

## Local news

# Area's air quality improves

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MONTEREY — It belches from tail pipes and billows out of smokestacks. Smog continues to nag the Monterey Bay Region, with seven days so far in 1995 exceeding the state standards for air pollution.

"We continue to decline, (in the number of bad days) but there is a nagging, continual violation that is occurring," said Doug Quetin, air pollution control officer for the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District. The district covers Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties.

The bad news is that this region hasn't attained state standards, meaning the air district must impose regulations on businesses to cut pollutants. To meet the standards, the region must have three years in a row where the standards are only exceeded three days or less.

The air district, however, believes it has met the less strict federal standards and is awaiting word from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Government standards apply to two

## Seven days exceed smog limit in 1995

pollutants — nitrogen oxides and reactive organic gases — that combine in sunlight to form what is commonly known as smog. The state limit is 10 parts per 100 million parts of atmosphere; the federal limit is 13 parts per 100 million parts of atmosphere.

The ingredients of smog come from a variety of sources, including the PG&E power plant at Moss Landing, motor vehicle exhausts, pesticides and solvents.

The good news is that the number of days the region has exceeded state limits has declined by nearly 100 percent from 1993.

Quetin said the decline could be due to a number of factors — efforts by air districts, including the local district, to cut pollution; fewer pollutants from motor vehicles; and the weather.

Aggressive programs in the South

Coast, San Francisco Bay Area and San Joaquin Valley air pollution control districts are benefiting the Monterey Bay area because it suffers somewhat from pollution traveling from those areas, Quetin said.

Part of this so-called "transport" pollution may be causing the high number of days this region exceeds state limits at its monitoring station at the Pinnacles National Monument near Hollister, Quetin said. There also is a strange phenomenon of high levels of pollutants measured at higher altitudes such as the Pinnacles, where the monitoring station is at 1,500 feet, he added.

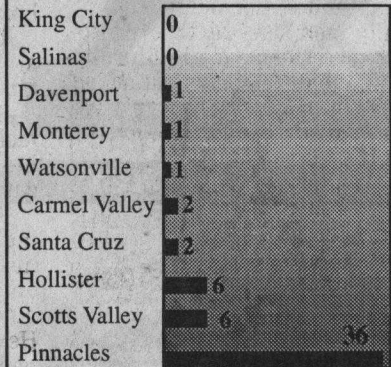
"There is also a pretty large decline in these two pollutants from mobile sources, cars in particular," Quetin said. "... In a general sense, cars are very, very much cleaner. It is not just the more recent engines, but also fleet turnover" as drivers get rid of older cars that produce more pollution.

The third factor is the weather. Smog reaches higher levels on very hot days with little wind, so the more days each year like that, the more days that are likely to exceed state limits, he said.

Because of this weather factor, the

### Smog levels

Number of days smog levels exceeded state standards since 1991



Source: Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District

Chris Carothers/Sentinel

"smog season" generally lasts from April through October.

The air district is predicting a strong decline in the days the region exceeds state limits through 2000, Quetin said. After that, the district expects emissions to level off.