to help the valley meet federal particulate pollution regulations by 2019.

Fireplaces are the biggest contributors of that pollution during the winter. The small particles can trigger asthma and heart problems.

Correction: Pollution Regulation story

The Associated Press

Fresno Bee, Friday, Dec. 21, 2012

LOS ANGELES -- In a story Dec. 20 about the dismissal of a trucking association's lawsuit against new California emission rules, The Associated Press misidentified the Natural Resources Defense Council as the National Resources Defense Council.

A corrected version of the story is below:

Judge dismisses Calif. bus, truck pollution suit

Federal judge dismisses lawsuit that challenges California's truck, bus pollution rules

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A federal judge has dismissed a trucking association's lawsuit against new rules aimed at reducing truck and bus pollution in California.

The suit left the court's jurisdiction when the Environmental Protection Agency approved California's plan to reduce emissions, including the rules for trucks and buses that will go into effect Jan. 1, U.S. District Judge Morrison C. England in Sacramento ruled Wednesday.

If the Upland-based California Construction Trucking Association wants to continue pursuing the case against the California Air Resources Board, it will have to include the EPA as a party in the litigation in a court of appeals, Morrison wrote.

CCTA spokesman Lee Brown said an appeal is being discussed and is likely. The group brought the lawsuit against state regulators to prevent implementation of the legislation, which was first adopted in 2008.

The 2008 rule was eased in 2011, in recognition that compliance costs were difficult to manage in the flailing economy. The regulation began being phased in with the 2012 calendar year, after the judge denied motions for injunctions to halt its implementation.

As of Jan. 1, a new phase of regulations will kick in requiring many heavy duty trucks and buses from model years 2000 to 2004 to install diesel soot filters, as needed. The 2012 phase had similar requirements for 1996 to 1999 models.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental protection group, applauded the court's ruling, saying it would ensure that roughly 1 million aging diesel vehicles will be retrofitted to reduce pollution.

"Older diesel trucks and buses have little or no emissions controls," NRDC attorney Melissa Lin Perrella said in a statement. "We have the technology to make these large vehicles cleaner for the people riding inside and for those who breathe their exhaust."

Overdue push to scrub soot from the air

San Francisco Chronicle, Fri., Dec. 21, 2012

On your next trip to the parking lot, run a finger along the hood of your car. That smudgy gunk that comes off is soot, considered the country's most widespread and deadly air pollutant. This grimy dust, almost impossible to see, is blamed for thousands of deaths and millions of sick days per year.

For years, curbing soot levels was a top target for environmental and public health groups, and it's a special challenge in California, which has the nation's dirtiest air. But getting anything done, until now, has been a sorry tale of foot-dragging and politics.

This month, the Environmental Protection Agency agreed to a significant cut in the amount of airborne soot, which sickens and kills tens of thousands in the country each year.

The new levels should make a huge difference in an overdue effort to alleviate a major health hazard. In tandem with other rules that limit smokestack emissions and tailpipe pollution, soot levels are already dropping, with the latest rule change adding extra force.

EPA chief Lisa Jackson believes nearly 99 percent of the country is on a course to hit the new standards in eight years, a milestone with genuine human benefits.

But these safer levels have taken too long. When the original levels were set in 1997, there was a proviso that new studies would adjust it later. In 2006, the Bush administration, siding with business objections over cost, brushed off advice from scientists that the soot level should come down.

A court case followed, with a judge directing the EPA to correct the standard in view of the overwhelming scientific evidence. Even that process was strung out by the Obama administration, with the final word coming a month after the presidential election.

The decision didn't come easily. Fuel, chemical and manufacturing lobbyists tried to block the tighter rules, arguing that the lower soot levels meant extra costs and threatened economic recovery.

With a court ruling very nearly requiring tougher soot rules, it was a losing argument. It rightly failed for another reason: the numbers just aren't there for the industry argument. The EPA estimates that meeting the standards will cost up to \$350 million more per year for business and transportation. In return, the nation would save \$4 billion to \$9 billion in health care bills and days lost to sickness.

For California, there's a special twist. This state has thrown all kinds of plans and regulations at its dirty air: specially formulated gas, high-mileage cars, and lower tailpipe emissions. But soot has remained a stubborn problem in the Central Valley and Southern California because of the state's warm weather, driving habits, and bowl-shaped landscape that traps pollution. Nearly half of the nation's container shipping runs through Southern California ports via diesel trucks and trains.

This state will need to work harder to overcome its pollution problem or face sanctions from Washington in the form of permit denials for major projects or lost highway money. Electric vehicles and low-emission engines are options that would cut into the freight sector, a major soot source.

A vital and dynamic region can't be allowed to choke itself on dangerous and dirty air. If the rest of the country can scrub away soot, then California should find a way too.

Soot on the spot

Soot sounds commonplace, but it's dangerous. Here's a description of the deadly pollutant facing tougher air-quality rules:

Size: Soot particles are tiny filaments one-thirtieth the width of a human hair.

Source: Gas and diesel engines, chemical plants, refineries and wood-burning fireplaces.

Health risks: Soot specks burrow into lungs and slip into the bloodstream. Blamed for asthma-linked deaths, stroke, heart attacks and lung diseases.

Controls: In 1997, federal rules set soot limits at 15 micrograms per cubic meter. After new studies, delays and litigation, that level will drop by 20 percent in eight years.

California's role: By 2020, only seven counties in the nation will likely exceed the lower soot limits. All are in Southern California and the Central Valley and include Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Imperial, Kern, Merced and Tulare.

EPA finalizes boiler rule to reduce air pollution

By Ken Thomas - Associated Press

In the Sacramento Bee, SF Chronicle and other papers, Fri., Dec. 21, 2012

WASHINGTON -- The Environmental Protection Agency finalized rules Friday aimed at reducing toxic air pollution from industrial boilers and incinerators while offering industry more flexibility and lower costs to comply with the new standards.

Obama administration officials said most of the 1.5 million boilers nationwide are not covered by the regulation since they are too small or emit too little pollution to warrant controls.

The changes will require pollution controls at about 2,300 of the largest and most polluting boilers nationwide, including those found at refineries and chemical plants. Those boilers will have three years to comply and could be granted a fourth year if they need to install pollution controls.

Another 197,000 smaller boilers would be able to meet the rule through routine tune-ups.

The EPA said it cut the cost of compliance by about \$1.5 billion.

Republicans have opposed the environmental regulations as detrimental to business during tough economic times and unsuccessfully tried to slow down the new rules in Congress.

The EPA estimated that despite the flexibility and the decision to target the largest polluters, the rules will still provide significant health benefits. The new standards will prevent up to 8,100 premature deaths, 5,100 heart attacks and 52,000 asthma attacks, according to the agency.

EPA estimated that Americans would receive \$13 to \$29 in health benefits for every dollar spent to meet the final standards and lead to a small net increase in jobs.

Environmental groups said the rules were not as stringent as they had hoped but would help Americans breathe cleaner air. "These standards are a mixed bag," said John Walke, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's Clean Air Program.

Industry groups said the regulations were still overly burdensome. Jay Timmons, president and CEO of the National Association of Manufacturers, said the rules were "far from being realistic" and accused the EPA of pushing "another costly and crippling regulation at a time when our economy is on the brink."

Industrial boilers burn coal and other fuels to generate steam and hot water for heat and electricity. After coal-fired power plants, boilers are the nation's second-largest source of mercury emissions, a potent neurotoxin. But boilers are among a handful of pollution sources that still have no standards for toxic emissions.

EPA issues air pollution standards for boilers and cement plants

By Kenneth R. Weiss

LA Times, Fri., Dec. 21, 2012

After a decade of legal and regulatory fights, the Environmental Protection Agency has finalized how it will crack down on highly toxic pollution from industrial boilers and cement plants.

But the regulations will give owners of industrial boilers and cement kilns years to meet strict new standards on mercury, acid gases and fine particulate matter, often called soot.

In announcing the new rules Friday, the EPA said the new standards will achieve extensive health benefits by curbing toxic air pollutants while at the same time dramatically reducing industry costs of compliance.

The way the new boiler standards are fashioned, the EPA announced that "99% of the approximately 1.5 million boilers in the U.S. are either not covered or can meet the new standards by conducting periodic maintenance or regular tune-ups."

The new approach for cement plants was applauded by industry, which said it needed the extra time to comply with the new standards.

The EPA's new rule, said Greg Scott, the president of the Portland Cement Assn., "strikes the right balance in establishing compliance limits that, while still extremely challenging, are now realistic and achievable."

But it received largely critical reviews from environmental attorneys who have pushed for years for the crackdown that the EPA estimates would prevent up to 8,100 premature deaths a year by curbing the toxic pollutants.

"For the people living near cement plants in California, it means another two years of unabated pollution from some of the dirtiest plants in the country," said James Pew, a staff attorney with Earthjustice.

Looking at health effects nationwide, he said, "by EPA's own numbers, the delay alone will cause between 1,920 and 5,000 Americans to die prematurely and unnecessarily."

Jane Williams, who lives near several cement plants in the Antelope Valley, called the EPA rule "a huge gift card to the cement industry."

As director of Desert Citizens Against Pollution, she vowed to challenge the weakened standards in court. Williams said residents around the plants have elevated respiratory illnesses and other health issues. Personally, she worries about her two children.

The EPA had tougher standards before it was sued by the cement industry. The result of that lawsuit, she said, was that the EPA "kowtowed to the industry." And, she said, "the communities that live around these towns are still in harm's way."