

[Fresno Bee Commentary, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2011:](#)

SEYED SADREDIN: Air District faces challenges

In the San Joaquin Valley, our air-quality challenges are more difficult than those in any other region in the nation.

On one hand, we have been given circumstances over which we have no control: The Valley's geography, topography and climate turn our region into a bowl with a lid; pass-through highway traffic brings pollution without any economic benefit; and emissions from the northwest add to our own. On the other hand, our resources and capacity to absorb the economic costs of combating air pollution are limited due to our high poverty and unemployment rates.

Designing and implementing effective strategies that protect both the Valley's economic well-being and our residents' health demand a great deal of innovation, creativity and hard work. Thanks to residents and businesses, we have made significant progress and air quality in San Joaquin Valley today is the best in recorded history.

Since 1980, air pollution from businesses has been reduced by more than 80%. Given where we are in our journey toward cleaner air, each of us must have the courage to look in the mirror and do our part as we craft reasonable remedies to protect public health. Enormous challenges remain, and we cannot achieve our clean air goals on the back of businesses alone.

Scientific polls show that air quality is a high priority for Valley residents and that they are willing to do their part to reduce air pollution. Most residents respond positively to calls to refrain from using wood-burning fireplaces and to reduce driving.

Although I'm gratified by the results of these polls, I also believe that the discontent expressed by individuals in the community deserves our attention and response, as it represents the feelings of many, and dismissing it as isolated incidences of denial and blame is foolish.

Let me share the Air District's core values:

- Protection of public health.
- Active and effective air pollution control efforts with minimal disruption to the Valley's economic prosperity.
- Outstanding customer service.
- Ingenuity and innovation.
- Accountability to the public.
- Open, transparent public processes.
- Recognition of the uniqueness of the San Joaquin Valley.
- Continuous improvement.
- Effective, efficient use of public funds.
- Respect for the opinions and interest of all Valley residents.

We have the lowest permit fees and administrative overhead among California's major air districts. We have absorbed significant new and unfunded mandates from the state and federal governments without increasing staff.

Many of our air quality programs now serve as the model for the rest of the state and the nation. All actions by the governing board are subject to months -- and sometimes years -- of public input, debate and discussion. Our pledge is that every instance of less than exceptional service that is brought to our attention is investigated and corrected.

Two actions by the Air District seem to be a source of discontent by some people in the community: Our "Make One Change" campaign that asks Valley residents to refrain from wood burning on poor air-quality days, and the new DMV fees that were enacted in response to what we believe is an unfair federal mandate.

"Check before you burn" has been our most effective and least costly clean-air strategy. Getting equivalent reductions from our heavily regulated businesses could cost hundreds of millions of dollars, which we all would pay in one form or another.

Valley businesses have already spent billions of dollars on cleaning up our air, which brings us to the new DMV fees. Facing an unfair mandate from the federal government, our board concluded that a \$12 per year fee is less detrimental to the Valley's economy than a \$29 million per year penalty on businesses. As one Valley resident aptly said at the public hearing, paying \$12 is better than he or his neighbor losing their jobs.

But we believe that neither Valley residents nor businesses deserve a penalty. If anything, they deserve commendation for their sacrifices and investments in clean air. We will continue our fight in Congress to repeal this unfair penalty.

Seyed Sadredin is executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. For more details on the district's core values, visit www.valleyair.org.

Feds and California to propose new fuel rules

By Ken Thomas

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WASHINGTON -- The federal government and California say they will coordinate on new proposals to increase vehicle fuel efficiency for future cars and trucks by Sept. 1.

The Transportation Department and the Environmental Protection Agency are working on new standards for vehicles that will be built during the 2017-2025 model years. Prior to Monday's announcement, the California Air Resources Board had planned to issue its own proposal for the same time period by March.

California has pushed for more stringent air pollution rules than required by the federal government but agreed last year to comply with federal rules up to the 2016 model year.

Officials say the single timeframe will lead to more cooperation between the federal government and California on the standards.