

[Modest Bee Editorial, March 19, 2003:](#)

Valley air needs state to push cleaner cars

The staff of the California Air Resources Board has not recommended abandonment of the state's historic Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate -- but almost. Bowing to car companies, the board's staff wants to discard the requirement that 2 percent of all new cars sold in California after 2005 produce no tailpipe emissions.

Instead, their new plan calls for manufacturers to produce 250 zero-polluting fuel cell vehicles between 2005 and 2008.

That's not good enough, and it doesn't go far enough to help curb the deadly air pollution in the Central Valley.

Essentially, the state would require car companies to commit a quarter-billion dollars to test a promising, clean technology, one companies say they are committed to anyway. The new proposal requires them to continue to produce hybrids, natural gas and ultra-low emission vehicles as well. Given market, technology and political realities, the staff has made a reasonable regulatory adjustment -- to start.

But it could be improved, and it needs to go further.

A dozen years ago, car companies made the same claims about electric vehicles they now make about fuel cells: that they are the clean technology of the future. If carmakers believe that, the state should not let them off the hook after 2008, as this new proposal does. A mandate for some level of zero-polluting vehicles should remain in place -- and perhaps escalate as years pass and technology improves.

Also, since no one can predict what the future will produce, the state should not abandon its policy of favoring no specific technology. Regulators should not dismiss fuel cells or electric or even technologies as fanciful as solar or wind power.

The valley's air is too filthy -- and too unhealthy -- to dismiss possibilities for cleaner vehicle technology.

In Stanislaus County, 150 to 200 of the county's 650 vehicles ultimately could be converted to an electric or hybrid fleet, according to county Chief Executive Officer Reagan Wilson. In turn, demand spurred by the county could entice a private investor to build an electric-car assembly plant here, Wilson said.

That would be a dual win for the valley, yielding both new jobs and cleaner cars.

But it only could work, Wilson added, with state clean air credits that help offset the price of producing low-emission vehicles, making them viable in a competitive market. The state air board is scheduled later this month to consider eliminating the credits for electric vehicles.

We believe cutting or constraining the credits would be a mistake. It is important to keep options open and incentives intact, regardless of pressure from carmakers looking to generate short-term profits.

California's ZEV mandate has produced results. The ZEV requirement is directly responsible for hybrids being sold commercially now and for the fuel-cell prototypes that the manufacturers say will be the basis for clean technology of the future.

State regulators are right to adjust to reality, but they should not lose sight of the goal or abandon policies that show progress -- and promise.

Community Voices / Ray Watson: State-mandated buffer wrong

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In his recent article, state Sen. Dean Florez defended his SB 707, essentially saying the Kern County Board of Supervisors has not done its job. He cited the fact that the board turned down a three-mile buffer zone for dairies on Jan. 10.

I voted against the arbitrary three-mile buffer because it has no basis in scientific fact. It was a negotiated distance as part of the Dairy Technical Advisory Committee negotiations. It was never enacted because the "by-right" location of dairies outside the three-mile zone, as part of the deal, was unacceptable. An appropriate zone may be greater or less from one sector to another, depending on many factors.

Florez failed to mention that when the three-mile buffer was voted down on Jan. 10, I invited cities and school districts to propose individual buffer zones that met their needs, and did not arbitrarily cut through sections of land.

The cities of Shafter and Wasco immediately went to work. Within 30 days, they came up with their own buffers, passed unanimously by both city councils and endorsed by the Milk Producers Council. This is a wonderful example of government working at the level closest to the people.

The Kern County Planning Department is working on a procedure whereby communities and school districts may submit proposals for their own customized buffers.

The current version of SB 707 not only includes the arbitrary three-mile zone, but also proposes a joint commission on local dairy placement. Mandatory members would include the local school district, irrigation/water district, park and recreation district, city council and the board of supervisors.

Presently, with or without a buffer zone, no dairy can be placed in Kern County without compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and preparation of an environmental impact report, both of which address impacts on air and water quality, along with a wide range of other issues. All of the organizations mentioned by Sen. Florez have input into dairy placement through public hearings of the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

Florez's proposal adds another level of bureaucracy to what is already an expensive process, taking several years to complete, before a dairy is approved. His own home town has demonstrated how responsive local government can be in solving problems. Yet, without consulting anyone in local government, he chose a course to the Legislature where the majority of representatives from metropolitan areas may have little knowledge or interest in rural issues. This kind of representation has created the many onerous burdens that are driving businesses out of our state.

Local government has demonstrated that the job can get done without another level of bureaucracy. My grandchildren live in Kern County. I can assure you I am working diligently for positive solutions to local planning and air quality issues for them and for future generations.

** Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson represents the 4th District.* Community Voices is an expanded commentary that may contain up to 500 words. The Californian reserves the right to reprint contributed commentaries in all formats, including on its Web page.