

New emission-reduction proposals sought

Staff reports

The Fresno Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Friday, June 20, 2014

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District is currently seeking new emission-reduction proposals for projects that will help the Valley air basin meet its air quality goals.

The district's newest funding cycle offers \$4 million to fund projects focusing on renewable energy, waste solutions or mobile sources through its Technology Advancement Program (TAP).

This is the fourth cycle of the TAP program. In previous years, the district has funded projects that have looked for alternatives to open burning of raisin paper trays and tested prototype compost systems designed to reduce air emissions.

Samir Sheikh, deputy air pollution control officer, said proposals are chosen based on how innovative the technology is and how relevant the project is to the Valley. Sheikh said the project's cost-effectiveness and its partnering with local education institutions are also factors on how proposals are chosen.

"It is really going to take something innovative to help clean up our air," Sheikh said. "It's important that we look for solutions locally that will benefit our residents and businesses."

According to the district, the Valley's air challenges are unique to any other region in the state. The area's topography, climate and geography make it difficult to meet federal health-based standards for particulate matter and ozone.

Despite major reductions in emissions, the Valley still struggles to show significant improvements in air quality.

Proposals will be accepted until 5 p.m. Aug. 15 and scored on objective criteria.

The district will also hold a free workshop on July 2 at the Fresno office to answer questions about proposal requirements. The request for proposals can be downloaded at www.valleyair.org/TAP.

Agency OKs funding for car free-repair program

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Saturday, June 21, 2014

At the opposite end of the spectrum from zero-emission electric vehicles are all those ancient, belching buckets of bolts.

Air pollution officials this week agreed to spend another \$4 million to keep alive a program that makes residents eligible for hundreds of dollars in free repairs if their cars prove unable to pass a smog test.

In a little more than a year's time, 694 cars have been repaired after their owners brought them to drive-up smog check events at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds in Stockton.

Those repairs were valued collectively at \$448,874. Valleywide, more than \$2.1 million has been invested into fixing up old, polluting clunkers.

The money for the Tune In & Tune Up events comes from air pollution fees that all Valley motorists pay as a part of their DMV registration.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District decided to pump in another \$4 million of those fees to "continue the momentum the program has built," according to a staff report.

The district also agreed to put \$500,000 into a new vehicle replacement program, in which owners of certain vehicles are offered vouchers of up to \$5,000 to be applied toward the cost of newer and cleaner late-model cars.

After visiting one of the Stockton smog check events, a motorist was able to replace a 1993 Toyota Previa with 252,779 miles on the odometer with a much lower-mileage 2008 Toyota Corolla, according to district documents.

Tune In & Tune Up events are held all over the Valley. The next event for Stockton is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on July 26. Gates at the fairgrounds open at 6:30 a.m. Arrive early and expect a wait of at least two hours. And remember, no smog certificates will be awarded - the event does not substitute for a real smog test.

More details: valleycan.org.

More S.J. drivers opting for electric Rebates help ease higher cost of green vehicles

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Saturday, June 21, 2014

Ready to consider an electric car?

You won't be alone. Not anymore.

Although significant roadblocks still hinder electric vehicle ownership in the San Joaquin Valley, new statistics show a surge in buyers over the past two years.

Want to learn more?

- For more information about the state rebates and to learn about various clean-car makes and models, visit energycenter.org and look under "Transportation."
- For more information about the Valley air district rebates, visit valleyair.org/grants/driveclean.htm.
- Public chargers remain relatively scarce but are now available in Stockton, Lodi and Tracy, and even in some out-of-the-way locations, such as New Melones Lake. The future looks brighter: Almost \$1 million in state grants has been awarded to build more stations in the Valley, including a network of chargers stretching from Stockton to San Diego.

For a map of both public and private stations, visit plugshare.com.

During that time, in San Joaquin County alone, motorists have pocketed more than half a million dollars in state rebates by purchasing 260 fully electric or plug-in hybrid vehicles.

That number might not sound so impressive, considering the many thousands of conventional cars on area roadways.

Still, almost as many clean-car rebates were issued in April alone (25) as a two-year period at the beginning of this decade (27).

"It's a steep trajectory, and there's a really good chance we'll see continued growth," said Colin Santulli, a senior manager with the California Center for Sustainable Energy, which runs the clean-car rebate program for the California Air Resources Board.

Make no mistake: This isn't the Bay Area or Southern California, where residents of more affluent and more densely populated communities have already purchased tens of thousands of electric cars.

Valley poverty rates are high. Electric cars still cost more than conventional cars, although rebates help.

Many Valley families can afford only one car. With their limited range, electric cars often work best in two-car families.

Our cities are farther apart, making electric cars less viable for commuters.

And public charging stations remain sparse - there are only 36 medium-powered public stations in the entire Valley, according to a recent report that Santulli's center wrote for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

So, given the obstacles, why the recent interest?

Consider this triple scoop of incentives:

- » Federal: Car buyers are eligible for a tax credit of up to \$7,500.
- » California: Buyers are eligible for a rebate of up to \$2,500 for the purchase or lease of zero-emission vehicles and plug-ins,
- » San Joaquin Valley: Buyers can obtain rebates of \$2,000 for plug-ins and \$3,000 for purely battery-electric cars.

Lumped together, this trifecta - available in its entirety only to San Joaquin Valley drivers - can help even out the difference in cost between electric vehicles and traditional cars.

That's especially true when you consider that in 2011, for the first time, the cost of gasoline exceeded the cost of owning a vehicle if averaged over time, according to the Consumer Federation of America.

"The numbers don't lie," Santulli said. "We've seen an increase in rebates. We know the Valley offers an additional incentive. ... That additional funding has really helped move these vehicles."

One of the very early electric-car pioneers in Stockton was Cindi Marsh, who leased an all-electric Nissan Leaf in 2010 with her husband, Paul.

The Marshes now have a plug-in hybrid Ford Fusion.

The Leaf was a challenge, Marsh said.

"We couldn't find places to charge our car," she said. "We would go to friends' houses and have to charge in their garage when we were there."

But Marsh takes heart in the fact that more cars of all varieties have been sold in the past couple of years. And, anecdotally, she believes she's seen more of them gliding around town.

And that's what it takes, Marsh said: Early adopters who pave the way.

"When you start seeing these cars on the road," Marsh said, "it's like, 'Wow ... those might actually work here.'"

Summer, with wildfires as wild card, brings ozone concerns

By Steven Mayer

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 20, 2014

Brace yourself, Bakersfield. Saturday is officially the first day of summer, and the change of seasons will undoubtedly bring significant shifts in weather and air quality.

This is how it works: Longer, hotter days in the valley bring more stagnant air and a corresponding buildup of ground-level ozone, the main component of smog.

But last summer was the cleanest summer on record. So we should be in good shape this summer, too. Right?

Not necessarily.

Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are worried that another factor they can't control could skew air quality readings -- in the wrong direction.

Wildfires.

"Due to this extreme drought, there's the potential for a crazy wildfire season," said Samir Sheikh, the district's deputy air pollution control officer.

"We're already seeing wildfires earlier than usual this year," he said.

According to Cal Fire statistics, in the period from Jan. 1 through June 14, the state documented 2,324 wildfires, a 60 percent increase over a five-year average of 1,447 fires during the same time interval.

There are provisions in the federal Clean Air Act allowing for "exceptional events," including wildfires, Sheikh said. That means the district and its residents should not be penalized if wildfires are shown to spike readings at air monitoring stations.

"But that doesn't avert the public health impact," Sheikh said. And protecting public health is the priority.

For those who care about what they are breathing, the focus in the summer always shifts away from particulate pollution -- the buildup of the typically wintertime problem of tiny dust and soot particles -- to ozone pollution, the scourge of Bakersfield's summers.

Ozone, a corrosive gas harmful to human health, is formed when sunlight bakes the mixture of nitrogen oxides, known as NOx, and volatile organic compounds.

These pollutants are plentiful in the valley, and motor vehicles are -- by far -- the largest contributors, Sheikh said.

The cars we drive, the trucks transporting goods on our highways, the tractors in the fields and the recreational off-road vehicles are responsible for more than 80 percent of the valley's NOx emissions.

That ratio represents a role-reversal from the 1970s and 1980s when stationary sources, including the oil and gas industries, were the biggest contributors to the formation of summertime smog.

"That's not a coincidence," Sheikh said of the reversal. "It's the result of billions of dollars industry has invested to reduce emissions."

On Thursday afternoon, the air district's monitoring station near Arvin recorded an ozone reading of 90 parts per billion, considered to be in the orange "unhealthy for sensitive groups" category, but not in the red "unhealthy" category.

If you drive, Sheikh said, you can make a difference by driving less, turning off your engine instead of idling and avoiding driving during the peak afternoon period.

Rebates are available for those who replace their gas lawn mower with an electric model. To learn about these and other incentives, go to <http://valleyair.org>.

Brace yourself, Bakersfield. Summer is here.

Valley to see cool down this week, chance of rain in Sierra

By Brianna Vaccari, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, June 22, 2014

The Pacific Northwest will share some of its cool weather with the San Joaquin Valley later this week when temperatures dip to just 90 by Thursday, the National Weather Service in Hanford said.

Monday and Tuesday will still be hot, said meteorologist Carlos Molina at the National Weather Service in Hanford. Monday's temperature in Fresno is expected to be 97 with a slight increase to 98 on Tuesday. Those highs are five to seven degrees above average for mid-June.

Coalinga and Avenal may hit the century mark Monday and Tuesday, but overall Valley highs will remain in the upper 90s, Molina said.

The cool-off will begin Wednesday, when the high is expected to reach 95. By Thursday, a "disruption" from the Pacific Northwest is expected to reach the region, bringing cloudy skies and

dropping the daytime high in Fresno to just 90, Molina said. The mountains near Yosemite may see a 20% chance of rain.

Winds in the mountains may also increase Wednesday and Thursday, Molina said.

The strongest gusts could be up to 40 mph in the west side of the Valley, said meteorologist Christine Riley. Those would arrive Thursday near Pacheco Pass, she said.

Overnight lows in the Valley will remain in the mid 60s throughout the week. By Friday, the high in Fresno is expected to be 93, just below the average temperature for mid-June.

The air quality for Fresno County is expected to be moderate on Monday and good in Tulare, Kings and Madera counties.