

Comment invited on latest draft of proposal to ban wood burning

The Bakersfield Californian

Saturday May 03, 2003, 11:11:43 PM

The latest version of a proposal to ban residential wood burning under certain conditions in the San Joaquin Valley will be presented for public comment in Bakersfield on Tuesday.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District proposes to ban the use of woodstoves and fireplaces during winter episodes of bad air quality to protect public health. This is expected to happen between 20 and 30 nights a year.

Winter inversion layers can trap wood smoke near the ground, causing breathing trouble for people with respiratory problems. Residential wood smoke is also responsible for up to 30 percent of winter particulate pollution. The valley fails to meet federal standards for particulate pollution and could face federal sanctions if this continues.

The proposed rule would also ban the installation of fireplaces and woodstoves in most new homes, and require older woodstoves to be disabled or replaced in existing homes at time of sale. The rule includes exemptions for gas-burning appliances, homes above 3,000 feet elevation, and areas where no gas service is available.

The air district has been revising the rule for about six months, since the last public workshops were held. The primary change tightens the rule by preventing the use of EPA-certified woodstoves on no-burn nights.

The first version of the rule contained a two-tiered enforcement program, allowing newer, cleaner-burning stoves to be used in moderately bad conditions when the use of open-hearth fireplaces and non-certified stoves would be banned. Now a single-tier rule is proposed that bans all wood heating. Air district officials said this change was made to simplify enforcement.

The Bakersfield workshop will be 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at air district offices at 2700 M St., Suite 275. Additional workshops are planned in Fresno at 6 p.m. Monday and in Modesto at 2 p.m. Wednesday. The public can participate in these meetings by live videoconference at the air district's Bakersfield offices.

For more information, call 326-6981 or visit www.valleyair.org.

Idea aims to reward drivers of clean cars

Perea wants free parking for less-polluting vehicles.

By Pablo Lopez, The Fresno Bee, May 4, 2003

Fresno's City Council will decide Tuesday whether to give drivers of electric or low-emission vehicles free parking at metered spaces and in city lots and garages.

Council Member Henry T. Perea has pitched the idea, saying: "It's time for the city of Fresno to be proactive and provide incentives for our community to purchase these vehicles."

It's unclear whether the proposal has the council support it needs.

"Symbolic gestures may make good headlines and sound bites, but we need actions that will actually clean our air," said Council Member Jerry Duncan, adding that a better idea would be to give free parking to those who carpool downtown.

Duncan also said there aren't enough electric or low-emission vehicles on Valley roads for Perea's idea to make a dent in pollution.

Perea said he supports Duncan's carpooling idea but insists that until Duncan or city staff puts together a plan, the city should move forward with his proposal.

Perea's proposal would apply to state-approved zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVs, also known as electric cars, and super-ultra-low-emission vehicles, or SULEVs, which are low polluters.

A list of the approved vehicles is on California Air Resources Board's Web site: www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/carpool/carpool.htm#vehicles.

The proposal is for a one-year pilot program. After a year of evaluation, the City Council can choose to adopt it or drop it, Perea said.

Currently, ZEVs and SULEVs can qualify for a special decal from the Department of Motor Vehicles that allows a single occupant to travel in designated carpool lanes throughout the state. Such lanes are in Southern California and the Bay Area, but not in the Valley, the California Highway Patrol said.

Perea said these DMV-issued decals will be required to qualify for the free parking pilot program.

Bob Madewell, transportation manager for public works, said Perea's proposal fits into the city's plans to improve air quality. He said the city also is working on a plan to offer reduced rates for carpool parking in downtown lots and garages.

Perea's proposal, Madewell said, won't hurt the city because "there are not that many vehicles out there at this time." If the city set aside 35 of the nearly 3,500 spaces in lots and garages, that would translate to about a loss of \$1,225 per month.

"This is insignificant in the overall parking program, which equates to about \$500,000 per month overall," he said.

There are more than 2,200 metered spaces, so if the city gives free parking to 20 of these spaces per day, Madewell said, that's a loss of only about \$1,000 per month in meter revenue.

"Still not significant," he said. "The benefit to the air quality would outweigh the lost revenue."

Perea has made air quality a top priority. Shortly after taking office in January, he persuaded his colleagues to ban wood-burning fireplaces and stoves in new homes.

His current proposal is similar to one by Los Angeles City Council Member Alex Padilla. In February, the Los Angeles council unanimously approved a pilot program to allow ZEVs to park free at metered spaces throughout the city.

Council Members Brad Castillo and Mike Dages support Perea's efforts. "It's a step in the right direction, and every little bit helps," Dages said.

Duncan, however, said Perea's proposal would be better-suited after technology for low- or zero-emission cars vastly improves. "Where can one buy a pure electric car in Fresno?" he said.

Electric/gas hybrids such as the Honda Insight and Toyota Prius do not qualify for the DMV decals. The approved vehicles run strictly on electricity or on alternate fuels.

Duncan said research shows automakers are spending money on research of fuel-cell cars, which would combine hydrogen, oxygen and a catalyst to produce electricity and emit water.

Perea supports fuel-cell research, but until those cars are put into use, he said, Fresno should give incentives to motorists who make an effort to improve air quality today.

Valley air quality gets failing grade

By MICHELLE TERWILLEGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian

Thursday May 01, 2003, 10:42:33 AM

The good news: The Bakersfield area dropped from its No. 2 ranking of the most polluted cities in the nation.

The bad news: It only fell to the No. 3 spot, with Fresno taking its place.

Not exactly an overwhelming success for the San Joaquin Valley.

The rankings are based on each area's ground-level ozone pollution and were published in the annual State of the Air report, released today by the American Lung Association.

As has been the case each year, the worst area in the country was the Los Angeles, Riverside and Orange County areas combined.

Richard Fallon, executive director of the Kern County branch of the American Lung Association, said that despite the San Joaquin Valley's unique geography of being surrounded by mountains on three sides, people can work to improve the air quality.

"We can ride-share, we can take the bus, we can try more bicycling or walking to work," Fallon said. "If everybody would make an effort to clean the air, it will happen."

Engine exhaust is one of the prime ingredients for ground-level ozone, which forms when automobile and other emissions cook in the heat. Although invisible, ozone can have harmful effects when people breathe it in, particularly those with asthma, lung disease and heart disease.

"Ozone basically is a very strong irritation," said Dr. Patrick Leung, a Bakersfield allergist. "Ozone mutates the air passages, exacerbates symptoms."

Wheezing, chest pain, asthma attacks, eye irritation and nausea are among the problems sometimes caused by breathing in ozone.

Despite Kern's poor air rating, the issue doesn't appear to be a major deterrent keeping people from the area, said Barry Zoeller, executive director of the Kern County Board of Trade.

In a survey conducted for Greater Bakersfield Vision 2020, California residents interviewed were more put off by Bakersfield's hot and dry weather than its pollutants, Zoeller said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has the unique distinction of containing four of the 10 worst polluted areas in the country: Fresno, Bakersfield, Visalia-Tulare-Porterville (No. 4) and Merced (No. 7).

"It's not a surprise," said district spokeswoman Kelly Hogan Malay. "We know we have a very serious air problem."

The air district is the public agency responsible for cleaning up the valley's air, including Kern's. The district must regulate all stationary sources of pollution, including oil refineries, factories, small businesses and some aspects of agriculture.

The valley is out of compliance with federal standards for both ozone and particulate pollution and has missed cleanup deadlines in both cases. Unless the valley shows progress toward meeting the standards, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency may impose sanctions on the region that could mean higher fees for businesses and a loss of federal highway funding.

The valley air has improved -- it's much cleaner now than it was in the late 1980s -- but it's not keeping up with newer air standards, Malay said.

Because of the unique geography, which keeps pollutants trapped in, valley residents may need to conserve their use of engines, fireplaces and other pollutants more than those in other areas, Malay said.

"We might need to make sacrifices on a personal level to take advantage of the opportunities here," she said.

And Bakersfield residents shouldn't feel too proud about Fresno taking the No. 2 worst spot this year.

Most experts believe it was only weather changes that allowed Bakersfield to change places with Fresno on the list.

Actor rides into town in clean-burning vehicle

By ERIN WALDNER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian

Thursday May 01, 2003, 08:00:15 PM

Actor Dennis Weaver, who starred in the classic Western TV show "Gunsmoke" and portrayed a deputy marshal in "McCloud," came to Bakersfield Thursday in black boots and a turquoise belt to promote alternative fuel sources.

His pit stop was part of "Drive to Survive 2003," a cross-country caravan showcasing vehicles powered by electricity, hydrogen, compressed natural gas, biodiesel, methanol and ethanol. The Ridgway, Colo.-based Institute of Ecolonomics, which Weaver founded in 1993, coordinated the event.

The vehicles were displayed at Bakersfield College. Weaver said he's often asked what Drive to Survive is all about.

"It's all about the future," he said. "A clean future, a healthy future."

A sustainable future, he said, requires a sustainable economy and a sustainable environment.

The two-week Drive to Survive, which began in Santa Monica Wednesday and concludes in Washington, D.C., emphasizes energy independence and the development of a hydrogen economy.

"Drive Hydrogen Home" is the theme of the campaign.

A hydrogen economy, Weaver said, is good for the economy, good for national security and good for the environment.

Burning hydrogen creates less air pollution than gasoline or diesel, according to the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

One of the vehicles on display was a truck that can run on natural gas or hydrogen. Tai Robinson, from Intergalactic Hydrogen, built the truck.

"If we can do that, we know damn well Detroit can do it," Weaver said.

Robinson said the air that comes out of his truck's tailpipe is actually cleaner than the air we breathe.

Greenpeace joined the California leg of the trip with a biodiesel-powered truck.

"It runs great," said J.P. Ross, from San Francisco Greenpeace.

Ross noted that "farmers throughout the Midwest are driving biodiesel trucks."

The city of Bakersfield currently has 69 alternative fuel vehicles, powered by Compressed Natural Gas, liquid natural gas, electric and propane. The city currently fuels its CNG vehicles at a local PG&E facility, but is building a CNG fueling station.

Clark Parson, an instructor at BC, stopped by Thursday's event with his battery-powered Segway Human Transporter, which he uses to commute to work. He said he bought the Segway because he likes to be outdoors and because it's environmentally friendly. He bought it for \$5,000 off the Internet.

Weaver tried out the Segway.

"It's like riding a horse, right?" Parson joked with the actor.

Clearing air -- here and in Sacramento

By VIC POLLARD, Californian Sacramento Bureau Chief

Bakersfield Californian

Friday May 02, 2003, 11:43:41 PM

SACRAMENTO -- The biggest effort so far to clean up the nasty air in the San Joaquin Valley is getting under way in earnest here.

It's an incredibly complicated game, if a battle with such high stakes can be called a game.

On one side are the valley's farmers, who provide most of the jobs and bring most of the money into the valley. Unfortunately, they also cause much of the pollution and will have to bear much of the burden of cleaning it up at a time when low crop prices have many of them teetering on the financial edge.

On the other side are environmentalists and health officials, acting on behalf of city dwellers and other valley residents who suffer asthma and other lung ailments at a rate three times that of the rest of the country.

In the middle is a Kern County lawmaker, Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

He has proposed a massive package of clean-air reform bills that would take the first big bite out of the dust, smoke and other particles that leave the valley with some of the dirtiest air in the nation.

Florez is an experienced legislator, but he got a quick lesson last month in just how hard the task was going to be.

Since old cars are considered major sources of smog, Florez had written a bill to require smog checks on cars going back 45 model years, 15 years older than under current law.

What he didn't reckon with was the political sophistication and clout of California's classic car collectors.

With "The Tonight Show" host and major-league collector Jay Leno personally leading the way, they shot that idea down like a clay pigeon.

While Florez figured air quality wouldn't suffer too much from dropping the old-car proposal, he is trying to hold on to the more substantive pieces of his legislative package as he steps into the legislative minefield.

The major items are:

- * An end to agriculture's traditional exemption from sometimes onerous state and federal clean-air laws. It is the only industry to be given such a free pass.

- * A phaseout of open-field burning of farm waste, one of the most visible sources of pollution. There is an accompanying measure to provide subsidies and other incentives to biomass facilities to burn more farm waste for their energy production.

- * Giving the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District some authority over pollution from cars, trucks and farm equipment for the first time. Now, the district's hands are tied when it comes to regulating mobile sources of smog, which is exclusively a state and federal function. Another valley lawmaker, Sen. Mike Machado of Stockton, is sponsoring a bill to add four members to the board appointed by state officials, a response to criticism that the current locally appointed board is too beholden to the agriculture industry.

- * A request for voter approval of a \$4.5 billion bond issue for, among other things, helping financially strapped farmers pay for pollution reduction measures and beefing up health care programs for asthma sufferers and other pollution victims.

So far, all the lobbying organizations that represent farmers -- the Farm Bureau, Western Growers Association, Nisei Farmers League, etc. -- are officially opposed to the major pieces of Florez's package, especially the blanket ending of the agricultural exemption.

Bakersfield's Republican Sen. Roy Ashburn got their support instantly with a proposal to officially retain the exemption but allow the government to impose regulations only on the biggest polluters.

That, however, died an instant death at its first hearing this week in the liberal-dominated Senate Environmental Quality Committee.

Florez, a moderate Democrat who represents the vast farming areas of the valley's west side, says his approach is to require changes in farming practices and equipment that will help clean up the air, accompanied by funding and financial incentives to help pay for it.

He says the traditional environmentalist philosophy of requiring the affected industries to pay all or most of the costs of pollution cleanup and prevention won't work with agribusiness.

And he knows it's going to be a hard sell to convince lawmakers from Los Angeles and San Francisco to vote to put the bond issue on the ballot.

Many of them still cling to the cliché that most farms in the valley are maintained as tax dodges by wealthy corporations from back east.

They may also want to know what's in it for them, and Florez may have to add some sweeteners.

"That's something we can talk about," he said recently.

But even if he gets the votes of all his fellow Democrats in the Legislature, they don't make up the two-thirds majority needed to move the bond issue.

He will need votes from at least two Republicans in the Senate and six in the Assembly.

Among GOP senators, Florez says the most likely targets are the three from the San Joaquin Valley: Jeff Denham from Modesto, Chuck Poochigian from Fresno -- and Ashburn.

So far, none of them are lining up behind Florez's plan.

"I'm opposed to a bond issue," said Ashburn.

"It's unwise fiscal policy given the indebtedness of the state and the uncertainty of the budget solution."

But there are lots of negotiations to come, and if you talk to individual farmers, many of them know that life will never be the same, given the growing public concern over the crud in the air that makes the mountains almost invisible and leaves children choking with asthma.

Said Shafter grower Jim Crettol, "It's something we're going to have to deal with."

Dairies focus of air hearing

Florez hears from supporters, critics of pollution bills.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

(Published Friday, May 2, 2003, 5:02 AM)

SHAFTER -- Dairies don't need a three-mile buffer to protect neighborhoods and schools from their odors and emissions, a Kings County planner told state Sen. Dean Florez on Thursday night.

"We think three miles is excessive," Kings County planner Bill Zumwalt said at Florez's Senate Select Committee hearing on air quality.

A measure creating that buffer from schools, neighborhoods and other urban developments is among a series of air pollution bills proposed by Florez. Zumwalt was one of many officials and experts testifying about the dairy measure.

But his opposition stood out at the Shafter Veterans Hall, where the audience of about 75 murmured uncomfortably as he spoke. Zumwalt said Kings County considers many factors, not just a dairy's distance from urban development.

Florez asked Zumwalt how he could continue to support dairy construction within three miles of development now that state officials acknowledge the exact amount of dairy pollution is not known.

"No one is falling dead in the streets," Zumwalt replied.

A health expert later noted that Philip Hernandez, 11, died of asthma on a Hanford school playground in 1996. Though there was no connection made between the student's death and dairy pollution, a connection between air pollution and asthma, as well as other lung problems, has been made through research.

Others said Thursday night that organic gases and ammonia come from dairy wastes and animals. Some of the gases become smog in summer, and ammonia combines with other chemicals in the winter to become tiny particle pollution.

But how much pollution is going into the air? And how does the San Joaquin Valley's complex atmospheric brew alter it? California State University, Fresno, and University of California at Davis are working on those answers and some results should be released in the next few months. But, for decades, government and industry officials have relied upon outdated and inaccurate estimates of organic gases coming from dairies.

The old estimates were used for so long because no one suspected dairies could produce significant pollution.

However, the number of dairy cows in the Valley has more than doubled since 1980 -- from 477,000 animals to 1.1 million last year -- as the industry has expanded.

In Kern County, one businessman has just begun construction on a dairy that could add 28,000 more cows.

Using the old estimates, the state projects livestock operations will pass automobiles in production of smog-forming reactive organic gases by 2005.

Many officials believe the estimate will fall when the results of California dairy studies become known in the next few months. Industry officials and others said it is difficult to regulate dairy emissions because there is not yet enough information about them.

"Right now, it doesn't look like the numbers will be as high," said Matt Summers, air quality engineer with the California Department of Food and Agriculture. "But no one is certain yet."

People at Thursday's hearing were certain of one effect from dairies: the smell.

Tom Frantz, a Wasco High School teacher, said no one would argue about the smell in winter.

"Dairies do stink," he said. "Visalia stinks in the wintertime. They have dairies too close to the city."

Dairy owner Ray Souza of Modesto said he and others in the business understand they need to be good neighbors. He said many dairy owners keep down dust and other emissions as much as possible: "We live on our farms. We share our environment with people in the area."

Souza said he wants to wait for "sound science" to guide regulations and new technologies that will curb pollution.

But environmental lawyer Brent Newell, representing the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said the time has come to regulate dairy air emissions. Newell has been involved in several lawsuits against development of so-called megadairies, which have thousands of animals.

"We know dairies emit pollution, we don't yet know exactly how much," he said. "At some point, we need to act on what we know."

Crippen asks for \$10m

Fresno crews erred in fire, claim alleges; city defends work.

By Russell Clemings

The Fresno Bee

(Published Saturday, May 3, 2003, 5:26 AM)

Charging that the Fresno Fire Department mismanaged last winter's monthlong fire at his

southwest Fresno recycling yard, Archie Crippen filed a claim against the city Friday for damages estimated to be more than \$10 million.

Charles Doerksen, a Fresno attorney representing Crippen, charged that the fire surged out of control partly because city crews were late to respond to calls for help from the Crippen family and made mistakes in trying to put out the fire, which burned through a huge pile of debris from demolished buildings.

"They took control of the property," Doerksen said of the city crews. "They basically said, 'Get off the pile or we'll arrest you,' and then they just screwed things up."

Doerksen also filed a claim on Crippen's behalf against the state Integrated Waste Management Board, which has sued Crippen for more than \$700,000 of its own firefighting costs. Crippen's state claim seeks \$19,417.50 for road rock that came from Crippen's concrete crushing business. The state used the rock to build roads around the debris pile for fire trucks and other equipment.

City officials said they had not reviewed the claim against them, but they were quick to defend their work on the Crippen fire, which filled the metropolitan area's skies with heavy smoke for days at a time from Jan. 11, when it was discovered, until it was extinguished in mid-February.

"Once the problem was identified on the site, the steps that were taken ... were all lawful," said James C. Sanchez, chief assistant city attorney.

Crippen's claim also takes issue with the city's decision to revoke his land-use permit, saying that deprived Crippen of his constitutional and other rights. The city Planning Commission voted Wednesday to uphold that action, and Crippen's attorneys have promised a court fight, but Sanchez flatly dismissed the charge that Crippen's rights were violated.

"He's had his due process," he said, "and under the circumstances, with the threat that the site posed to the public health and safety, he's had more than due process."

The claim against the city alleges that the permit revocation was "retaliatory, discriminatory and based on political and/or improper purposes," but does not list those purposes.

It says the city's seizure of the fire site amounts to condemnation for which Crippen is entitled to be paid. It says the Fire Department's four-hour delay in returning on the evening of Jan. 11, when the fire flared up for a second time, led to the fire going out of control.

And it says that city crews "did not have the expertise or equipment" needed to fight the fire, and made "inappropriate decisions" in their response to it. Doerksen said one such inappropriate response was using water rather than firefighting foam to cool the fire in its earliest days.

As a result, the claim said, Crippen was being pursued by various government agencies for reimbursement of their fire suppression costs.

"Additionally, claimants have been left with a mound of debris that will need to be removed to a landfill," the claim said, "and their business has suffered a severe diminution in value and more likely has been destroyed, for which they are entitled to be compensated by the city of Fresno and the responsible public employees."

[The Bakersfield Californian editorial, May 03, 2003:](#)

Ag: clean air partner

Some might call state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, crazy. Others might call him courageous.

But there is no doubt Florez has picked a pretty strange fight for a politician who represents a predominantly agricultural district. Florez is taking on agriculture in an effort to clean up the valley's polluted air.

The eight-county San Joaquin Valley is one of the most polluted air basins in the nation. The highest rate of childhood asthma in California is recorded in the basin.

State and local regulators face increasing pressure from the federal government, and health and environmental groups to drastically cut smog by 2005 or risk sanctions that could freeze up to \$2 billion in federal transportation funds and prevent industries from operating.

Florez has authored a package of air cleanup bills that includes some first-time rules directed at the generally exempted agriculture industry.

This is not to imply that agriculture is to be blamed for the area's air pollution woes. It is not to imply that agriculture has not helped clean up the air.

State regulators estimate 25 percent of the valley's smog-forming gases are generated by farming activities, while cars and trucks produce about 40 percent. Agriculture has voluntarily pioneered pollution-reducing and energy-conserving measures that have helped clean up the valley's air.

But the voluntary steps are not enough. Like all other industries, agriculture is being targeted with stricter rules including permit requirements for diesel irrigation pumps, dust control measures and the eventual ban on burning of crop wastes in fields.

Florez's bills four of which cleared a committee hearing last week propose to do these things. And the Kern County lawmaker is getting a lot of heat from farmers for his efforts.

Crazy? Florez doesn't think so. Courageous? Maybe a little. He admits he knew he would be in for a rocky ride.

"But when can you take such a rocky ride if it is not at the beginning of a four-year term, which you won with 70 percent of the vote?" he asks.

While many politicians are busy maneuvering for a new term or another elected post never willing to take the risk of leadership Florez has stepped up to the plate. He is taking a good hard swing at knocking pollution down a bit in the valley.

Not all the pollution bills Florez introduced will get the public's or Legislature's nod. The give-and-take of the political process will modify some proposals. But give Florez credit for trying.

Agriculture is not the bad guy causing the valley's air pollution. But it is a contributor. It must be an active partner in the solution.

Much of the air pollution is spewed from sources beyond state control particularly from trucks and cars that rumble along valley highways.

Pressure must be applied on federal agencies to set stricter limits on diesel fuel and polluting vehicles. Florez's bills take a whack at these sources. They also expand the membership and authority of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board.

"We need to do as much as we can to control our local sources of pollution first, since we are in such a dire health situation, and then look to the state and the nation for help controlling other sources," Florez told The Californian.

"Agriculture is really at a crossroads," he said. "They can join me and put into place workable controls that clean our air and move beyond this issue or they can try and do the minimum, keep our air dirty and face the voters at the ballot box."

[Bakersfield Californian Another View, May 01, 2003 -- Don Doerksen:](#)

New dry cleaning fluid not tested completely

I am writing in response to your recent article about the new solvent some dry cleaners, including Today Cleaners, are switching to.

Over the past 10 years, several solvents have been introduced to dry cleaners as the solvent of the future. Most have faded away. One that was introduced several years ago, decamethylcyclopentasiloxane, is a silicon-based solvent. It is known as Greenearth and is said to environmentally friendly.

Several errors in the article need to be cleared up. Much about the toxicity of this silicon is not known because studies are not complete. The first major inhalation study by Dow Chemical was just released and it states there was an increase in uterine cancer among laboratory animals breathing the silicon.

Is this cause for concern? I think so. Especially because 90 percent of dry cleaning employees are women.

Another misconception is that the current dry cleaning solvent, perchloroethylene, commonly known as perc, causes smog. Not all air contaminants cause smog. Perc is one that does not cause smog.

Silicon-based solvent is also released into the air as a contaminant. Approximately one pound of perc is released into the air per day in each store. This certainly is not the 500 tons as reported. An equal amount of silicon is released.

In the past, there has been some groundwater or well contamination caused by perc, but most of this is not because of dry cleaners.

The government is the largest polluter. Other industries, such as computer chip industries and hi-tech industries along with metal producing industries, all use perc as a degreaser and have caused contamination.

There is no current data on what occurs if silicon is released into the ground or water supply.

One of the reasons dry cleaners want to use silicon solvent is there are no controls by government agencies. You can put in a plant without going through the permit process.

Companies do not need an EPA number or a permit from the air pollution control district. Since this study came out, the Los Angeles Basin Air Quality Control District has stopped the processing of grants to help change to this solvent. They are reviewing the Dow Chemical study.

Perc has been used safely for the past 60 years. Perc is highly regulated by the Air Resources Board and the EPA. A properly maintained plant does not pollute the air or the ground.

Perc has been removed from the federal EPA list as a possible carcinogen. It has never been able to link perc with cancer in humans. Other states have removed it from the list, as well. Currently it has not been removed from the list in California.

Is silicon a viable solvent? Is it environmentally friendly? The first test does not confirm this, and not enough testing has been done to convince me that this is the solvent of the future. There are too many unknowns at this time.

In the meantime, we will continue to use perc, a safe and clean solvent.

Don Doerksen is general manager of Martinizing dry cleaning in Bakersfield.

[Community Voices, Bakersfield Californian May 02, 2003 -- Godon Nipp:](#)

City needs better development policy

The city of Bakersfield has been rapidly approving one large housing project after the next in the open space of northeast Bakersfield.

Unfortunately, planners and decision makers seem to have very little concern about these projects' effects on our abysmal air quality and about potential northeast traffic congestion.

The city has routinely ignored the cumulative impact to traffic and air quality from the many proposed projects in the area.

Until recently, there had been no detailed studies of the issues. Finally, as a result of urging from citizens, cursory air and traffic studies are grudgingly being done. Developers commissioned studies, and most of them minimize impacts.

Independent studies show that two-lane Highway 178 will have a breakdown flow of traffic unless something is done, and cumulative air emissions will be roughly 20 times the air district's significance level for ozone precursors.

The Sierra Club supports preservation of agricultural land. If there has to be sprawl, it is better to sprawl in the northeast, rather than on prime agricultural land in the west.

However, development anywhere should be done properly. Developers should not have free rein, and the city should not relinquish its duty to deal with such issues as traffic and air quality.

City Councilman Mike Maggard criticizes thoughtful citizen input as trying to "tell people what to do with their land," while he himself imposes conditions on developers' land. The public should be encouraged to have input into the way its community develops.

There are very real issues that should be explored thoroughly and openly through the democratic process. The public should be given complete and accurate information via an environmental impact report, and public input should be taken seriously.

Maybe Maggard's vision is a good one, but the public should know the details and be given the opportunity for input.

Unfortunately, the city does not have a very good record in dealing with these concerns. Congestion in the northwest and on Rosedale Highway has become Los Angeles-like.

The city's general plan EIR admits that, even when expanded to six lanes, Highway 178 will have level of service F in 2020 -- more traffic than the road's capacity. The Sierra Club thinks the city should do a comprehensive northeast traffic study open to public scrutiny, and that it should commit to a firm time line and firm funding for traffic congestion solutions.

Regarding air pollution, decision makers routinely ignore air quality issues when approving projects that would further degrade our air and make more people sick. The Sierra Club thinks they should focus on improving air quality. Among other things, new housing should include solar photovoltaic panels to generate electricity. Developers should pay an Air Quality Mitigation Fee to help offset increased air pollution from their projects, perhaps to fund improved public transportation.

There is potential for much progress on these important issues. The political will to adopt progressive measures is best generated by public demand. Let your elected officials know they should take air pollution and traffic congestion seriously.

Gordon Nipp is a retired math teacher and a member of the executive committee of the local chapter of the Sierra Club.

[Modesto Bee editorial, published: May 4, 2003](#)

Poll: Encouragement, Surprises

A public opinion survey of Central Valley residents last month confirmed some disturbing trends, gave reason for encouragement and furnished a few surprises.

The poll, by the Public Policy Institute of California, found that valley residents worry most about growth, traffic, air pollution, water sufficiency and quality, lack of jobs and loss of farmland.

Not only are most residents choosing such issues as most pressing, but more people see them as "big problems" than in previous years' surveys. That suggests: a) the problems may be worsening and b) public awareness of key issues is increasing.

The awareness, at least, is encouraging. Acknowledgment of problems is a first step toward solving them. In another promising finding, respondents expressed willingness to make tradeoffs to nudge some problems into submission.

For example:

51 percent of respondents said they would be willing to take public transit more often to reduce air pollution.

79 percent said they'd be willing to drive a more fuel-efficient vehicle to help clean the air -- even if it wasn't their dream car.

Such results give public- and private-sector officials information with which to improve products and policy. The poll suggests there is a market in the valley for better public transit and more efficient vehicles.

Residents generally were split over higher taxes for schools or general services, although a heartening majority would embrace a sales tax boost for local transportation improvements. "The strongest public support for (new) local taxes is evident for transportation projects," the report found.

The numbers are significant:

In the Central Valley, which covers inland California from Redding to Bakersfield,

66 percent of respondents would support a half-cent per dollar sales-tax increase for transportation.

In the Northern San Joaquin Valley, defined as San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties, 65 percent would favor it.

Such a measure would require approval from two-thirds of voters -- so the poll numbers suggest it would be viable.

In a poll that touched on issues ranging from water and housing to growth and leadership, few issues or ideas drew overwhelming support from respondents. Among those that did:

84 percent of residents favor cooperative regional growth planning, compared with independent planning by each city or jurisdiction. That sends a clear message to local government officials who bicker and cling to provincial perspectives.

73 percent said local voters, not elected representatives, should make important decisions about public policy. That reflects a deep distrust of public officials, perhaps because residents doubt they put the public interest first.

The poll also delivered a few surprises. For example:

When asked if racial and ethnic diversity makes the valley better or worse, 35 percent said better, 12 percent said worse -- and 52 percent said it doesn't matter either way.

85 percent of respondents said they are somewhat or very satisfied with their commute to work. Although the number could be skewed by those with short drives to the office, it remains surprisingly high given the thousands of valley residents who drive daily to the Bay Area and Silicon Valley. It's also possible that many commuters were still stuck in traffic when the pollsters called.

Asked to imagine the year 2025, residents are most concerned about growth, overcrowding and the subsequent strain on public resources. Population in the Central Valley is projected to surge from 5.7 million today to 9.3 million in 2025.

Just 13 percent of respondents believe such growth would be good for the valley. The majority -- 57 percent -- called it a bad thing, and 26 percent said it would make no difference. The rest thought something else or didn't know.

These findings, along with others in the survey, underscore the need for good planning, strong leadership, long-term thinking, and a focus on answers to foreseeable problems. The data give public- and private-sector officials valuable clues about how they might build consensus and craft solutions to the great challenges that loom in the valley.

The poll was administered to 2,000 randomly telephoned residents from April 10 to April 21. The margin of error is plus or minus two percentage points. For more information or to read the study, visit www.ppica.org/main/home.asp.

[Fresno Bee Editorial, May 3, 2003:](#)

Air bills advance

Unfortunately, partisan lines have already been drawn on legislation.

A package of bills designed to help clean the Valley's dirty air moved through legislative committees in Sacramento early this week, which is good. The votes on the bills, offered by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, were along strict party lines votes, which is too bad.

On Monday the Senate Environmental Quality Committee approved:

SB 700, which would end a long-standing exemption from a permit process for diesel engines used on farms to pump irrigation water, and for dairies and other animal-feeding operations.

SB 704, which would require biomass plants in the Valley to burn more ag waste to qualify for state subsidies they need to operate. This is a companion bill to SB 705, which would end the practice of burning ag waste in open fields by 2010.

SB 707, which would require three-mile buffer zones -- with some exceptions permitted -- between dairies and urban development.

On Tuesday the Senate Transportation Committee approved SB 708, which would allow local law enforcement agencies to inspect for polluting cars and trucks at sobriety checkpoints, and raise fines for those found operating such vehicles.

It may have been inevitable that this effort would take on partisan tones, but it's nonetheless unfortunate. Ag interests feel themselves the target of too much of the blame for the Valley's bad air, and they clearly are not the sole contributor to pollution -- not even the largest. But they do bear a share of the blame, and Florez has brought these particular bills to the Legislature first. There are other measures sure to arise that will make urban dwellers and businesses howl. And Florez is also proposing a bond measure that would raise much of the money ag is going to have to spend to change its practices.

It would be much more useful to have more unanimity, to make this a pro-clean air campaign instead of letting it turn into a series of conflicts between special interests. But that may be too much to expect in this partisan age.

[Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee](#)

Valley's dirty air just getting worse

By Adriana Dermenjian

Fresno

(Published Monday, May 5, 2003, 3:15 AM)

In your recent article "Fresno is second for smog," I learned that Fresno is the second smoggiest city in the nation. This is awful news.

For years now, we have had horrible smog in Fresno, but never to this extent. It just keeps on getting worse and worse, partly due to the carelessness of Fresno residents.

This problem should definitely be fixed -- and soon.

Flawed air bills

By Karri Hammerstrom

Kingsburg

(Published Friday, May 2, 2003, 5:22 AM)

The Bee's editorial endorsement of state Sen. Dean Florez's air quality bill is disappointing (April 27). "Impressive and ambitious" are not adjectives I would choose to use to describe his proposed legislation. Air quality is important to everyone. Unfortunately, much of this legislation will do little other than shut down a few more businesses and increase our double-digit unemployment.

As a trained land-use professional, I believe SB 707 is just one more terrible example of legislation proposed and taxpayers' money wasted for special interests. Legislatively mandating land planning from the capital is an egregious abuse of power. Most local jurisdictions have worked with their communities to establish and implement strong general plans with development guidelines, as well as definitive spheres-of-influence to guide planning through the year 2020. These planning tools are the result of many years of hard work, collaboration, thoughtful planning, sensible leadership and public input to design a blueprint to direct local growth.

Environmental protection and economic growth go hand-in-hand with local government, business and industry working together to craft environmental policies that are balanced and fair. However, state-mandated land use and the elimination of private property rights is a dangerous departure from local control, which is necessary to have the flexibility to address unknowns and ensure agricultural sustainability and viability in the most appropriate areas.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee](#)

Trim lawns, brown air

Published: May 5, 2003, 05:50:11 AM PDT

There's been a lot of news in the paper about the air quality in the valley, and a lot of suggestions about what can be done about it. But I haven't heard anything about lawn care and how much it contributes to valley air quality. A single gas-powered lawnmower puts out more pollution than 73 new cars run for the same amount of time!

Gas-powered blowers are as bad or worse. Plus, these gas-powered machines also contribute to the pollen count by blowing this stuff up into the air. In order for the air quality to improve, we must all do our part. So, consider an old-fashioned rotary mower, get a little exercise and be proud of how much pollution you're preventing even with that tiny little contribution!

GAIL CLARK

Modesto