

The following article, written by Mark Grossi, was published in the Fresno Bee and the Modesto Bee under different titles.

New fee aimed at cutting smog

Valley residents will pay an extra \$1 for motor vehicle registrations.

Fresno Bee, October 17, 2003

\$2.38 million to help valley fight air pollution

Modesto Bee, October 17, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley on Thursday picked up \$2.38 million annually to attack its worst air quality enemy -- pollution from cars and trucks.

The money will come from Valley residents who own cars, trucks and other vehicles. They will pay an extra \$1 in motor vehicle registration fees, starting in January.

Local air officials will funnel the money into programs for replacement of old diesel vehicles, purchase of clean-air cars and investment in public transportation for the Valley, the second-dirtiest air basin in the country.

The fee, authorized last month in SB 709 by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, will be added to a \$4 surcharge on vehicle registration fees for air programs. Residents have been paying the \$4 surcharge for more than a decade.

"That's been very successful," said Dave Crow, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "Forty million dollars-plus have been placed in a wide variety of projects."

But the district board didn't unanimously approve the new fee increase. Two board members, Jack Sieglock of San Joaquin County and J. Steven Worthley of Tulare County, liked the idea but wanted to wait.

They thought the district should hold off until California's new governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, decides how he will handle the budget crisis and the tripling of the vehicle registration fee.

Worthley said he wanted the money used in new efforts to push the Valley faster toward clean air. He said the state might withhold state funding from existing Valley air incentive programs and allow the locally raised \$2.38 million to backfill.

"I don't want them to say, 'there's a buck we don't have to spend,' " Worthley said.

Many board members, who are members of city councils and county boards of supervisors throughout the Valley, were sympathetic. But board member Barbara Patrick of Kern County said now is not the time to wait.

"We need to keep our eye on the ball," she said. "We're getting far afield."

Industry officials also brought the board's attention quickly back to air pollution. Kirk Hunter of Southwest Transportation Agency, a public school transit agency based in Riverdale, said the Valley has the highest number of pre-1977 school buses in the state.

"We're talking about the biggest gross polluters in the Valley," Hunter said. "They need to be taken off the road, but most of us don't have the money to replace them."

A representative of waste haulers said his industry supports the fee, anticipating that it will help replace heavy-duty diesel engines with cleaner technology.

The district's heavy-duty engine incentive program has helped to upgrade hundreds of other engines. The program has spent \$45 million.

Other district programs have provided start-up subsidies to promote the Altamont Commuter Express between the north Valley and parts of the Bay Area. But state funding for such efforts will probably dwindle as the state attempts to balance its budget.

Linda Urata, who became well-acquainted with the district's funding programs as the former executive director of Project Clean Air in Bakersfield, urged board members to approve the fee Thursday.

"This money will be used to educate people and reduce emissions where the citizens live and work and play," she said. "At my house, this would cost \$2 a year. I think you're looking at a bargain."

Air pollution district adds \$1 vehicle fee

Extra money for vehicle registrations meant to fund emission-control programs

By Dave Myhra - SAN JOAQUIN BUREAU

(Published in the Tri-Valley Herald on October 19, 2003)

Drivers in the San Joaquin Valley will have to pay an additional \$1 fee when they register their vehicles as of Jan. 1 to help cover costs of air pollution.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District voted Thursday to approve the fee increase, expected to raise up to \$2.38 million annually.

Local air officials will funnel the money into programs for replacement of old diesel vehicles, the purchase of clean-air cars and investment in public transportation for the Valley, the second-dirtiest air basin in the country.

The fee, authorized last month after Gov. Gray Davis signed a package of clean air bills, will be added to an existing \$4 surcharge on vehicle registration fees for air programs Valley residents have been paying for more than a decade.

"A fee of \$1 per vehicle is an exceptionally low-cost investment that Valley residents can make now for a tremendous return of blue skies and clean air in our future," said Dave Crow, air pollution control officer.

The district doesn't have any say in emission standards of privately owned cars, so it needs to take in fees to offset the pollution caused by frequent vehicle trips.

"Once you buy a car, you can drive it all day everyday, and the district can't say you can't drive your car," said Josette Merced Bello, district spokeswoman. Some programs the district has helped fund include the Altamont Commuter Express train, bike trails, down payments on hybrid cars and grants to convert tractors, buses and off-road vehicles to cleaner fuels.

Since 1993, the district has invested about \$41 million into emissions-reducing programs. The state's budget crisis could jeopardize programs like these, which sparked the district to increase this fee.

Every car that is registered in the eight-county jurisdiction of the air district will be subject to the extra \$1 fee.

Air rules create backlog

S.J. business leaders fear firms will suffer

By Audrey Cooper, The Record, October 17, 2003

A growing number of rules aimed at cutting the San Joaquin Valley's air pollution has created a bureaucratic backlog of applications from businesses who need regulators' approval before expanding or starting new companies.

Business leaders worry the backlog could hurt businesses trying to compete in a depressed economy.

The Valley Air Pollution Control District is struggling to deal with more than 1,000 accumulated applications for permits. The air district's staff said that although the waiting time to get permits has dropped in the past few months, the number of applications waiting for review is only expected to increase.

Companies have to get air-pollution permits before installing or updating polluting machines, or before starting a process that emits pollutants. That affects companies in the oil industry, auto-body shops, restaurants, canneries and others.

Permits have to be updated if the company wants to change its operation. New permits may also be required when air-pollution rules change.

About 7,000 Valley businesses have at least one permit from the air district.

The wait to get that permit can be as short as a day for simple applications, such as changing equipment at a gas station. Modifications to a power plant or refinery, however, can take several months.

"Industry moves at a rapid pace, and some business decisions need to be made quickly. If it takes six months to get a permit, a business could see economic impacts of that delay," explained Chris Savage, director of environmental affairs at E.&J. Gallo Winery in Modesto.

Savage said his company hasn't experienced any direct problems resulting from the permit backlog, because it has been able to plan ahead. However, smaller companies without Gallo's resources may have problems, Savage said.

The Valley air district receives 4,000 applications each year. Per capita, that's twice as many as any other air district in the state, said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's director of permit services.

The backlog should be cut in half before next summer, Sadredin said.

That will be tough with forthcoming air rules.

The air district's governing board approves new rules almost once a month. That can include changes to oil-storage tank regulations, which recently caused a new flood of applications.

Within months, heavily polluting farms will be required to get air permits for the first time ever. As many as 10 percent of the Valley's 28,000 farms may qualify, Sadredin said.

"We don't want to have a backlog delay to the point that businesses lose business or can't renovate on their own timetable. This is our No. 1 priority," he said.

Already, air-district officials have made some progress in reducing the time required to get complicated permits.

The percentage of applications filed for more than 120 days has dropped from 45 percent in January to the current 22 percent, Sadredin said.

Streamlining the application process will help in cutting the backlog, said Jim Swaney, the air district's permit-services manager.

Container maker to pay \$2.2m to settle with EPA

By Mark Grossi
The Fresno Bee

(Published Saturday, October 18, 2003, 6:19 AM)

A container manufacturer will spend \$2.2 million to make amends for alleged violations of the Clean Air Act at six factories in the San Joaquin Valley, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday.

Silgan Containers Corp. agreed to invest \$1.57 million on emissions reductions at the six Valley locations.

EPA officials estimate the settlement will remove up to 118 tons of pollutants annually from the Valley's air.

Silgan also agreed to a \$659,900 fine.

Federal officials said the settlement is significant because the Valley has more smog violations this year than any other place in the country except the Los Angeles area.

"Silgan's commitment to reduce emissions is a step in the right direction for Valley air," said Jack Broadbent, the EPA's air division director for the Pacific Southwest region. "Improving air quality will require compliance from all Valley industries with Clean Air Act rules and regulations."

Anthony Allott, spokesman for Connecticut-based Silgan Holdings Inc., corporate owner of Silgan Containers, said the company had no comment.

The Silgan settlement involves plants in Stockton, Kingsburg, Riverbank and three in Modesto.

Silgan's manufacturing sends out smog-forming pollutants called volatile organic compounds.

The emission reductions will be achieved at the Silgan sites by converting from solvent- to water-based coatings.

Other measures will be included, officials said.

The alleged violations came to light five years ago when Silgan evaluated its facilities for compliance with the Clean Air Act.

The company determined it had not met legal requirements when adding some manufacturing processes.

The company disclosed its findings to the EPA, and both sides negotiated the settlement.

Silgan Holdings Inc. is a leading North American manufacturer of consumer goods packaging products, with annual sales of approximately \$2 billion last year.

The company operates 67 manufacturing facilities in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In North America, the company is the largest supplier of metal containers for food products and a leading supplier of plastic containers for personal care products and of metal and plastic closures for food and beverage products.

Reporter Tracy Correa contributed to this story.

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Firm, EPA settle over air violations

Record Staff Writer, October 17, 2003

A packaging company with a Stockton facility has agreed to make more than \$1.5 million in air-quality improvements under a settlement announced Thursday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Silgan Containers Corp. also agreed to pay a \$659,900 fine for alleged violations of the Clean Air Act, the EPA announced.

In the San Joaquin Valley, Silgan makes cans used by companies such as Campbell's Soup, Del Monte Fruits and Vegetables and Friskies Pet Food. The process of making those cans emits pollutants that contribute to smog formation.

The violations of federal law were discovered when the company did an audit of its national facilities.

Violations of law were reported to the EPA, which took the company's voluntary actions into account before levying the fines, EPA spokeswoman Lisa Fasano said.

The Valley is one of the smoggiest areas in the nation and routinely exceeds the federal health-based limits for smog. Smog has been linked to asthma, cancer and other lung problems.

Under the settlement with the EPA, the company agreed to reduce emissions at six Valley plants by as much as 118 tons a year in order to comply with federal law.

The settlement covers three sites in Modesto, as well as sites in Stockton, Kingsburg and Riverbank.

Silgan also operates a plant in Lodi at Pacific Coast Producers. Silgan officials said this week that they plan to close that plant.

Silgan Container reaches agreement on cleaning air

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, published in the Modesto Bee, October 18, 2003

SAN FRANCISCO -- Silgan Containers Corp. has agreed to reduce hazardous emissions at six of its San Joaquin Valley plants, including Modesto, Riverbank and Stockton, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said.

The company also agreed to pay a \$659,900 fine for alleged violations of the federal Clean Air Act, the agency said Thursday.

The EPA said the company would begin reducing emissions by as much as 118 tons per year at an estimated cost of \$1.57 million.

Silgan evaluated its own compliance with the Clean Air Act in 1998 and turned over its findings to the EPA, the agency said. As a result, Silgan facilities in Modesto, Riverbank, Stockton and Kingsburg were found to be in violation.

Silgan manufactures metal and plastic containers. Its plants in the San Joaquin Valley emit volatile organic compounds that contribute to the formation of smog.

The San Joaquin Valley ranks second only to the Los Angeles basin for the smoggiest air in the country.

Bus fumes pose risk

By JULIANA BARBASSA

and SUSAN HERENDEEN/MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, October 19, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- Going to school in the familiar yellow school buses may be exposing children to dangerous doses of exhaust, according to a government study.

A study released Wednesday by the California Air Resources Board showed that toxic fumes from a bus's own engine and from surrounding traffic entered older vehicles. This exposed kids to levels of pollution two to five times greater than those riding new buses, increasing their risk of cancer by 4 percent.

Local officials said they are aware of air-pollution concerns, but also noted that easy fixes are not always possible.

In Modesto City Schools, officials tried to retrofit 15 buses last year, and even had state money to pay for the work. They dropped the matter because their vendor couldn't deliver.

"They could not manufacture a retrofit for our buses," said Alice Quayle, supervisor of transportation.

In the Manteca Unified School District, officials took a look at the state's retrofitting programs, but declined to participate, because particulate traps have not always worked well.

"Looking at the technology, I don't know that it's 100 percent there yet," said Jason Osborne, supervisor of transportation.

For the air board study, researchers looked at seven buses used by the Los Angeles Unified School District on urban and suburban routes. The vehicles included all types of buses used in the state: a "dirty smoker" built in 1975; two 1980s buses; three from the 1990s, one of which has a particulate trap to filter the exhaust; and one compressed natural gas bus from 2002.

The study found the highest pollution levels inside the older buses in urban routes with heavy traffic. Since much of the pollution came from the bus itself, closing the windows increased the levels of pollutants. Following behind other buses and riding in congested traffic also contributed to unhealthy levels of exhaust.

The test, conducted by the Universities of California at Los Angeles and Riverside, was paid for by \$450,000 from the ARB.

The study reached the same conclusion of an earlier study conducted by the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Gina Solomon, the NRDC's lead researcher and study author, said riding a bus is safer than other ways for children to get to school and pollution problems can be solved by retrofitting or replacing the older buses.

"We are trying to get changes at the state level to help replace the old, dirty buses," Solomon said. "The budget crisis is working against us. We need to provide school districts with the money they need to clean up their bus fleets."

Opening windows helps a lot Solomon said both studies determined that riding with the windows open helped move air through the bus. The study said pollutant levels were 2.5 times lower when windows were open.

"Whenever comfort allows, open the windows," she said.

The air board has taken steps to improve air quality in and around buses by requiring the use of low-sulfur diesel in buses and trucks, and passing regulation that forbids diesel-run engines from idling within 500 feet of schools.

These measures are part of the state's larger goal of reducing exhaust from heavy-duty vehicles and generators by 75 percent by 2010, and by 85 percent by 2020.

The state's budget troubles have made money hard to come by, but voter-approved Proposition 40 is providing \$50 million to the ARB over two years for distribution to air districts for projects that affect air quality. One-fourth of that money is meant for buying cleaner school buses for use in California's public schools.

Quayle of Modesto City Schools said her bus drivers may not idle within 100 feet of a school. They're also expected to turn the engine off if they are loading large numbers of students at a bus stop.

"We're doing what we can," she said. "The (reduced) idling, I do think, helps."

Modesto City Schools replaces buses every 20 years, or when they reach 300,000 miles. Twenty-four of the district's 52 buses were manufactured in the 1980s.

Osborne said his bus drivers don't idle in school zones, either.

Manteca Unified would like to replace its buses every 20 years, but the district still has a few from 1977 in its fleet. Twenty-seven of its 51 buses were manufactured before 1990.

"Money's tight," Osborne said.

More information is available at the California Air Resources Board's Web site:
www.arb.ca.gov/research/schoolbus/schoolbus.htm.

[Fresno Bee editorial:](#)

All aboard

South Valley partners pick up steam with railroad project.

(Fresno Bee - Published Friday, October 17, 2003, 5:49 AM)

A South Valley partnership has every reason to toot its own horn with the completion of a \$14.2 million rail rehabilitation project between Huron and Visalia.

The Cross Valley Rail Corridor Project renovated about 47 miles of track laid in the 1870s so it can handle heavier freight cars and faster trains. The new tracks were dedicated last Friday.

This is an impressive accomplishment for many reasons:

Cooperation. At a time when even the smallest decisions get derailed by political infighting, it is impressive to see diverse groups work together to accomplish such a worthy goal.

The tracks were paid for by a joint effort among the cities of Visalia, Lemoore and Huron, all of which sit along the rail line operated by San Joaquin Valley Railroad, based in Exeter. Other partners include Kings, Tulare and Fresno counties, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the state and federal government, as well as the railroad company, Los Gatos Tomato Products and Western Farm Services. Public and private, Democrats and Republicans, they all worked together to raise the money for the project.

Economic. The rail line has created an additional shipping option that is interesting companies all along the line. The two largest shippers on the new line weren't even using rail before the improvements. Los Gatos Tomato Products was beyond the reach of usable rails, and Leprino Foods' new mozzarella cheese factory opened this year.

The previous rail service was slow and unreliable because of the poor condition of the tracks, which were built originally in the 1870s by the Southern Pacific Railroad. Now the tracks can accommodate refrigerated rail cars capable of hauling 286,000 pounds each, giving the South Valley's industrial plants another way to reach markets on the East Coast or in Asia.

Environmental. Valley air pollution control efforts got a big boost from the improved train travel. Los Gatos Tomato Products reduced its truck shipments by 4,500 trips a year. That's taking a lot of traffic and a lot of pollution from truck and trailer traffic off Highway 198 and Interstate 5. The railroads can now accommodate immense refrigerated rail cars that are equal to about three tractor-trailer loads.

The momentum of this project has energized the partners so much that they are now exploring prospects for passenger rail service along the San Joaquin Valley Railroad line -- at first between Visalia and the Lemoore Naval Air Station and, eventually, between Huron to the west and Porterville to the southeast.

The group plans to do a ridership survey and to estimate the cost involved. The idea has many benefits:

Enable Visalians to connect to Amtrak in Hanford without driving.

Provide an alternative for people who commute between Lemoore and the naval air station, Hanford and Visalia for work, shopping and recreation.

Reduce congestion and improve safety on Highway 198, particularly during the fog season.

Provide a link for South Valley riders to a high-speed rail line that may run between the Bay Area and Southern California

Reduce traffic.

Provide a platform for demonstrating new technology, perhaps a place to try out locomotives powered by fuel cells.

The optimism among the partners in the Cross Valley Rail Corridor Joint Powers Authority is justified.

Their goals are inspiring and we encourage Hanford and other affected areas to consider jumping aboard.

We congratulate all the partners on their success.

[Fresno Bee editorial:](#)

The price of cleaner air

Valley vehicle owners will soon pay a little more to reduce their pollution.

(Fresno Bee Editorial - Published Monday, October 20, 2003, 4:13 AM)

Valley residents will pay an extra dollar to register their cars with the state beginning in January, but the money will provide important dividends in cleaner air -- it will be used to reduce air pollution created by the very vehicles we drive.

Vehicles are the single biggest culprit in the Valley's filthy air. It is perfectly appropriate that all of us who own those vehicles should have to pay for mitigating at least some of the damage we cause when we drive.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board adopted the fee on Thursday. The new fee is part of legislation by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, that went into effect recently. It comes on top of a \$4 surcharge for air quality improvements that all California vehicle owners have been paying for years.

It's expected that the additional Valley fee will raise almost \$2.4 million a year for clean air projects within the district. That's not a huge sum of revenue, considering how bad the problems are here in the Valley. But every drop in the bucket -- even this very big bucket -- helps get us a little closer to the eventual goal of clean air for ourselves and our children.

There are a number of possible uses for the money, including helping farmers replace older, dirtier diesel engines with newer, cleaner ones, or helping cities, counties and other public agencies convert their fleets to cleaner alternative-fuel vehicles.

There is a danger -- and it emerged during the air district board's discussion Thursday -- that the state, in its current budget crisis, will see the new fee as an excuse to reduce other state funding by a similar amount.

That can't be allowed to happen. If we just tread water in the struggle to clean up the air, we lose that struggle.

We're willing to tax ourselves to wipe out our problems. The state must help. We are owed at least that much.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

Valley vehicle owners will have to pay a little more, but the dividend will be cleaner air.