

EDITORIAL: Our air and kids' health

By The Bee Editorial Board

Fresno

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On Tuesday, Valley Public Radio's Rebecca Plevin reported a chilling story on findings by Dr. Kari Nadeau of the Stanford School of Medicine.

Based on her research with young asthma patients, Nadeau believes that exposure to the San Joaquin Valley's worst-in-the-nation air pollution was possibly causing changes to children's DNA.

Reported Plevin: "(Nadeau) noticed that many of her child asthma patients had abnormally low levels of regulatory T-cells, which are crucial to maintaining a healthy immune system.

"Then, she noticed something interesting.

" 'I went back and looked at age, ethnicity and address and, low and behold, the addresses were all in one area of the country,' Nadeau recalls.

"Fresno, to be exact."

Nadeau also discovered that Fresno children who don't have asthma have lower regulatory T-cell levels than children in clean-air Palo Alto with asthma.

"This study was all about associations, but it implied, and you could infer that, at the DNA level, there were some changes going on in people who lived in Fresno, and those changes were associated with the level of PAH in the air, Nadeau told Plevin.

PAH, or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, "are created when products like coal, oil, gas and garbage are burned but the burning process is not complete," according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Fumes from vehicle exhaust, coal, coal tar, asphalt, wildfires, agricultural burning and hazardous waste sites are all sources of exposure."

Nadeau is among the researchers from Stanford and UC Berkeley who are studying children's health and air pollution in the Valley. They are funded by a five-year grant from EPA and the National Institutes of Health.

Context is everything in life. So we must note that two days after Plevin broke her story, the Fresno City Council voted 4-3 to scrap a nearly decade-long effort to build Bus Rapid Transit lines.

The city wanted to use \$50 million in state and federal grants for the system, which reduces air pollution and moves people more quickly through the city.

The victorious opponents — Lee Brand, Steve Brandau, Paul Caprioglio and Clint Olivier — gave their reasons for killing the project. Not enough people will ride it. Fresno can't afford it. It doesn't cut enough pollution. Fix the regular bus system instead. The general plan needs to be rewritten first to meet the housing preferences of residents.

City Manager Bruce Rudd says that Fresno has about 30 days to rework the BRT plan, earn council approval and save the grants.

We suggest that the four council members — who clearly answer to developers first and the health of the community second — read Plevin's story at www.kvpr.org.

Comment by going to fresnobee.com/opinion, and clicking on the editorial.

Read more here: <http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/01/31/3743957/our-air-and-kids-health.html#storylink=cpy>