

## **Feds, state provide millions to clean up diesel trucks, tractors — but is it enough?**

By Steven Mayer

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Older diesel trucks are some of the dirtiest polluters in the southern Central Valley.

So when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District gets a few million dollars from the federal government or the California Energy Commission to replace some of those vehicles with newer, cleaner-burning models, or retrofit them with newer technology, the move is celebrated as a positive step to help clear up the valley's chronic air pollution.

But how much does it help?

This spring, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded nearly \$6.4 million to the air district to replace older diesel trucks for those that run nearly 90 percent cleaner, and older farm tractors for those that meet the latest emissions standards.

That chunk of change will ultimately affect 144 trucks and 237 agricultural tractors, air officials say. That's a lot of harmful nitrous oxide and soot particles that won't be getting into the air we breathe — or the lungs we use to breathe.

But what percentage of the huge number of trucks that crisscross the valley every day, seven days a week, will be affected by the program?

"We greatly appreciate EPA's attention and care for the health of valley residents," Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and pollution control officer, said in a written statement. "This grant from EPA will help us with our enormous challenge to reduce emissions from mobile sources, which make up 85 percent of the pollution in the San Joaquin Valley."

Despite that sunny outlook, Sadredin and the man who will replace him on July 6, Samir Sheikh, know that the 1,770 trucks replaced by the district in recent years through its Truck Replacement Program is just a tiny portion — less than 1 percent — of the estimated 226,000 trucks operating in the valley on any given day.

The district needs about \$1 billion a year to replace hundreds of thousands of trucks, Sadredin says. But that level of funding is not available to the valley.

Some argue that the region, with its chronic air pollution problems, deserves emergency funding to combat the problem. Shouldn't the areas suffering the most receive the most help from Congress and the EPA?

"We 100 percent believe that the San Joaquin Valley should be a top priority when allocating these funds, and we have worked very hard to ensure that the valley receives its fair share of both state and federal funding," said Jaime Holt, the district's chief communications officer.

The district often receives half of the available funding for EPA Region 9, which includes western states and territories, Holt said, even though the population in the valley is relatively small when compared to areas such as the South Coast district and the Bay Area.

"Long haul trucks are getting pretty clean," said Tom Frantz, a Shafter-area almond grower who has advocated for cleaner valley air for decades. "The trucks used for seasonal harvests are filthy, so help is needed to replace them.

"I truly believe electric trucks will soon be available for local uses and that's where the money should go. We should start with electrifying the thousands of milk and feed trucks used daily by the dairy industry."

Frantz cited a 2008 study by Jane V. Hall, an environmental economist at Cal State Fullerton who calculated the cost of air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley at more than \$1,600 per person per year, or \$6 billion to the region's economy. Meeting federal clean-air standards would redirect that money to more productive ends, Hall said.

Exposure to air pollution causes premature death, hospitalizations and respiratory symptoms, limiting a person's normal daily activity and increasing school absences and loss of workdays, said the researchers.

Fortunately, EPA isn't the air district's only funding source for programs designed to clean up pollution from fuel combustion, including heavy-duty diesel truck exhaust, tractors and school buses.

In April, the valley air district governing board accepted \$8 million in funding from the California Energy Commission to replace older, high-polluting trucks in the valley. The grant will provide funding to replace an additional 80 trucks.

"Through the CEC award and other new funding," Sheikh said in an email, "the district has been successful this past year in bringing new funding resources to the valley and encourages businesses to participate in the district's grant programs and take advantage of funding before it runs out."

But everyone, including the incoming director, seems to agree that more and consistent funding is needed to tackle this environmental health crisis.

"While this funding is helpful for the valley, achieving the magnitude of emissions reductions required for attainment in an expedited manner will only be feasible through significantly greater and sustained funding commitments from the state and federal governments for the deployment of new clean mobile source technologies," Sheikh said.

Even Frantz says these programs are a step in the right direction. But if we are really serious about cleaning the air, the "M" in millions will need to be replaced by the "B" in billions.

"At this rate of progress," he said, "we'll get there in 2070."

### **More Information**

This email interview was between Californian Staff Writer Steven Mayer and Samir Sheikh, the valley air district's current deputy air pollution control officer and incoming APCO/executive director, effective July 6.

TBC: In April, the valley air district accepted \$8 million in funding from the California Energy Commission to replace older, high-polluting trucks in the San Joaquin Valley. The funding will be used in the district's Truck Replacement Program which, to-date, has replaced more than 1,770 older, high-polluting trucks with new, cleaner vehicles. This grant will provide funding to replace an additional 80 trucks.

TBC: Can you speak about how this is similar and/or different from the truck and tractor program utilizing \$6.4 million in EPA dollars?

Sheikh: The District offers a variety of incentive grant funding levels to interested truck fleets based on the emission reduction effectiveness and cost of new available technologies. The CEC funding will be used by the district to deploy new "near-zero emissions" truck technology capable of reducing emissions by an additional 90 percent compared to new conventional trucks. This new truck technology has just recently become available on the market and is more expensive than new conventional trucks. Through higher grant funding for these new near-zero trucks, this new funding will encourage and assist fleets in deploying the next generation of clean truck technology. In addition to funding these new near-zero truck technologies, the district also continues to fund the replacement of existing higher-polluting trucks with new clean trucks that achieve significant reductions (including through the federal grant included in the recent \$6.4 million award from EPA).

TBC: Does the 1,770 number include the federal program? Or is that in regard to CEC money only?

Sheikh: This figure includes the total number of trucks replaced by the district in recent years through its Truck Replacement Program.

TBC: The \$6.4 million from EPA is expected to replace 144 trucks and 237 agricultural tractors. But the CEC's \$8 million is expected to replace just 80 trucks. Why?

Sheikh: See above. The district is offering higher incentive funding for the new near-zero emission trucks to encourage their adoption by valley fleets and help offset the higher cost of the technology.

TBC: There are an estimated 226,000 trucks operating in the valley on any given day. It's my understanding that this program has replaced 1,770, or about 0.8 percent of the total. What do you say to those who complain that this barely moves the needle in a valley where mobile sources contribute as much as 85 percent of the harmful pollution?

Sheikh: Mobile sources comprise the majority of emissions in the San Joaquin Valley, and developing and deploying zero/near-zero technologies for mobile sources is critically important to addressing the valley's federal attainment challenges. Grants such as the recent CEC award are extremely helpful in assisting businesses to replace their vehicles and equipment with the latest generation of clean technologies. Through the CEC award and other new funding, the district has been successful this past year in bringing new funding resources to the Valley and encourages businesses to participate in the District's grant programs and take advantage of funding before it runs out.

Sheikh: While this funding is helpful for the Valley, achieving the magnitude of emissions reductions required for attainment in an expedited manner will only be feasible through significantly greater and sustained funding commitments from the state and federal governments for the deployment of new clean mobile source technologies.

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