

[GVWire.com Op-Ed, Tuesday, Oct. 16, 2018:](#)

We're Working Hard to Improve Valley Air Quality: Air District Director

Growing up in this great Valley and working for nearly 20 years with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District to improve our air quality, I have gained a deep appreciation for the ingenuity, effort, and investment that we as a region have made to improve the quality of life for all Valley residents.

There is no doubt that the San Joaquin Valley faces unique and unparalleled air quality and economic challenges that require sustained and creative efforts by all of us if we are to overcome them.

Surrounded by mountains, experiencing weather that often traps air pollution, and serving as the primary corridor for moving freight through California and the rest of the nation means that even greater reductions in air pollution are needed to improve air quality when compared to other regions throughout the nation.

Working for Decades to Improve Our Air Quality

Given this challenge, the San Joaquin Valley has been working for decades to improve our air quality by putting into place the toughest and most innovative clean air measures anywhere.

These efforts have not been easy or cheap — billions in dollars have been invested by Valley businesses to upgrade equipment, modernize fleets, install pollution control equipment, and enhance operating practices with the goal of improving air quality and public health.

Through these investments, air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley has been reduced by more than 85% and air quality has improved considerably over the years. Valley communities now experience more clean air days than ever before. Accomplishing this has only been possible through strong leadership from our local Governing Board, and cooperation and sacrifice from Valley businesses and residents that have repeatedly been asked to do more.

Despite our collective efforts to clean up the Valley's air, there is no doubt that more must be done given the public health implications as well as the economic consequences to our region of not meeting federal mandates. Building on the Valley's past efforts, the Air District has been hard at work preparing a new plan for improving the Valley's air quality and meeting the newest federal air quality standards for fine particles.

New Regulations to Reduce Air Pollution

This new plan has been supported by dozens of public meetings and workshops involving residents, businesses, public agencies, and others that have taken the time to participate, provide valuable input, and make suggestions. The draft plan contains a range of new regulations, clean air grants, and other innovative measures across every sector that push the deployment of new technologies and will reduce air pollution significantly in the years to come, including:

- Even further restrictions on the use of residential wood-burning devices and fireplaces, increased public education on the health impacts of wood smoke, and increased grants for transitioning to clean devices
- New rules to further reduce air pollution from industrial sources such as boilers, steam generators, internal combustion engines, glass manufacturing facilities, agricultural conservation management practices, and other sources
- An innovative strategy for reducing air pollution from commercial restaurants using underfired charbroilers
- A suite of clean air grants for Valley residents, including grants for electric and other clean air vehicles, replacing gas mowers with electric mowers, grants for vanpools, and other grant opportunities
- Incentive programs for Valley businesses including for the replacement of heavy-duty trucks, agricultural equipment, off-road equipment, electric dairy feed mixers, locomotives, almond harvesting equipment, commercial zero-emission lawn, and garden equipment, and other grant opportunities

Bold Measures Must Be Pursued

While the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will continue to seek additional reductions from local stationary sources under our authority, it is clear that bold measures and investment to reduce mobile source emissions now comprising 85% of our remaining air pollution must be pursued.

In addition to the Air District's new local measures, the California Air Resources Board is committing to reduce air pollution from mobile sources under their authority through a number of new measures, including new regulations for cleaner vehicles and ongoing inspection and maintenance of heavy-duty trucks, as well as new incentive-based grant measures to help replace aging heavy-duty trucks and agricultural equipment with new clean technologies.

Accomplishing these significant reductions will require swift and decisive action by the state and federal governments to establish new state and national clean air standards for trucks, locomotives, and other mobile sources.

New Funding Will Be Required From the State

To implement the new clean air grant measures in the new plan, \$1 billion per year in new funding will be required from the state over the next five years. Without this action, the Valley will not be able to achieve our clean air goals and meet federal clean air mandates, and as a result, will be subject to devastating penalties and face a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the nation.

That is why, in addition to the significant mobile source reductions called for in the new plan, the Air District has repeatedly called for the federal government to recognize the Valley's need for mobile source reductions and adopt new clean air national standards for mobile sources.

Moving forward with the strategies in this plan will be a major endeavor that can only be accomplished through a collaborative approach and significant investment at the local, state and federal level. The Valley has seen success in advocating for our needs in Sacramento and bringing hundreds of millions in new dollars to Valley communities for clean air investments. We will need to build on this success to secure the needed funding in the coming years.

Much is being asked again of Valley residents and businesses in the new plan, and we will need continued support from all Valley sectors, and the state and federal governments, to achieve clean air for all Valley residents.

About the Author

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For more information about the Air District's new plan, visit www.valleyair.org/pmplans.

For more information about the Air District's grant programs, visit www.valleyair.org/grants.