

## DOCKETED

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## **Tupman School Needs an Air Monitor**

What's the true purpose of air monitors, anyway?

At their Sept. 23 meeting, the Kern County Board of Supervisors discussed and voted to send a letter to the California Energy Commission requesting that certain mitigations be attached to any approval of the controversial, proposed HECA project.

The building and operation of this coal-fired, hydrogen energy/chemical fertilizer plant would, by its very nature, increase the air pollution in the southern San Joaquin Valley, most notably the air that will be breathed by residents of the community of Tupman and the children who attend Elk Hills Elementary School, located only one-and-a-half miles downwind from the HECA site.

Residents, school administrators, neighboring farmers and even two State Assembly members have expressed concern over this issue. They have requested requiring the installation of an air monitor at the Tupman school site to measure levels of both ozone and particulate matter, so that school officials could be alerted to keep students inside when air pollution levels are dangerously high.

There is an air monitor in Shafter, but it is some 20 miles away from Tupman. It is located upwind from the HECA and Elk Hills School sites, and measures ozone, but not particulate levels. Without the air monitor, Elk Hills School officials would not have accurate air pollution information needed to protect the 200 children in their care.

So, what was the response to these concerns and the need for a mitigating air monitor at the Tupman School?

Planning Department Director Lorelei Oviatt explained Kern County's position, stating:

While it may seem to the residents of Tupman that this is a reasonable request, these air monitors have regional impacts, and the Air District has concerns that the more air monitors we have, the more we may end up with localized impacts that really are just temporary. But, those could then be used to affect our attainment goals.

Therefore, we have always deferred to the San Joaquin Valley Air District as to whether they think that an air monitor added to the State Air Resources Board official monitors is really appropriate.

Doesn't the air quality near the HECA site matter? It certainly would matter to those who live nearby and have only that air to breathe. Is meeting attainment goals more important than the truth about the quality of our air? The operating life of the HECA project, and its consequent pollution, is 24 hours a day for 25 years. That is not a temporary impact.

What is the purpose of air monitors? Is it to protect our attainment goals? Is there any goal to alert the public as to what we are inhaling? The Air District's Report to the Community, 2012-13 Edition, proclaims that public health is its No. 1 priority. They reference studies that show a connection between short-term NO<sub>2</sub> (nitrogen dioxide) exposures and an increase of symptoms associated with respiratory illnesses. And they tout their network of air-quality monitors that support the mission of improving air quality and protecting public health.

Is it a shell game that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is playing with our air quality and our health? The district is charged with improving the quality of our air, already infamously known as the worst in the nation. And yet, it is promoting use of inaccurate, incomplete data to achieve air quality attainment goals.

Residents have been told that their request for an air monitor is inappropriate. It might lead to violations of air quality standards that the Air District does not want the public to know about. However, just saying that the air is cleaner does not make it so, especially when the impact of a very large, polluting plant is discounted. If the air near the Tupman school is too bad to measure when the HECA plant is in operation, then this is another reason why HECA should not be built at all.

If you believe that Tupman schoolchildren deserve protection from pollutants emitted into the air from the HECA project, please join me in expressing your concerns to the California Energy Commission, to your local governmental representatives and the Kern County Board of Supervisors.