

## **Pollution fees fall to builders**

**City sprawl will cost Valley developers who do not minimize bad air from the increased growth.**

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

also in the Modesto Bee, Friday, December 16, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley on Thursday became the first place in the nation to take on air pollution created by city sprawl.

Compelled by state law and prodded by activists, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board approved unprecedented rules to curb pollution, despite vigorous opposition from builders.

"This is the last major source of pollution in our Valley that has not stepped up," said Sierra Club member Kevin Hall of Fresno. "It is time."

The goal is to reduce bad air from traffic going back and forth from new homes, businesses, commercial buildings and even school buildings constructed on the edge of town.

Builders can install air-enhancing features such as outdoor outlets for electric lawnmowers, bike lanes and energy-efficient water heaters to help reduce fees that will be assessed for traffic pollution.

Officials estimate the rules will raise \$103 million in the next three years. The money will buy clean-running buses and street sweepers, as well as pay for other fixes to reduce the smog, dust and soot that make the Valley one of the worst air basins in the country.

The rules, costs and wisdom of controlling vehicle pollution this way were debated more than four hours on Thursday.

The building industry complained about burdening home buyers and new businesses with higher costs. They also questioned the fairness of loading air-cleanup costs on new developments, not on existing homes and businesses.

Builders and their supporters sought a delay to restructure the proposals and make changes to include existing developments.

"Everybody should do their part," said Robert J. Keenan, executive vice president of the Building Industry Association of Tulare/Kings Counties Inc. "Come up with a price tag and divide it up among all homeowners and businesses. I'd be happy to pay my five bucks."

But health advocates, activists, environmentalists and a few farm spokesmen presented persuasive arguments. At one point, Dr. John Telles, a cardiologist who often practices at Saint Agnes Medical Center, made the room go silent.

He said the long string of air violations currently gripping the Valley has resulted in an onslaught of lung-related admissions.

"We had 10 ambulances lined up in front of Saint Agnes with patients," he said "The emergency room is filled with asthmatics and people with chronic lung problems. If you had a heart attack, there might not be an ambulance to take you to the hospital."

SB 709, the state law requiring the district's new sprawl rules and fees, made a bigger impression on a few board members. Mike Maggard, a Bakersfield council member, said he wouldn't have voted for the rules if not for the law.

But another board member, Dan Prince, a council member in Ripon, wondered whether the fee was high enough. Air district staffers said the worst-case fee for builders would be \$781 per home until 2008, when the cost would climb to \$1,772.

The fees apply only to developments with 50 or more units. By including various air-quality features, the fee can be lowered, depending on the location of the subdivision.

Prince said, "I would suggest that those numbers are too low. I think \$1,500 to \$2,000 per house is peanuts to a developer."

He said developers might just pay the fee and move ahead with their projects instead of working through ways to cut down air pollution.

Building representatives, however, considered the fee excessive, saying it would blunt the home-buying market. It was a change in direction from the stance the industry took two years ago when officials said they would help with the rules to do their part for clean air.

Builders' worst-case scenario differs from the air district staff's estimate. They believe the fees on homes, businesses and industries might raise more than \$600 million in the next several years.

They say the rules are unacceptable, particularly because of double-digit unemployment and the hardship it places on the working poor.

"It's patently unfair for one group to shoulder such a disproportionate load," said Clovis Mayor Nathan Magzig.

Gordon Nipp, a Bakersfield-area Sierra Club member and retired university math professor, said the market sets the price for homes.

Said Nipp: "Housing costs went up 40% last year in Bakersfield, and it has very little to do with fees."

## **Air district OKs fee for sprawl**

### **Region first to charge builders, or credit them for efficiency**

By Sarah Ruby, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Dec. 16, 2005

FRESNO -- The San Joaquin Valley is the first region in the nation to regulate builders for their impact on air quality.

At a meeting made more immediate by the poor air quality lurking outside, dozens of citizens in Bakersfield and Fresno convinced the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board to charge builders a fee for sprawl.

Homes and shopping centers attract car trips, industrial centers draw trucks, and taken together, they've become a pollution pool too large to ignore, according to state law. The impact will only worsen as the valley's population jumps 24 percent by the end of the decade, according to the district.

Housing and business groups fiercely opposed the rule, but few individual builders spoke out against the fee, which could exceed \$1,700-a-house by 2008. The rule also includes commercial development and government buildings, including schools.

The rule's central opponent, a coalition known as Stop The Air Board Tax, We'll All Pay!, voiced dismay at the board's unanimous vote.

The air district "has just levied a whopping new tax on Central Valley taxpayers, businesses and our entire regional economy -- all with no guarantees of improved air quality," said Clovis Mayor Nathan Magsig, the group's spokesperson, in a news release.

But carrying the day were dozens of citizens, Spanish speakers, environmental justice groups, doctors, agricultural leaders, religious organizations and other supporters of the rule.

"I feel truly encouraged," said Ann Williams, who's lived in Bakersfield most of her life. She hears about "growing and appalling" health problems related to air quality, she said, and this is a step against that trend.

The rule's supporters spoke of relatives with asthma, of grown children leaving the valley because of poor air quality and of builders being the last industry unregulated for air pollution.

A cardiologist described a Fresno-area hospital so full of patients with air-related illnesses that ambulances can't unload new ones. Growers groups, who led dramatic protests when the district tapped them for regulation, said welcome to the club.

The valley's air problems won't be solved with a fee on new development, but the rule's supporters hope it will change growth in the valley. To drive down fees, developers are encouraged to build bike lanes, add retail space, make room for public transit and incorporate a host of other features. The district will evaluate each project on its own, giving builders credit for the air-friendly features they include.

Builders may also sponsor their own pollution-saving projects instead of paying the district directly.

To complicate matters, the fees will increase as cheap pollution-cutting measures, such as replacing old diesel engines, are eliminated. Subsequent pollution solutions might not be so affordable.

At today's prices, fees on a 75-unit subdivision would start at \$780 per house, according to the district. By using cleaner construction equipment and adding affordable housing, bike lanes, bus service, nearby jobs, good traffic circulation, sidewalks, nearby retail, nonwood fireplaces and energy efficient appliances, that developer could pay as little as \$192 per house.

Local builder Jeff Williams, who wasn't at the meeting, said he can see both sides of this issue.

"I'm right with everyone saying yeah, there's a problem," he said. "(But) they're looking for (new homes) to be a much larger part of the solution than it is part of the problem."

Local governments look to builders as an easy source of cash, he said, but home building isn't always the gold mine it's been in recent years.

The rule's opponents raised other concerns: Who will make sure the district spends this new pot of money responsibly? Why don't all residents pay a fee for car and truck trips? Why not target cars directly?

All 11 board members approved the rule, though some had misgivings. Some worried the fees weren't high enough to encourage builders to design air-friendly projects. Others believe the rule puts undue burden on new homeowners. In the end, they agreed to review the rule in 2010 to see how it's working.

"I'm going along with adopting this rule today for one reason -- I am legally bound to do so," said Mike Maggard, a Bakersfield councilman who will become chair of the air district board next month. "I despise raising fees on the public."

Kern County Supervisor Barbara Patrick came to the meeting with doubts about the rule, she said, but after listening to the public she "feel(s) more resolute than ever."

The rule applies to projects that produce at least two tons of particulates and smog-forming nitrogen oxides per year. It forces builders to cut each project's nitrogen oxides by a third and slash particulates in half, or pay to reduce them elsewhere.

It also requires emissions reductions from construction equipment.

The district will use the fees to pave unpaved roads and replace dirty engines. None of that money will pay to run the program, which will require 10 employees and four temporary workers, according to district staff.

The district expects to review 1,200 projects each year. It will likely collect \$103 million in the first three years, according to district figures.

Smog and particulate pollution are blamed for the valley's high asthma rates. In the San Joaquin Valley, 12 percent of children have asthma, and in Kern, 9 percent of adults suffer the disease, according to the Great Valley Center, a Modesto nonprofit.

Studies also associate high particulate pollution with heart disease and premature death.

At the meeting, the board also tightened restrictions on other industries:

- The valley's 18 largest winemakers will have to cut smog-forming ethanol emissions by 35 percent.
- Industrial and agricultural operations, plus the occasional restaurant and hospital, must make sure their boilers, dryers, dehydrators, steam generators, heaters and ovens meet new emissions standards.
- The district adjusted controls on oil fields and factories to be more consistent with federal standards.

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- Starting in March, builders will have to pay up or design low-emissions projects.
- Fees on homes could exceed \$1,700 by 2008. Those fees drop depending on the pollution-cutting design features of each project.
- Commercial and government buildings, including schools, will also be subject to fees.
- The district will use most of the money to pave roads and replace dirty diesel engines.
- The fee also applies to commercial buildings, like strip malls and government buildings.
- At first, a 12,000 square-foot strip mall with no overtures to air quality would cost the builder \$18,000, according to the air district. Typical mitigations would drive the fee down to \$11,717. The same size drive-through pharmacy would cost a builder \$32,650, and with adjustments that figure would be \$19,180, according to the district.

### **Central Valley sets smog fees on builders** **First levy in nation to link air pollution to new construction**

by Greg Lucas, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, December 16, 2005

Sacramento -- Central Valley air quality officials, looking for ways to battle deteriorating air quality in the fast-growing region, voted unanimously Thursday to place an air pollution fee on new large-scale residential and commercial development -- the first action of its kind in the country.

After more than two years of discussion, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District agreed to force builders to pay fees that increase depending on the harm their developments have on the region's air quality, already among the worst in the nation. The rule takes effect March 1.

"It's a necessary evil," said Carol Whiteside, president of the Great Valley Center, a Modesto-based think tank focusing on the Central Valley. "There's no question the more people in the area, the more stress there is on the environment, but the higher the fees on housing, the harder it is for people to buy homes."

In the first three years, the district estimates it will collect \$100 million in fees, which will be used for projects and grants intended to improve air quality. Smog fees collected from developers could go toward putting cleaner engines in school buses, encouraging use of alternative fuels and promoting videoconferencing.

Hotly opposed by builders and business groups, the fee is one of the first regulatory attempts to encourage growth to be more environment-friendly.

It will affect construction in the fast-growing region overseen by the district: San Joaquin, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Madera, Merced and Stanislaus counties and the western half of Kern County.

The district's rationale is that new developments increase pollution initially through their construction and, when completed, through more vehicle trips and other polluting activities such as yard maintenance.

"We know vehicle miles traveled is a huge factor in air pollution and in climate change," said Bill Allayaud, a Sierra Club lobbyist in Sacramento. "This is a very welcome move to get serious about land-use patterns."

Exempted from the fee are residential developments of fewer than 50 units, commercial buildings under 2,000 square feet and office space of less than 50,000 square feet.

Opponents and supporters, which included various environmental groups and Fresno Metro Ministries, squared off at a daylong public hearing. Fifty-seven people spoke, 43 in favor of the rule and 14 against.

Among the opponents: the Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce, the Reason Foundation and the California Building Industry Association. Opponents objected to the fee's effect on home prices, the district's lack of specificity on how the money will be spent and the fact that cars are more responsible than builders for the valley's polluted air.

Central Valley residents are exposed to unhealthy levels of ozone more often than people living in the Los Angeles Basin, historically home to some of the nation's poorest air. From 1999 through 2004, the valley failed to meet the federal standard for healthy air 38 percent of the time.

The air district, which in the past raised the ire of farmers in the agriculturally rich region by imposing more stringent rules on dust creation and debris burning, has no jurisdiction over mobile sources of pollution, such as cars. The state Air Resources Board regulates that kind of pollution.

"This fee will stifle new construction," said Nathan Magsig, the mayor of Clovis and a member of the Stop the Air Board Tax coalition. "Developers are being blamed for sprawl. Local governments develop general plans, and developers, both residential and commercial, build on property based on those plans."

The fees, which the air district agreed to re-evaluate in 2010, could be as high as \$780 for a home and \$18,000 for a 2,000-square-foot commercial structure, the district estimates.

Opponents said the fees would add \$1,700 to the price of a house in 2008 and reach nearly \$400,000 for a new community shopping center that same year.

The fees are reduced if builders make design changes to reduce the project's effect on air quality. If a project is air-friendly enough, there will be no fee, although the district acknowledges it would be unlikely for a developer to reach that level.

Among some of the features the district would reward in a residential development: bike paths, sidewalks on both sides of each street, higher density, greater energy efficiency and no wood-burning stoves. Outlets for electrical lawn mowers and locating the development near jobs and retail space also would win a fee reduction.

Locating a commercial center near housing, improving its energy efficiency, providing bicycle racks and having multiple tenants could reduce the commercial fee by nearly two-thirds, the district says.

Besides the fee's effect on affordability, builders object that it targets only new construction.

"We're already incorporating a lot of the things they're suggesting would be incentives to reduce the amount of fees a developer would have to pay," said Kevin Huber, president of the Grupe Co., which is readying a 7,000-home development near Stockton.

"As to the fee itself, I think it's the wrong approach. The degradation of air quality in the valley is the result of several things and several industries and should not be borne just by the new home buyer and home builder," Huber said.

### **What the new rule does**

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District imposed a fee on the builders of new large-sale commercial and residential developments in the San Joaquin Valley to discourage projects that worsen air quality.

### **How it works**

Builders submit their projects to the air district, which calculates the projects' impact on air quality and gives developers a chance to revise plans with designs that reduce pollution. Those designs include energy-efficient appliances, sidewalks, bike paths, electrical vehicle charging stations, speed bumps and locations near retail shops or job centers.

### **How high is the fee?**

Builders who do nothing to make their projects more air-friendly could pay as much as \$780 per house and \$18,000 for a 2,000-square-foot commercial structure. The district expects to collect \$100 million over the next three years and use it for programs to improve air quality.

### **Exemptions**

Residential projects with fewer than 50 units, commercial spaces under 2,000 square feet and office spaces less than 50,000 square feet are not subject to the fees.

*Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District*

## **Regulators OK tough air pollution law**

By Juliana Barbassa, Associated Press

Published in the Merced Sun-Star, Washington Post, NY Times, LA Daily News  
Friday, December 16, 2005

FRESNO -- Air regulators on Thursday approved the nation's first air quality controls on wineries in an effort to clamp down on the smog-forming chemicals that drift into the atmosphere during fermentation.

Among the sweeping reforms, officials also approved rules requiring developers and industry to adopt features that will cut down on pollution that many blame on sprawl throughout the Valley -- one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation.

The winery rule approved by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District asks the 18 largest wine makers in the eight-county region to reduce pollution coming from their plants by 35 percent.

In a move opposed by environmentalists, the district's board hedged a bit, allowing wineries to pay another industry, such as a neighboring dairy, to reduce a similar amount of pollution if the vintners find that making changes in the production process is too expensive.

Vintners can also choose to pay into a fund the air district will use to help other communities and industries reduce their pollution.

Wineries in the Valley have come under scrutiny because the fermentation process that turns grape sugars to alcohol releases ethanol, methanol and other organic compounds into the atmosphere, where they react with sunlight and heat to form ozone.

Environmental advocates complained that the rules were too lax and gave wineries an easy way to avoid cutting back emissions.

"They rushed it," said Earth Justice's Sarah Jackson.

The San Joaquin Valley has 109 vintners -- including some of the country's largest such as E&J Gallo and Delicato -- and produces approximately 338 million gallons of wine a year, or roughly 70 percent of California's table wine.

But the Valley also has some of the nation's most polluted air. Regulators said the grape fermentation process releases about 788 tons of pollutants a year.

Vintners opposed the rule, claiming it will cut into their profit margins and hinder their ability to compete internationally since no other country asks wine makers to implement air quality controls.

But they praised the district for making the rule flexible.

"You still get the emissions reductions the district wants to achieve, but it gives wine makers a way of complying in the most cost-effective way," said David Farabee, a lawyer for the Wine Institute, which represents most of the wineries that fall under the rule.

Also Thursday, regulators approved rules requiring developers and industry to cut down on pollution.

The rules, which require developers to include features such as bike lanes and sidewalks or pay a fee of up to \$780 a home, apply to developments with more than 50 homes, commercial projects exceeding 2,000 square feet and other sites meant for industrial and medical uses.

Regulators said the initiative is the toughest in the state, and among the most stringent in the nation.

The Valley risks losing federal highway funds and other benefits if it does not come into compliance with clean air standards.

Several dozen clean air advocates, concerned residents and environmentalists spoke in favor of the rule, saying the timing couldn't be more appropriate.

Two days ago, for the first time, regulators said the air in the entire eight-county region was too polluted for anyone -- even healthy adults -- to spend time outdoors.

Industry representatives complained the rule will discourage businesses from moving to the area.

## **Air Quality Regulators Impose Rule on Developers**

**San Joaquin Valley builders will have to pay fees or take actions to help reduce pollution.**

By Miguel Bustillo, Los Angeles Times, December 16, 2005

San Joaquin Valley air quality officials Thursday approved what are believed to be the nation's first rules requiring developers to pay fees or alter building plans in order to reduce air pollution.

The rules, scheduled to take effect in March, are primarily an attempt by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to force builders of housing subdivisions, shopping centers and office complexes to plan their developments in ways that help reduce pollution from motor vehicles.

The San Joaquin Valley, which has experienced explosive growth in the last two decades and is now home to more than 3.7 million people, is expected to double in population over the next 40 years.

The valley now rivals the Los Angeles Basin for the worst air quality in the United States, according to health standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Although much of the pollution in the valley comes from factory farming, motor vehicles are the biggest source of smog and soot.

"With the amount of expected growth in the valley, every emission reduction from this rule is important," Seyed Sadredin, the air district's deputy director, said in a statement. "Although air quality has improved greatly over the years, we still have a severe problem, and innovative programs like this will help us clean the air."

Building industry officials, who question the legality of holding developers accountable for indirectly contributing to air pollution, have indicated that they may challenge the rules in court.

But farmers, who have been the target of many San Joaquin Valley air pollution regulations in recent years, supported the rules, arguing that other contributors to the pollution problem should also be forced to make changes. Of the 57 people who commented on the rule during Thursday's hearing, 43 expressed support.

The rule will require builders to make changes to their projects to reduce urban sprawl or pay fees

to fund air pollution programs. By building stores near houses, or incorporating walking paths, developers could limit their exposure to fees. Developers could also reduce fees by eliminating fireplaces and making structures more energy efficient.

In another action, air district officials approved a precedent-setting regulation to reduce ethanol emissions, which contribute to smog, from fermentation tanks at wineries.

## **Regulators adopt rules for developers, wineries**

by Warren Lutz

Stockton Record, Friday, December 16, 2005

Air pollution cops Thursday enacted first-of-their-kind rules that place taxes on Valley projects that increase sprawl.

By having builders pay for the smog that sprawling construction projects create, officials hope to reduce air pollution by more than 10 tons daily in the San Joaquin Valley.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District regulates stationary sources of pollution but can't directly control tailpipe emissions.

The board's vote was unanimous. It also chose to revisit the rules in 2010.

Some Central Valley officials opposed the new rule, arguing developers would pass the extra costs onto consumers and that it would tack on thousands of dollars to the price of a new home.

The fees would increase each year for three years beginning in 2006. The proposal would add \$1,772 to the cost of a typical home by 2008, according to district projections.

Builders would pay less if they designed energy-efficient buildings, put them near mass transit and added bike and pedestrian paths, all of which would help decrease smog.

Among the sweeping reforms, officials also approved rules requiring the 18 largest wine makers in the region to reduce pollution coming from their plants by 35 percent.

Regulators said the the fermentation process that turns grape sugars to alcohol creates ozone and releases about 788 tons of pollutants a year.

The San Joaquin Valley produces approximately 338 million gallons of wine a year.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

## **Suit alleges dairy project does not have permit**

By Gretchen Wenner, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, December 16, 2005

A familiar name in Central Valley dairy litigation has filed a federal lawsuit against a project under construction outside Shafter.

The Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, a group that frequently litigates on behalf of citizen groups over environmental issues, filed suit Thursday in Fresno district court against the C & R Vanderham Dairy. The center is representing the Association of Irrigated Residents, a Shafter group.

According to the suit, dairy operators Rick and Corrie Vanderham failed to get a necessary permit before starting construction earlier this year. The suit also alleges Vanderham didn't comply with new rules requiring cutting-edge pollution controls.

The air district that issues the permit in question said Vanderham's project wasn't big enough to trigger such requirements, while a lawyer for the center said the suit is based on federal laws, which are tougher than state law.

Rick McVaigh, compliance director for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the district investigated Vanderham's case.

The facility will house 1,320 milk cows, McVaigh said. The new rules kick in at about 1,954 lactating cows.

"The dairy being built would not require an 'authority to construct' (permit), based on that," McVaigh said.

The district has issued seven violation notices to San Joaquin Valley dairies that have started building without the required "authority to construct" permit, he said. None are in Kern County.

The threshold number has a gray area, he said, because nonlactating cows are also kept on dairies as support stock. They emit significantly less air pollutants than lactating animals, research indicates, so figure differently in overall air impact formulas.

The project is slated for 195 dry cows, 486 heifers and some calves, or about 2,000 adult animals in all, according to the district.

Brent Newell, lead attorney in the case, said federal air laws, which are stricter than the state's, apply to any source that emits more than 2 pounds daily of certain pollutants -- a low threshold.

"We're enforcing federal law," Newell said, adding that in cases where federal and state rules clash, "federal laws trump."

The suit requests a temporary restraining order, civil penalties, a jury trial, attorney fees and other remediation.

Dairy industry consultant John Dunlap III, speaking on behalf of the family, said: "The Vanderhams are surprised at this action."

The longtime dairy family has followed rules, answered questions and filed timely paperwork during the long permitting process, he said.

The Vanderhams, among an influx of Chino-area dairy families migrating to the Central Valley, went through years of permitting hurdles at the county level to get the OK for their site at the southeast corner of Riverside Street and Palm Avenue.

Some residents objected, saying the facility was too close to schools and homes.

## **Burn rule goes up in smoke**

### **Exempt from restrictions, Fire Department conducts training by torching house**

By Sarah Ruby, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, December 16, 2005

Wednesday was a no-burn day for everyone but the Kern County Fire Department.

That became clear to Maria Stewart as she watched the Fire Department burn down a house on TV news that evening.

It struck her as odd, then a little outrageous. Because of poor air quality, Kern residents haven't been able to use their fireplaces for a week. The valley needs a strong wind to banish polluted air, and with none forecast, the fireplace ban is likely to hold through Christmas.

Stewart doesn't like watching an unlit fireplace, but if it helps the air in her northeast Bakersfield neighborhood, she figures she can live with the rules.

She expects government to do the same, she said.

"What makes them think the rules don't apply to them?" she asked.

Fireplace rules don't apply to fire department training, said Capt. Doug Johnston, public information officer for the county Fire Department.

"It's one of those things done for the greater good of the community," he said.

Pollution from the house "is a drop in the bucket" of overall pollution, he said.

The department has to take opportunities to run fire training in a house scheduled for demolition, Johnston said. They come up two or three times a year, he said.

Officers ignited individual fires throughout a house in Lamont to give about 50 firefighters and some reporters a controlled look at fire suppression. Finally, after they'd burned all the rooms they could, they set the whole house ablaze in the afternoon.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District worked with the Fire Department to delay the training as long as possible, said spokeswoman Brenda Turner.

"We've been stalling them for about a month," she said. "They have done what they needed to do and worked with us. It just was one of those things, they couldn't wait any longer."

This year, the San Joaquin Valley has seen an increase in the kind of air pollution that comes from fires, engines and other activities. Stagnant weather lets that pollution collect, and without a good storm or even some wind, there's no way to get rid of it, according to the air district.

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## **Cities not sure hybrids are worth savings in gas**

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By Patrick Walters, Associated Press

in the Modesto Bee, Friday, December 16, 2005

PHILADELPHIA - By gradually adding hybrids to this city's vehicle fleet, James Muller knows he's helping to save the environment. What he doesn't know is whether switching to the more expensive "green" vehicles will save taxpayers money.

The city just bought 20 new hybrid Ford Escapes to add to the six Toyota Priuses already in its 6,000-vehicle fleet. Muller, Philadelphia's fleet manager, said officials are doing it to improve air quality, but the upfront costs definitely take a bigger hit on city coffers.

"That's what we're finding with the initial cost ... it doesn't wash out," he said. "You're actually paying more money."

Hybrid vehicles, which save gasoline by switching between an electric motor and a gas engine, are seeing enormous sales growth among ordinary consumers. More than 173,000 had been sold in 2005 through October, more than doubling the total for all of 2004, according to the Electric Drive Transportation Association.

Officials in many cities, however, are hesitant, even though municipal governments have been part of the vanguard for bringing technologies such as electric cars and natural-gas-powered buses to the nation's roads.

It's only been a year or two since many cities started adding hybrids to their fleets, but officials say the initial costs can be tough to bear. And they simply don't know whether they'll save money over gasoline-only or diesel vehicles the long run.

Officials in various cities estimate that choosing a hybrid vehicle costs an extra \$3,000 to \$8,000, depending on the model and which gasoline-only model would have been bought in its place.

Officials in Ann Arbor, Mich., decided not to add hybrids to their fleet after determining the costs would outweigh the benefits. Ann Arbor has other types of alternate-fuel vehicles but found that hybrids just weren't cost-effective, said David Konkle, the city's energy coordinator.

Konkle estimated the hybrids would save \$300 to \$500 a year each in gas, making it impossible to make up the difference in purchase price, which he said was \$8,000.

"Economic times have been very tough, and we were facing the toughest budget year that I've seen in the 15-plus years that I've been here at the city," Konkle said.

In New York, which had bought more than 830 hybrids as of 2004, the vehicles make sense because the city requires the purchase of the cleanest vehicle available, said Mark Simon, director of alternative fuel programs.

"It was not our mandate to save money," he said. "They're expecting us to pay more for a cleaner tailpipe."

In Oregon, Dan Clem oversees 3,000 vehicles - 123 of them hybrids - as fleet manager for the state's Department of Administration Services.

Whether the state ultimately saves money depends on a number of factors, including how gas prices change and how well the hybrids hold up, he said.

"If they don't last, then they won't pencil out," Clem said, adding that they appear to be holding up well so far.

### **Bloggers question district's no-burn days**

Bakersfield Californian (online version), Friday, December 16, 2005

The Californian asked its online readers whether they are obeying the recent bans on fireplace burning. Here are just some of the things being said. You can join the discussion by going to [www.bakersfield.com/blogs](http://www.bakersfield.com/blogs) and clicking on the Eye of Bakersfield blog.

Get online and start writing!

Comments

I will burn in my fireplace anytime I want. My name is in the phonebook. Look up my address and come and cite me you jack-booted thugs. I dare you. You don't have the guts.

I have a fire in my fireplace right now, and I will have one for some time.

-- Posted by: John Derouche December 15, 2005 at 11:06 AM

Throw another log on the fire John, kids with asthmas don't need to take no stinking breaths.

-- Posted by: Neocon Savior December 15, 2005 at 11:17 AM

I have a gas insert. It doesn't smell as good, but there's no mess, and no smoke. Instant fire in seconds. I even bought this cool stuff that when heated makes crackling sounds just like the real thing!

I'll save the woodburning for camping.

-- Posted by: Progressive Pete December 15, 2005 at 11:27 AM

I find it odd that we aren't allowed to have fires in our fireplaces, but big companies can pollute the air with whatever the hell they want. I guess the SJVAPCD is starting small, really small. Why not aim bigger, huh? Are we little homeowners the real villains?

-- Posted by: Danielle December 15, 2005 at 01:39 PM

BAH! HUMBUG!

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has IGNORED every complaint I have ever made in the last ten years and they are another GRINCH trying to steal Christmas.

Go ahead. Make a complaint about a company polluting and then call to follow up.

YOU WON'T GET THE TIME OF DAY FROM THESE DUMMIES!...

-- Posted by: Curt Dalton December 15, 2005 at 02:40 PM

I bought a house with a fireplace a few years ago and have not had a fire in it yet and probably never will. Lived in the mountains for a while when propane was still \$1.25 a gallon. We used

wood for heat and I am tired of being the fire tender. My wife has holiday decorations and three candles in the fireplace now. Looks pretty good. Maybe I'll plumb gas to the fireplace next remodel project.

-- Posted by: randyg December 15, 2005 at 04:47 PM

I will burn my fire place with wood anytime i want. If the town of Bakersfield is so concerned about pollution stop building all the houses all over town. I bet if they could make money off people burning their fireplaces, all of of sudden the air would be good.

-- Posted by: greg December 15, 2005 at 05:24 PM

## Topic of the Day

Bakersfield Californian (online version), Friday, December 16, 2005

### What do you do when fireplace burning is banned because of poor air quality?

I burn anyway. They're never gonna catch me. And if they do it's probably a small fine.  
9%

I obey the rules. I don't want to have to breath dirty air.  
31%

I never pay attention to whether it is allowed or not. So I'm not sure if I am breaking the rules.  
23%

I don't ever use my fireplace/have a fireplace.  
38%

Total Votes : 257

[Modesto Bee editorial, Friday, December 16, 2005](#)

### U.S. needs to face up to its role in stopping global warming

The planet is getting warmer. Ice caps are melting, sea currents are shifting, water temperatures rising, coastlines are threatened - all of which has been documented by federally funded studies.

So why does the Bush administration still have its head so firmly planted in the sand? Harlan L. Watson, the United States' top negotiator at the Montreal summit on global warming last week, walked out of the conference to avoid even discussing the rules to discuss a cap on greenhouse emissions. Worldwide pressure brought him back, but we wonder why he bothered. His only mission was to impede any real progress.

The problem is the Bush administration, which appears to put its faith in the babblings of a diminishing group of pseudo-scientists who continue to argue that global warming is a sham. Having been mocked off the international stage for such insistence, President Bush finally admitted last summer that global warming is real. But so far, his only actions have been to make certain the United States won't help solve the problem. He insists the best solution, mandatory caps on smokestack emissions, would hurt the U.S. economy.

Would such caps hurt the economy more than a permanent shift in the world's weather? To see what that looks like, rewind the tapes of Hurricane Katrina.

At the Montreal conference, Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin spoke pointedly: "To recalcitrant nations, including the United States, I would say this: There is such a thing as a global conscience, and now is the time to listen to it."

Fortunately, many Americans are listening. Two weeks before the Montreal meeting, Sens. Richard Lugar and Joseph Biden, leaders of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced a bipartisan resolution calling for the United States to help achieve "significant long-term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions" through negotiated commitments. As the Montreal talks

were taking place, 24 senators wrote Bush and urged him "at a minimum, to refrain from blocking or obstructing" discussions.

Gov. Schwarzenegger has talked about mandatory reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions, as has New York's Republican governor, George Pataki. The Philadelphia Inquirer has reported that nine Northeastern states have agreed to freeze carbon-dioxide emissions from power plants. Most encouraging are local efforts as some 200 mayors in nearly 40 states have committed to using energy more efficiently and cutting greenhouse gases.

The United States produces 23 percent of the world's greenhouse gases; without real reductions from us, there can be no real solution. It is time to listen; it is time to act.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Friday, December 16, 2005](#)

### **We don't care about our worsening air**

Let's stop pretending that we care about the air in the San Joaquin Valley. The days of seeing the mountains in the distance most of the year are gone. The ability to breathe and our children's health are secondary to buying bigger homes, bigger trucks and SUVs, and allowing nonstop growth without the infrastructure to support it. Agriculture, dairies and pollution blown in from the Bay Area are convenient scapegoats, but those factors have not changed significantly. It is our self-centered, gluttonous, bigger-is-better mentality that is to blame for our horrible air quality. When we accept that, and each of us makes changes as individuals and in our families, then the San Joaquin Valley will be allowed to heal.

Matthew Bovenkerk, Waterford

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, December 16, 2005:](#)

### **'Needs to get better'**

We have very bad air quality in Fresno and because of that, children get asthma. We need to find good ways to control this problem.

Cars aren't the only things causing bad air. Cows are gaining on them, because their waste is an important factor too. I think we shouldn't be having this problem.

We need to have better programs to prevent this unhealthy problem. I would suggest people carpool more often. Everyone should be doing their part to help the environment because it affects all of us.

We also need to do something about the cows. We can ask dairy farmers to keep their farms cleaner, which will help a little bit, but we need to think of something very good, very fast. Our air needs to get better and it's only getting worse.

Varsenik Keshishyan, Fresno