

Davis signs bills to clean dirty Valley air

Action ends agriculture's exemption from smog rules.

By Jim Davis and Jennifer M. Fitzenberger

The Fresno Bee

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Gov. Davis signed into law Monday an air-legislation package that will end agriculture's historical exemption from air pollution controls and eventually stop farmers from burning waste such as orchard prunings.

At a news conference at Viking Elementary School in Fresno, Davis representatives announced the governor had signed the bills earlier in the day. About 20 students at the school are participating in a study on asthma.

Davis was in Los Angeles at an event with Washington Gov. Gary Locke pledging their states and Oregon would work together to obtain fuel-efficient vehicles, reduce diesel fuel emissions and improve monitoring of greenhouse gas emissions.

He could not attend the Fresno conference, said Kevin Ryan, a Davis spokesman.

"The schedule just didn't allow for it, but he's thrilled to be signing this legislation into law," Ryan said.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who worked with Davis administration officials all summer as he pushed the air bills, said he learned about noon Monday that Davis had signed the legislation.

"Am I disappointed the governor didn't show today?" Florez asked. "Yeah, but, at the end of the day, we have legislation that will make the air cleaner."

Florez said the legislation will clear an estimated 400 to 500 tons of pollution a day from the Valley's air -- about the equivalent of the emissions from 6,000 to 7,000 cars.

In a statement, Davis said: "This package of legislation has passed because the people of the San Joaquin Valley are sick of the air that's easier to see than it is to breathe."

The Valley's air ranks among the worst in the nation for smog and tiny particle pollution.

But agriculture leaders opposed most of the bills, saying they put too many restrictions on farming and unfairly singled out the industry. Farmers argued that too-tight regulations would be costly and, in some cases, jeopardize their businesses.

The most fought-over measure was Senate Bill 700 to repeal the agriculture industry's exemption from air operating permits. The bill brings agriculture under the same pollution-control requirements guiding other industries in California.

Farmers agreed to end the exemption, as ordered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the wake of an environmental lawsuit settlement. But they argued that Florez's bill went too far.

The bills passed through the Senate, but stalled in the Assembly where Florez accused lawmakers of holding them up for politics. But, with the support of Assembly Member Sarah Reyes, D-Fresno, the bills were approved Sept. 10 by the Assembly.

Reyes was scheduled to join Florez at Monday's news conference, but her flight was delayed.

Respiratory therapist Kevin Hamilton and the Sierra Club's Kevin Hall praised Davis for "stepping forward" to sign the legislation.

Bonnie Holmes-Gen of the American Lung Association of California said, "This is a great day for air quality and public health. And this is a great day for everyone who lives in the Central Valley."

Hot, smoggy day forecast Valley urged to take precautions, Spare the Air.

By Marc Benjamin

The Fresno Bee

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Today's heat will turn the Valley's air unhealthy and prompt warnings that young and old alike should take it easy.

Today is a Spare the Air day, meaning the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is requesting residents take voluntary measures to reduce harmful air emissions.

"We have had schools calling and asking us," Josette Merced Bello, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman said Monday. "We are recommending schools use caution when scheduling outdoor exercise in the afternoon for the next two days."

The district recommends residents from Madera County to the South Valley use caution.

Schools will receive a "cautionary statement" and the district will monitor air quality throughout the day and update school officials.

The air quality index will peak at 182 in Fresno, Kings and Madera counties and is projected to hit 192 in Tulare and Kern counties. A reading higher than 100 is unhealthy for sensitive groups, and a reading above 150 is unhealthy for everyone.

Today's air quality readings are similar to those from July's string of 100-degree days, Merced Bello said.

Ozone, produced from motor vehicle emissions, is of the most concern today.

Among the worst areas in the Valley are Parlier in Fresno County and Arvin and Edison in southern Kern County. Parlier had the central region's projected high Monday at 185; Arvin's was 187.

"Parlier gets downwind emissions from Fresno and Clovis, and we are seeing some high readings in Arvin and Edison because they get downwind emissions for the whole Valley," Merced Bello said.

Parlier Unified School District officials met with coaches Monday to talk about air quality and heat problems students could encounter today, said Maria Meneses-Trejo, district superintendent.

"We were talking to coaches about limiting the amount of time that students are in practice because of air quality and heat and everything that comes with it," she said.

The school district also advised teachers at primary grade levels.

"We tell teachers at elementary levels that they don't have to take the children out; they can do indoor activities or limit the outdoor activities or try to take them out earlier in the day," Meneses-Trejo said.

Errands are recommended to be done as early in the day as possible, and those who work outdoors should take frequent breaks and drink plenty of fluids, Merced Bello said.

Residents are urged to reduce driving and postpone errands, especially those done during rush hour at the end of the day. Any work with gas-powered engines also is recommended to be kept at a minimum.

This month, there have been seven 100-degree days. Today will be the eighth if temperatures reach predicted highs.

That would tie for the most 100-degree days in the past seven years during September. Last year, eight 100-degree days were reported.

Century-mark temperatures are not uncommon this late in the year.

The latest 100-degree day on record for Fresno was Oct. 14, 1978. Other 100-degree days have been reported in the first week of October.

Last year, the final 100-degree day was Sept. 24.

Monday's high of 102 was shy of a 104-degree record set in 1949. Today's record is 105, also set in 1949.

Bakersfield tied a 77-year-old record with a high of 105. Also Monday, Lemoore hit 104 while Madera and Merced reached 102.

Fresno and Madera are forecast to reach 100 today. The hot spots will be Delano and Coalinga at 102.

By Wednesday, temperatures should drop by about 4 degrees, and as the week continues temperatures will be dropping slightly to between 90 and 95 degrees, with light winds.

Davis enacts 5 Valley air bills

Package requires new ag permits, bans waste burns

By Jake Henshaw

Sacramento Bureau of the Visalia Times-Delta

SACRAMENTO -- The campaign to clean up the air in the San Joaquin Valley got a big boost Monday when the governor approved a multiple-track attack on regional pollution.

Gov. Gray Davis signed five bills by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, that will require new permits to farm, allow new fees on vehicles and put an end to open field burning of agricultural waste.

The governor also signed legislation by Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, D-Fresno, that will require general plans in Valley communities to include strategies to improve air quality.

The legislation becomes law Jan. 1, though some provisions are phased in over several years.

The measures are part of a major effort to clean up the Valley's air, which is the dirtiest in the nation outside of the Los Angeles basin.

The pollution is so bad that federal officials, as the result of a lawsuit settlement, are threatening to withhold highway funds among other severe sanctions if the state doesn't take major steps to clean the air.

"This package of legislation has passed because the people of the San Joaquin Valley are sick of air that's easier to see than it is to breathe," Davis said in a prepared statement.

Florez, in his own statement, thanked the governor for "realizing just how critical these bills were for the Valley."

Florez added, "While it was often the opposition that made the news, there was also an outpouring of support from everyday citizens who wanted to see to see their Legislature do the right thing, which was to give Valley residents hope for cleaner air in the future."

The bills drew strong opposition from agriculture, which spent long days at the end of the legislative session earlier this month negotiating with Florez and other legislators, air district officials and environmentalists over the terms of the bills.

In the end they won some concessions that tempered their objections, such as the chance to opt out temporarily from a ban on open field burning of agricultural waste if there is no economically feasible alternative.

But the major controversy was over Senate Bill 700, which ends agriculture's 56-year exemption from federal air rules requiring permits.

As a result of negotiations, Florez amended the bill to focus primarily on the larger farms by requiring regulators to consider cost, socio-economic effects and other factors in determining who would be subject to new controls.

The key agreement, however, was a delay in the date for implementing new regulations from 2004 to 2006 so the local air board will have time to consider academic pollution studies now under way in drawing up new rules. The studies are due within the next 18 months to two years.

"We are not sure, but we think we set up the proper foundation to measure what our contributions might be [to Valley pollution] and then it will be up to the stakeholders and regional board to determine if they fall within the regulations and permit [requirements] or not," said Gary Conover, a lobbyist for Western United Dairymen.

Davis signs bills to ease air pollution in San Joaquin Valley

BRIAN SKOLOFF, Associated Press Writer (published in the San Francisco Chronicle, September 23, 2003)

Gov. Gray Davis has signed a package of bills to reduce air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley, home to 3.3 million people and the state's agricultural heartland.

The legislation will end the agriculture industry's exemption from federal clean air laws by forcing farm polluters to apply for permits. The industry is blamed for making the valley the second dirtiest air basin in the nation.

The bills also provide \$6 million for the valley's waste-to-energy biomass plants to encourage burning of agricultural waste such as trees and plant matter, and phase out agricultural burning in the valley.

In addition, law enforcement is given new authority to ticket "gross-polluting" cars.

Bills signed by Davis on Monday include SB700, 704, 705, 708 and 709, sponsored by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

Davis also signed into law AB170, a bill sponsored by Assembly Member Sarah Reyes, D-Fresno, which requires valley cities and counties to amend their general plans to include goals, policies and implementation strategies for improving air quality.

In an appearance at a Fresno elementary school, Winston Hickox, secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, said the new laws will move the valley toward cleaner air sooner rather than later.

"I think the people of the valley have spoken and through their representatives in Sacramento they have said, 'Enough,'" Hickox said.

Davis, fighting for his job in the state's historic recall election, has signed dozens of bills into law during the last week, including measures aimed at improving security at airports, protecting the coast from oil spills and expanding domestic partnership rights.

Monday's bills focussed exclusively on the environment.

Sierra Club member Kevin Hall, who has long fought for cleaner air in the valley, said the recall election has nothing to do with the governor's commitment to the environment.

"This is consistent with his voting record since he's been in office," Hall said.

Three of the valley's cities rank among the four smoggiest metropolitan areas in the United States. Fresno County has the highest childhood asthma rate in the state. Clean air proponents blame air pollution for 72,000 asthma attacks and hundreds of deaths a year in the San Joaquin Valley.

"It's a huge step in the right direction," said Brent Newell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. "But the air will not be cleaned magically based on the signing of these bills. It will take significant work on the part of regulators to put this into action."

Newell said the valley stood to lose \$2 billion in federal highway funds without legislation that forced polluters to begin cleaning the air.

But not everyone was pleased with the new laws.

Cynthia Cory, director of environmental affairs for the California Farm Bureau, said the bills simply go too far.

"Any time you see the potential for new regulations and rules and fees ... farmers get very concerned," Cory added. "The Safeways of the world don't care where their oranges come from. They look at how much it costs per carton. If it's \$10 dollars from California and \$5 from Chile or Mexico, we know which ones they will buy."

Western governors join to fight global warming

JEREMIAH MARQUEZ, Associated Press Writer (published in the San Francisco Chronicle, September 23, 2003)

With a smog-choked state park as their backdrop, the West Coast's Democratic governors accused the Bush administration of not doing enough to fight global warming and vowed their states would develop a joint plan to reduce air pollution.

"Unfortunately the Bush administration is still in denial on global warming. They have their head in the Texas sand, they're foot-dragging. They refuse to believe it's a problem," California Gov. Gray Davis said. "My message today is if Washington, D.C., will not lead, then the West Coast of the United States will lead on global warming."

Davis and Washington Gov. Gary Locke, joined by environmental activists, unveiled the pact Monday. Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski, who was unable to attend, endorsed the plan in a statement.

The trio said they would work to check global warming through coordinated actions that include purchasing fuel-efficient vehicles, developing renewable sources of energy and creating standardized methods to account for emissions.

Davis said the agreement was necessary because President Bush refused to act more aggressively to cut emissions.

Locke, who said the three states account for nearly 2 percent of global emissions, warned that climate change could wreak havoc on natural habitat by melting snowpacks and sparking forest fires.

"Other countries are paying attention and acting," Locke said. "The current administration is paying only lip service and doing little to address global warming."

Dana Perino, a spokeswoman for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, dismissed such criticism. She cited the administration's proposals to give tax incentives to consumers who use alternative energy and buy hybrid vehicles, along with a plan that calls for the amount of greenhouse gases released as a percentage of economic growth to be reduced by 18 percent by 2012.

"The facts surpass political rhetoric. We have an aggressive and comprehensive global climate change set of initiatives that go further and deeper than his proposals today," Perino said.

The three states hope to:

- * Use their purchasing power to obtain fuel-efficient vehicles.
- * Reduce diesel fuel emissions from ships and trucks, including by creating a network of emission-free truck stops along Interstate 5 from Mexico to Canada.
- * Promote more renewable energy.
- * Develop uniform efficiency standards.
- * Work on better measurement and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

The action was welcomed by environmentalists, who have been critical of the Bush administration's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol to slash emissions and what they view as a willingness to allow companies to take only voluntary measures.

"This plan is the kind of leadership we need. And we're hoping it will produce real results that will demonstrate that it's possible to take steps to begin the long fight to prevent global warming," said David G. Hawkins, director of the National Resources Defense Council Climate Center.

Europe's traffic-clogged cities try to keep people out of their cars for a day with mixed success

ANGELA DOLAND, Associated Press Writer (published in the San Francisco Chronicle September 22, 2003)

Many European towns restricted traffic, offered cheap subway rides or lent bikes in an experiment Monday to cut air pollution -- a problem that aggravated Europe's deadly heat wave this summer.

More than 1,000 cities, most of them in Europe, took part in the sixth annual car-free day. In London, accordion players provided entertainment in streets closed to cars; in Paris, people toured electric-powered buses and tested environmentally friendly Segway scooters.

The annual event started six years ago in France as a way to push drivers to think about air pollution and their role in creating it. This time, the problem seemed even more pressing: Bad air worsened the suffering of thousands of elderly people who died in August's soaring temperatures.

But people had a hard time leaving their cars in the garage, and many streets were as clogged as usual.

"People are too addicted to their cars," said London cab driver Joe Steele, who said he hadn't seen an effect on traffic, though some streets were closed. "They're too used to them."

In Paris, police blocked most cars -- except for taxis and low-emission vehicles -- from the city's tourist core surrounding Notre Dame cathedral and the Louvre Museum.

Streets in the area were free of the usual angry honking. But bottlenecks were worse than most days just a few blocks away, on the wide boulevards heading to the suburbs.

Emiline Chonville, a 20-year-old medical student, spent more than an hour on the bus to get to city hall, where she borrowed a bike for free. The trip from her suburban home usually takes 20 minutes.

"There are traffic jams everywhere," she said.

The event was part of "European Mobility Week," whose organizers say that 40 percent of the transport sector's carbon-dioxide emissions come from private cars in cities.

As the heat soared in August, air pollution skyrocketed in many places. Some cities were on alert for high ozone levels and even forced drivers to slow down.

High ozone levels can worsen problems for people with breathing and heart ailments. A report from France's Health Watch Institute urged more studies on the link between dirty air and the thousands of heat-related deaths this summer.

In France, the government put the heat wave death toll at 11,435. More than 4,000 elderly Italians may have died, according to official estimates.

Most efforts Monday focused on encouraging people to take public transport. In Helsinki, Finland, a single ticket allowed travel on subways, buses, trams or commuter trains for the whole day. In Geneva, the usual \$8 day pass was valid for a week.

In Dublin, few people switched from their cars to the Irish capital's patchwork of buses and trains. Many griped they had seen no advertising about the day -- particularly the plans to hand out free bus tickets for a few off-peak hours.

"What am I supposed to do with this? Go home and kiss the wife?" said Frankie Meehan, 42, when offered a free ticket at lunchtime.

Some cities launched the operation over the weekend instead. Officials in Copenhagen, Denmark, said it would be too expensive to close the capital on a weekday.

Bratislava, the Slovak capital, participated on Saturday, with organizers offering rides on rickshaws or a historic tram. In Sarajevo, Bosnia, about 300 people rode bikes together through the calm streets on Sunday.

In Athens, many people had no choice Monday but to take public transport. Taxi drivers and gas station owners were on strike, protesting government plans to force them to issue printed receipts.

Rome, notorious for its chaotic streets, didn't take part because it was short on funding. Still, city officials urged people to leave cars at home, and schools organized bike rides - an idea that one Roman said was just too dangerous.

"As a city, Rome is constructed for cars," said Mario Catanzaro, a bookshop owner. "If you cycle, you are risking your life."

[Fresno Bee editorial September 23, 2003:](#)

Moving forward

Landmark cleanup bills mark a significant step toward clean air.

It was appropriate that the people most responsible for clean air legislation for the Valley should be surrounded by schoolchildren as they congratulated each other yesterday at Viking Elementary School in Fresno. It is the children of the Valley who stand to gain the most from this historic moment.

Winston H. Hickox, secretary of the state Environmental Protection Agency, and Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, led a press conference at the school to celebrate the signing of five Florez bills earlier in the day by Gov. Gray Davis. Florez handed out kudos and Hickox waved a copy of last year's Bee special report, "Last Gasp."

For the record -- once again -- the new laws address some specific cleanup needs, mostly in the agricultural industry:

SB 700 repeals a decades-old ag industry exemption from the need to acquire air pollution permits. Agriculture now must play by the same rules that affect other industries.

SB 704 and SB 705 will, in combination, phase out open-field burning of ag wastes and create incentives for biomass power plants to take that waste and burn it to generate electricity.

SB 708 raises fines for so-called "gross-polluting" vehicles, responsible for a disproportionate share of the Valley's air pollution.

SB 709 gives the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District new powers over vehicle emissions, a critical step toward reducing the No. 1 source of air pollution.

There were community activists and medical professionals on hand, some of the vital foot soldiers in the fight for the legislation. There was also the usual clutch of cameras and reporters to record the event.

And there were the Viking students. They heard, as children often do, that this effort was all in their behalf. Some of the children from the school, especially the younger ones, must have wondered what all the fuss was about. Many of them shifted restlessly as the grown-ups held their ceremony, no doubt wishing they could be elsewhere at the end of a hot day at school.

That's OK. They'll understand someday. And let's hope they have reasons to be grateful then.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

The governor's signature on historic clean-air legislation for the Valley is a crucial first step in our long fight against pollution.

[San Francisco Chronicle editorial, September 23, 2003:](#)

IT WAS not easy for Sen. state Dean Florez, D-Shafter, to take on the most powerful industry in the San Joaquin Valley. But he did -- and he won.

Actually, the biggest winners of a package of clean-air legislation shepherded by Florez will be the many young people who are suffering from some of the nation's most polluted air. Child-asthma rates in the valley are off the charts.

"This package of legislation has passed because the people of the San Joaquin Valley are sick of air that's easier to see than it is to breathe," Gov. Gray Davis said in Monday's announcement that he was signing legislation to end agriculture's 60-year exemption from clean-air rules. The Florez bills will also offer \$6 million in incentives to biomass facilities to burn more agricultural waste and will require the valley's air district to develop a time line to phase out agricultural burning. Another measure, by Assemblywoman Sara Reyes, D-Fresno, would require city and county general plans in the valley to include strategies for improving air quality.

Florez and Reyes merit commendation for their fortitude in moving these meaningful measures through a resistant California Legislature -- and Davis deserves praise for signing them.

The governor also announced the signing of SB288, by Sen. Byron Sher, D- Palo Alto, which will ensure that California will continue to impose the "new source review" clean-air regulations that President Bush has weakened at the federal level. Those rules require refineries and power plants to install modern pollution controls to offset major increases in emissions.

It was a good day for preserving the environment and quality of life in this state.

[Modesto Bee editorial September 23, 2003:](#)

Board is right to say no to air district split

The problems that confront the San Joaquin Valley are too big to be overcome by the residents in San Joaquin County alone. Or Stanislaus County's residents by themselves or the folks in Merced County without any help.

When it comes to getting the poisons out of our air, everybody's best efforts -- from Stockton to Bakersfield -- are vital to success.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District voted last week not to proceed with a study that might have recommended a separate air district for San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties. Splitting the air district might have made it easier for businessmen

and farmers in our three counties to skirt the toughest air-quality regulations that will come with the extreme nonattainment designation. But not for long.

Pollutants kicked up in the Bay Area blow into the valley, then head south to the Tehachapis. Along the way, the air gets dirtier from more vehicles, factories and farming. The problem doesn't belong to just Fresno or Bakersfield.

As we said in July, anything that distracts from the pursuit of a solution for our entire valley is not a good idea. The valley needs to stand together on all sorts of important issues – water, transportation, higher education and pollution.

Governor signs air legislation

Tuesday, September 23, 2003

By [Cynthia Neff <mailto:cneff@mercedsun-star.com>](mailto:cneff@mercedsun-star.com) - Merced Sun-Star

Gov. Gray Davis signed into law Monday a package of bills expected to help the Central Valley's residents breathe a little easier.

Five bills - one of which will end agriculture's exemption from the federal Clean Air Act - aim to take on the area's air pollution problems. The Valley currently has the second-dirtiest air nationwide.

"The governor believes that this legislation strikes a fair balance between the needs of the agricultural community and the health concerns of 3 million San Joaquin Valley residents," Davis spokesman Kevin Ryan told the Sun-Star.

Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who authored four of the bills, called the day "historic." The announcement that the legislation was signed was made at 2:45 p.m. Monday at Fresno's Viking Elementary School by CalEPA Secretary Winston Hickox.

A local air district official said the legislation is a positive step in the direction of cleaning up the Valley's air, but that implementation of the bills is still far off.

The bills include:

- Senate Bill 700, which ends agriculture's exemption from the Clean Air Act and brings it under the same pollution control requirements guiding every other industry in California. The measure also saves the state from losing \$2 billion in federal highway funds.
- Senate Bills 704 and 705, which will work in tandem by phasing out open-field burning of agricultural waste and creating incentives for Valley biomass facilities to take in agricultural waste, giving farmers a viable alternative to burning waste in the field.
- Senate Bill 708, which targets gross-polluting vehicles. This measure increases the penalty for driving a smoking car and puts the increased revenue toward air district pollution control efforts.
- Senate Bill 709, which expands the authority of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to monitor and regulate mobile sources of emissions.

"This package of legislation has passed because the people of the San Joaquin Valley are sick of air that's easier to see than it is to breathe," Gov. Davis said in a written statement.

Josette Merced Bello of the air district said that lifting the agriculture exemption was necessary to avoid hefty penalties from the federal government.

Two billion dollars in federal highway funds could have been jeopardized if the state Legislature hadn't taken action to reverse its earlier decision to allow farmers an exemption from the Clean Air Act.

"(There is) relief that the ag exemption has been dealt with at the state level," she said. "It's getting us out of harm's way of the sanction - the sanctions clock would have started running this fall."

But Merced County Supervisor Mike Nelson, who sits on the air district governing board, said lifting the exemption has the potential to create problems for area farmers.

"It creates a lot of uncertainty for people when they won't know what's going to happen," he said.

Cynthia Cory of the California Farm Bureau Federation also said it's too soon to predict what the control measures will be.

"We need to work closely with state and local air districts and make sure as new measures (are) created they are ... fair, effective and will improve air quality," she said.

Merced Bello said the air district's next step is to work with the public to develop effective regulations to meet the legislation approved Monday.

"The first step is understanding the spirit (of the legislation) and the details," she said.

"We have to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to be heard and provide comment, and all of that takes time."

[Editorial, Merced Sun-Star, Sept. 23, 2003:](#)

Air district split unlikely to happen

We didn't think it was a good idea last month and we're not alone either in this sentiment now: it's simply not prudent to split up the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and it doesn't look like it will happen.

On a 5-3 vote, directors of the air district, which stretches from Bakersfield to Stockton, turned down the proposal to make San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties a separate jurisdiction. For the north-south split to occur, it would have needed approval from the board as well as the California Air Resources Control Board as well as the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

At Thursday's meeting where representatives of Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties were on the losing end of the north-south vote to split things up, the need for Valleywide unity to battle air pollution was stressed and we think that's a valid point.

Yes, air currents blow in a southerly direction and the northern Valley counties may not be quite as polluted as Bakersfield, but we've still got a major pollution problem on our hands here and it doesn't make much sense to weaken the overall efforts of the eight-county region in bettering its air quality.

With the Valley facing the possibility of drastic U.S. government sanctions and loss of federal highway funding by 2005 if clean air standards don't improve, it seems more sensible to attack the problems on a unified, not fragmented, front.

We'll reiterate all eight San Joaquin Valley counties have a common problem with poor air quality and it doesn't make much sense to single out San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties because they pollute slightly less than their southerly neighbors, thanks to prevailing winds. There are no physical barriers, significant weather patterns or

demographics distinguishing Merced County from counties to the south as far as air quality goes.

Setting up a separate planning area, in terms of staffing, office and equipment costs, could be a sizable and largely unnecessary expense, maybe costing millions. A north-south split with separate bureaucracies also could duplicate programs and personnel already in place to combat air pollution. In budget-strapped times, that's not such a hot idea.

Again, we think elected and appointed Valley representatives need to pull together to improve our air quality. Rather than being consumed in geographical bickering, it would be much better to try to achieve significant strides in making our air more livable.

Electric pumps attract attention

By Richard T. Estrada, staff writer

Modesto Bee

Sept. 22, 2003

Stringent regulations and costly permits for diesel irrigation pumps could help convince San Joaquin Valley farmers to install electric units in place of fuel-driven pumps.

"Farmers see air quality regulations tightening, so when they replace their older diesel pumps, many of them will take a closer look at electric," said Mark Bagby, director of communications for CalCot, a cotton cooperative with members throughout the valley.

Thousands of stationary pumps draw water from canals and wells to irrigate valley crops. In pulling water from the ground, though, diesel-fueled pumps send pollutants into the air.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is about to crack down, in compliance with the Clean Air Act.

Setting up a diesel irrigation pump can cost twice as much as an electric motor, growers say, but diesel fuel has historically been less expensive than electricity. That makes diesel more cost-effective over time.

"We've got six electric pumps and thought of changing some to diesel," said Matt Maring, who grows cantaloupes, tomatoes and almonds on about 1,000 acres in the Westley-Patterson area on Stanislaus County's West Side.

"But we keep seeing new regulations for diesel pumps, and we're definitely staying with the electric."

Irrigation pumps are a necessity in the valley, where rain is rare during the summer growing season. With pumps, valley agriculture has developed into an industry worth \$15.45 billion annually.

Valley growers have traditionally used diesel fuel to power pumps on acreage where electricity was not available, and where it would have been costly to string power lines across miles of land.

For electric hookups, growers often pay standby fees -- charges that are incurred whether the pumps are running or not.

Maring pays up to \$400 a month to Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to offset the utility's cost of maintaining power lines and guaranteeing that electricity will be available at any time.

Dave Alexander, shop foreman for Cavanaugh Pump Co. in Merced, said there are no standby fees for diesel pumps. "That's one reason diesel has been cheaper," he said.

But diesel costs are expected to rise, as a result of the EPA's settlement last week of a lawsuit brought by several environmental organizations.

Under terms of the settlement, the EPA will throw out its rule of asking farmers to estimate how often they use their diesel pumps and how much pollution is generated.

The agency agreed to write a new rule under which farmers must calculate emissions based on pumps' potential for polluting 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year long.

Permits will be required for every farm with diesel pumps that have the collective potential to produce more than 25 tons of emissions a year.

Two standard 250-horsepower pumps have the potential to produce 32 tons a year, according to the EPA, kicking in the permit requirement.

Only 18 farms applied for permits under the original rule, said Cynthia Cory, director of environmental affairs for the California Farm Bureau Federation. Many more farms are likely to need permits under the revised rule.

The cost for each farm will range from about \$1,000 to more than \$10,000, depending on the number of pumps.

Farmers said they will try to recover those costs when selling commodities. If successful, retail prices could go up.

"I'm an environmentalist, up to a reasonable point, so I could understand a higher price if it will help air quality," said Donna Schantz of San Andreas. "But, like all of us, I also watch my pocketbook."

As much as Schantz loves vine-ripened tomatoes at the grocery store, she said a price increase could force her to pass on some foods.

The environmentalist in Schantz and others might like to see farmers try solar power.

But it is not an option, growers said, because solar-powered motors do not have sufficient horsepower to draw and disperse the massive amounts of water needed for irrigation.

Switching power sources also is expensive, with irrigation pumps costing \$5,000 to \$20,000.

"If you look at the hard costs of running the pump, diesel probably is more attractive," Maring said. "But figure in the price of permits and penalties for breaking air quality rules, and electricity becomes more appealing."

It also can benefit farmworkers, including Maring, who often work in close proximity to the pumps. Not only are there fewer pollutants in the air, electric pumps make less noise.

The Sierra Club is among the organizations encouraging farmers to turn to electricity.

"Electricity tends to be cleaner overall because the power is generated at a large facility and it is easier to capture the emissions," said John Rasmussen, chairman of the Sierra Club's Tehipite Chapter, which includes Merced, Mariposa and Madera counties. "It's more difficult to control the emissions from thousands of diesel pumps than it is from a couple of primary power sources."

Farmer Linda Oliveira pointed out another benefit of electric pumps.

"They don't run out of fuel in the middle of the night," said Oliveira, who grows cotton with her husband, Fred, near Los Banos. "I believe all of our pumps are electric now. My husband is happy with the way they're running."

Spare the Air declaration

Modesto Bee

Sept. 23, 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. People can help reduce pollution by carpooling to work, not using gasoline-powered gardening equipment and forgoing lighter fluid for barbecues.

Spare the Air theme

Modesto Bee

Sept. 23, 2003

Elementary through high school students are invited to submit drawings for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's seventh annual art contest.

Selected entries will illustrate the district's 2004 calendar. The entry deadline is Sept. 30.

The contest theme is Spare the Air, and district officials said artwork can depict any air-friendly activity, message or concept.

The district will select two drawings each from grades K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10 and 11-12, based on artistry, message appropriateness and creativity. Each winner

will receive 25 calendars and a certificate, plus air-friendly prizes and games.

Drawings may be in crayon, markers or watercolor, and must

be submitted on 8 1/2-by-11-inch, unlined white paper. Artwork should be oriented across the 11-inch width, and entrants should avoid stapling or folding their entries.

Each entry should have the artist's name, address, telephone number and school printed clearly on the back. Mail entries to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno 93726.

More information is available by telephone, 557-6475, and online, www.valleyair.org.

Davis signs farm air pollution bills

By VIC POLLARD, Californian Sacramento Bureau

The Bakersfield Californian

Monday September 22, 2003, 10:35:10 PM

Historic legislation to require farms and dairies to help clean up air pollution for the first time was signed Monday by Gov. Gray Davis.

The governor signed five bills by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, that will end agriculture's traditional exemption from clean-air laws.

They will require farms and dairies to obtain smog permits like other industries and take a variety of steps to reduce emissions from such sources as diesel pumps and dust from roads and corrals.

He also signed two other major clean-air bills.

Davis noted that the bills are targeted mainly at the worsening pollution in the San Joaquin Valley, the second worst in the nation.

"This package of legislation has passed because the people of the San Joaquin Valley are sick of air that's easier to see than it is to breathe," Davis said in a statement.

The governor's approval of the bills was announced by Winston Hickox, the secretary of the state Environmental Protection Agency, at an elementary school in Fresno.

It was an appropriate setting, said Kevin Hall, a valley Sierra Club official who pushed for passage of the measures.

"It's a spare the air day," Hall said, "You can't see the mountains 20 miles away and kids are not allowed outside today for recess."

Florez said he believes the bills will make a major contribution to the quality of life in the valley.

"These important bills," he said, "are about the health of our valley, the health of our children, the health of our economy."

Hickox paid tribute to the valley environmental and public health officials who pushed for the bills as well as as *The Californian* and the *Fresno Bee*, both of which published packages of major articles about the valley's air pollution problem.

"An awakened electorate, an awakened constituency, an awakened public, is the only way we will get the solutions to these problems," Hickox said in an interview.

Florez pushed the bills through the Legislature over the opposition of agribusiness, the biggest industry in his west valley Senate district, but he insisted the new rules will be fair.

"Under my legislation," he said, "for the first time ever, all valley businesses will be under clean-air regulations. Those that have enjoyed an exemption are going to have to work a little harder, cut back on the pollution they produce, and live under the same rules that

industries like the oil industry and factories and machine shops and others have been living and thriving under for years."

The centerpiece of the package is SB 700, which officially ends the agricultural exemption from anti-smog rules. It authorizes the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue permits and require pollution reduction measures for stationary sources of pollution, such as pump engine exhaust and dust from feedlots and poultry barns.

California is required to end the exemption by a court ruling in an environmental lawsuit. It faces the loss of \$2 billion in transportation funding and other sanctions if it does not.

Other bills in the Florez package will phase out open-field burning of farm waste, crack down on gross-polluting cars and allow the valley air district to take some steps to control air pollution from cars and trucks, normally a state responsibility.

Agriculture groups and other critics of the bills said they impose a harsher and more expensive regulatory burden on farmers than is necessary under the court decision.

While the governor signed the bills, he stopped short of personally appearing at a signing ceremony with their author, which he normally does.

Relations between Florez and Davis have been chilly since last summer, when Florez sharply criticized the Davis administration's handling of a major computer software contract.

"Whether the governor likes me or not," Florez said, "he did his job and I did mine, and we've taken big steps toward cleaning up the air in the valley."

Davis also signed a related bill by Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, D-Fresno, that will require cities and counties in the valley to include strategies for improving air quality in their general plans for development.

He also signed a bill by Sen. Byron Sher, D-Palo Alto, that places into California law some former federal air quality standards that President Bush relaxed last year.

Supporters of the new laws, which will be phased in over the next few years, were elated at the action.

"For the first time," said Hall, of the Sierra Club, "I feel a very strong sense of hope and optimism that we can clean the air in the San Joaquin Valley."

Spare the Air Days called for Valley

The Hanford Sentinel

Sept. 22, 2003

FRESNO - Summer's air inconveniences aren't over yet, as the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has called Spare the Air Days for today and Tuesday in all three regions of the Central Valley including Kings County.

Temperatures were to be at or near triple digits in many Valley locations today and Tuesday, so unhealthy air pollution levels are expected.

Residents are encouraged to help reduce and control air pollution levels by taking the following steps:

€ Avoiding unnecessary vehicle use, including personal automobiles when possible,

watercrafts and off-road vehicles.

€ Adjusting driving habits to reduce emissions including accelerating gradually, using cruise control on the highway, obeying the speed limit, combining errands into one trip, and avoiding topping off at the gas pump.

Use of Natural Gas Vehicles brings award to city

The Madera Tribune

Saturday, September 20, 2003

By [Leon Emo-- Correspondent <mailto:leon_emo@yahoo.com>](mailto:leon_emo@yahoo.com) - The Madera Tribune

The City of Madera has done its part in helping to reduce harmful air pollutants, and the Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition has awarded the city the coalition's 11th Annual Achievement Award.

The honor recognizes the city for powering vehicles with natural gas the past year.

Pacific Gas & Electric Clean Air Transportation Program Manager Bob Riding nominated Madera for the award.

The city has 38 natural gas vehicles in operation in all city departments. In addition, three more are scheduled to be delivered and put into service.

The vehicles range from six Honda Civics driven by staff in various departments to a 10-yard dump truck and a street sweeper in Public Works.

The eleventh annual achievement Awards will be presented at the 21st National NGV Conference and Exhibition to be held at Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas.

Representing the city at the conference will be City Council Member Sam Armentrout, City Manager David Tooley and Public Works Administrative Analyst Mark Etheridge.

Pollution district will stay as one

By Barbara Anderson

The Fresno Bee

Published in The Modesto Bee

Sept, 19, 2003

Three Northern San Joaquin Valley counties may have cleaner air than their neighbors to the south, but they can't build a wall around themselves to avoid harsh air cleanup plans.

A bid by San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties to carve a separate smog plan for themselves was shot down Thursday by the five remaining counties in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which runs from Stockton to Bakersfield.

The three counties wanted approval for a study that would determine whether they could take control of cleaning the air in just their counties, leaving Fresno, Madera, Kings, Tulare and Kern to follow their own cleanup plan.

Reached after the meeting, a frustrated Tom Mayfield, Stanislaus County's representative on the board, said he didn't understand why members from the southern half of the valley didn't act to spare their northern colleagues from sanctions.

"If there's eight of us in a lifeboat, and four or five life preservers, and the boat sinks, are we going to let those four or five life preservers float off and we all drown?" Mayfield said.

Six of 10 representatives on the board voted against a study of a separate cleanup plan. Representatives from the three northern counties voted in favor, and one member from the south was absent.

Officials from the northern counties argue that businesses in their areas shouldn't be unfairly punished for dirty air in counties to the south.

The northern counties' ration-ale: They seldom violate air standards, but violations in Fresno or Bakersfield affect the whole air district. A violation of the one-hour ozone standard occurs when the air contains 125 parts per billion of ozone, a corrosive gas that is the prime ingredient of smog.

San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties tinkered with the idea of seceding from the district last year, but backed away from it. Thursday, they said they asked only that a study be completed of the feasibility of splitting the district into two planning areas, one for the three northern counties and a separate area for the remaining five.

"As members of the boards of supervisors and city councils, we do feasibility studies all the time," said Jack A. Sieglock, a San Joaquin County supervisor who requested that the board look at a study.

As a farmer, Mayfield said he's doubly frustrated because farmers are being regulated for dust, diesel irrigation pumps and burning, among other things. He doubts whether the valley will meet its 2010 clean air deadline, particularly because the air district has no control over cars and trucks, which create most of the smog.

"Every time I come to these meetings, there's always something we have to do to tighten the screw," he said. "You can tighten down all you want, but if you can't control 80 to 90 percent of the cause, then how you going to solve it?"

But board members from the south said dirty air transported from the north contributes to the district's bad air.

And they also voiced concern that a study could not be done in time to make a difference.

By January, the board must decide if the entire district should be reclassified as an extreme nonattainment area for the federal one-hour ozone standard. The move would thrust the district into the worst federal category for smog offenders. The extreme designation is held only by the Los Angeles area.

Time is of the essence because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would have to approve a request by the district to be declared an extreme smog area. EPA approval could take three months or longer.

Without the extreme designation, the valley runs the risk of sanctions being imposed on businesses in the area this spring.

Kerry Drake, associate director of the EPA's regional air division, said history shows decisions to split air districts take at least a year to come to conclusion.

Bee staff writer Melanie Turner contributed to this report.