

Earth Log: Readers wondering again about Bay Area pollution blown into the Valley

By
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A bicyclist rides over the Stanislaus Street Bridge in downtown Fresno with the smog-enshrouded Security Bank in the background.

MARK CROSSE — Fresno Bee file photo [Buy Photo](#)

“While some of our pollution is blown in from other areas, most of our air pollution is home grown and it is our responsibility to clean it up.”

— San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

It didn't take long for folks to bring up the Bay Area after [our Sunday story](#) on the newest proposed ozone standard — the story warning that gasoline-powered cars may have to be eliminated completely to clean up the air.

Among my emails on the story was this one from reader Bill Tucker:

“Has anyone brought up that maybe the Bay Area is where they need to start all these restrictions? If their fuel burning was greatly reduced it would greatly reduce the amount of smog we get blown in from that region.”

The standard reply from San Joaquin Valley air quality officials: Yes, the wind blows Bay Area and Sacramento pollutants into the Valley. No, it is not the biggest problem here. The biggest pollution loads are home grown.

Here are my next questions: Will the Bay Area's dirty air make more of a difference in the future? As more pollution is reduced in the Valley, does dirty air from outside the Valley have a bigger impact?

Also, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is trying to figure out how much pollution blows into the Valley from China and the rest of Asia. Combined with pollution from the Bay Area and Sacramento, will it make any difference here as new standards kick in?

I will explore those ideas later this year.

Let's go back to the pollution coming from the Bay Area and Sacramento. We need to remember any new ozone standard would be enforced throughout the United States. That means the Bay Area and Sacramento will need to get pretty dramatic about cutting back pollution, too.



So, just to complete the thought, how much pollution is drifting into the Valley from the Bay Area and Sacramento? For years, I've been quoting the [air district's website](#).

“Air pollution transported from the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento areas account for approximately 27% of the total emissions in the northern portion of the district (San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced Counties).

“In the central region (Fresno, Madera and Kings Counties), the percentage drops to 11%, and in the south valley (the Valley portion of Kern and Tulare Counties), transported air pollution accounts for only 7% of the total problem.

“While some of our pollution is blown in from other areas, most of our air pollution is home grown and it is our responsibility to clean it up.”

If you consider the biggest air quality problems are south of Merced, you can understand why the district says the imported pollution is not a major factor compared to locally produced pollution.

Even adding the 27% contributions from the Bay Area and Sacramento, Stockton, Modesto and Tracy consistently have healthier air than the Valley cities of Clovis, Parlier and Edison. Pacific Ocean breezes are breaking up pollution in the north.

[Last year](#), the three northern cities of Stockton, Tracy and Modesto combined to exceed the eight-hour federal ozone standard 22 times. Stockton had only two, one of which was in July and one in October.

Farther south and east, Parlier had 44, and Edison 37. Clovis finished with 56 — tied for second-worst total in the country.

By the way, [Sequoia National Park's Ash Mountain entrance](#) continues to be among the worst in the Valley and the nation. The location broke the federal standard 51 times last year.

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