National Park Goes Electric

By Elizabeth F. van Mantgem
Valley Voice Newspaper Online
Week of March 3, 2003

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks - For years, the National Park Service (NPS) has been cooperating with both private and public sector organizations to develop cleaner energy tactics within our parks. As a result, the NPS has become a showcase for several alternative energy technologies and minimized combustion emissions through the use of cleaner energy sources all over the country. California's National Parks offer good examples of this long-term, national endeavor to clean the air, lower noise pollution, reduce our reliance on gasoline, and educate the public, all at the same time.

The clean air effort includes our very own, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, where electric vehicles donated via Ford's TH!NK program are being put to use by bear technicians, campground rangers, and building & maintenance staff. The 2002 TH!NK program donated 500 electric vehicles to the 23 National Parks in California: 250 two-seat neighbors and 250 four-seat neighbors.

One dozen of these arrived at Ash Mountain headquarters and are used among Lodgepole, Cedar Grove, and Ash Mountain visitor sites. The electric "neighborhood" vehicles are actually replacing gasoline-powered vehicles and represent a donation of about $96,000 dollars per dozen.

"This donation from Ford Motor Company and the National Park Foundation will help protect the environment while enhancing the visitor experience at National Parks throughout California," Gale Norton, Interior Secretary and NPF chairman, said of the program. "This type of innovative partnership is the future of National Park stewardship, and I am grateful to Ford for this gift" (American Woman Road & Traveler 2002).

The TH!NK vehicles are quiet, zero emissions, electric vehicles that can go up to 30 miles per hour. They can be fully recharged in any standard outlet in eight hours. The neighborhood model was developed for use in niche markets, like small towns and college campuses, to spare air quality and reduce noise pollution. Their initial development began during the 1970's oil crisis, and improvements have been significant since then.

More recently, Sequoia National Park received four GEM vehicles (Global Electric Motorcars) issued through the National Park Foundation. The GEM vehicles came from the DaimlerChrysler Company in December 2002, and like the TH!NK cars, the GEMcars are zero emissions electric vehicles that will reduce air emissions and decrease noise levels in the Parks. DaimlerChrysler donated 500 GEMcars to National Parks and park partners, with 150 of the vehicles going directly to California National Parks and their in-park partners. Both Ford and DaimlerChrysler were motivated to donate zero emissions vehicles to obtain air emission credits.

As one of California's 23 National Parks, Yosemite likewise received 12 electric neighborhood vehicles from the TH!NK program. Other alternative energies used within both Sequoia and Yosemite include solar panels. Sequoia National Park uses solar power in conjunction with wind power to completely electrify an air quality monitoring station on the Mineral King Road. Yosemite's solar roofing panels can power 10% of the park's El Portal administrative site. That's approximately 47 kilowatts during peak usage hours.

In 1999, Yosemite National Park was one of the recipients of the Green Energy Parks program, sponsored by the Department of Energy partnered with the Department of the Interior. Through the Green Energy Parks program, 12 of Yosemite's red shuttle buses were refurbished to run on propane (biodiesel) rather than on gasoline. Another California park to get biodiesel vehicles is Channel Islands National Park. A list of the many other projects completed through the Green Energy Parks program can be found on the Federal Energy Management Program (FEMP) web site, under Green Energy Parks case studies (www.eren.doe/gov/femp/techass/green_casestudies.html).

Other NPS showcased, clean energy technologies includes the use of fuel cells for electricity, like the one in California's Golden Gate National Recreation Area, in their Kirby Cove

campground. After reviewing recommendations from a National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) advisory team, Golden Gate Park Service personnel chose to install a hybrid fuel cell system made up of a, “960-watt photovoltaic (solar) system connected to a 25-watt fuel cell supported by 9 kilowatt-hours of battery storage.” The cost of the hybrid system, “was only $47,000, about $113,000 less than the cost of a new, standard power line” (FEMP Focus Newsletter July/August 1999).

None of these sorts of NPS projects will singularly achieve the broader goal of significantly saving energy, but the cumulative, actual effects, as well as the influence they have on their neighbors, should make a huge difference. As Kent Bullard, maintenance supervisor of Channel Islands National Park said for Alternative Fuels News (vol.6 no.2, October 2002), “National Parks are not islands. If we minimize our environmental impact, the beneficial effects spill over into the community.”

Rule change would benefit farmers

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer
Sunday March 02, 2003, 10:28:53 PM

A proposed federal rule change would make it easier for farmers to install cleaner-burning diesel pumps, though critics warn it could virtually eliminate regulatory control of these pumps.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposes to exempt farmers from an existing regulatory program if they upgrade their stationary diesel pumps to newer, cleaner models. Farmers use thousands of these pumps throughout the San Joaquin Valley to move water, generate power and perform other work.

Currently regulated under a statute known as Title V, these engines are classified as stationary "major sources" of pollution. This status requires farmers to obtain a detailed permit, conduct monitoring and, potentially, pay fees to regulators.

But the EPA is considering a new approach that would group these engines with tractors and other mobile sources of agriculture emissions not subject to the same rigorous oversight. The proposal also calls for creating a pool of money to help farmers replace older pumps with cleaner ones.

"The proposal would give us more immediate emission reductions," said EPA spokeswoman Lisa Fasano. "The benefit would be that they would be able to apply for monies to switch out their engines to the newer, cleaner diesel engines, and then would potentially not need to go through the Title V permitting process to account for their emissions. The bottom line is to reduce overall emissions."

State law currently exempts agriculture from smog rules, but EPA has ordered that exemption withdrawn by Nov. 23. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District would regulate farm pumps under Title V if the exemption is withdrawn, but it has not finalized rules for compliance.

The air district already has a voluntary program that pays farmers up to half the cost of a cleaner pump. The program has helped farmers purchase 2,321 new pumps since 1997. A new pump emits only one-fifth the particulate pollution and half the nitrogen oxide emissions compared to pumps made before 1987, depending on engine size.

Overall, farm-related equipment is responsible for 44 percent of all particulate pollution from stationary sources, and 25 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions.

It is estimated that more than 2,000 older engines remain in operation on farms valley-wide, and the EPA thinks its proposal might clean those up quicker while sparing farmers from burdensome regulations.

"I think that would be great," said Loron Hodge, executive director of the Kern County Farm Bureau. "We're all under the hammer on this Title V thing. This would be a big advantage for us."

Others caution the proposal could eliminate these engines from regulatory oversight. Kevin Hall, an air pollution expert with the Sierra Club's Tehipite Chapter, said that without Title V

regulation, air quality officials and the public will be unable to track how much pollution diesel pumps produce.

"Without a permit, you have no authority. How will you enforce and monitor compliance?" Hall said. "What they're trying to do with this sort of tinkering is avoid the real issue and continue the loophole."

Wasco area farmer Jim Crettol said a new 250-horsepower diesel pump can cost up to $18,000. At that price, it can be hard for a farmer to justify replacing a perfectly good existing pump. He said the EPA's proposal -- simpler regulations coupled with a financial subsidy -- could help make farming cleaner.

"It would help me in the process of converting some engines over to the new style engines, which would be less polluting," said Crettol, who grows almonds, alfalfa, wine grapes and other crops on 2,500 acres. "I know growers who have 50, 60, 80 engines. You're talking millions of dollars. So there's a huge financial burden on some of these growers out there. Where we can do air quality improvements in agriculture today, let's go ahead and do it."

Farm: Manure management effort makes a splash at Ag Expo

By Eiji Yamashita
Hanford Sentinel Reporter

TULARE - Amid growing environmental pressures toward better manure management, animal waste digesters are capturing widespread interests in and out of California.

In Southern California, dairymen have already embarked on the use of digester technology in a regionwide attempt to cut down on dairy waste.

Dairy specialists in a neighboring state are also exploring the potential in manure digesters through projects and vigorous research.

Experts say these manure treatment systems could bring economic and environmental benefits to California agriculture. This technology yields a valuable side ag product - electricity - while reducing odor and producing high quality fertilizer.

In King County, the technology was a subject of controversy last year during review of the Dairy Element of the Kings County General Plan, which sets policies for future dairy industry growth in the area. County planners' original recommendation to make manure digestion a requirement for all incoming and expanding dairies was dropped after drawing ample opposition from local dairymen and experts.

Proponents of the technology say it is an effective defense against environmental regulations that are only toughening with time. Some of their views and experiences were shared locally early last month at a seminar during this year's World Ag Expo in Tulare.

Regional Approach

Nathan DeBoom, environmental specialist with the Southern California-based Milk Producers Council (MPC), said dairymen in the Chino Basin were forced into finding a better means of manure management by air and water quality regulations that come with urban growth.

"We are getting hammered, and we need to do something about it," DeBoom said. "We have to start acting more proactively to manage our manure. They've got a lot of studies against us on ammonia and methane emissions."

Over the past several decades, DeBoom said, the Chino Basin - a dairy capital with the highest concentration of milk cows in the world - has been heavily taxed with water quality and manure management rules.

Ever progressing urbanization is driving the cost of manure removal higher and higher; the area is facing new South Coast air quality regulations on top of existing local regulations. Life is becoming more difficult for dairymen, DeBoom said.

The environmental clock is ticking. Pollution reduction goals by the South Coast Air Quality Management District call for cutting ammonia and methane emissions from cow manure in the

Chino Basin by 20 percent this year, 30 percent next year and 50 percent by 2006, MPC Executive Director Bob Feenstra said.

"If we don't cut the emissions of methane and ammonia into the air, we are in bigger trouble," Feenstra said. The Central Valley, another top dairy region, is heading toward the same fate, he said.

In the Chino Basin, the question of how to best handle manure is being answered by the project to convert it into energy and quality compost through partnership with municipalities.

Feenstra's group is currently taking some of the manure into a human waste digester at the Inland Empire Utility Agency, a sewer treatment agency. Solids are processed by Synagro, a waste residuals management company, into organic fertilizer. Today the pilot project connects nine dairies to sewers, and the MPC is hoping to double that participation level this year, Feenstra said.

Manure to Methane
Fresh manure is collected daily in order to prevent further contamination due to runoff, with salts and nitrates seeping into the groundwater. The manure is then taken to a digestion facility, where it is unloaded into a large concrete tank.

Undergoing mixing and heating inside the tank, the manure is gradually pumped into a sealed underground anaerobic digester, which slowly induces an organic and biological process during a 20-day span.
It is during this process when pathogens are significantly reduced from the material, and from the destruction of the organic solids, a useful fuel is created: Methane gas.

Captured methane goes through a scrubber, which removes moisture and filters out particles, then through a compressor. The gas is finally burned to generate electricity to run the facility. Excess gas is used to produce about 25 percent of the electrical power for Chino Basin's desalination plant.

Semisolid materials from the digester will be dewatered. Water will be stored on site for future use, and the salt removed through the process goes to the ocean.

Dewatered solids will be transported to composting facilities, where the materials are further processed into exceptional quality compost.

Individual Approach
Presentations also featured a methane digester research project on an individual dairy in Oregon. Research results generally supported the effectiveness of the technology, Mike Gamroth, extension dairy specialist at Oregon State University, said as he evaluated the project undertaken by milk producer Bernie Faber of Salem, Ore. But he said the economic feasibility of the still-developing technology remains uncertain.
Early in the project, the electricity production on Faber's farm started out low in average kilowatts but caught up with a theoretical two kilowatts per cow last year, Gamroth said.

The research also compared the levels of pathogen, E Coli, between raw manure and digester effluent. Gamroth said the digester was clearly effective in pathogen removal as well.

"During the two-month trial, we were consistently (seeing) about 98 percent reduction in pathogen," Gamroth said.

Data showed 60 million colony forming units (CFU) per 100 ml in raw manure while the figure was down to 1 million CFU per 100 ml in the digester effluent, Gamroth said.

Gamroth also said the research showed the usefulness of manure solids as a fertilizer for some crops. Soil mixed with the solids not only accelerated growth of sweet corn and sugar beats on a test plot, but also ensured adequate growth without causing stunting of the plants, he said.

Other obvious benefits include odor control, which helps avoid lawsuits.

But why aren't there more digesters?
According to Gamroth, these are some of the reasons former digester users all cited:
* poor design
* excessive maintenance and operation time
* diminishing returns on electrical income over time
* loss of interest
* farming operations went out of business

Economic feasibility of the technology varies depending on where it's used and which digester system is used, Gamroth said.

A basic system to handle dairy manure tends to pay back in about seven to 10 years, Gamroth said.

But there are other types of digesters dairymen may want to consider. A complete mix digester is what is commonly seen in sewage treatment plants, where the manure is essentially stirred all day and kept at a constant temperature. A plug-flow, lower in cost and the most common, is a long pit where the manure enters at one end and progresses slowly to the discharge.

There is also a technique for covered lagoons, which is more practical for the environment, such as Southern California, where temperatures do not drop significantly.

Whichever system is used, it is important that the operation can be kept at $6,000 to $7,000 a year, Gamroth said.

Equally important is the price paid by electricity companies for energy generated through digesters.

In some states tax credit may be available for digester users, which can be as substantial as 1.5 cents per kilowatt hour of energy generated, Gamroth said. In Oregon, that is worth 50 percent additional income over what dairymen receive with a wholesale energy price, he said.

Ag voluntarily doing its part to clean up air

Commentary, Fresno Bee

By Roger A. Isom
(Published Monday, March 3, 2003, 5:40 AM)

Recent media reports have left the perception that agriculture is not doing its part to help clean up the San Joaquin Valley's air.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Agriculture is, and has been, a key player in the effort to reduce emissions, control particulate matter (PM10) and to work toward clean air for the Valley.

While agriculture has endured criticism for not doing its part and for seeking exemptions, farmers and ranchers have quietly worked on a voluntary basis for the past several years to incorporate changes in their on-farm practices for the benefit of clean air, recognizing the importance of their stewardship actions to preserve food and fiber production for future generations.

In the past four years, farmers and ranchers have retrofitted or replaced more than 2,300 agricultural irrigation pump engines, resulting in more than 2,000 tons per year of NOx emissions reductions from the implementation of the California Air Resources Board's (CARB) Carl Moyer Program.

Likewise, farmers and ranchers have oiled more than 500 miles of unpaved roads throughout the Valley, generating over 400 tons per year of PM10 emission reductions. This has been accomplished through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

No exemptions
To say that agriculture is exempt from air quality regulations is simply not true. For example,

agriculture has been using CARB low-sulfur diesel fuel since 1994. CARB does not exempt agriculture from the diesel fuel specifications, yet the other 49 states do. In 2006, a new federal diesel fuel standard will be in place known as "ultra low sulfur" diesel. Again, California will be the only state that will require agriculture to use this new fuel.
Neither state nor federal law exempts agriculture from regulations of particulate matter from harvesting, discing and driving on unpaved roads, only from permitting of these emissions. Most serious PM10 non-attainment areas in the state, including the Valley, have control measures in place for PM10 emissions from unpaved roads and equipment yards.

Moreover, the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District is working with agriculture to develop a list of conservation management practices for "on-field" agriculture, including discing and harvesting. The actual regulations for these will be in place later this year, regardless of any legislative efforts.

The federal Title V permitting of diesel engine emissions will not bring meaningful control measures to anyone. Yes, agriculture opposed the implementation of Title V on farms and ranches, but so did every other business in the state, as well as every air district and the CARB. Title V simply requires sources that exceed specific emission thresholds to obtain a "permit to operate."

It's nothing but a piece of paper. All industries opposed it, because it requires additional paperwork and fees. It does nothing to reduce emissions or improve air quality.

Paved over
Air quality discussions can't ignore the rapid increase in population in the San Joaquin Valley. On average over the past 14 years, 11,000 acres of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley each year are converted to urban built-up land, never to be farmed again.

With the population increase comes an exponential increase in the number of vehicle miles traveled for the general population. The cities are bigger, and the population moves further from the center; therefore, one must drive farther to get to and from work.

We hope that this issue will be debated in the context of its true merit. Do we need additional red tape or paperwork that comes with Title V? No. Do we need clean air? Absolutely.

Contrary to popular and misguided belief, agriculture has stepped to the plate to do its part for air quality, and is already hitting home runs with the Carl Moyer Program and EQIP. We don't need sensationalist environmentalists or "spur of the moment" attention-grabbing legislators. We simply need action.

In the meantime, farmers and ranchers will continue to do their part.

Roger A. Isom is the vice president and director of technical services for the Fresno-based California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association.

Committee takes look at Valley's air

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, March 01, 2003

FRESNO - The board room was filled with enough acronyms and bureaucratic terms to make anyone gasp.

But gasping is exactly what state Sen. Dean Florez is hoping to avoid.

The Democrat from Shafter listened to three hours of testimony Friday about problems associated with San Joaquin Valley’s notorious air pollution.

The meeting was held at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and was the third of 13 hearings Florez is holding as chair of the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality in the Central Valley.

That committee was established in January.

Among those providing testimony Friday were representatives of agriculture, Valley businesses, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Caltrans - which stands to lose about $2 billion in highway funds as a result of federal sanctions surrounding the air pollution.

“The overall goal is to come up with some long-term solutions,” Florez told the Sun-Star after the meeting. “The bottom line of this committee is health.”

The San Joaquin Valley’s air quality currently fails to meet health standards set by the federal Clean Air Act.

In addition to health problems faced by Valley residents, businesses and farmers are facing tougher regulations to clean up the smog and dust.

Jack Broadbent, an assistant director with the EPA, told Florez that cleaning the Valley’s air is one of his agency’s highest priorities.

“It’s also one of our biggest challenges,” he said.

Broadbent outlined a host of federal sanctions that could be imposed if the Valley’s air doesn’t get cleaned up by future deadlines.

Among those sanctions is the loss of $2 billion in federal highway dollars and more restrictions on Valley businesses.

“We have imposed the sanctions in California before and we are prepared to do so in the future,” he said.

Barbara Goodwin, with the council of Fresno County Governments, listed a host of Caltrans roadway projects that could be affected by the loss of highway money.

Among them, she said, is a $70 million project to widen Highway 99 in Merced and the $40 million Campus Parkway project that will provide access to the University of California, Merced.

Alan McCuen, a district director with Caltrans, was questioned by Florez about Caltrans’ long-term plans.

He said Caltrans had not factored in the potential loss of highway funds.

Florez asked if the loss would be “devastating” and McCuen responded, “For the San Joaquin Valley, it definitely would.”

The Valley is plagued by two types of air pollution: ozone and particulate matter.

If the Valley air district - which is charged with cleaning the air from Bakersfield to Stockton - fails to submit a plan for particulate matter by August 2003, the EPA could impose more costly regulations for businesses.

If the plan still hasn’t been submitted by February 2004, the EPA could impose other sanctions, like the loss of highway money.

Broadbent said he’s been told a cleanup plan will be submitted to his agency by May for particulate matter.

Cleaning up ozone air pollution is a trickier situation.

The Valley is currently classified as being in “severe” noncompliance with the Clean Air Act for that pollutant.

But the Valley air district has indicated it plans to request being downgraded to “extreme” noncompliance in order to avoid sanctions and receive more time to lessen the amount of ozone in the Valley.

Under that scenario, the district has until 2010 to improve ozone pollution.

By that time, air district officials believe they’ll have a better handle on the problem.

Whatever the outcome, Valley businesses and farmers expressed their concerns Friday.

The EPA has said that the state Legislature must end a decades-old exemption for agricultural air pollution.

But representatives with the ag industry questioned how much the air will be improved if farmers must comply with the same permitting now faced by other businesses in the Valley.

Roger Isom, with the California Cotton Ginners and Growers, said that farmers understand the air needs to be cleaned.

“We understand that despite comments that have been made otherwise,” he said. “People have been led to believe ag isn’t doing anything and that is an absolute mistake.”

Without any mandates, he said, farmers have oiled more than 500 miles of unpaved roads, which are a known source of particulate matter pollution.

Isom said farmers have been meeting with the EPA and the Valley air district over the past six months and established 100 different practices for various crops that could reduce air pollution.

Isom also said that farmers are losing their ag land to urban development, and “our emissions are going down whether we want them to or not.”

He said that permitting of farmers will do nothing to improve air quality.

“All it is is a piece of paper.”

What’s needed, Isom said, are more programs to help farmers replace heavy polluting engines and equipment.

David Crow, director of the air district, told Sen. Florez that much of the problem in cleaning the air stems from the jurisdictional puzzle that oversees air quality.

The Valley air district is responsible only for “stationary sources” of pollution and has no jurisdiction over cars and trucks. Regulation of vehicles is left up to the federal and state government.

Crow said the air district has reduced air pollution in recent years, but, “We simply have not made enough progress quick enough.”

Crow said a partnership is needed between the air district, the state and the federal government.

He said that solving the problem will depend on cleaner fuels, lower-emission vehicles and more funding and tax incentives to replace heavily polluting farm equipment.

“It’s mobile,” Crow said of the air pollution problem. “It’s the totality of what’s rolling through the San Joaquin Valley.”

Closing loopholes

EPA tells ag industry it must do more on issue of permits.

Editorial, Fresno Bee (Published Sunday, March 2, 2003, 5:53 AM)

Get rid of it: That's the word from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on the agriculture industry's proposal for dealing with a permit loophole in state air regulations. The industry wants to amend the law, and that's not good enough.

Much is at stake in this revision of the existing law. The federal government has raised the specter of expensive sanctions against businesses if the law isn't changed. Billions of dollars in federal highway funds are also at risk.

There has been considerable focus recently on pollution from agricultural sources, which accounts for significant portions of the gases that form smog in the summer and the airborne particles -- dust and soot, mostly -- that have been linked with respiratory illnesses, especially in winter.

Some of those in the ag industry bristle at the criticism, especially if it begins to sound to them that agriculture is being singled out. They point out -- absolutely correctly -- that cars and trucks on the Valley's roads are by far the single largest single contributor to our air pollution problems.

They also point out -- again, correctly -- that the industry is already heavily regulated, and not just in the area of air pollution.

And they remind us that in the past three years Valley farmers have replaced more than 2,000 older diesel engines -- commonly used to run irrigation pumps and other devices, and a major source of the pollution caused on the farm -- and that other pollution-fighting measures are coming.

All true -- and more is going to be required of agriculture in those areas. But that's true of every sector of the Valley: farms, urban businesses, government agencies and private residents, whether they live in cities or the rural countryside. Agriculture is just getting most of the attention right now.

Every one of us is going to face new realities in our work and in our lives. There is a great long list of things that we may have to give up if we are ever to have clean air for ourselves and our children to breathe.

And if you think the howling from ag is loud, wait until attention turns to those automobiles, and we're all directly affected.

Reduce emissions

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By W.F. Bates
Auberry
(Published Sunday, March 2, 2003, 5:10 AM)

The Bush administration has refused to cut emissions of greenhouse gases that threaten to disrupt the earth's climate in environmentally destructive ways.

First, the president repudiated the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty requiring emissions reductions that other industrialized nations have chosen to pursue. Then he asked companies to voluntarily control their polluting emissions, instead of making reductions mandatory.

Sens. John McCain and Joseph Lieberman have introduced a bipartisan bill that imposes a mandatory limit on U.S. greenhouse gases from large polluters, and steadily reduces the amount to 1990 levels. I ask people to write to their congressmen today and urge them to support this legislation.

EPA calls for axing loophole for ag

Official tells Fresno hearing he favors that over amending air law.
By Mark Grossi
The Fresno Bee
(Published Saturday, March 1, 2003, 5:09 AM)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would prefer elimination of an air regulation loophole for farmers rather than an amendment to state law, as suggested by the agriculture industry.

The agency believes the farm amendment could work, but Jack Broadbent, regional air division director, made EPA's wishes clear Friday in Fresno at a state Senate hearing on air quality.

"We think the language needs to be removed completely," Broadbent said.

Agriculture officials, eager to showcase their air cleanup efforts, defended their suggested amendment, adding that it is just a part of their work on air quality.

Spokesman Roger Isom said the industry has oiled hundreds of miles of unpaved roads to hold down dust, replaced 2,300 old diesel engines and reduced 20% of smog-forming emissions from pesticides.

"People have been led to believe ag isn't doing anything," he said. "That's an absolute mistake."

Broadbent, Isom and others commented at the hearing conducted by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter. It was the third of 13 hearings on air quality scheduled by the senator throughout the year.

Florez has proposed 10 air quality measures pointed mainly at the Valley, which is among the dirtiest and most unhealthy air basins in the nation.

One of the measures would remove the state exemption that prevents regulators from including large farms in the so-called Title V permit program in the federal Clean Air Act.

The exemption applies only to on-field farming, which includes harvesting, discing and livestock operations. Other parts of agriculture, such as unpaved roads between fields, are regulated in other ways.

The Title V permit applies to large emission sources such as refineries, power plants and glass manufacturers, known as "stationary sources." The permit allows regulators to catalog emissions for the air basin as well as track pollution from larger sources.

Federal officials, responding to an environmental lawsuit settlement last year, have told California to lift the decades-old permit exemption for farmers or face expensive penalties for new and expanding businesses by Nov. 23.

Florez said even if fellow lawmakers and the governor agreed to his proposed repeal, it couldn't become law until Jan. 1.

"Do you have any intention of enforcing sanctions during that six-week period?" Florez asked.

Broadbent said the EPA would not levy sanctions if the Legislature passed an acceptable change that was signed by the governor.

The farm amendment could be acceptable, Broadbent said earlier this week. EPA has suggested two technical changes, which appear to be acceptable both to farm lobbies and environmentalists.

Farm spokesman Isom, who is vice president of the California Cotton Ginners and Growers Associations, told Florez that farmers have been misunderstood on air issues. Agriculture has been involved in studies, research and funding efforts for many years, he said.

Isom said agriculture has worked for six months with other officials to devise practices for reducing possible emissions on farm fields. The group has about 100 practices.

Florez asked why the farm story hasn't been told until lately.

"There hasn't been a need," Isom said. "We've just been doing it."

The need for public attention was clearly outlined by many speakers Friday. With federal deadlines fast approaching, the EPA is poised to levy sanctions on the Valley as early as August over air cleanup plans.
The sanctions start with the higher fees for new and expanding businesses, but the real hammer would fall six months later when federal road-building funds would be frozen.

The spotlight on the Valley's air problem makes other communities more attractive to businesses, said Dave Spaur, president of the Economic Development Corp. of Fresno County. While distribution centers are coming to the Valley, other businesses often opt for Reno, Nev.; Las Vegas or Phoenix, he said.

"We're not even on the list for many of these companies," Spaur said. "How would I answer a question about air quality here? They rarely ask the question. They just avoid us altogether."

Letters to the Editor
Bakersfield Californian
March 3, 2003

Make air healthy again

We have so many days with unhealthy air that we've come to think of it as normal, but our elected officials are oblivious. Our supervisors continue to approve more pollution, such as what the Tejon Ranch project will generate. They are so focussed on growth, that they've forgotten about the quality of life for those of us who are already here.

The time has arrived to call a moratorium on new projects that will result in more pollution, until the state and feds act to decrease the pollution generated by agriculture and motor vehicles and the air becomes healthy once again. We need to tell the developers that our air has reached its capacity to absorb more pollutants.

If we don't, there will be even more days when it will be unsafe to let our children play outside and many of us will continue to cough and wheeze in the winter's toxic fog.

GEORGE LAVEN, Bakersfield

Clean air no priority

A recent article in *The Californian* caught my attention: "Women quits air advisory committee."

Ann WIlliams recently resigned from her seat on the citizens advisory committee to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. She said, she felt powerless to affect any improvement in the valley's unhealthy air and disillusioned by a political process she believes continues to hold the door open for polluters.

The number one concern voiced by our community, according to the Vision 20/20 project, was air quality. Yet our local governmental representatives continued to ignore individual and environmental studies which rate air quality as the number one factor impacted by development after development -- i.e. Borba dairies, Tejon industrial complex.

My question is : Why do our representatives continue to approve development plans were the number one concern is the impact on air quality and pollution? Each of these developments compound what is already Kern County's least desirable feature -- dirty, polluted air!

What are the priorities of our Kern County supervisors and planniners? From my vantage point, being concerned about the quality of air we breathe is low on their list.

RICHARD SCHWARTZ, Bakersfield

EPA is outrageous

The EPA tells the San Joaquin Valley to clean up its air "or else!" Environmentalists don't trust elected officials on the air district board and want their "own" representatives to clean the air.

The law says the local air district can control emissions from stationary sources and the federal government (through EPA) retains control over mobile sources (trucks passenger cars.)

Experts say 30 to 40 percent of our pollution comes from stationary sources (local control) and 60 to 70 percent from mobile sources (EPA control.).

One great advantage of government being best that is closest to the people is it's easier to bash. People frustrated with our air quality are striking out at this closest target.

The local district has imposed control measures over the years that have been effective and cost industry billions of dollars, including stringent control measures on the 1,200 diesel engines used in the oil fields. However, EPA hasn't done much about the 20,000-plus trucks with the same diesel engines driving through Kern County each day.

It's outrageous that EPA keeps threatening the San Joaquin Valley with sanctions when it's their gorilla in our living room! Congress: Do your job.

MARY K. SHELL, Bakersfield