

The Bee's 'Last Gasp' earns 3 more awards

EPA, others recognize report on Valley air quality.

The Fresno Bee, April 27, 2003

"Last Gasp," The Bee's 24-page special report on deteriorating air quality in the San Joaquin Valley, earned the newspaper three more awards last week.

The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment in Oakland awarded The Bee its 2003 Meade Clean Air Prize. It recognizes an outstanding contribution by a journalist or publication in furthering the public's understanding of air pollution.

"It was a superb exposé. Just look at the impact," said prize founder and selection committee chairwoman Gladys Meade. " 'Last Gasp' sparked an outpouring of reader responses and a wave of public concern that spurred local, regional and state officials to respond with new legislation, special hearings, and increased oversight."

The Environmental Protection Agency presented a plaque to The Bee at the agency's fifth annual Environmental Awards ceremony.

The EPA Region 9 Environmental Awards program acknowledges commitment and significant contributions to the environment in California, Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, Guam and tribal lands. Forty-four groups and individuals were selected from more than 200 nominees.

"We commend The Fresno Bee for elevating public awareness about the serious air pollution challenges that continue to face residents of the San Joaquin Valley," EPA Regional Administrator Wayne Nastri said. "The Bee continues to keep all of us on our toes as we move forward in cleaning up air in the Valley." The EPA said "Last Gasp" represents "the most complete story yet on what causes the Central Valley's air problems, and what it will take to see improvement."

Friday, the Coalition for Clean Air gave The Bee a Corporate Clean Air Leadership Award for its coverage of air quality issues during 2002, including "Last Gasp."

Honoring the Earth

Green-minded friends gather on Fresno Courthouse Park grass.

By Erin Kennedy, The Fresno Bee, April 28, 2003

While a mandolin player on a solar-powered stage sang about low-flush toilets, Fresno's Earth Day celebrants signed clean-air petitions, debated composting methods, watched a video on tree sitting and lounged with green-minded friends on the Courthouse Park grass. Coffee sold at the Sunday afternoon festival was the free-trade variety served in paper, not Styrofoam.

Food booths featured organically grown salads and solar-cooked chicken and rice. And recycling bins sat next to trash cans.

Valley residents paid homage to all things living and green and traded ideas for cleaning up the environment and keeping the people in it peaceful and healthy.

"Do you know what to do on 'Spare the Air Days?' " Josette Merced Bello asked everyone who passed by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District booth.

Amanda Renfrow, a home care nurse, grabbed a postcard used to report smoking vehicles to authorities. "Boy I need this!" she told Merced Bello.

The women talked about how unnecessary it is to warm up today's cars and how bad it is for the air.

Merced Bello says she spent the first six of her nine years at the air pollution control district trying to convince people there is a pollution problem. "Now they get it," she said with a smile.

Sierra Club lobbyist Kevin Hall had no problem getting signatures on a petition he hopes to take today to Sacramento for a legislative hearing on eliminating air emissions exemptions for agriculture.

Fresno environmental consultant Bruce Morris hopes people will turn their attentions toward garbage now that they understand and are working toward cleaning up Valley air. At the Earth Day celebration, Morris set out a sign-up sheet looking for charter members for his new organization: Zero Waste Communities.

The group met for the first time last week and talked with Richard Anthony, board member of the national Grassroots Recycling Network and former recycling coordinator for Fresno County.

The county faces \$10,000-a-day fines if it doesn't follow state orders to reduce its landfill waste by 50%. That should be impetus enough to reach for zero waste, Morris says.

"It's a goal, an admirable goal that will likely never be reached," Morris acknowledges. It starts with reusing, repairing and recycling whenever possible.

Morris lives the ideal by carrying canvas shopping bags as he bikes around town. He keeps a ceramic mug and a soup bowl in his back pack so he can bypass disposable coffee cups and the Styrofoam bowls that his health club serves soup in.

Morris says the new environmental group will ask members not only to follow suit, but to lobby schools and governments to become less wasteful. Group members also will use their buying habits to encourage businesses to reduce garbage and package things in recyclable containers.

"If there's no market for No. 4, 5, 6 (types of) plastic in recycling, then let's put everything in No. 1, 2, and 3," Morris says. "Starbucks is using No. 1 plastic cups and they can be put in city recycling bins."

Zero Waste Communities' first project is to get the Fresno City Council to follow the leads of San Diego and San Francisco.

Both cities buy office products with less packaging and made out of recyclable material, institute more citywide recycling, ban organic materials from garbage pickups and reduce what they send to the county landfill.

Judge orders cleaner air; regulators may appeal

The Associated Press

Published in the Bakersfield Californian, April 27, 2003

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - A judge has ruled that the Bay Area's air quality must be improved, but local regulators said such a plan would be difficult to develop, so they may appeal the decision. In a ruling cheered by environmentalists, San Francisco Superior Court Judge A. James Robertson ruled late Thursday that air-quality regulators in the Bay Area have been too lax. A 2001 plan for reducing smog should have found ways to decrease pollution-forming precursors by an additional 26 tons a day, Robertson ruled. But officials with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District said it would be hard to hit that mark, so they may appeal.

"We really don't think the judge fully understood the law he was ruling on, frankly," said Lucia Libretti, an air district spokeswoman. "Coming up with a plan for 26 tons is a rather difficult thing to do."

Environmentalists hailed the judge's ruling as a victory.

"They're going to have to come up with some real strategies, real fast," said Suma Peesapati, a lawyer for Communities for a Better Environment, which filed a lawsuit that sparked the new ruling.

Robertson's ruling comes in the wake of a mixed record for Bay Area air quality.

Between 1980 and 2000, the amount of volatile organic compounds - the smog precursors - put into Bay Area air each day dropped by more than half. But officials with the state Air Resources Board have said that since the mid-1990s, Bay Area smog levels appear to have leveled off or begun to inch back up.

Residents in California's Central Valley have long complained that pollution from the Bay Area blows inland, reducing air quality in Valley cities.

AIR POLLUTION VIOLATIONS

The Bakersfield Californian, April 27, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued the following citations against businesses suspected of violating pollution rules. For more information, call the district at 326-6900.

Cooper Cameron in Bakersfield was cited March 13 for operating contrary to permit condition. Facility was using a non-HVLP spray gun. Solvent in parts washer exceeds volatile organic compound limit.

Certis USA LLC in Wasco was cited March 12 for operating a boiler without a compliance source test within 60 days of anniversary date of annual test.

Equilon in Bakersfield was cited March 11 for carbon monoxide analyzer not in operation; acid gas was sent to flare without a breakdown condition; sulfur content of fuel gas burned in excess; gauge hatch was not maintained gas tight.

Certis USA LLC in Wasco was cited March 10 for boiler emissions exceeding the 47 ppm carbon monoxide permit limit.

AES Delano Inc. in Delano was cited March 10 for exceeding the opacity limit.

MGM Auto Body Repair in Bakersfield was cited March 6 for operating a paint facility without a permit or an authority to construct.

Bakersfield Senior Center in Bakersfield was cited March 5 for failure to submit notification for demolition project, failure to thoroughly inspect for the presence of asbestos and failure to keep material wet until contained for disposal.

Occidental of Elk Hills in Tupman was cited March 5 for having a volatile organic compound leak on a vapor boot.

City of Bakersfield Recreation & Parks was cited March 5 for burning tumbleweeds at the intersection of Meacham and Abbott without a district permit.

Larry R. Saenz of Tulare was cited March 5 for failure to use and store solvent-laden cloth or paper in a closed container, failure to keep records of specific coatings used on vehicles or

equipment, mix ratios by volume and volatile content of each coating as applied at K&A Paint & Body.

Tulare County Compost & Biomass Inc. in Tulare was cited March 5 for exceeding process weight rate of material handled.

Weeks Nursery in Wasco was cited March 4 for smoldering agriculture burn containing illegal material at the southwest corner of Prospect and Griffith.

Da-Yah Farms in Earlimart was cited March 4 in Pixley for setting an open outdoor fire for the purpose of disposal of residential rubbish. No burning shall be conducted without prior authorization.

W.C. Novel in Bakersfield was cited March 3 at the Bakersfield Senior Center for failing to submit notification for a demolition project, failure to thoroughly inspect for the presence of asbestos and failure to keep material wet until contained for disposal.

AIR POLLUTION VIOLATIONS

The Bakersfield Californian, April 26, 2003

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Corona's Automotive in Bakersfield was cited March 18 for having a multi-stage coating system exceeding 4.5 lb/gal. volatile organic compound limitation.

EOTT Energy Operating, LTD in Tupman was cited March 17 for exceeding emissions allowed by district rule with loading line leak on lanes; compressor leak rate exceeded that allowed.

McKee Electric Co. in Bakersfield was cited March 17 for operating an above ground storage tank without a permit.

Hugh McCay in Bakersfield was cited March 14 for demolishing buildings (removed buildings from foundation) without waiting 10 working days.

David Heaton in Exeter was cited March 14 in Ducor for burning orchard removal prior to inspection.

American Construction and Concrete in Tipton was cited March 14 in Bakersfield for demolishing buildings (removed buildings from foundation) without waiting 10 working days.

ChevronTexaco in Fellows was cited March 13 for a water storage tank venting volatile organic compound vapors to atmosphere rather than to the vapor recovery system; exceeding the 24-hour time limit on a breakdown episode.

Bakersfield City Landfill in Bakersfield was cited March 13 for a leak of 1,500ppmv being detected at sleeve/pipe connection between flare and pressure release vent in excess of 1000ppmv permit limit.

AES Delano Inc. in Delano was cited March 13 for a boiler stack emitting gases in excess of 20 percent opacity for more than three minutes in a one-hour period.

Rules on fuel may threaten plants

By MARK JAFFE, Bloomberg News, April 25, 2003

DENVER -- The Valero Energy Corp. refinery outside Denver, a jungle gym of white and silver pipes on the edge of the Colorado prairie, has been converting oil to fuel since 1937.

It's still profitable. The 27,000 barrels of oil it processes each day provide 15 percent of Colorado's gasoline and diesel fuel.

That may not be good enough. Valero, the third-largest U.S. refiner, must decide whether to spend millions of dollars to retool the plant to make cleaner fuel beginning in 2004, or shut it down.

ConocoPhillips, Exxon Mobil Corp., BP Plc and other refiners across the U.S. face the same choice. The industry estimates it must spend \$16 billion to retrofit plants to meet the costliest federal clean-fuel rules since lead was banned from gasoline in 1986. Only 13 of 152 U.S. refineries now comply.

"It's going to cause supply to be in shortfall. I kid you not," said William Greehey, Valero's chief executive, in an interview. The Denver plant will be closed unless Valero can organize a joint venture there: "It does not justify those investments on a stand-alone basis."

One Illinois plant has already been shut and five other refineries including the Denver plant are considered at risk of being closed because they are too old or too small to be profitable given the cost of retooling. The resulting consolidation of the 16.6 billion-barrel-a-day U.S. industry will reduce already-stretched capacity, company executives and analysts said. It may also cause gas prices to jump.

Less capacity, higher prices

U.S. refinery capacity will shrink between 5 percent and 10 percent under the new rules, according to a study by Friedman Billings Ramsey & Co., a brokerage and investment bank in Arlington, Va.

"Marginal players are going to drop out," said Jacques Rousseau, an analyst at Friedman Billings Ramsey. Other companies will need to form alliances to cut costs, he said.

New production methods needed to produce the cleaner fuels will also cut U.S. refinery capacity. The new regulations, issued last year by the Environmental Protection Agency under provisions of the 1970 Clean Air Act, require refiners to begin reducing levels of sulfur in gasoline in 2004. By 2006, refiners must remove virtually all sulfur, under the EPA rules.

The hydrogen technology used to remove sulfur reduces the quantity of gasoline produced, and the octane as well, said Tom Nimbley, president of refining at ConocoPhillips, the biggest U.S. refiner.

The tighter capacity will make the gasoline market vulnerable to price jumps, executives and analysts said.

U.S. refineries ran at an average 91 percent capacity in 2001, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Demand for gasoline is growing about 2 percent a year, while capacity has been growing about 1.5 percent annually, said the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association, a trade group.

California phaseout

In March 1999, Gov. Gray Davis ordered the removal of Methyl Tertiary-Butyl Ether from California gasoline no later than Dec. 31, 2002. The MTBE phaseout deadline was later extended to Dec. 31 of this year.

California refineries are now undergoing a switch from MTBE to corn-based ethanol. Ethanol is an additive that helps gasoline burn cleaner but does not have the same environmental dangers as MTBE.

The Shell Bakersfield Refinery on Rosedale Highway was retrofitted earlier this year. The refinery produces three grades of gasoline, in addition to other petroleum products.

Energy experts have said the rise in California gas prices this year was partly due to the switch-over from MTBE to ethanol.

No new refineries

"The system is incredibly tight," said Jon Kyle Cartwright, an analyst at Raymond James & Associates in St. Petersburg, Florida. "A new refinery hasn't been built in the U.S. in decades, so most of the time the industry is running at more than 90 percent capacity."

"Any disruption can lead to a jump in prices," he said.

Regular gasoline rose to a record national average price of \$1.72 a gallon on March 18, the day before allied soldiers entered Iraq. Some refiners lost oil supplies due to a strike in Venezuela while others were producing heating fuel.

Fewer companies and less production capacity may translate into wider profit margins for the survivors and "lead to some good times for the refining industry," Jack Drosdick, chief executive of Sunoco Inc., the seventh-largest U.S. refiner, said at a conference for analysts this month.

Debate over costs

The price for staying in the industry will be steep. The National Petrochemical and Refiners Association estimates the new rules will cost the industry \$16 billion. The EPA put the cost at \$5.2 billion.

"Our experience is that industry always overestimates the cost of regulations," said Margo Oge, director of the EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality.

Refiners counter that the EPA's estimates are too low. The five largest refiners alone -- ConocoPhillips, Exxon Mobil, Valero, BP and Marathon Ashland Petroleum Corp. LLC -- are planning to spend about \$3.4 billion, according to federal filings and company estimates. The industry total will be higher. In 2002, there were 48 companies operating 152 U.S. refineries, converting crude oil into gasoline, diesel fuel, heating oil and butane for cigarette lighters, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

'About the worst business'

The added costs confront an industry that has not been very profitable in the last decade. "Until three years ago refining has been just about the worst business in the country," said Cartwright of Raymond James.

Sunoco, for example, has had an average annual profit margin of 2.3 percent for the past five years and Valero a margin of 1.1 percent, according to Bloomberg data.

Shares in the Standard and Poor's Supercomposite Oil & Gas Refining and Marketing Index fell 2.4 percent over the past five years. The index, which includes Valero, Sunoco and five other companies, has risen 5.4 percent this year.

Refiners say they aren't sure if or how they'll be able to pass along the cost of those investments. The EPA estimates the cost at 2 cents a gallon. The refiners' association says it will be 5 cents, including annualized amortization of the investment in new equipment plus higher operating costs.

"These are going to be difficult investments to recoup," said Joel Maness, Sunoco vice president for refining. "We aren't adding capacity. We aren't making a new product."

Because of that, most companies said, they will avoid borrowing to finance the cost retrofitting of their plants.

They will spend cash instead, as the industry traditionally does to pay for upgrading and maintenance work.

Saving the Earth

By Laura Florez

Staff writer, Visalia Times Delta

Children learn the four R's: reduce, restore, reuse and recycle

Alyssa Espinoza and Hillary Shuklian learned some valuable lessons at an Earth Day 2003 celebration over the weekend, including how to help the Earth and their academic careers in one shot.

The two Visalia students learned how to make recycled paper, a task they were told might just get them extra credit at school.

"Cool. I want to make a lot," said Alyssa, who made her first sheet of recycled paper in less than 10 minutes after taking a lesson from local artist Beth Greer.

Greer, who frequently makes recycled paper with her daughter, told the girls that if they did their homework on the recycled paper they made, their teachers might give them extra credit for their hard work.

So the girls, fueled by their willingness to help the Earth, gathered the materials needed to accomplish the task: shredded pieces of paper, water, a blender, household screens, and recycled parchment paper -- most of which can be found lying around any person's home, Greer said.

"I use my water-color paintings when I don't like them anymore," said Greer, who recycles paper not only to reduce the amount of trash that goes into landfills but also to reduce the amount of money she spends on costly paper supplies.

Learning to make use of paper shreds was just one of the lessons learned by Tulare County residents who attended Earth Day 2003 at ImagineU Children's Museum.

The four R's

The event gave Tulare County residents a chance to learn how to reduce, restore, reuse and recycle things to help the environment.

"It's fun to see what recycling does," said Alyssa, who attended the event as a member of Girl Scout Troop 573, which built an igloo out of more than 500 milk containers.

By visiting information and activity booths, hundreds of Tulare County residents learned how they could make Earth Day an everyday effort.

At the University of California master gardener's booth, people learned how to make their own compost by putting shredded paper, egg shells, dry leaves, sawdust and green leaves into piles or containers.

At the city of Visalia booth, employees taught people how to conserve water by keeping watering schedules and taught about recycling items like glass.



Johanna Vossler/Times-Delta
From left, Jordan Hayward, 8, Kayla Trevino, 4 1/2, Jessica Hayward, 6, and Felicia Trevino, 2 1/2, far right, learn about worms and composting at an Earth Day event Saturday from Christine Lopez of Tulare County Youth Corps. The event included art stations for children, tree planting, food booths, entertainment and information on water and soil conservation.



Johanna Vossler/Times-Delta
Hillary Guerra, 8, of Visalia makes clay animals Saturday at ImagineU Children's Museum, 700 E. Main St., Visalia.

If recycled, glass can be used 1,000 times, but if it's taken to landfills it will never deteriorate.

Local artists, such as Kevin Spottedhorse, showed children how to make masks and art out of recycled materials like fast food containers.

And the Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency and Tulare County Recycling collected old computer monitors, televisions and old computers to be recycled or restored and reused by the Visalia Emergency Aid Council.

The Avina family of Visalia tested their knowledge of recycling and passed a pop quiz with flying colors.

"We recycle at home and do a lot just to help the environment," said Angela Avina, whose children Valerie, Samuel, Hope and Sara answered recycling questions correctly.

"If we don't know how to recycle something, we just ask," Valerie Avina said.

Originally published Tuesday, April 29, 2003

[Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee, April 28, 2003:](#)

Legislation a good step toward cleaner air in the Valley

By Megan Scottt, Fresno

As a junior at Bullard High School, I read "Florez revises push for clean Valley air" (story April 21).

As an athlete and someone who is frequently outside and very active, I think it is crucial that people really see how beneficial these bills could be to our Valley, our home. It is about time that some of these problems are looked at and, I hope, corrected.

With the heat of summer around the corner, we will experience more unhealthful days of breathing polluted air. I am definitely not looking forward to that, since I will be outside exercising along with many others.

Poor air quality interferes with everyone's ability to participate in outside physical activities. For example, banning the burning of farm waste in open fields is a great way to reduce bad air quality.

And just because it's going to be harder on the farmers is no excuse. Everyone in our Valley needs to be willing to take a more active role in fighting for better air quality.

Unless everyone is willing to change their habits just a little bit, we will all suffer the consequences.

'Share the air'

By Tracy Pepper

President, League of Women Voters, Fresno

The League of Women Voters supports measures to establish air quality standards that will protect the public health and welfare, and the development of effective enforcement and implementation procedures at each level of government. While the goals of Operation Clean Air are admirable, the league is concerned about keeping the process of government decision-making open and public.

It is troubling that the OCA committee did not allow for diverse, broad-based community input at the early stages of the process, even though it was requested of them. OCA committee members

chose instead to invite the public to participate in ratifying decisions already made by the committee.

Democratic, sustainable government relies upon public participation in decision-making. It is vital that the public be closely involved in any plans to clean the air, especially when public funds are being used.

It is the hope of the league that OCA will open up its ranks to reflect a committee more representative of the stakeholders involved. By inviting interested community-based organization representatives to serve on its committee prior to the allocation of any federal funds, OCA can affirm its stated goal of "enlisting the involvement of all Valley air quality stakeholders in an effort to address their needs in a collaborative and inclusive fashion." After all, we all share the air.

[Fresno Bee editorial, April 27, 2003:](#)

A legislative test

Package of air quality bills will begin to reveal how serious Sacramento is.

There will be a crucial test Monday for legislative efforts to clean the Valley's filthy air, when four of the 10 bills submitted by state Sen. Dean Florez come before the Environmental Quality Committee for their first hearing.

Another piece of Florez's package, SB 709, made it through the Local Government Committee last week. That bill would give the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District more authority over mobile sources of pollution.

It's an important moment because it should begin to reveal just how serious the Legislature is prepared to be on the critical Valley issue of air quality. There are powerful special interests arrayed against one or more of the bills, and the time is nearing when they will have to put their cards on the table. It's a process that will test the nerve of members of the state Senate and Assembly, as well as Gov. Gray Davis. And it will give all of us in the Valley a precise measure of just who our representatives are there to serve.

The bills up for a hearing Monday include:

SB 700, which would repeal a long-standing exemption from a permit process for certain sources of air pollution on farms, principally diesel engines used to pump irrigation water. Florez regards the bill as the "linchpin" of his package, and there is much opposition from the ag industry.

SB 704 would require that ag wastes would have to constitute at least 60% of the total of debris burned at biomass plants, which turn debris into energy. This would help create a market for ag debris that would allow an end to open-field burning of plant waste.

SB 705 would prohibit such open-field burning after June 1, 2005. Air districts would be required to help farmers find other ways -- such as biomass facilities -- of eliminating plant waste. Again, the ag industry is strongly opposed.

SB 707, a very contentious bill, would mandate a three-mile buffer zone between any new dairy and existing schools and urbanized areas. Local boards and city councils could grant exceptions. The bill would also require new dairies to meet the standards for large industrial facilities contained in the California Environmental Quality Act.

It's an impressive -- and ambitious -- set of legislative acts. And it's only about half of what Florez proposes. But a little bold and aggressive action would be awfully nice in the matter of our air quality, after so many years of degradation and denial. Can our elected state leaders muster that sort of energy and courage? We'll begin to find out Monday.

[Fresno Bee editorial, April 26, 2003](#)

Keep the mandate

Zero emission vehicle rule has spurred progress on air quality.

They fought long and hard, and on Thursday the nation's automakers finally got their way. The California Air Resources Board bowed to industry pressure and approved a flawed proposal to revise the state's historic Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate.

Two questions divided the board members. One was whether to continue the mandate after 2008. They did.

The second question was whether to drop the mandate's longstanding neutrality on technology by requiring car companies to build 250 zero-polluting fuel cell vehicles during that time. They shouldn't have, but they did that, too.

The ZEV mandate has been remarkably successful. Automobile manufacturers are pushing for a new rule that would require them to make a relatively modest investment in fuel cell vehicles and to abandon battery electric cars, a technology they regard as a dead end.

The exact number of clean cars the state should force automakers to produce may be worth debating, but the existing mandate should have remained in place for the foreseeable future. Why? Because air quality in California, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley, still fails to meet state and federal clean air standards.

Under the new rules, carmakers are required to make modest investments in low-emission vehicles over the next several years -- including some goals that manufacturers can meet by selling clean-running cars in other states, such as Massachusetts and New York.

"It's not backsliding," insisted Board Chairman Alan Lloyd.

Yes, it is. It's giving automakers more time to meet emissions mandates adopted 13 years ago and consistently eroded ever since. It's also giving them a potential pass on doing their part to improve the state's filthy air: Build cleaner cars for other states, and that will count for California, too. CARB should tell all of us in the Valley how it will help our air to have cleaner cars on the road in Boston and Albany. We'd love to hear that explanation.

This kind of backsliding will do little to help the health of Californians, particularly Valley residents, who remain choked by polluted air that flunks federal and state clean air standards.

[Modesto Bee editorial, April 26, 2003:](#)

State's air board backslides on auto emissions

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Under the new rules, carmakers are required to make modest investments in low-emission vehicles over the next several years -- including some goals that manufacturers can meet by selling clean-running cars in other states. "It's not backsliding," insisted Board Chairman Alan Lloyd.

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[Also from the Modesto Bee editorial pages, April 26, 2003:](#)

Visalia stepped up to the air quality plate this month and belted a clean base hit. The city council there voted to make every effort to replace the cars and trucks in its fleet with alternative-fuel vehicles as the need arises. That's exactly the kind of

public policy decision all of us should be encouraging from all our elected officials, wherever we live in the valley. Russ Webber, Visalia's public works director, put it well: "We do have poor air quality, and we need to do our part."

[Modesto Bee editorial, April 28, 2003:](#)

Air quality bills will test courage of legislators today

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Another piece of Florez's package, Senate Bill 709, made it through the Local Government Committee last week. That bill would add public members to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board.

It's an important moment because it should begin to reveal just how serious the Legislature is prepared to be on the critical valley issue of air quality. There are powerful special interests arrayed against one or more of the bills, and the time is nearing when they will have to put their cards on the table. It's a process that will test the nerve of members of the state Senate and Assembly, as well as Gov. Davis. And it will give all of us in the valley a precise measure of just whom our representatives are there to serve.

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SB 707, a very contentious bill, would mandate a 3-mile buffer zone between any new dairies and existing schools and urbanized areas. Local boards and city councils could grant exemptions. The bill would also require new dairies to meet the standards for large industrial facilities contained in the California Environmental Quality Act.

It's an impressive -- and ambitious -- set of legislative acts. And it's only about half of what Florez proposes. But some bold and aggressive action would be incredibly refreshing, after so many years of degradation and denial. Can our elected state leaders muster that sort of energy and courage? We'll begin to find out today.