

Valley will struggle with tough, new air standard

By Mark Grossi
mgrossi@fresnobee.com

Federal leaders on Thursday announced their [most-protective national ozone standard](#), saying California alone would save up to \$2.1 billion annually in health care after 2025.

But the San Joaquin Valley, which hasn't yet achieved the older eight-hour ozone standard, will struggle to meet this one in the 2030s, a local air-quality leader said. Cars, trucks, buses, tractors and trains would have to run on electricity, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

"We will have to eliminate emissions associated with fossil fuel combustion," he said.

The Valley leads the nation in the number of days exceeding the federal eight-hour ozone standard over the last 15 years, followed closely by the South Coast Air Basin, according to figures from the [California Air Resources Board](#).

We will have to eliminate emissions associated with fossil fuel combustion.

Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

The controversial new ozone standard – industries say it's too strict, environmentalists say it isn't tough enough – is 70 parts per billion.

The older standard set in 2008 is 75 parts per billion. The oldest eight-hour standard was 80 parts per billion, set in 1997.

Most counties in the nation will achieve it by 2025, federal officials said. California's trouble spots – led by the Valley and South Coast – would have a deadline of 2037, the EPA said.

The bowl-shaped Valley always has had air-quality challenges because its often stagnant weather patterns tend to allow the buildup of pollution over many days.

Gina McCarthy, administrator of the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#), said the science-based standards are aimed at the health of Americans.

"Put simply – ozone pollution means it hurts to breathe for those most vulnerable: our kids, our elderly and those suffering from heart and lung ailments," she said Thursday in a prepared statement.

The new standard would prevent more than 200 premature deaths in 2025, EPA said.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that forms when oxides of nitrogen combine in warm, sunny weather with fumes from gasoline, paint and dairies. The gas can irritate the lungs and trigger breathing problems, asthma and heart ailments.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that forms when oxides of nitrogen combine in warm, sunny weather with fumes from gasoline, paint and dairies. The gas can irritate the lungs and trigger breathing problems, asthma and heart ailments.

Based on its proposal from last year, the EPA had been exploring a standard of somewhere between 65 and 70 parts per billion – and many advocates pushed them to go even lower than that.

But groups such as the [National Association of Manufacturers](#) strongly resisted. On Thursday, the group's president and CEO, Jay Timmons, said the new standard was expensive and burdensome on industries.

“The new ozone standard will inflict pain on companies that build things in America — and destroy job opportunities for American workers,” he said.

On the other side of the issue, environmental, health and other advocacy groups resisted the new standard for not going far enough.

Harold P. Wimmer, national president of the [American Lung Association](#), said in a prepared statement that the new standard “offers significantly greater protection than the previous, outdated standard.”

He also urged members of Congress to defend the Clean Air Act against “any attacks that would block, weaken or delay life-saving protections from ozone pollution.”

But, he added that the threshold should have been lower, perhaps as low as 60 parts per billion: “The level chosen of 70 parts per billion simply does not reflect what the science shows is necessary to truly protect public health.”

Mark Grossi: [559-441-6316](tel:559-441-6316), [@markgrossi](#). The Bee’s Washington bureau contributed to this report.