

## Pollution estimates lowered

Mike Jensen, Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, March 06, 2003

The Valley's air district released new data this week showing that some farming practices produce less air pollution than previously thought.

"The bottom line is, better information is going to allow us to develop better controls," said Josette Merced Bello, a spokeswoman with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district monitors and regulates air quality from Stockton to Bakersfield.

Cynthia Cory, director of environmental affairs for the California Farm Bureau Federation, had not yet heard about the revised pollution estimates.

However, she said farmers would likely be pleased.

Recently agriculture has come under the scrutiny of air quality regulators, as well as citizen groups and environmentalists concerned about cleaning the Valley's air.

The Valley's air quality currently fails to comply with health standards set by the federal Clean Air Act.

The Valley air district had previously thought that in 2000, farming operations contributed 113.3 tons per day of tiny particle pollution, known as PM10.

New research from the University of California, Davis, however, now shows that agriculture actually produced 79.6 tons per day. That's a 28 percent decrease.

"That's a pretty significant drop," said Merced Bello.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is on the verge of starting up a permitting program for large farm operations that generate more than 25 tons of pollution per year.

Essentially those farmers will have to comply with the same permitting as other Valley businesses.

The permitting system will apply to stationary air pollution sources such as diesel irrigation pumps and manure collection ponds.

Mobile pollution sources, such as tractors, will not be included.

Cory, with the state farm federation, said that farmers would likely be pleased with the new information because it is more specific to agriculture.

She said farmers want any imposed regulations to target ag practices that will actually bring about changes in air pollution emissions.

"Let's get the biggest bang for our buck," she said.

Merced Bello, with the Valley air district, said that the new numbers help validate previous arguments from farmers over air pollution.

"It does support their argument that we needed better science," she said.

Under previous EPA figures, farm activities like root-cutting, discing, ripping, land planing and weeding were each assumed to produce one pound of PM10 pollution for each pass across an acre of land.

Under the revised figures, root cutting produces 0.3 tons, discing and tilling produces 1.2 tons, ripping and subsoiling produces 4.6 tons, land planing and floating produces 12.5 tons, and weeding produces .8 ton.

## ACE weighs Valleywide rail service

S.J. panel set to OK five-year plan

By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer  
Published Thursday, March 6, 2003

Rail officials are pushing forward with studies of how to add a new commuter rail system that could run from Merced to Sacramento, enabling more workers to ditch their polluting cars.

The proposed service is expected to get a boost today when the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission, which helps operate the Altamont Commuter Express, approves a five-year plan.

The plan includes benefits for ACE commuters, including faster trains, a midday return bus, and money for a long-awaited fourth train.

But it also includes a proposal to add \$500,000 to a study on how Stanislaus County could hook up with ACE. Money from the state and from the regional rail commission would expand the study and examine whether a new, ACE-style service running up the Valley would succeed.

Stanislaus County commuters who drive into San Joaquin County to take ACE into the Bay Area have helped make the crowded Lathrop/Manteca ACE station the line's busiest.

Yet in the long run, adding a new ACE track in Stanislaus County may not be the best way to spend valuable federal, state and local funds, said the rail commission's executive director, Stacey Mortensen.

"For the same price plus a little more, we may as well bring a new service from there up into Sacramento and maybe down to Merced. That gets us the ability to serve two markets instead of one," Mortensen said.

"Then our people would also have access to two employment markets. It's perfect timing," she said.

The two systems could meet at a transfer platform around Lathrop, she said.

The expanded study will include how the cost of the service may be divided, where the trains would run and how many riders it may attract.

The idea of the new service has been generally included in long-term regional transportation plans written by the San Joaquin Council of Governments. COG is a transportation-planning agency and administers a half-cent sales tax that voters approved in 1990 for transportation projects. Those funds have been a significant source of money for ACE.

"We've only discussed it in the most general of terms, but that doesn't mean it couldn't come out as a high priority eventually. It just hasn't yet had the full range of discussion it deserves," said Andrew Chesley, COG's deputy executive director.

The idea of a Valleywide commuter service excites rail advocates. Ken Gosting with the group Transportation Involves Everyone said ACE's success proves there is a market for more service.

"It would be a real plus for the Valley. It could coordinate with any (statewide) high-speed rail (system) and really be a great innovation," Gosting said.

He added that the new University of California, Merced, would benefit from a commuter line, as would visitors to Yosemite National Park, especially if the train ran on weekends. It could drastically cut air pollution caused by both commuters and Yosemite tourists, he said.

The five-year plan to be discussed today also covers other improvements to the ACE system. Those include:

- \* Midday return bus. The bus would calm San Joaquin County commuters' fears of being stuck in the Bay Area without an emergency ride home. Officials believe the lack of a midday return option keeps potential riders off ACE. The new bus service could begin by June.
- \* Speed improvements. Each year's mandatory track improvements can help shave up to 10 minutes per trip off the ACE schedule, getting commuters to work and home even faster.
- \* Maintenance facility. The \$25 million maintenance and layover facility would serve both ACE trains and the agency that runs the county's public bus service. ACE must show it is making progress on securing the maintenance facility before it can add a fourth train.

\* Lathrop/Manteca station expansion. Construction is expected to begin within weeks on adding 165 parking spaces to the station.

\* Improvements at all county stations. The rail commission wants to spend \$376,000 to add security cameras, additional lights, reader boards and information kiosks over the next five years.

\* New track to Stockton. For \$7.0 million, the rail commission plans to build a 3.3-mile track between the maintenance yard and the Stockton ACE station, which would enable all trains to reach the Stockton station. Currently, only two of the three trains start and end in Stockton because of track crowding with freight trains.

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#### **Panel to meet**

The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission meets at 8 a.m. today at 2901 Arch Airport Road in Stockton.

## **Lodi loses power plant**

By Jeff Hood, The Record  
Lodi Bureau Chief

Published Thursday, March 6, 2003

LODI -- Regulatory delays have killed a company's plans to build a power plant in east Lodi, city officials said Wednesday.

CalPeak Power had planned to build a 49-megawatt electric generator on Thurman Road under a contract with the state Department of Water Resources, which wanted the power to meet peak electricity demand during the summer.

Other available power was to go to Lodi's municipal utility, with the city taking ownership of the plant after a decade.

But concerns by San Joaquin County officials about the three-mile pipeline that would deliver natural gas from a Pacific Gas and Electric Co. pipeline in Acampo caused a majority of the delays, according to Alan Vallow, Lodi's utility director.

That left CalPeak Power unable to meet its contractual obligation to begin generating power by June 1, and the DWR rejected the company's request for a 30-day extension.

"There wasn't a full meeting of the minds working with the folks doing the approval at county public works," Vallow said, adding that county Supervisor Jack Sieglock was instrumental in cutting through some unforeseen bureaucratic tangles.

"It doesn't hurt Lodi other than we're disappointed, because we were depending upon the reliability from the additional power source in town," City Manager H. Dixon Flynn said.

On Tuesday, the county Board of Supervisors set a public hearing for March 25 to grant a pipeline franchise to CalPeak Power.

The same day, Vallow received an e-mail from company officials telling him their deal with the state was off.

"Building something in California is just tougher than nails," Vallow said. "Any one agency can kill you."

Vallow said the city will consider building the proposed pipeline anyway at a cost of just under \$2 million to have the site ready in case another company has an interest in building a power plant.

A slow economic recovery is only delaying an inevitable need for more so-called peaker plants in the state, Vallow said, adding that when electricity supplies run short, the Lodi site again will be attractive to a power company.

\* To reach Lodi Bureau Chief Jeff Hood, phone **367-7427** or e-mail [jhood@recordnet.com](mailto:jhood@recordnet.com)

## Local leaders leave to lobby state lawmakers

By Melinda Morales

Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta

Originally published Thursday, March 6, 2003

A group of 40 members of the Business, Industry and Government Coalition of the southern San Joaquin Valley is traveling to Sacramento today to lobby legislators for reform on what it believes are the most pressing issues facing the five counties of the San Joaquin Valley.

Presenters will discuss a range of topics, including the Tulare Lake Basin Plan Revision, the Williamson Act, rising workers' compensation-insurance costs, transportation, housing and land use and the fiscal stability of local governments and community colleges.

"Most of the topics are of concern primarily to the Central Valley," said Bob Keenan, director of the Building Industry Association of Tulare and Kings Counties.

"But things like air quality and transportation are federal issues, and we need to build a coalition of state legislators in order to increase the federal funding for some of these problems," he said.

Participants include elected officials, city managers, educators and business leaders and planners.

From Visalia, Mayor Jesus Gamboa, Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Officer Ken Oplinger and College of the Sequoias President Kamiran Badrkhan will make presentations on issues affecting the area.

## More soil testing set

By Doug Keeler, Midway Driller City Editor

Taft Midway Driller

Posted Wednesday, March 6, 2003

More soil testing is planned on the vacant lot at the center of lead contamination in Ford City, and, depending what is found during a 10-week cleanup, even more testing may be done.

Michael Pixton, project manager for the Department of Toxic Substance Control, said his agency will borrow equipment from the federal Environmental Protection Agency to examine the site cleaned up seven years ago.

Pixton said the DTSC will use an x-ray fluorescence detector to look for metal contamination in the ground.

That testing is being done at the request of area residents who are concerned that more polluted soil is still on the lot.

The highest levels of lead contamination have been found along the alley that runs through the two-acre lot. Pixton said soil samples found up to 14,000 parts per million of lead in the soil in that area, more than 30 times the level that is considered hazardous waste.

Pixton and Lisa Fasano, a spokeswoman for the EPA, said more testing might be done depending what is found during the cleanup that starts Monday.

"We are continuing to evaluate the situation," Fasano said Tuesday. "The first action we are taking is to go forward with the 10 houses. If an additional phase of this project is necessary, then we will evaluate at that time and go forward."

Pixton said soil samples will be taken during the project.

"Any time you have a cleanup, you take confirmation samples," he said. "If we find more (lead) than what we originally thought, then we may have to do more testing."

The residents in the 10 affected homes, on the 100 block of Jackson Street and Birch Street between Jackson and Monroe, will be moved out of their homes while contaminated soil is removed from the yards one home at a time.

It will take six to 10 days to remove the tainted soil from each yard and replace it with clean dirt.

The entire project is expected to take 70 days.

## Air Pollution Violations

Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday March 05, 2003, 10:55:05 PM

- Kirschenman Enterprises in Edison was cited Sept. 4 for agricultural burn on a no burn day in a walnut orchard in Kern County.
- Jim Hronis & Sons in Delano was cited Sept. 4 in Arvin for burning cardboard slips that are used for packaging table grapes. Cardboard material is prohibited from being burned.
- Bidart Brothers in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 9 in Shafter for failing to keep records of concentration prior to venting.
- Lemon Cove Granite Pit in Lemon Cove was cited for the second time Sept. 9 for unpermitted equipment. First application denied for uncorrected deficiencies in the equipment.
- Aera Energy LLC in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 9 in Belridge for failure to operate the vapor control system listed in permit equipment description.
- Occidental of Elk Hills, Inc. in Tupman was cited Sept. 10 at the gas plant in Tupman for operation of two emergency heaters due to heat exchanger being taken off-line for repair when turbines were still operating.
- Air Liquide America Corporation in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 10 for lab analysis results from a sample pulled on June 12, 2002, from Air Liquide's red paint #7108 stock reading 3.23 to 3.26. The VOC content of paints/coatings at this facility are limited to 2.8.
- MMI Services in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 10 for emissions exceeding registration conditions. NOx emissions were greater than 500ppm.
- Hamilton Ranches in Visalia was cited Sept. 11 for exhaust gases in excess of permit to operate limit.
- Berry Petroleum Company in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 12 in Taft for operating a Cogen 38 in noncompliance with the permitted limit for one hour on a three-hour average.
- Sierra View Hospital in Porterville was cited Sept. 12 for operating equipment without a permit.
- Kern Community College District in Bakersfield, Industrial Arts Building was cited Sept. 13 for failure to perform initial startup source test of the chillers and failure to comply with ongoing quarterly emission monitoring requirements.
- Kern Oil and Refining Company in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 13 for overfill of a gasoline storage tank causing tank to fail vapor tight requirements.
- Chevron USA in Bakersfield was cited in Shafter for operating equipment without an authority to construct.
- Occidental of Elk Hills Inc. in Tupman was cited Sept. 16 for installing vapor control equipment on two glycol reboilers without obtaining an authority to construct permit.
- Chevron USA in Bakersfield was cited Sept. 16 for maintaining vapor control efficiency at less than 99 percent.

## Farm Loyalist's Proposal to Curb Smog Is Heresy to Big Agriculture

By Mark Arax, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer, March 1, 2003

FRESNO -- No politician in California has ever managed to touch it. For nearly 60 years, thanks to rural tradition and state law, agriculture has been exempt from clean-air rules.

Even as the San Joaquin Valley has emerged as the smoggiest region in the nation, farmers continue to enjoy a special status, burning their uprooted trees and vines in big bonfires and plowing their fields into great clouds of dust.

But the days of wide-open farm pollution in the valley may be nearing an end. Last week, state Sen. Dean Florez (D-Shafter), one of agriculture's most loyal supporters here, walked into the state Capitol and did the heretical. He introduced a package of bills that, if passed, will stop agricultural burning in California and make cotton, fruit, vegetable and dairy farmers answer to the state and federal Clean Air acts for the first time.

Environmental groups call the legislation historic. Some farmers consider it a betrayal, while others plan a concerted fight to water down several of the 10 bills. Pollsters say Florez's timing could not be better, with surveys showing air quality as a top concern of valley voters.

"It's a gutsy move because it shows that Dean is willing to challenge agriculture on a sensitive issue," said Carol Whiteside of the Great Valley Center, a nonpartisan Modesto-based think tank. "But no issue moves politically until it's ripe, and the issue of air quality is ripe in the valley. Over the past few years, growth and air quality have become the No. 1 and No. 2 concerns of voters here. Like any politician worth his salt, Dean has a good antenna."

Veteran political observers say Florez, a maverick Democrat, is a savvy politician with an eye toward higher office. As an assemblyman last year, Florez proved he was willing to cause a stir. He pushed so hard in committee hearings that exposed a no-bid \$95-million computer contract with Oracle Corp. that he embarrassed Gov. Gray Davis' administration. That earned him a reputation for calculated political risk and, many believe, got him fired from a committee chairmanship.

Now the Harvard-educated freshman senator is proposing to take on the San Joaquin Valley's No. 1 employer by imposing new regulations on agriculture. If air quality has emerged as an issue dear to a voter's heart here, this region also happens to be the Bible Belt of California, where conservative viewpoints, including pro-business arguments, resound.

One likely outcome of the legislation, analysts say, is a compromise that creates clean-air rules that farmers can stomach while acknowledging the health concerns of suburbanites, whose numbers keep growing. Already in talks with farmers, Florez has indicated there is some wiggle room.

V. John White, a Sierra Club lobbyist who has opposed Florez on many issues, said the senator could make a real difference if he holds firm under the pressure sure to come from big agriculture.

"What he is proposing here has never been done. The fact that he's taking on agricultural burning directly for the first time is big enough. But his approach is even more comprehensive. If all his bills were to pass, it would lead to clean air in the Central Valley."

But others see a risk in Florez digging in his heels and saddling farmers with regulations too onerous. "His district still depends on agriculture for its economic livelihood," said Tony Quinn, a Sacramento-based political analyst. "There's a political risk any time you take on the biggest employer."

As Florez worked to finish the legislation last month with coauthor Byron Sher, a state senator from Stanford and longtime environmental standard-bearer, he speculated on the political danger. Sure, lawmakers in Los Angeles and San Francisco would have no trouble backing him. But not one of his fellow legislators from the San Joaquin Valley would sign on as a co-sponsor.

Florez could hardly blame them. For the longest time, he said, he also wasn't willing to tackle the immense problem of smog and particulate pollution. But in recent months -- after reading newspaper stories about a region that has missed more than two dozen clean-air deadlines and listening to tales of children dying from respiratory failure -- Florez decided to take a stand.

So here was a 39-year-old grandson of farm workers who had never crossed farmers on a big vote holding court with the Sierra Club.

Here was the same politician who once browbeat an environmentalist for challenging the opening of a large dairy in Kings County now telling dairy farmers that their lagoons full of manure are the equivalent of industrial smokestacks. As such, he wants them to be regulated.

If Florez prevails, dairies and housing tracts will no longer be able to locate within a three-mile radius of each other.

"Something had to be done, and it couldn't be piecemeal or Mickey Mouse," said Florez, a former track and football star at Shafter High School who became student body president at UCLA. He worked as a fellow for former Democratic state Sen. Art Torres of Los Angeles and as an investment banker before winning an Assembly seat in 1998.

Some farmers see SB 700 and its companion legislation as something else: a good, old-fashioned stab in the back. One bill seeking to reduce farm dust would alter the way a tractor tills the land by utilizing different techniques or equipment. Few issues are more dear to a farmer's heart than his plow. What these changes might entail isn't made clear in the bill.

"A lot of what Dean is suggesting just isn't practical," said Pete Belluomini, a Kern County potato and citrus farmer. "We create dust for small periods of time but we prevent dust for longer periods" by planting crops such as alfalfa.

Belluomini said he met with Florez last week and came away encouraged. He believes there is plenty of room for negotiation. "It's very early in the process, and these bills are going to be restructured again and again. Some will come to pass, others will drop by the wayside."

Farm groups question why none of the bills focus on the building industry and its role in valley sprawl. Over the last decade, new freeways and suburbs to accommodate a growing population have increased the daily miles traveled from 63 million to 83 million. On-road vehicles account for 40% of the smog here.

To offset the impacts of growth and help farmers, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has talked about charging a \$5,000 fee for every new house built in the valley's eight counties. That money would go into a fund to help farmers convert to cleaner-burning engines and fund alternatives to open-field burning. Florez has steered clear of any such impact fees.

"You would think agriculture is the only industry in the valley. You would think that there isn't a Highway 99 and an Interstate 5 with cars and trucks and suburbs all along the way," said Cynthia Cory, director of environmental affairs for the California Farm Bureau.

"Everyone has to share in the clean-air burden: people, developers and farmers. But these bills focus almost exclusively on agriculture. You lose a farm by making it too costly and what pops up in its place? Another strip mall with more cars belching fumes."

Over the last two decades, as cities up and down the state's farm belt have undergone extensive growth, dirty air has veiled the mountains in a year-round curtain of brown. The San Joaquin Valley hasn't seemed in any hurry to take corrective action.

Yet when this basin recently found itself ranked ahead of Los Angeles as the smoggiest region in the country over the last two years, with more days in violation of the 8-hour federal ozone standard, the complacency disappeared. Suddenly, no matter where you turned -- the preschool, the coffee shop, the Friday night football game -- people were talking about air pollution and their children's breathing problems.

Whether Republican or Democrat, politicians have done their best to steer clear of air pollution as a campaign or policy issue. In four years of state office, Florez never wrote a single news release on air quality. He said the reason was simple: It was an issue sure to anger the valley's Big Three: agriculture, oil and the building industries.

Florez said he began to open his eyes after reading a long story in The Times in December on the failure of local, state and federal regulators to clean the air. A week later, the Fresno Bee published a 24-page special section titled "Last Gasp." The letters-to-the-editor page began filling up with angry missives from longtime residents who had grown tired of business as usual.

"There's a growing recognition among people in the valley that they've been left behind in the state's fight against air pollution," said White. "People are angry because it's affecting not only their health, but economic development."

When children's asthma grows worse breathing dirty air, White explained, it can't help bring businesses to the region.

Farm groups had been hoping to beat back a recent set of legal challenges by EarthJustice, a San Francisco-based environmental group that wants the federal government to enforce the Clean Air Act here.

One of the lawsuits was settled last year after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed to seek an end to California's farm exemption. If the state fails to follow through by regulating agriculture, it risks losing billions of dollars in federal highway funds.

But the 10 bills put forward by Florez and Sher go far beyond simply removing the exemption.

In addition to banning agricultural burning and controlling dairy emissions by Jan. 1, 2005, the legislation would add a respiratory specialist and environmentalist to the regional air-quality board. Currently, the board regulating air pollution here is made up of county supervisors and city council members whom Florez believes are reluctant to challenge farmers, developers and oil companies.

Three of the bills call for tax-exempt bonds and other funding to help underwrite the costs of converting to cleaner farm operations. One bill seeks to end the practice of San Joaquin Valley biomass plants processing only construction debris from Southern California. Florez wants any local plant utilizing state funds to set aside at least 30% of its capacity for farm waste.

Farmers and residents will get a closer look at the proposals in hearings chaired by Florez over the next six months. But by offering the package after just one hearing in Sacramento, he has plunged into the fight.

[Fresno Bee editorial, March 6, 2003](#)

## First wave

Florez's legislative assault on Valley air pollution is a good start.

Late last month state Sen. Dean Florez launched what might be called the equivalent of a legislative frontal assault. He introduced a package of 10 bills that would make changes - many of them dramatic - in our approach to air pollution in the Valley.

It's an ambitious effort, and we hope it isn't derailed by special interests or timidity in Sacramento.

Some of the bills are natural companions to others. All deserve careful scrutiny and, we believe, the support of representatives from all over the state. Let's call the role:

SB 700 repeals a decades-old rule in state law that has prohibited farms from being required to seek air pollution permits for diesel-powered irrigation pumps and for confined-animal feeding operations such as dairies. It requires farmers to obtain permits for those sources by Jan. 1, 2005, and mandates that local air districts adopt rules to reduce or eliminate air pollution caused by everyday farming activities such as harvesting, tilling or disking by the same date.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is insisting on a repeal of the exemption for agriculture. The industry is looking for a softer landing, but repeal is the best way to go.

SB 701 would create a low-interest loan program to help farmers pay for new equipment or other measures to limit air pollution. SB 702 would expand an existing state grant program that helps farmers pay to replace or retrofit dirty, diesel-powered irrigation pumps. The bill would also allow grant money to be used for upgrading other equipment such as tractors.

These bills will soften the blow to agriculture by smoothing out costs. That makes it easier for farmers to do the right thing. Crucial public policy interests are served when pollution is reduced; that's worth paying for with taxpayers' money

SB 703: Revokes "standby" charges that agricultural customers must pay utilities to keep irrigation pumps connected to the electricity grid. That would reduce costs, and should encourage farmers to use electricity rather than cheaper, but dirtier, diesel fuel.

This one's a slam dunk. Farmers could save money, power would be conserved and air pollution reduced. It makes so much sense only the utility companies could oppose it.

SB 704 would require biomass facilities to regularly burn agricultural waste -- at least 30% of their total fuel -- to produce electricity. SB 705 would ban open-field burning by June 1, 2005, and require local air districts to help farmers find alternatives for disposing of farm waste.

These bills go together, along with a third measure that's in Gov. Gray Davis' hands. The biomass plants require subsidies in order to be competitive with plants that burn fossil fuels. Davis removed existing subsidies in his budget cutting this year; they must be restored. Once again, the social cost of pollution makes this a wise public policy choice.

SB 706 would prohibit wood-burning fireplaces in all new homes starting Jan. 1, 2004, except those that meet certain federal EPA standards.

Burning wood in fireplaces is a luxury, not a right. And it's become a luxury our lungs -- and our children's lungs -- cannot afford.

SB 707: Sets up buffer zones between dairies and cities by blocking new dairy construction within 3 miles of an urbanized area or school, and conversely, would prevent schools or homes from being built within 3 miles of an existing dairy.

This is another good idea, but it must be made bulletproof against the assaults sure to come from local governments that want to bend the rules and permit development in inappropriate areas.

SB 708 requires older cars and trucks to comply with state air emission standards through the Smog Check II program, but would continue an exemption for vehicles more than 45 years old -- a concession to antique or classic cars that are seldom driven.

Spreading the net on the smog check program is a good idea, but better enforcement is still the most important need.

SB 709 would add three public members with expertise in health, economics and the environment to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Board. Members would be appointed by the governor, the Senate Rules Committee and the Assembly speaker.

The district's current board consist solely of elected local government officials. Their actions, or inactions, in some cases, are too often predicated on local political needs and not the social and environmental needs of the entire region. Outsiders would help mitigate that natural tendency.

It's an impressive package, and deserves wide support -- especially from Florez's colleagues in both parties from the Valley. Passage of these bills essentially intact will mark a very useful beginning in the long effort we face to clean up the air we breathe.

[Letters to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian](#)  
March 6, 2003

## Air quality improved?

Who can improve the valley's air quality? I contend the following cannot:

- \* Someone who uses their home fire- place when the air has enough particulate matter to be unhealthy.

- \* Kern County Planning Commissioner Ross McClintock, who said at the recent Vanderham Dairy hearing that he does not like to see one small industry picked on for what is caused, to a great extent, by factors beyond our control.

- \* The dairyman who found anaerobic digestion (AD) too expensive. AD places manure in a chamber where bacteria process it into methane and clean solids; little odor or pollutants leave the chamber.

- \* ChevronTexaco, which was fined \$7 million two years ago for polluting at its El Segundo terminal. Does "Clean Air Now," a valley industry group that was started with \$2 million from ChevronTexaco, respect us more than ChevronTexaco does?

- \* President Bush, who relaxed regulations for factories and power plants when they update their facilities.

- \* Supervisor Ray Watson, who said that a moratorium on air pollution was a moratorium on development.

- \* The U.S. Department of Energy research on energy efficiency and renewable energy. Its budget is only 0.1 percent greater than last year's budget.

- \* The appliance dealer who advertised a device to keep our homes at 72 degrees year-round.

Responsible Americans improve valley air quality as they bicycle off to buy more money-saving, electricity-saving, compact fluorescent bulbs. Visit them at [www.calcleanair.org](http://www.calcleanair.org).  
ARTHUR D. UNGER, Bakersfield

## Send Florez tumbleweeds

If Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, wants to propose a ban on ag burning, he must already have an idea of what to do with all those tumbleweeds. If not, I'm sure there are plenty of farmers who would be more than happy to deliver them to his front door.

BRENDA JONES  
Arvin

## Store brings traffic

I admire the two commissioners who voted against the Super Wal-Mart off of Panama Lane. The City Council should spend a couple of hours (between 4 and 6 p.m.) observing the traffic on Panama and that way should see how much more traffic would be added in that area.

The two commissioners did just that and they could see ahead about the traffic problem.

It was like Sue Benham said -- once toothpaste is out of the tube you can't put it back. Look at the mess we have on the White Lane off ramp.

There has been quite a few bad accidents on the off- and on-ramps on Panama, and again, they're adding more traffic to that.

One entrance and exit would add more pollution while the cars and trucks are waiting for the light to get onto Panama. In case of evacuation, there again one exit. The smallest businesses have two, if not more, outlets.

I'm not against Wal-Mart because I like them. The one off of Panama should be thought of very hard by our City Council before they approve it.

The City Council should think about health, safety and congestion.  
JUANITA PARNELL, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, March 6, 2003](#)

## Silent deaths

By Linda Wales  
Fresno

It was a quiet chilly night up on that mountain. The ground around its feet had been trampled, the air it breathed had been polluted, and it finally could take no more. When it lost its footing, it came down on a close friend and they both slowly fell to the ground. Their bark and branches splintered upon impact, their massive grandeur now lay motionless. When the earth received their bodies, no one even knew the time of their death. No one even cared.

We walk, we talk, we pollute, we use and abuse. What a tragic message these majestic sequoias left us with. May they rest in peace.

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, March 04, 2003 :](#)

## In defense of SUV owners

Editor: A recent letter writer's one-sided slant on SUV owners is a shallow attempt to stereotype. Let's take another view (mine) on this situation. The reason we have terrorism is that our country has allowed these terrorist to terrorize Israel for many years. Our country's citizens have a smugness about them, that if it does not happen here, it doesn't happen. Our dependency on foreign oil instead of developing new sources of energy is shameful. The oil company honchos do all in their power to defeat the other industries.

SUV owners are no worse than the people who allow Japan to take over our economy with their imports. Does Mr. Appel purchase items from any other place on earth than America? Of course he does. Does Mr. Appel eat dairy products? Then he is causing the pollution in the country with

the depletion of the ozone. Does Mr. Appel eat meat products? If he does, then he is contributing to the depletion of our environment. Ridiculous? We can take any issue of today and draw imaginary lines to places. But can we take these issues and relate them to other issues in the world? Mr. Appel should not worry about SUVs, but worry about how he can make the world better, one person at a time.

In closing, I drive an SUV. I can volunteer to take Boy Scouts on campouts, I can volunteer to fill it up with food for the homeless. I can only hope that the car makers will wake up and use alternate energy sources such as soy beans and other plants, solar and electric energy for our vehicles. Until then I will drive whatever type of vehicle I wish, because as a vegetarian I don't pollute the earth with animals and their gases, I don't ruin our environment with their feces. I recycle my trash. I do more good than harm. Can Mr. Appel say the same thing?

Lori Atkins  
Gustine