

Editorial -- The Fresno Bee, July 22, 2003:

Thinking in a rut

Business as usual means the Valley's air will get worse, not better.

As new air quality rules and regulations advance through the Legislature and the local air district board, a disturbing -- though perhaps predictable -- pattern is emerging. The most serious obstacle in the path of cleaner air for the Valley may be inertia. In this case, that means the difficulty we all have accepting unpleasant realities and making ourselves think about things in new ways.

Just listen to some of the reactions to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's decision last week to ban fireplace burning on a few days each winter. Urban wood-burning is a practice that, for the vast majority of us living here, is purely aesthetic in nature -- we burn wood in our fireplaces because it's fun, pretty and cozy, not because we need to heat our homes that way. In fact, the few people who really do need fireplaces to heat their homes would be permitted to use them. So would people living in the foothills and mountains above a certain elevation.

Here's something else we know: Urban wood fires cause a huge amount of particulate pollution in winter, and that pollution is a source of much suffering for those who have respiratory problems. The cost of those cozy fires isn't limited to the price of a cord of firewood; it also includes the cost of health care and missed days at work, for starters.

But none of that matters to some. Instead, they feel their right to -- what, pollute? -- is being trampled.

One piece of legislation being considered in Sacramento would add four members to the 11 already on the governing board of the air district. The existing members are all local elected officials or their appointees. The four new members would be appointed by the governor and the Legislature, and one of them would have to be a "physician with expertise in the respiratory effects of air pollution." The others would have to have "a demonstrated interest and knowledge of the impact of air pollution" on the Valley.

How would that hurt the deliberations of a board charged with making our air better? Well, it would take control from local officials and give it to the state, say. Four members out of 15? Opponents of the change must think very little of the 11 local officials already on the board, to believe that they would so willingly and quickly surrender their constituents' interests to this new Gang of Four.

The Bee believes the change -- it's in SB 999 -- will bring a better sense of regionalism and greater public participation to the affairs of the local air board. Those are good things.

These are all minor concerns, of course, set next to the monstrous inertia that must be overcome to get a sufficient number of us out of our cars and into less-polluting forms of transportation. None of this will be cheap, none of it will be

easy and most of it won't happen very quickly. But all of it must get done, and all of us must be part of doing it.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

The greatest obstacle to better air may be the reluctance of people to change, even when that change means healthier lives.

Letter to the Editor -- The Fresno Bee, July 22, 2003:

New Measure C must serve needs of all county residents

By Jeanne Larson
Fresno

Harry Armstrong and Octavia Diener (commentary July 11) state that expanding our freeways (which aren't going to clear our traffic but only worsen the air pollution) are the answer to our traffic problems and that it would only be fair if we didn't need a two-thirds majority to pass another Measure C.

They don't mention the negative effect of the freeways -- the homes bulldozed and people displaced, businesses closed, those who live with noise and no landscaping along the freeways, who look at weeds and chain link fences from their front yards. Residents near Freeway 41 are still awaiting long-ago promised sound walls.

Businesses adjacent to Freeway 168 and Shaw Avenue in Clovis want to put up commercial signs visible from the freeway, because it is taking business past their doors. Just wait until the new Fresno State entertainment complex opens. But, hey, widened freeways could move more people to the sprawl occurring northeast of Clovis.

The commentary touts expansion without buying new right-of-way. Originally the center corridor on Freeway 41 was for mass transit, which Fresno must begin constructing in order to help clear the air. When will construction begin on a transit line? Never, probably. The center corridor on Freeway 168 is a transit line corridor. Will it be in future plans? Probably not.

Rail consolidation is the biggest traffic and safety problem Fresno City has, and has been ignoring for years. A large number of poor and elderly have only an underfunded, inadequate bus system for transportation.

A new Measure C must address the transportation needs of all Fresno County citizens. Then, there will be no problem with extending Measure C with a majority vote of two-thirds.

Visalians worry about crime, survey reveals

By Jason D. Plemons

The Fresno Bee

July 22, 2003

VISALIA -- Most people living here think the city's quality of life is above average but are concerned about gang-related crime, according to the results of a city-sponsored survey.

Visalia's Citizen Advisory Committee conducted the 18th annual survey, asking 300 randomly picked residents a series of questions ranging from how well they like the city to how good the city is at providing basic services.

Because of a computer glitch, survey coordinators said, the results of the poll are not scientific, but they do offer the City Council an idea of what the public is thinking, said Rachele Bergland-Baily, chairwoman of the committee that conducted the survey.

Having the committee do the research instead of paying a consultant saves the city money and still gives the information City Council members want, said Council Member Wendy Rudy.

People are most worried about crime, growth and education, the survey indicates. "None of those surprised us," Bergland-Baily told council members Monday.

People generally gave the city high marks, with 68% of those surveyed rating the city's overall quality as high or very high.

However, people also think the city has a gang problem, with 50% saying police should target gang activity. About 37% said crime was the No. 1 issue facing the city, and 61% said gangs were the largest problem.

"I think it's interesting that quite a number of people list gangs, crime and gang-related activity as concerns," said Council Member Phil Cox.

"I think it shows just how much the community wants and needs to feel safe," said Council Member Bob Link.

People in different areas of town had different perspectives on the Police Department's effort at providing a safe community. Overall, 59% of people rated the Police Department's efforts as high or very high. But in the northeast part of the city, just 5% rated the efforts as very high, compared with 11% and 16% in other areas of the city.

Those in the northeast also gave the department its lowest numbers, with 12% ranking the efforts as low or very low.

Eighty-one percent of those surveyed rated the city Fire Department as either doing a good or very good job.

"We'll go over the survey as a staff and see what areas we can address," said City Manager Steve Salomon.

One of those areas already being looked at is the city's split-container garbage cans. While people rated their garbage-collection service highly, 52% of them said there is not enough room for recyclables and trash in the split-container system.

According to the survey, people are also concerned about growth issues, **air quality** and schools.

Continued warm weather could lead to power warnings and outages

The Merced Sun-Star

By Alexandria Rocha, staff writer

Tuesday, July 22, 2003

Last week's weather didn't break any heat wave records, but that doesn't mean area residents have stopped running for cooler temperatures.

In fact, Pacific Gas and Electric Co. spokeswoman Carey Madill said the California Independent System Operator issued a near-peak usage notice on Monday.

"Any time we run into a string of 100-degree or plus days, energy use will go up," she said.

Madill added that as long as customers continue a healthy conservation effort with their electricity habits, California's energy source should remain stable.

"If we continue to have a warming trend, that conservation is going to be very important," she said.

Since the Valley's heat wave began, PG&E has been issuing tips to customers on how to stay cool in their homes, as well as how to keep a handle on their energy bills.

Some tips include:

- Setting thermostats to 78 degrees or higher when the workplace or home is occupied, and 85 degrees or off when not occupied, health-permitting.
- Turning off lights when no one is present.
- Turning off office equipment or setting it to "power saver" mode when not in use.
- On hot days, drawing the curtains and/or shades to keep the sun out.
- Trying to wait until after 7 p.m. to use major appliances, including dishwasher, clothes washer, dryer and oven.
- If you own a swimming pool, switching the pool filter and sweeper operations to off-peak hours.

These conservation efforts will be the name of the game, as the weatherman says relief from the heat isn't expected anytime soon.

In fact, today is expected to be Merced County's eighth consecutive day of weather that reaches above 100 degrees.

"We have a very strong high-pressure system over the area," said Jim Dudley, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford. "A high pressure system is like a big dome of hot air trapped over the area. It's like putting a lid on a hot pan."

Coupled with last weekend's high temperatures, clouds rolled over the Valley Friday afternoon and continued to block the sun Saturday.

Dudley said the cloud cover was left over from a hurricane that hit a Texas coastline on July 15.

"Those clouds finally moved up over Mexico and Arizona and finally up into Southern and Northern California," Dudley said. "That's all gone away now."

The cloud cover, which came from Hurricane Claudette, prescribed Merced County an intense dose of humidity.

Dudley said the county's upcoming forecast also rests above 100 degrees.

And it doesn't stop there. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has declared today a Spare the Air Day, meaning ground level ozone, the main pollutant in what is commonly known as smog, is expected to be unhealthy.

Valley residents can help reduce and control air pollution levels by:

- Carpooling or taking alternate transportation.
- Making sure gas caps, on vehicles, gas cans and maintenance equipment, are replaced when missing or when threads are stripped.
- Using water-based paints and solvents.

More heat on the horizon

Region's air quality could suffer as inland temperatures near 100

By Douglas Fisher, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald

July 22, 2003

As irksome as the heat and dead air are to the air conditioner-less set, air pollution regulators view the combo this week with downright dread.

The Bay Area sits on the cusp of meeting federal clean air standards for the first time in a decade. Federal rules allow it just one violation this summer at its most notoriously smoggy spot: the Livermore testing station.

That happened Thursday, a day no one expected. This week's forecast -- 100-degree heat inland, shifting winds and a weak ocean breeze -- contain all the ingredients for a second violation.

"Winds are shifting a lot. We are going to be in a pattern for a couple of days of day-to-day trying to determine whether the next day is going to be a Spare the Air day," said Will Taylor of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Monday was a Spare the Air day. Today is not. Wednesday could be. Regardless, the district is asking everyone to make a little extra effort.

"If in the past you haven't changed your behavior, this is definitely a good year to do so," said district spokesman Aaron Richardson.

Should the Bay Area meet the

standard, it's off the hook for costly air quality measures required of smoggier areas.

The National Weather Service expects the heat to stick around until Thursday, when the offshore breeze should strengthen and bring relief inland. Temperatures in some spots could hit 100 degrees today.

Monday's high in Livermore was 97 degrees. Bay locales saw much cooler weather -- Oakland topped out at 72 degrees -- and that pattern should continue this week, forecaster Rick Canepa said.

The heat also offered no respite for 785 firefighters tackling a 4,700-acre fire in steep, wooded terrain off Interstate 5 in Stanislaus County. The fire was 20 percent contained Mon-

day, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention.

Firefighters had better luck elsewhere: An 800-acre brush fire on Fort Ord in Monterey was reported fully contained. A two-acre fire in Marin County was stopped as it bumped against the fences of three Novato homes Monday morning.

A brush fire that started on Bethel Island on Monday got stopped at 10 acres three hours later, according to the Contra Costa Fire Protection District. The cause remained under investigation.

Foothills residential burn permits suspended for rest of fire season

By Jeff Jardine
Modesto Bee
July 22, 2003

SAN ANDREAS -- The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has suspended all residential burn permits in its southern region, which includes the foothills of Mariposa, Tuolumne and Calaveras counties.

The order took effect Friday, and will remain in effect until significant rain ends the fire season.

Agricultural, forest management, hazard reduction and industrial burning is allowed only if the CDF inspects the job and issues a permit.

With temperatures soaring past the 100-degree mark throughout this week, those who live in or visit the foothills or Sierra can find tips on how to avoid fire danger by visiting the department's Web site at www.fire.ca.gov.

Some of those tips include how to keep brush and trees away from structures, how to make sure emergency personnel can reach your home, how to create an emergency water supply, how to build or remodel to make a home more fire safe and what to do if threatened by wildfires.

Campers must obtain campfire permits when venturing into forests. Permits are issued by four agencies: the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and the CDF.

Permission can be obtained at any Forest Service, BLM or CDF facility in California. Permits are required for open fires, such as campfires, barbecues and portable stoves.

"The two things you need are a permit and permission," CDF spokeswoman Karen Terrill said. "You need to have a permit in your wallet, but you also need to check with the jurisdictional agency of the land you're on. "

Each of the four separate ownerships can restrict campfire permission independently of the others, she said.

Campfires must be attended at all times, and the CDF recommends that campers clear away all vegetation within 10 feet.

"The ideal thing is to have a campfire in an area designated for campfires," she said. "But if you don't, be smart. Build a (perimeter) out of rocks. Don't build it under a tree, where the sparks can go up and start a fire. And leave it a mud puddle."

Spare the Air today

Modesto Bee

July 22, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has declared today a "Spare the Air" day in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties. Officials urge children and adults with breathing problems to limit the amount of time they spend outdoors. Everyone can help reduce pollution by carpooling to work, not using gasoline-powered yard and lawn equipment, and forgoing charcoal lighter fluid for barbecues.

Ashes to ashes: Burn ban OK'd

By Matt Weiser, Californian staff writer
The Bakersfield Californian
July 21, 2003

Editor's note: This story was revised July 21, 2003, to correct new limitations on fireplace installations in new housing developments.

When the air is chilly and thick with fog next winter, it is now likely that you'll be required to drop the firewood and turn up the thermostat instead.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Thursday approved new rules designed to make those foggy winter nights a little easier on the lungs. The controversial rules ban the use of wood stoves and fireplaces when the air quality index exceeds 150, the point at which pollution is considered unhealthy for everyone.

District officials say these no-burn nights are expected to occur about 25 times each winter in Kern County, which usually has the valley's worst particulate pollution.

Wood burning releases soot particles that are 20 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair. These particles can penetrate deep into the lungs, causing shortness of breath and heart disease, and aggravating asthma and bronchitis.

The valley is notorious for its winter inversion layers, which trap pollution near the ground. During these episodes, smoke from residential wood heating can produce up to 20 percent of Bakersfield's particulate pollution, air quality studies have found.

"We've had so much concern from constituents about air quality, and they're looking for leadership. I think we've come up with something that's reasonable," said Barbara Patrick, Kern County supervisor and a member of the air district's governing board.

The governing board approved the rules in a 6-3 vote. The "no" votes came from Merced County Supervisor Michael Nelson, Stanislaus County Supervisor Thomas Mayfield, and San Joaquin County Supervisor Jack Sieglock. All three felt the rules are too strict.

The rules also require older wood stoves -- but not fireplaces -- to be removed or replaced when existing homes change ownership. And they limit the installation of wood-burning devices in new housing. But the board loosened the rules in this area slightly.

The initial proposal allowed only one fireplace or wood stove per home when density is two homes per acre or less. The approved rule allows new housing developments to contain no more than two EPA Phase II-certified wood burning devices per acre. If housing density is less than two units per acre, each new home is allowed either a Phase II-certified wood-burning device or a fireplace.

This amendment was passed after several board members expressed concern that the rule seemed to open the door to dirty fireplaces in low-density construction, and that only wealthy home buyers would be allowed to burn wood.

"I have trouble applying that kind of standard to something as basic as wood burning," said J. Steven Worthley, a Tulare County supervisor and air district governing board member, who proposed the amendment.

Even so, the building industry supported the original draft of the rule, stating that the housing market is moving toward gas-burning devices anyway.

The rules were approved in spite of a full-court press from the hearth-products industry, which had numerous lobbyists and business owners testify before the board in Fresno. The industry pushed for a two-tiered enforcement program, arguing that open-hearth fireplaces and older wood stoves are the biggest polluters and should face tighter burning restrictions. On the other hand, modern, cleaner-burning wood and pellet stoves represent a small part of the problem, they said, and people who invested in these devices should not be penalized.

"Non-EPA certified stoves are by far the worst polluters. I call them 'belchers,'" said Jay Hanson, regional representative for the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association.

But air district officials said their options are limited by federal enforcement actions, which require adoption of the best available control measures by Sept. 11 or the valley faces penalties. The board did pass a resolution, however, requiring a public education campaign to reduce wood burning and encourage clean-burning practices when the air quality index reaches 100, considered unhealthy for children, the elderly and people with breathing problems.

Many hope that an effective public education campaign will limit the need for mandatory burning bans. But the district's longstanding "Please Don't Light Tonight" voluntary campaign did not prove effective enough at reducing winter pollution levels, and that's partly why the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency demanded tougher controls.

Others argued that the outright burn ban should have an even lower trigger.

"If we were focusing on human health, we should focus on sensitive groups and go for a trigger at 100," said Kevin Hall, a Sierra Club air quality specialist in Fresno. "I would like to see us step forward and get way out in front on all of this, because, frankly, we're a decade behind on improving air quality."

District officials said the details involved in enforcing the burning ban remain to be worked out, but will begin with patrols by district inspectors and telephone complaints from the public.

The retrofit rule for existing homes will be enforced as a disclosure requirement during the escrow process, said David Crow, the district's air pollution control officer, and that additional coordination with the real estate industry is planned.

Dooley proposes second rail line over Tehachapi Pass to move cargo

By Matt Weiser, Californian staff writer
The Bakersfield Californian
July 21, 2003

Clean air and less-crowded roads could be among the benefits of a proposal by U.S. Rep. Cal Dooley to find more room for freight trains over the Tehachapi Pass.

The pass is considered a major bottleneck in moving freight around the state and even the nation. Only one set of tracks, owned and operated by Union Pacific Railroad, currently crosses the steep pass and it already operates near capacity. Dooley, D-Hanford, hopes to secure \$1.5 million in federal funding to study adding a second complete set of tracks over the pass.

"If we could double-track it, we would be able to provide greater economic opportunities for the entire valley," Dooley said. "We would also be able to reduce the number of trucks on Interstate 5 and Highway 99, and thus reduce the amount of pollution that is having significant health and economic impacts."

A second rail line could create additional capacity to launch a new Amtrak passenger route between Bakersfield and Los Angeles, though Dooley said that isn't a focus of his proposal at this point.

"It has definite economic advantages as well as environmental advantages from an air quality perspective," said Ron Brummett, executive director of the Kern Council of Governments, the county's regional transportation planning agency. "The single line we have right now is basically being used to its maximum. Increasing that capacity would allow significantly more train traffic over that route to either Southern California or to the Midwest and East Coast."

About 40 long freight trains currently cross the pass daily, leaving little room for additional traffic. As the valley continues to grow, this limited capacity will become a bigger concern, especially as major corporate warehouse distribution centers continue to leave the Los Angeles region for the valley's low property values, bringing more dirty diesel truck traffic to the region.

"I do believe it's critical to the future growth and success of the valley and also the environmental issues the valley is suffering from," said Richard Allen, chief executive officer of the Allen Group, developer of the International Trade and Transportation Center in Shafter. A 1.7 million-square-foot Target Stores distribution facility recently opened at the center, designed to move freight smoothly between trains and trucks.

"One of the reasons this needs to happen is to get truck traffic off the roads. There's no money for freeways, and let's face it, the trucks are tearing the freeways apart," Allen said.

The study sought by Dooley would cover a number of options, from adding a second set of tracks along the existing rail line to building a second line along a different route. If the funding is approved, Caltrans would disburse the funds and oversee the study.

Heavy-truck traffic has grown 66 percent in Kern County since 1984, according to Caltrans statistics. That's faster than the state average of 49 percent. In the San Joaquin Valley, which has some of the nation's worst air quality, heavy-diesel trucks emit about one-fifth of all nitrogen oxide pollution, a key ingredient in smog.

A single double-stacked freight train can take more than 200 diesel trucks off the road.

"The more the hauling of freight would get on the railroads and off the roads, the better off we are," said Joe Fontaine, a Tehachapi resident and former Sierra Club national president. "It could have positive environmental benefits, particularly air quality, but the route they pick would be the important thing to look at."

The current train route over the pass covers rugged terrain that includes numerous tunnels and sheer cliffs. It also includes the famous Tehachapi Loop, an engineering marvel that allows a train to climb the steep terrain by crossing over itself as it snakes up the pass.

The route also includes a number of sidings added over the years that allow one train to wait while another passes. These sidings could become part of the solution: If they can be linked together, Caltrans officials say, only about 14 new miles of track would be needed to create a second complete rail line.

But those 14 miles include some of the most treacherous terrain along the route, and connecting them would require more construction feats -- all while keeping the present route open for trains.

"That's one of the reasons for taking a look at a slightly different alignment," said Alan McCuen, Caltrans deputy district planning director. "It might be easier and more cost-effective to actually split the rails significantly from what they are right now."

Union Pacific officials familiar with Dooley's proposal could not be reached for comment Monday. But they have been involved in discussions on the proposal, and Dooley said they are "interested." He intends to push for the funding when Congress returns from its August recess.

Valley Clean Air Now, a coalition of business leaders, has also endorsed the proposal and committed to spend \$5,000 on an initial feasibility study of its own, said board member Joe Drew, a Tejon Ranch executive.

Spare the Air advisory issued for Tuesday

The Bakersfield Californian
July 21, 2003

Tuesday has been declared a Spare the Air day in Kern County in response to continued hot temperatures and high air pollution levels.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issues Spare the Air notices whenever air quality is expected to reach unhealthy levels, or a score of 150 or higher on the air quality index.

All valley residents are urged to minimize outdoor activities to protect their health, especially children, the elderly and anyone with breathing problems.

Residents are also urged to curtail behavior that causes air pollution, such as unnecessary vehicle trips, lawn mowing, barbecuing, boat and off-road vehicle use, and painting.

For health information and Spare the Air tips, call 1-800-SMOG-INFO or visit [valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org). <<http://www.valleyair.org>>

For the latest five-day forecasts, visit [bakersfield.com](http://www.bakersfield.com)'s Weather section. <<http://www.bakersfield.com/weather/>>

A hot commodity Kern doesn't need

By Christina Vance, Californian staff writer
The Bakersfield Californian
July 21, 2003

A solid week of 100-plus degree days has gripped Bakersfield, and forecasters said to prepare for week two.

The streak began July 15 with a temperature of 104, and there's no immediate relief in sight, according to National Weather Service forecasts. Monday's high was 105 degrees, according to the service.

It's possible high temperatures could dip below 100 sometime this week, but Hanford-based meteorologist Mike Sowko said 99 is about the best Bakersfield residents can expect.

Bakersfield native Terry Bryan was sipping a big drink Monday afternoon on Chester Avenue, on her way indoors.

"It's so hot I can't stand it. I don't think I'll ever get used to it," she said.

Bryan said she went downtown for a few minutes for an errand, but the heat made it a short trip.

Just down the street, Lupe Moran stopped sweeping the floor in Colima Mariscos restaurant to explain that her customers weren't all braving the heat like Bryan.

"It's really hot, and they prefer to stay at their house," she said.

That "hot" isn't leaving anytime soon.

Estimated highs for Bakersfield range from up to 107 today to 101 by Friday, according to weather service forecasts.

Today's possible highs for surrounding Kern County areas weren't any better: 108 in Delano and Lake Isabella, 109 in Taft, 104 in Mojave and 111 in Inyokern.

Only some of the county's mountain communities have cooler predictions, with today's high of about 92 degrees in Tehachapi and 93 in Frazier Park.

In 2003 so far, Bakersfield has already had 21 days with a high of at least 100 degrees. This time last year, 14 days had hit the 100-degree mark, according to NWS records.

On average, Bakersfield has 38 days with temperatures of 100 degrees or higher each year, according to NWS statistics.

NWS issued a heat advisory through Wednesday for most of the San Joaquin Valley. Such advisories are issued when the heat index reaches 105 degrees in a wide enough area, Sowko said. The heat index is how hot it feels while considering factors like humidity.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District also declared today a Spare the Air Day.

Kern County coroner's officials said there hasn't been a heat-related death yet in the county this year, but weather service officials said folks should still be careful.

Residents are advised to avoid outdoor activity, drink plenty of water and wear light-colored clothing.