

Request not to use fireplace tonight

The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday December 31, 2002, 09:15:10 PM

The first full night of the new year brings a request for valley residents to avoid using their fireplaces.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Tuesday issued a "Please Don't Light Tonight" advisory for tonight through Thursday afternoon. The voluntary alerts are issued when weather conditions may trap pollution near the ground, which is where the fine-particle emissions from wood smoke are most likely to affect people with breathing difficulties.

Agricultural burning is also banned on the valley floor until further notice.

Fine particles come from wood and gasoline combustion. Unlike larger particles, particulate matter of 2.5 microns bypasses even the best filtering methods of the nose to become lodged in the lungs. It is known to aggravate respiratory conditions and linked with increased risk of heart attacks and in some cases, cancer.

"Even though we've got good (wind) dispersion, the buildup is going to be more than Mother Nature's going to help us with, as everyone uses their fireplaces," said air district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

Those who must burn wood for heat should build only small, hot fires using dry, seasoned firewood. An EPA-certified woodstove or fireplace insert is preferable to an open fireplace or older woodstove.

The voluntary advisory is expected to become mandatory next year, along with limits on installation of fireplaces and woodstoves in new and existing homes. For more information, call 1-800-SMOG-INFO or visit www.valleyair.org.

Luxury, size and power to dominate LA Auto Show

By GARY GENTILE, AP Business Writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday January 02, 2003, 12:30:09 AM

LOS ANGELES(AP) - People at this year's Greater Los Angeles Auto Show may find it easy to forget about rising gas prices, international instability and smog while checking out the luxury SUVs, supercharged muscle cars and stylish roadsters.

The show, which opens Saturday, is the first major international show of the year and typically features production vehicles and concepts that appeal to California trendsetters.

The show traditionally serves as a showcase for automakers looking to tap into the consciousness and wallets of people concerned about greenhouse gases and dependence on foreign oil.

But this year, even as concern grows over the political crisis in Venezuela and possible war with Iraq, no new electric, hybrid or fuel cell vehicle is scheduled to make a debut at the show.

Instead, the show - which will cover an area equal to 17 football fields - will see the North American debut of new SUVs from Porsche and Volkswagen, the return of Pontiac's classic muscle car, the GTO, and even a new Dodge concept car featuring a ferocious 430 horsepower Hemi engine.

New hybrid cars, which use both electric and gasoline power, are to be shown at the Detroit auto show, which opens the week after Los Angeles. Several automakers, including Ford and Honda, are expected to introduce new production hybrids in 2003.

But the automakers are not doing enough, according to some activists, including a group of celebrities and hybrid car owners who plan to demonstrate outside the LA show Friday.

"Very few of the vehicles are putting available technology to work to improve fuel economy," said David Friedman, engineer and senior analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists. "You can have that GTO, you can have that SUV and still have significantly higher fuel economy, and that's where automakers are letting consumers down."

Friedman's group will present a report Friday arguing that today's technology, including hybrid designs, can result in cars getting an average of 40 miles per gallon over the next 10 years. Waiting for fuel cell technology to become widely available may take up to 30 years, the group concludes.

While there may be a growing concern for the environment and fuel economy, consumers are demanding bigger, faster and swankier, according to recent sales trends and surveys.

In September, Ford reported increased sales of all its luxury lines - Lincoln, Jaguar, Volvo and Land Rover. It was the first time all the luxury brands had improved year-over-year at once.

"What is popular are luxury vehicles and SUVs and a return to performance," said Jeff Schuster, director of North American forecasting at J.D. Power and Associates.

Automakers aren't showcasing as many fuel-efficient cars at shows this year in large part because there haven't been major advancements in technology over the past year, Schuster said.

He added that consumers are unlikely to display a real backlash against gas-guzzling SUVs unless war in Iraq or problems in Venezuela result in prolonged higher gas prices.

The broader national trends will certainly be mirrored at the LA show, which will see the introduction of new sports cars from Aston Martin, BMW, Ferrari and Mercedes.

One highly anticipated debut will be a new brand from Toyota aimed at young drivers.

Two models from the new Scion label will debut at the show. Details are scarce, but the cars will be sold first in California for eight months before being rolled out to the rest of the country.

The two models are expected to be marketed to an even younger audience than the Ford Focus and other youth-oriented brands that have been accepted by more-mainstream audiences.

"California is the right place to test market a product like that," Schuster said. "The reaction of the LA show goers will be an indication of how that brand will launch. It's a risky move for Toyota."

One problem the automaker may face is pronunciation.

"That's a fairly substantial problem - no one knows how to say it," Schuster said.

For the record, it's pronounced sigh-on.

On the Net:

<http://www.laautoshow.com>

California ushers in new laws

From staff and wire reports

Bakersfield, Californian, Tuesday December 31, 2002, 10:53:33 PM

It's a new year, and with it comes new rules to live by.

The California Legislature was busy in 2002, making new laws on everything from contact lens prescriptions to terrorism.

Here is just a smattering of some of California's new laws.

Veterans

* A package of new laws paves the way for construction of five new California veterans' homes in West Los Angeles, Lancaster, Saticoy, Fresno County and Shasta County.

Family

* Workers will be able to leave their job for up to six weeks at 55 percent pay to care for a newborn, newly adopted child or sick family member.

* Domestic partners will be able to inherit their partner's property if he or she dies without a will.

Cable TV

* Requires retailers and cable TV companies to agree with consumers to a four-hour period within which a delivery, service or repair will take place. Increases from \$500 to \$600 the total amount of damages that a small claims court can award for a violation of these provisions.

Crime victims

* Victims will have up to 10 years after their assailant is paroled to sue them for financial damages, including earning from telling their story in a book, film or other publication.

Global warming

* Requires the California Air Resources Board to begin setting standards to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases that can contribute to global warming in future new cars and trucks.

Paydays

* California will more closely monitor the payday lending industry. A new law gives the Department of Corporations the authority to audit payday lenders, collect data on the high-interest, short-term loans and provide a comprehensive study for future legislative reforms.

SEGWAY

* Legalizes the two-wheeled, one-passenger transportation devices and classifies their users as pedestrians. Allows cities and counties to regulate their use.

Air pollution

* To help improve the air in the Central Valley, motorists in the San Francisco Bay area must comply with stricter car inspections under the Smog Check II program.

Tree fires not hard to prevent, officials say

By CHRISTINA VANCE

e-mail: cvance@bakersfield.com

Sunday December 22, 2002, 09:55:03 PM

Bakersfield Californian staff writer

With the holidays in full swing, fire officials are hoping for minimal, if not any, tree fires that have been known to occur each season.

City and county firefighters have said they usually respond to several Christmas decoration-related fires each year.

Christmas tree fires frequently damage property or injure families trying to decorate for the holiday, Kern County Fire Department Capt. Benny Wofford said.

The tragedy is that Christmas tree fires are fairly easy to prevent, he said. That's why the department tries to educate the public each year.

"I've seen it all firsthand: the death, the destruction and the gore," he said. "It's kind of hard for a person to understand where you're coming from."

Most importantly, Wofford said people should keep their trees away from heat sources like fireplaces, heater vents and wall heaters.

Although some decorations on the tree will probably be made of flammable materials, Wofford encouraged people to get non-combustible ornaments.

The base of each tree should be cut at a 45-degree angle before it's mounted in a water stand, and the tree should be watered regularly.

"We all know that green is good when it comes to fire. Once it starts to turn brown, it's like paper," Wofford said.

Frayed lights should be thrown away, and Wofford said UL-listed lights are the safest.

Other safety tips for winter include:

- * Keep fireplaces screened with a wire mesh at the top of the chimney.
- * Don't plug too many decorations or lights into one outlet and use a power strip with a protective breaker for multiple plugs.
- * Make sure guests know exits and locations of fire extinguishers.
- * Keep mistletoe and holly out of the reach of children.
- * Make sure lights are off, fire screens closed and candles extinguished before going to bed.
- * **Never use the fireplace to burn wrapping paper or holiday garbage.**
- * Give the gift of a smoke detector to anyone who doesn't have one.

Valley endures plenty in 2002

Grizzlies Stadium success a bright spot in year marked by fire, fall of politician.

Fresno Bee Staff Reports

(Published Wednesday, January 1, 2003, 5:43 AM)

It was the first full calendar year after 9/11, the day of deadly terrorist attacks that forever changed America. And 2002 reflected the new reality.

Nation-building continued in Afghanistan. Time-consuming airport check-ins became the norm. War against Iraq grew likely.

But in many ways, local events dominated the hearts and minds of most central San Joaquin Valley residents.

High hopes and pride were a common thread. A \$46 million baseball stadium opened in downtown Fresno, ending a decade of City Hall feuding. Construction of California State University, Fresno's \$100-million-plus Save Mart Center picked up steam.

Tragedy, too, was a recurring theme. Fresno County Sheriff's Deputy Dennis Phelps was killed in the line of duty. A Merced man killed his daughter and three former

stepchildren, then committed suicide. Two Greyhound bus passengers died in a crash caused when another passenger stabbed the driver in the neck.

Conflict was common. Budget troubles and a looming state takeover roiled the waters at West Fresno School District. Jerry Tarkanian stepped down as Fresno State men's basketball coach after seven tumultuous seasons.

There was justice: Cary Stayner received three death sentences for murdering three Yosemite tourists in February 1999.

There was justice delayed: Police continued to search for Chandra Levy's killer as Gary Condit's political career apparently came to an end.

And there was self-criticism: Is it time to clean up our air?

In the time of your life, said author William Saroyan, live. Here is a look at the top 10 stories we lived through in 2002.

Valley air quality worsens

People with sensitive lungs probably didn't need a state report to know 2002 was a bad-air year in the San Joaquin Valley. Doctor and medication bills speak volumes.

But add up the federal violations in one air measurement category, and you find this was the Valley's worst year since 1989. Indeed, the Valley was the worst in the nation in 2002.

The 25,000-square-mile area violated the long-term federal health standard for ozone 124 times. The South Coast Air Basin, considered the nation's worst smog pocket, had 98 violations.

It is the fourth consecutive year the Valley has been the worst in this category.

These long-term or eight-hour violations show Valley residents spend more time breathing bad air than any others in the country. Ozone, the corrosive main ingredient of smog, damages lungs, eyes and skin. It is known to trigger asthma and aggravate other lung problems.

Experts struggle to explain why last summer was worse than previous years. Evan Shipp, meteorologist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said in-depth analysis will take place in 2003.

In 2003, the Valley faces deadlines for ozone and particle cleanup plans. The air district also is expected to adopt a rule forbidding fireplace burning on the most-polluted nights during colder months.

Terror strikes Greyhound bus

On Sept. 30, Greyhound Bus No. 7148 rolled along Interstate 5 about 30 miles north of Coalinga. Fifty passengers, some chatting softly, were headed for San Francisco.

An instant later, 27-year-old Arturo Tapia Martinez rushed from the back of the bus, a pair of scissors in hand. He stabbed driver Abel Hernandez, a former Reedley resident, in the neck. Hernandez tried to fight off Martinez while keeping the bus on the highway.

The bus swerved off the road, flipped on its side and slid into a cotton field. Two female passengers were killed, another 26 were hospitalized. Martinez was surrounded by officers and arrested at gunpoint.

Martinez was found mentally incompetent to stand trial. He is expected to be sent to Atascadero State Hospital for treatment until doctors say he can understand the murder charges he faces.

Hernandez turned 51 on Thanksgiving and is recovering from his injuries with his family in Pomona. Flashbacks and severe headaches remain a problem.

But Hernandez is unbowed: "I want to go back to driving. That's my thing."

Grizzlies Stadium opens

Backers of a downtown Fresno stadium made the call years ago: Build it, and they will come.

Looks like they were right.

The 12,500-seat Grizzlies Stadium opened to a packed house May 1. By year's end, the stadium had lived up to its billing as a popular entertainment center and a possible catalyst for downtown revitalization.

Home attendance topped a half million and the per-game average was the fifth-best among Triple A clubs nationwide. Not bad considering the Grizzlies finished with the Pacific Coast League's worst record.

Supporters, however, never sold the facility as strictly a cathedral to baseball. It was to be "multipurpose." So Roosevelt and Edison high schools played football games there.

Barney the purple dinosaur strutted his stuff between the foul lines. The blues of B.B. King floated over the fences.

There were some bumps along the way. The city unveiled a downtown parking plan partially linked to the stadium that angered many folks. And the city still hasn't figured out how to sponsor money-making shows at the stadium to help pay the construction debt.

In 2003, officials promise more nonbaseball events, most likely including the stadium's first soccer match.

Stayner is sentenced to death

Serial killer Cary Stayner received his final sentence in December, nearly four years after committing the murders of three Yosemite sightseers and a park naturalist that captured international headlines.

In a packed San Jose courtroom, Judge Thomas Hastings sentenced Stayner to die for strangling Carole Sund, 42, and Argentine exchange student Silvina Pelosso, 16, before sexually assaulting 15-year-old Juli Sund and then slashing her throat.

Hastings finalized a jury's condemnation of Stayner, which came in October after a four-month trial. The sentence ended a journey for the families of Stayner's victims, who had been waiting for justice since their loved ones disappeared in February 1999.

"It helps me turn the page and start over," Silvina's father, Jose Pelosso, said as he left the courtroom for a return to his ranch in Las Varillas, Argentina.

Stayner was already serving a life term, with no prospect of release, for the July 1999 decapitation murder of Yosemite park naturalist Joie Ruth Armstrong, 26.

After receiving the death sentence, Stayner was ordered to San Quentin -- where California's death row is lodged -- while his appeals wind through state and federal appellate courts.

While Stayner, 41, will sit on death row for years, his execution is not a foregone conclusion. Since California reinstated the death penalty in 1978, the state has executed 11 of 722 inmates sent to death row.

Valley sheriff's deputy slain

For the second consecutive year, hundreds of law enforcement officers from throughout California gathered in Fresno with black bands across their badges to attend a service for a Fresno County sheriff's deputy slain in the line of duty.

Dennis Phelps, 47, was shot May 19 while checking a suspicious vehicle just north of Clovis. Investigators say the man accused of killing him, Mark Charles Volpa Jr., 21, took Phelps' patrol car and shot at another deputy who spotted him on Highway 168. The deputy chased him but was forced to back off when shots fired from the fleeing patrol car struck the deputy's vehicle.

Phelps' car was later found just south of Prather, triggering a nearly week-long search for the killer.

On May 25, SWAT teams surrounded a truck camper on the Big Sandy Rancheria. Sheriff Richard Pierce said SWAT officers killed Volpa after he charged out of the camper spraying gunfire from an AR-15, one of two weapons taken from Phelps' patrol car.

May 28, Phelps was buried at the Clovis District Cemetery, less than a hundred yards from the grave of Eric Telen, a 26-year-old Fresno County deputy who was killed in August 2001 while investigating a break-in in the mountain community of Dunlap.

McNally fire spreads

When Alvie Kracik looks around her mountain land these days, all she sees is a fresh coat of snow.

"It looks beautiful," said Kracik, who lives in Ponderosa, where she runs the Mountain Top Bed and Breakfast out of her home.

Visitors wouldn't know it, but beneath the layer is the aftermath of one of the worst forest fires in state history -- the McNally fire, which charred 150,696 acres.

A Bakersfield woman is accused of igniting the blaze when an illegal campfire grew out of control on July 21 and quickly swept across the mountains.

The blaze -- which took \$60 million, 2,000 firefighters and six weeks to control -- torched the Road's End Resort nine miles north of Kernville and several U.S. Forest Service barns and caused the evacuation of several mountain communities in southeastern Tulare County.

The woman, Peri Van Brunt, pleaded innocent to federal charges that she started the blaze. Her next federal court date is Feb. 24 in Fresno.

Kracik's mountain land narrowly escaped the blaze. Nowadays, she doesn't like to think about how close she came to losing everything.

Man kills four children, self

Even before the funeral for her four slain children, people were sending money to Christine McFadden.

The well-known Merced veterinarian used the money to start a memorial account that grew during several fund-raising events in the months after the March 26 murder of her children. At least four events, including auctions and golf tournaments, are planned for 2003.

Merced was shaken when Melanie Willis, 17; Stanley Willis, 15; Stuart Willis, 14; and Michelle Hogan, 5, were fatally shot. After killing the children during a methodical march through McFadden's home, 49-year-old John Hogan turned a .40-caliber Glock handgun on himself.

The private investigator and retired Santa Clara County sheriff's deputy was McFadden's ex-husband, Michelle's father and a former stepfather to the others.

Hogan shot the three teenagers and his daughter while McFadden was on a morning walk. Hogan held Michelle's body as he shot himself in the head.

McFadden began working on ways to honor her children and raise money for her community. Her work included the 2002 Stuart Willis Memorial Soccer Tournament, a dog walk and "softball fun day."

Scholarships will be awarded to four Merced County high school graduates this spring with money from the Melanie, Stan, Stuart and Michelle Foundation. Contributions to the foundation can be sent to PMB 121, 3144 N. G St. No. 125, Merced 95340 or by calling (209) 722-6776.

A school district in trouble

The near-calamitous fiscal failings in the two-school West Fresno School District fueled an ongoing battle with the county superintendent and drew widespread scrutiny from state officials and judicial agencies.

The year started where 2001 left off: Fresno County Schools Superintendent Pete Mehas contended that West Fresno trustees were plunging the school district into debt with out-of-control spending. Trustees maintained they had enough money to cover expenses but that Mehas was withholding it.

Meanwhile, other officials and agencies kept an eye on the turbulent situation or launched new investigations. Most notably, a federal grand jury in San Francisco subpoenaed the district for records regarding its "e-rate" money, which is intended to upgrade school technology.

By fall, Assembly Member Sarah Reyes, D-Fresno, wrote a bill that would allow the state to take over the 1,000-student district. Gov. Davis later vetoed the legislation.

Then there was a confluence of events within a few days in October: Employees were enraged that paychecks were delayed because there wasn't enough money to cover salaries. Trustees approved seeking a loan from the state. A judge's ruling bolstered Mehas' power. Davis pledged to support a new takeover bill.

Reyes, author of the new bill, said it will work its way through the Legislature in January, and she doesn't believe the state's own fiscal crisis will stop the highly unusual overhaul.

Bulldogs fouled by problems

In with the new, and out with the old.

That theme repeated itself during 2002 for the Fresno State basketball program, though some of its old demons reared their heads and overshadowed a season as newsworthy as it was noteworthy.

Star forward Melvin Ely missed six games of the 2001-02 season because of an extra-benefits violation. Later in the year, former Bulldogs Tito Maddox and Terrence Roberson admitted to taking money from agents while with the team. An internal investigation concluded with the Bulldogs' self-imposing scholarship reductions and a two-year probation.

Want more? Of course, because what would a year in Bulldogs basketball be without stomach-wrenching tumult?

The old: Coach Jerry Tarkanian drifted into retirement and left a program stigmatized by off-the-court troubles and on-court underachievement, as his team missed the NCAA Tournament despite three of its players, Ely, Maddox and Chris Jefferies, going in June's NBA draft. The new: Ray Lopes took over after an eight-year apprenticeship at powerhouse Oklahoma.

The old: Selland Arena is in the midst of its last season hosting Bulldogs basketball. The new: Fresno State's gem of an arena, the \$100 million Save Mart Center, complete with luxury boxes and personal seat licenses, is scheduled to open in November. And there hangs the cloud of the NCAA, which in spring will render its decision whether Fresno State's self-imposed penalties for athletic department improprieties suffice. If not, a postseason ban could follow and give the Bulldogs a heaping spoonful of what the old tasted like.

Condit's bright future fades

Over the next week, the final act of Rep. Gary Condit's 13-year congressional career will be played out almost unnoticed in Washington, D.C. He leaves Congress on Jan. 7.

The Ceres Democrat, who just 20 months ago was considered a rising star and a mainstay of his party's conservative wing, will leave Congress with a tarnished reputation.

Condit pushed through legislation protecting portions of the Merced River. He secured money for the new University of California at Merced campus. He supported a controversial, Republican-written farm bill.

He was re-elected easily six times.

Every success, however, was overshadowed by the May 2001 disappearance of Chandra Levy. For months, Condit refused to talk about Levy or address reports that he was romantically involved with her. Though he was never named a suspect in Levy's disappearance, his popularity suffered.

Condit forged ahead with an underdog re-election campaign. He was forced to attend candidate forums he normally could ignore. He lost in the March primary to then-Assembly Member Dennis Cardoza, a former Condit staffer.

Afterward, Condit stepped further back from the spotlight. His voting participation fell to 84% this year, the lowest of any California House member.

In May, Levy's remains were found in a park not far from her apartment. No suspects have been arrested.

INSIDE

Ultimatums to Iraq named the top news story of 2002.

Page A4

Opinion

A look ahead

Prospects for 2003 aren't as rosy as we'd all like, but the challenges could make us a better community.

(Published Wednesday, January 1, 2003, 1:09 PM)

It is difficult, at first, to summon much enthusiasm for facing the year ahead for Fresno and the Valley. The signs are bleak: Budgets are shredded at every level of government. Higher taxes and cuts in essential services are coming. Schools continue to struggle to meet new standards and satisfy old demands. Crime still plagues us -- and frightens some of us clean out of our wits. Poverty is rampant in the Valley and getting worse. Economic development is halting at best. We are still fighting ancient battles over water. Stocks are down, war is on the horizon, and our **very air is killing us**.

It would be easy just to throw our hands up and walk away -- except that most of us can't. This is where we live, our home. It is the place we've chosen to raise our families, practice our professions, pursue our entrepreneurial dreams, enjoy our retirements -- the place we've chosen to make a stand.

In defense of this place, then, we can envision and accept the sort of challenges that define communities as good and vibrant. Or we can decline the effort, stand on the sidelines and watch this home of ours wither and die. Those are the choices -- and only one of them is really possible.

We won't always have much help. Legislators from the coastal metropolises of California and the state's governors have never found it very difficult to neglect the needs of the Valley and its people. And, to be fair -- something the rest of the state often does find difficult -- there are problems everywhere. The Golden State has considerable tarnish on its once brilliant luster just now, and the rest of the country mostly finds that amusing. Here there's not much to laugh about, but there is plenty to do. And it all begins with the fact that we cannot hope to succeed in the tasks ahead unless we are all involved in the effort. It is no cliché to say that we're all in this together; it is the fundamental fact of our lives.

We must, first and foremost, rebuild -- and in many cases, build for the first time -- an ethic of community that will sustain us over the long haul. We all depend on having good schools. We all need first-rate police and fire protection, and other government services. We all drink the water. We all need jobs and income -- and most of us want better jobs and more income. We all need health care. **We all drive the streets and roads and ride the buses. We all breathe the air.**

We all face the Valley's problems, and we all have a duty to help address them.

Here's a partial list:

Air quality: This is the principle task for 2003 and the foreseeable future. The Valley's poor air quality affects every aspect of our lives, and especially the lives of our children. Hard choices lie ahead. It's a certainty that we will be asked -- and in some cases, told -- to restrict or even abandon some of our most cherished habits, including but not limited to wood fires in the wintertime, cheap and unfettered use of internal combustion engines and burning farm waste in open fields.

In Fresno County, the public policy starting point is a new version of a Measure C extension. The first attempt foundered in November on bitter opposition from those who thought it spent too much on roads and highways and not enough on alternatives. They may have been right, but the rejection of the measure by voters does not necessarily translate into support for a tax more heavily weighted toward mass transit, as some opponents wish. There is much skepticism among voters, and resistance to getting out of our cars. The new Measure C will have to be crafted and then aggressively sold to voters, or it will fail as well. There is no time to waste on this effort.

In our private lives there are thousands of small ways we can help clean the air. Walk, bike, carpool, ride buses -- try to limit the number of miles we log alone in our cars. And keep the pressure up on elected leaders. If they begin to see that a constituency is developing among voters for this effort, they will do what "leaders" mostly do these days: join the pack.

Schools: The overarching task schools face in 2003 has little to do with class size, standardized testing or teacher salaries. Instead, it is the need to renew the community's

understanding of how crucial the schools are to all of us. Our society has incrementally turned its back on the schools, dumped all the responsibility for children's education on teachers and administrators -- though seldom with all the resources they require -- and washed our collective hands of the chore.

That has to end. The education of the next generation is the responsibility of everyone in the community, not just parents -- though a distressing number of them are absent from their own children's education. It also includes those whose children are grown and finished with the schools, and those who have no children at all. If the next generation is well-educated and well-prepared to take its place when the time comes, then the entire society prospers. If they are not, the society suffers.

If this sounds suspiciously like the altruistic "village" that so many love to sneer about, so be it. But here's a note for the sneering crowd that has nothing to do with altruism.

Taxpayers have a choice: Pay a little for 12 to 16 years of education, or pay five or six times as much to stuff uneducated adults into prisons for 20 to 50 years. Do the math before turning away from our shared obligation to the schools.

Economic development: Job creation is always on the agenda in this Valley, with our chronic double-digit unemployment and low wages. When the economy is as sour as it is right now, it's even more difficult to address. We have an obligation to see that our government isn't choking off opportunities, but rather finding creative ways to build and diversify our economic base.

Job creation is also linked to the other great issues of the day in the Valley: Air quality, schools, services, housing costs, recreation and entertainment opportunities -- it all works together. Improve in those areas, and we'll be better able to attract and create better jobs.

Growth and planning: There are the barest glimmers of hope that a more regional approach to growth and planning may be possible in the years ahead. This is crucial to the effort to improve the air quality here, as well as in transportation and other issues. The greatest difficulty is usually not the planning, but the defense of the plans once they have been adopted -- as will be the case with the city of Fresno's new general plan. Citizens must be alert to the depredations that special interests can commit when attention is elsewhere.

As with air quality measures, our elected leaders will listen to the loudest voices -- even when those voices are no louder than the soft rustle of campaign donations. Planning issues don't usually offer high drama, and that's why they're so easily overlooked. But when we don't pay attention to decisions being made in our name, we often pay a very high price: sprawl, congestion, decaying older neighborhoods and bad air.

Transportation: Measure C is the biggest transportation issue we face, but not the only one. Fresno must continue to pursue rail consolidation, and that must be a part of a Measure C extension. Our growing awareness of the air quality problem suggests that high-speed rail, consigned to the back burner by an indifferent governor, Legislature and public, makes more sense now than ever before.

Quality of life issues: In all of this grand agenda we cannot overlook the small things. The parks, libraries, museums, fields, arenas, theaters and all the other places we go to play and refresh ourselves must be cared for with the same attention we turn to the larger issues. Without them our lives would be sterile and unsatisfying; if we cherish and nourish them we help build a more attractive community, and thus one more likely to prosper.

It's a tough year ahead. Those who tell us something different are fooling themselves and us. But strong metals are formed in such crucibles, and strong people emerge from such challenges. As with all challenges, we can shirk these and walk away, or we can accept them and overcome them. Our Valley, our homes, our lives. Our choice.

Railroads, PUDs, Super Hornets and police: It's been a year of growth, change and controversy in Lemoore

LEMOORE--Lemoore continued to grow in 2002.

Lemoore Advance, 1/1/03

And this growth generated controversy dealing with many matters including the city council's action to define how the city will grow and the police involved shooting of a Hanford man.

On March 1 Peter Contreras was shot by LPD officer Jeff McCabe. McCabe had pulled Contreras over for a minor traffic violation. McCabe determined Contreras was under the influence of drugs and tried to arrest him. Contreras struggled with the officer and after a brief chase was able to get back into his vehicle. McCabe shot Contreras through the passenger side of the vehicle once. Contreras died at the scene. The shooting was ruled justifiable because McCabe perceived himself in danger. The Contreras family has filed a civil suit against the city, the LPD and McCabe.

The city passed a planned unit development (PUD) by a vote of 3-2 after many local realtors, contractors and others involved in the building and selling of residential properties spoke out against the plan. The motion concerns 11 parcels of land that will now follow a development program designed to give the neighborhoods individualized plans including curving streets and garages in the back of homes. The lots will also be larger than those lots in areas not covered by the PUD.

Changes occurred at local schools.

Mike Cawley resigned his position as Lemoore High School principal. Jim Bennett was hired to replace him. Bennett is a familiar face around campus having been a teacher, counselor and an assistant principal. Bennett was hired on June 13. Bennett's leadership has so far resulted in a decrease in administrative staff and an increase in state and local testing results.

Lemoore High School Superintendent Bill Black announced his plans to retire at the end of the 2002-2003 school year. Black began his career with LHS as a teacher. He has served the students of the district in the positions of assistant principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent since 1991.

Elections on Nov. 5 resulted in changes in the Lemoore High School District board of trustees. In a race that had six people vying for three slots, Lois Hubanks and Noah

Lawson won replacing Marion Wilson and Bill Miguel while incumbent Gary Sedgwick retained his seat.

At Central Union School District a bitter race ended up with incumbents Ceil Howe Jr., Jeff Gilcrease, Larry Jones, Margaret Brown and Claribel Nunez fending off challengers with one seat settled by three votes. Measure A, a bond to build the next elementary school, went down in defeat leaving Lemoore Elementary School District administration the necessity of housing students as the city population grows. The elections also saw a new city council member elected. David Andreasen took the oath of office early because council member Sky Wild resigned before her term was completed.

In August the Kings County Dairy Element was finalized giving the dairy farmers in the county a blueprint for growth and maintenance. The uniform plan streamlines the process new and existing dairies wishing to expand herds must go through. The element, breaking the county down to nine areas, none near large housing tracts, specifies how dairies are to maintain ground water and air pollution protection -- and allows the county dairy to grow while protecting the environment.

The plan also saves dairy farmers thousands of dollars because they do not have to provide an environmental impact review each time they expand. That review is already in the element with which dairies must comply. With dairies as the top agricultural industry in the area the plan is invaluable to the planned growth of the county.

Ground was broken for the new railroad on May 3. The Cross Valley Railroad will allow local industries such as Leprino to ship more produce that will connect with main lines at the town of Goshen in Tulare County. With the completion of the line the potential for industrial growth in our area will increase. Another plus is that because more products and material will be shipped via the train there will be a lesser need to use trucks to ship things resulting in less air pollution.

Keep synchronization simple

Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, January 2, 2003

Editor: Your "Traffic signals need to be synchronized" editorial educated us on how the city once again wants to waste time and money. They will tell you that they don't have money for programs that are pertinent to the quality of life for Merced citizens yet they are willing to shell out \$100,000 on a whim to study whether or not synchronizing traffic lights would be effective. It shouldn't have to take a study and \$100,000 to learn that stop and go traffic causes less miles per gallon, more pollution from exhaust and braking, more wear and tear on automobiles, more time to get from point A to point B, and more stress for the drivers and their occupants.

If someone doesn't have the education to figure this one out without a full-blown study, they should at least have enough common sense to know that synchronizing traffic

signals is effective, and effective in a big and positive way. Here we go again with the rocket science projects.

Next we will be hearing about how they need to spend a whole lot more money for a study to figure out how to synchronize the lights. Part of the study will be to figure out if the approach should be mathematical or theoretical. My guess is they will end up spending a lot of money to do a mathematical study to find the right formula to do the job. Well, let me help save a lot of money for the citizens of Merced by suggesting that no studies be conducted and to make a simple adjustment to the formula that is currently used to synchronize the signals that makes sure every light turns red as you are approaching it.

Let's keep it simple. Invert the current process. Make the lights turn green instead of red.

Stephen Cooper
Merced