

Air survey: Valley residents skeptical

Visalia Times Delta, July 10, 2003

The number of Central Valley residents who believe air pollution is a big problem has grown by 50 percent in three years, and most are skeptical that the air will get any better in 20 years.

And, in a survey made public Wednesday by the Public Policy Institute of California, more Valley residents than those of other areas where air pollution is a problem believe that "hardly any" progress has been made in the past 20 years.

The survey, which has been taken annually since June 2000, also revealed that a larger number of Valley residents tend to blame pollution from outside their region for fouling their air. At the same time, fewer Valley residents blame vehicle emissions.

Statewide, Californians see air pollution as a major problem and blame automobile use as the main culprit, but few think their own driving is part of the problem.

Nearly 80 percent reported they were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their vehicle's fuel economy.

"People don't recognize the connection between their own actions and the problems in their region," said Mark Baldassare, the institute's statewide survey director. "There's such a dominant car culture that people don't want to recognize the problem."

The survey said more residents of the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys -- 39 percent -- are concerned about air pollution than residents of any other region of the state. Statewide that figure is 30 percent and in Los Angeles County it is 33 percent.

In the Central Valley, the survey said, questions of growth and sprawl, water pollution and an adequate water supply pale as issues compared to the quality of the air.

Measuring the growing awareness among Central Valley residents of air pollution problems, the survey said 28 percent said air pollution was a big problem in June 2000.

That number had grown to 33 percent in May 2001, 39 percent in June 2002 and 42 percent in the latest survey.

In Los Angeles County, 43 percent said air pollution was a big problem, but that figure had dropped from 47 percent a year ago.

And in the Valley, 60 percent said air pollution was worse than it was 10 years ago. Sixteen percent said it was better. In the Bay area, Los Angeles County and the rest of Southern California, between 34 percent and 37 percent of those surveyed said air pollution was worse.

Valley residents are less likely than others in the state to believe much progress will be made in reducing pollution in the next 20 years.

Only 20 percent in the Valley believe that, the survey said. On the other hand, 48 percent expect "only some" progress to be made and 25 percent expect "hardly any."

Despite their attachment to a car-based lifestyle, Californians appear willing to change their driving habits to help the environment. About 52 percent said they would consider buying a smaller car to reduce air pollution and fuel use the next time they replace their current vehicle. About 45 percent said they would seriously consider switching to public transportation to commute to work.

The survey also found that California residents continue to be "greener" than the average American.

About 65 percent said protecting the environment should be given priority over economic growth, compared to 47 percent nationally. The same number of state residents said they would support tougher air pollution standards even if it would increase the cost of cars.

The majority of Californians said they do not support proposals to reduce dependence on foreign oil by drilling off California's coast or federally protected areas such as the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

The PPIC surveyed 2,002 California residents between June 4-15.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Valley air bills advance in Assembly

By Jake Henshaw, Tulare Advance Register, Sacramento Bureau, July 9, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- Legislation intended to help clean San Joaquin Valley air cleared three Assembly committees Monday:

Assembly Natural Resources Committee: Approved two bills by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter - Senate Bill 700, which would end agriculture's exemption from federal clean air rules, and SB 707, which would set new rules for locating or expanding a dairy near cities or schools.

SB 999 by Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden, also was approved. It would add four new appointed positions to the current eleven-member board of locally elected officials of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District.

Assembly Transportation Committee: Approved SB 708 by Florez. It allows smoking vehicles to be inspected at sobriety checkpoints, and increases fines for gross polluting vehicles.

Assembly Utilities and Commerce: Approved SB 704 by Florez. It would provide \$6 million to biomass facilities as an incentive to burn agricultural waste to create energy.

All the bills passed Monday are scheduled next to go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Smog is in the air

David Read, Tracy Press, July 10, 2003

A new state survey shows that while California residents are concerned about air quality, they're less likely to think their own driving habits are a source of the problem.

"There is a recognition among Californians that automobile emissions are a major contributor to air quality, and there is a desire to conserve to reduce our dependence on foreign oil," said Mark Baldassare, research director at the Public Policy Institute of California, which did the survey. "But that recognition doesn't show in their behavior."

In the survey of 2,002 California adults, 58 percent said they believed "air pollution was a serious health threat to themselves and their immediate family." A further 37 percent of respondents reported that either they or an immediate family member had a respiratory problem.

Emissions from passenger cars account for more than half of all smog-producing pollutants, and almost half of all state residents know that, according to the survey.

But only 13 percent reported being "very concerned" about their vehicle's emissions, and 31 percent said that they were somewhat concerned. Moreover, 29 percent of Californians drive a van, pickup or sport utility vehicle. Among Central Valley residents, the figure rises to 34 percent. "It's no surprise at all that people don't feel they're part of the problem and don't want to give up their cars," said San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokesman Anthony Presto.

"The thing that continues to surprise me every day is how much they love and stand by their SUVs."

In the Central Valley, only 33 percent said their vehicle emissions were the primary cause of air pollution, and 21 percent believed most local air pollution is generated outside the area.

Presto said only 17 percent of the northern San Joaquin Valley's air pollution comes from the Bay Area, and that figure drops farther south in the valley. Despite perceptions, Presto said most Central Valley air pollution is homemade from vehicle emissions.

There were also similar concerns about air pollution, regardless of vehicle size. For example, 13 percent of compact car drivers said that they were very concerned that their car pollutes too much

- the same rate as seen in SUV, van and pickup drivers.

Presto said he was also surprised that 64 percent of those larger vehicle owners were very or somewhat satisfied with their vehicle's fuel economy.

Baldassare said those numbers can be explained because respondents have already come to terms with their choices. For example, an SUV driver probably knew before he or she purchased the vehicle that it would be expensive to fill.

Other survey results showed California residents statewide like to drive, like to drive alone and spend a lot of time doing it. Of employed Californians, 73 percent said that they drove to work alone, and more than half said they liked to drive a great deal or a fair amount.

"We really need people to change their lifestyle habits," Presto said. "We need people to take mass transit, carpool, bike, roller skate or walk."

In the Tracy area, commuters have few options besides driving. Altamont Commuter Express trains take around 1,500 people over the hill and back again every day, and San Joaquin Regional Transit District commuter buses take another 650 people.

SJRTD spokeswoman Kari Wilson said that the district's commuter bus service is growing quietly, with new routes usually created in collaboration with Bay Area businesses. But she said she sees the service growing.

"We'll definitely add routes," Wilson said. "Especially as more and more people come here to buy from the Bay Area and continue to work there."

While they love to drive, California residents are also the most environmentally conscious people in the nation. Sixty-five percent favor protecting the environment at the risk of curbing economic growth, far above the national average of folks who feel that way.

State residents also overwhelmingly supported forcing vehicle manufacturers to improve fuel efficiency, even if this means higher car costs, and offering tax incentives for drivers who buy fuel-efficient hybrid gas/electric cars.

Despite Californians' love for clean air, the survey suggests they're not willing at this point to get out of their cars to do it.

"I know that we will achieve cleaner air some day," Presto said. "The difficult aspect is changing people's lifestyles."

Poll: Valley worried about air pollution

By Will Shuck, The Record Capitol Bureau Chief , July 10, 2003

Californians say air pollution is the state's top environmental worry, and nowhere is that sense more pronounced than in the Central Valley, where nearly two-thirds of the residents believe the air has gotten considerably worse in the past decade, according to a statewide poll released today.

While 64 percent of Valley residents say their air is dirtier, 41 percent of the people in Los Angeles think their air is cleaner, according to a survey by the Public Policy Institute of California.

Across the state, Californians said they were more worried about air pollution (30 percent) than water pollution (10 percent) or unchecked suburban growth (7 percent).

But Valley residents were most likely to rank it No. 1, with 39 percent citing it as the biggest problem. In Los Angeles, 33 percent said so, and in San Francisco, just 26 percent agreed that smog was the worst pollution problem.

Central Valley residents also were more pessimistic about the future regarding dirty air. Only 20 percent said they expected better air quality 20 years from now. In the Bay Area, 24 percent expected better air, and 26 percent of people in Los Angeles foresee improvements.

It's a significant attitude shift from three years ago, when only 28 percent of Valley residents saw pollution as a big problem.

"This just comes out so loud and clear," said Mark Baldassare, director of the PPIC poll. "I think people in the Valley have become quite sensitized and concerned to this issue -- and I think quite upset about where the trends are going."

The telephone survey of 2,002 adults was conducted in English and Spanish from June 4 to June 15. The results have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

The survey also found that Latinos were more likely than whites to say their local air quality was bad, 39 percent to 28 percent. And renters (36 percent) were more likely than homeowners (29 percent) to perceive air quality as a problem.

Though 47 percent of respondents blamed cars and trucks more than anything else for the problem, only 13 percent were "very concerned" that their vehicle pollutes too much.

Valley residents were more likely than the population as a whole to cite agriculture (18 percent) as a major contributor. Across the board, only 13 percent thought farms were a big problem.

Assemblywoman Barbara Matthews, D-Tracy, said that seemed to fit with her opposition to a number of clean-air bills aimed at farms. There are other places to look before heaping regulations on farmers, she said.

"I'm not opposed to our dealing with air quality; just some of the recommendations I thought were not well thought-out, and we needed to be more thoughtful about how we do this," she said. "Many of them affect agriculture, and we need to be thoughtful about what we do to agriculture."

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has authored a slate of clean-air bills, including some of the ones Matthews opposes.

"I think the survey validates what we've heard from Valley residents. They want some action from the state on air quality," he said.

Pollsters also found:

- * More people support the effort to recall Gov. Gray Davis (48 percent) than oppose it (42 percent.)

- * 51 percent say removing the governor won't affect environmental policy.

- * 86 percent of Californians will weigh environmental views of candidates when voting for president next year.

- * 29 percent of state residents, and 34 percent of Central Valley residents drive a van, pickup or SUV.

Senator changes dairy bill

By Will Shuck, The Record Capitol Bureau Chief Published Thursday, July 10, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- State Sen. Dean Florez agreed Wednesday to significantly alter a controversial bill that would keep dairy cows far away from homes and schools.

The bill previously would have required all dairy, feedlot and other confined animal operations to remain at least three miles from existing homes, businesses or schools.

But, facing strong opposition from a range of agriculture groups, the Shafter Democrat narrowed the bill so that it deals only with dairy herds of 700 or more.

He also gave dairy farmers the chance to use other means than a three-mile buffer zone to keep the smell and air pollution of their operations from wafting into urbanized areas. And he made it a bit harder for surrounding cities and schools to stop the siting or expansion of a dairy.

"It's getting better," said John Gamper, a lobbyist for the California Farm Federation.

But Gamper and other agriculture advocates still oppose the bill, specifically the portion that gives one city a say over what happens in a neighboring city or county.

"I represent a lot of cities, and this just doesn't happen," said Anthony Gonsalves, a veteran lobbyist working against the bill. "This goes way beyond normal land-use policy."

But Florez said bad air in the Valley calls for dramatic action, and he rejected arguments that his package of bills will hurt the agricultural base of the Valley economy.

"In the long run, we lose businesses coming to the Central Valley because of air pollution," he said.

"You have people who say, 'I don't want to go there. I don't want my kids to have asthma.' So, in the long run, I believe what we're doing is creating jobs, because we're fighting for the thing that most people are concerned about, which is air quality."

A statewide poll released today by the Public Policy Institute of California found that Californians ranked air pollution as the state's No. 1 environmental problem.

More residents concerned about air, survey reveals

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

(Published Thursday, July 10, 2003, 4:44 AM)

Dirty air already is touted as the No. 1 environmental issue among Central Valley residents, but a survey being released today shows more residents are now deeply concerned about it.

The statewide survey by the Public Policy Institute of California shows 42% of Valley residents think air pollution is a big problem now. Three years ago, when Valley residents made air quality their top environmental issue in the institute's annual survey, only 28% felt that way.

The Central Valley mirrored statewide opinion on the major culprit: vehicle emissions. Yet, like most Californians, Valley residents expressed only a modest concern about their driving contributing to poor air quality, institute officials said.

That was not a big surprise to one official with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which has struggled for years to clean up one of the worst air basins in the country.

"When it comes to clean air, everyone wants it, but few are willing to make even small personal changes to make it happen," said district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

Institute researchers called 2,002 adults last month and posed questions about the environment. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, and the sampling error is plus or minus 2 percentage points.

The survey is a collaborative effort of the private, nonprofit institute, based in San Francisco, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation.

By a wide margin, Californians consider air pollution the most important environmental issue. About 30% of those surveyed ranked air pollution No. 1, followed by 10% for water pollution and 7% for growth and sprawl.

Even though many residents don't see their driving habits as a big problem, they would be willing to consider getting a smaller vehicle to reduce fuel consumption and air pollution.

Mark Baldassare, the institute's statewide survey director, said: "That says a lot about environmental protection in relation to economic concerns."

Institute officials said the increase in air quality concern was clear among residents in the Central Valley, which includes both the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. Why?

"Valley residents [60% in the survey] are by far the most likely to report that air quality has worsened in the past decade," the researchers wrote.

The San Joaquin Valley's air problem has actually improved in many areas over the past decade, local air officials say. But it hasn't improved as quickly as other areas, nor is it close to achieving the federal standard for healthy air, environmentalists say.

By one measure, federal smog violations over eight-hour periods, the San Joaquin has been worse than the South Coast Air Basin for the last four years.

The rest of the state is well-aware of air quality problems too. The survey showed 58% of Californians believe air pollution poses a serious health threat and 37% say a family member suffers from asthma or other respiratory problems.

Californians apparently like one pollution-fighting idea -- high-speed rail. About 65% said they would approve a \$10 billion bond measure for planning and construction of a high-speed rail connection between Los Angeles and San Francisco via the Central Valley.

In other survey findings:

Only 28% of respondents approved of the way Gov. Davis is handling his job, and only 30% approved of the way he's handling environmental issues in the state. "Here's an issue in which [Davis has] demonstrated some pretty decisive acts," Baldassare said, citing last year's expansion of the Smog Check II program to include the Bay Area and support for an open space bond on the ballot. "He's getting no credit for anything these days."

About 46% of respondents said the state government is not doing enough to protect the environment in California.

Staff writer John Ellis contributed to this story. The reporter can be reached at mgrossi@fresnobee.com or 441-6316.

Californians Are Willing to Pay for Cleaner Air, Poll Finds

By Miguel Bustillo, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer, July 10, 2003

Californians are deeply concerned about air pollution and they consider vehicle emissions a big culprit — yet most do not see their own cars and sport utility vehicles as part of the problem, according to a poll being released today.

The poll by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California and the Hewlett, Irvine and Packard foundations found that Californians would be willing to make economic sacrifices for the sake of the environment — as long as it did not involve giving up their own trucks and cars.

Three-quarters of those polled favored requiring auto makers to boost the fuel efficiency of vehicles sold in the country, even if it meant increasing car costs. Nearly two-thirds would like to see tougher air pollution standards on new vehicles, even if it drove up prices. Seventy-nine percent — including 69% of sport utility vehicle drivers — would support changing federal fuel standards for SUVs to make them as stringent as those for passenger cars.

However, 73% of respondents drove alone to work, 62% wished to continue driving a vehicle as big as the one they are using now, and 55% did not believe that their own cars and trucks were significant contributors to air pollution. Only 7% did not drive at all, and two in three reported having at least two licensed vehicles in their household. On the other hand, 45% said they would be willing to seriously consider using public transit to commute to work.

"Californians and their car culture puts the environmental challenge in a different perspective. We are dealing with a very strong lifestyle preference," said Mark Baldassare, the Public Policy Institute's statewide survey director. "They don't particularly see that their personal driving habits have an effect on fuel shortages and prices and on air pollution. That's what makes it a difficult issue."

Three out of four Californians considered air pollution a problem in their part of the state, making it the top priority among all environmental issues, while 47% considered vehicle emissions the biggest cause. The findings were based on a telephone survey of 2,002 California adults conducted between June 4 and June 15.

Among other results, the poll found that 86% of Californians consider candidates' environmental positions an important factor in how they will vote in the 2004 presidential elections. Although 53% approved of the job President Bush is doing, only 37% supported how he was handling environmental issues.

The poll also found that only 28% approved of Gov. Gray Davis' record in office, and just 30% agreed with his handling of environmental issues — a number Baldassare said "speaks volumes" about the Democratic governor's plummeting popularity as he faces a recall threat.

When asked which party best represented their environmental views, one in five chose the Green Party, another number the pollster said raised questions for Davis and the Democrats, who have traditionally captured the environmental vote. Only 39% chose the Democratic Party and just 27% the Republican.

The poll once again confirmed the commonly held view that Californians are strong supporters of the environment, more so than the nation as a whole.

Asked which should be given greater priority, the environment or economic growth, 65% chose the environment, including most Republicans as well as Democrats. In a nationwide Gallup Poll recently, only 47% of Americans gave environmental protection greater weight.

"Changing demographics in the state seem to have had little effect on environmental attitudes. In fact, Latinos if anything seem to be even more environmentally conscious than whites," Baldassare said. "The air may be hazy in Los Angeles and the Central Valley, but people are also thinking of things like global warming, and the fact that what we are doing might have implications for the planet."

Nearly three-fourths of respondents believed that immediate steps were needed to combat global warming, with 69% saying they would be willing to make major lifestyle changes to address the problem.

Californians worry about air pollution, but don't blame themselves

The Bakersfield Californian, Thursday July 10, 2003, 02:30:10 AM By TERENCE CHEA, Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - Californians see air pollution as a major problem and blame automobile use as the main culprit, but few Golden State residents think their own driving is part of the problem, according to a new study released Thursday.

A recent survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found that 58 percent of Californians believe air pollution is a serious health threat, while 47 percent of state residents see vehicle emissions as the primary cause.

Yet less than half of survey respondents said they are "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about how their own driving contributes to poor air quality. Nearly 80 percent reported they were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their vehicle's fuel economy. "People don't recognize the connection between their own actions and the problems in their region," said Mark Baldassare, the institute's statewide survey director. "There's such a dominant car culture that people don't want to recognize the problem."

The institute conducted telephone interviews with 2,002 adults between June 4 and June 15 for its fourth annual survey on state residents' attitudes toward growth, land use and the environment.

The institute will present the survey's findings to federal, state and local government officials responsible for making environmental, transportation and energy policy.

Of those surveyed, 30 percent said they view air pollution as the most important environmental issue, far surpassing the number of people who see water pollution, growth and sprawl or water supply as the biggest problem.

About 68 percent said little progress has been made in dealing with the problem over the past 20 years, but about half expressed some optimism that California's air quality would improve over the next two decades.

Worries over air pollution grew most dramatically in the Central Valley, where 42 percent of residents rate it as the most serious environmental problem, up from 28 percent in 2000. About 60 percent of valley residents said their air quality had worsened over the past decade.

Despite their attachment to a car-based lifestyle, Californians appear willing to change their driving habits to help the environment. About 52 percent said they would consider buying a smaller car to reduce air pollution and fuel use the next time they replace their current vehicle. About 45 percent said they would seriously consider switching to public transportation to commute to work.

The survey also found that California residents continue to be "greener" than the average American. About 65 percent said protecting the environment should be given priority over economic growth, compared to 47 percent nationally. The same number of state residents said they would support tougher air pollution standards even if it would increase the cost of cars.

The majority of Californians said they do not support proposals to reduce dependence on foreign oil by drilling off California's coast or federally protected areas such as the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

Sound Off for July 10

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday July 09, 2003, 11:45:13 PM

Reader: It is a known fact that autos cause more smog than most any other thing. My question is how much smog do autos make sitting 3 to 5 minutes at traffic lights? If these lights were synchronized how much would it clear the smog problem. -- *Ed Broun*

Jenner: Great question, Ed. We'll add that to our list of possible stories to look into.

Senate GOP offers budget plan that may bridge gap

The Bakersfield Californian

By TOM CHORNEAU, Associated Press Writer

Wednesday July 09, 2003, 08:15:17 PM

SACRAMENTO (AP) - In what could be the foundation of a possible budget agreement, Senate Republicans offered Wednesday ideas for trimming about \$2.7 billion in spending - at least some of which have already been proposed by Gov. Gray Davis.

Ranging from the elimination of \$1 million in funding to help counties pay for special elections to the reduction hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance to local governments, Senate Republicans are in agreement with the Democratic governor on a wide variety of issues, according to an analysis.

Expectations are that the list of more than 100 budget amendments proposed by Senate Republicans could serve as the seeds of an agreement that would unlock the two-week-old stalemate on state spending. Senate Republican Leader Jim Brulte, R-Rancho Cucamonga, said that despite optimism surrounding the plan, he isn't sure how Democrats will react.

"I'm heartened by the fact that a number of Democrats in the Senate asked to be briefed on several ideas," he said. "I'm not sure what to read into that, except that they wanted to know about it."

Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, D-San Francisco, said that he had not reviewed all the Republican proposals yet and could not comment on their merits.

The amendments are expected to be debated Monday on the floor of the Senate.

California's record deficit of \$38.2 billion is the nation's largest. But progress on solving the fiscal crisis has been hampered during the last few weeks by partisan politics.

But some budget observers hope the Senate Republicans' latest plan could change the debate because it includes ideas that have come from other sources, including the governor's May budget proposal and blueprints suggested by other Democrats, Republicans and outside sources.

Still, some ideas may not prove popular with Democrats, including proposals to cut some environmental protection programs. For example, the Senate Republicans want to save \$10 million by abolishing the California Coastal Commission. They would also cut funding for a commission that oversees San Francisco Bay cleanup, saving about \$3.5 million.

[The Senate GOP plan would also do away with a variety of fee increases proposed by Democrats, from air pollution permit fees to fish licenses and parking fees at parks. Combined, the elimination of the fee increases will add about \\$900 million to the budget.](#)

Like Davis, the Senate Republicans would divert money from urban redevelopment programs to schools, worth as much as \$250 million.

Higher education would lose big dollars. The University of California would lose about \$100 million for financial aid, research units and other programs.

Public health programs would also take a hit. Republicans would save \$76 million by eliminating 12-month Medi-Cal eligibility for low-income children. There is also a provision for Medi-Cal patients to provide a co-payment for services, saving the state about \$31 million.

Some optional benefits now provided by the state under Medi-Cal - such as dental services - would also be reduced by the Republicans, saving almost \$700 million.

"What we have proposed is really a very modest decrease in state spending," said Sen. Tom McClintock, R-Thousand Oaks. "The bottom line is that with so many families and small businesses having to make much deeper cuts of their own spending this year - for the state to resist having to make only a \$4 billion cut in its spending is unconscionable."

Meanwhile, party leaders spent several hours behind closed doors with Gov. Gray Davis Wednesday on the budget and emerged saying little about their progress. Sen. Brulte said there is some interest in exploring an idea to cut local sales taxes by a quarter-cent while raising the statewide tax by the same amount, a move that might allow the state to borrow \$11 billion without actually raising taxes.

Brulte said that he asked for a full Department of Finance analysis of the idea, but noted that the plan has not been endorsed by either side.

Unhealthy air is forecast

The Hanford Sentinel, July 9, 2003

By Sentinel Staff

Unhealthy air quality is forecast for today and Thursday in Kings County because of projected air pollution levels by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Residents can help reduce smog by linking car trips, refueling vehicles late in the day and postponing yard work with gas-powered equipment.

Valley can cash in on its dirty air

By Bill McEwen

The Fresno Bee

(Published Thursday, July 10, 2003, 4:25 AM)

After four days in the Sierra chasing brown trout and slapping mosquitoes, we were headed home when the central San Joaquin Valley floor came into view.

"Look at that mess," my wife said of the foul air ahead.

While my eyes saw the brown haze of summer, my brain thought green.

Often overlooked in our clean-air debate, which typically is about the high cost of improving the environment, is the money to be made in the pollution industry.

Much of these profits will be made by big companies with political connections and marketplace muscle. PG&E, for example, figures to do quite well selling compressed natural gas to businesses converting their vehicles to air-friendly engines.

There also is room for the savvy entrepreneur with bright ideas, says Byron Kennard, founder and executive director of the Center for Small Business and the Environment, based in Washington, D.C.

In business speak, environmental companies that start small and grow fast are known as green gazelles. Among them is IdleAire, which Kennard says was born after a truck driver complained to his brother-in-law about getting a \$250 ticket for idling his diesel engine while he slept at a truck stop.

Why do resting long-haul drivers idle their engines? To keep the cabs' air conditioning or heating on.

IdleAire inventor A.C. Wilson came up with a solution: portable consoles that attach to trucks much like a drive-in theater speaker. The Tennessee company's consoles provide telephone, Internet and television service in addition to climate control, and they are being installed at truck stops throughout the country, including California.

"About 4.4 billion gallons of diesel fuel a year is used by idling trucks," Kennard says. "Trucking companies love this technology because the consoles are cheaper to use than paying for wasted fuel."

In the Valley, where many business people, particularly farmers, have waged political wars against air regulations instead of seeking technological solutions, green gazelles are rare.

"We are hoping people will take advantage of these regulations and someone comes up with a unique idea," says Seyed Sadredin, director of permit services for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "But the business is mainly on the service side, installing and servicing emission-reduction devices."

An exception is Jack Rabbit, a company in Ripon that makes chippers and shredders. At the height of the energy crisis in the early 1980s, Jack Rabbit invented a machine that collected and chipped tree prunings, which farmers could then sell as fuel to biomass plants.

But when electricity prices fell, so did the market for the prunings, and Jack Rabbit sold only eight machines, says company founder Earl Anderson.

Now, with farmers under pressure to reduce field burning, Jack Rabbit offers a machine that chips prunings small enough to be left to decompose in the field.

Anderson says he has orders for five chippers at \$250,000 each, and he expects them to become a popular item.

Clean-air backers are gaining political strength, and that is creating a new dynamic for businesses big and small: Pay for the cleanup or find a way to cash in. The choice is theirs.

The columnist can be reached at bmcewen@fresnobee.com or 441-6632.

EPA poised to sign regional air plan

Transit groups breathe sigh of relief as threat of funding freeze is lifted

By STAFF WRITER, Tri-Valley Herald - Thursday, July 10, 2003 - 3:59:55 AM PST

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday it intends to approve the Bay Area's latest clean air plan, ending the threat of sanctions that could have frozen construction money for new highway projects in October.

The blueprint, subject to numerous lawsuits and nearly two years overdue, outlines how Bay Area regulators aim to reduce smog-forming pollutants by nearly 122 tons per day by 2006.

It does that by trimming industrial emissions and placing new rules on paints and solvents, among others. Combined with the Bay Area's move to the tougher Enhanced Smog Check program, or Smog Check II, the result should be cleaner air for everyone, said Jack Broadbent, the EPA's regional air division director.

The decision is good news for local regulators, particularly the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which faced a spending freeze of highway and transit money in October if the EPA didn't approve the document.

But Wednesday's decision isn't the last word. The agency simply "proposed to approve" the plan. The public can still weigh in on the matter during a 30-day comment period that should begin in two weeks, according to the EPA.

[The Fresno Bee Editorial, July 10, 2003](#)

Forward momentum

Clean air legislation will be a proper foundation for harder steps.

Clean air bills for the Valley continue their march through the Legislature, an encouraging sign that these basic first steps will soon be put into place, and the long and difficult task of cleaning up our foul air can begin in earnest.

Updating the bills, most authored by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, approved in committee on Monday:

SB 700 (approved by the Assembly Natural Resources Committee) repeals a long-standing exemption in state law that has prohibited farms from being required to seek air pollution permits for diesel-powered irrigation pumps and for feeding operations such as dairies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency demands this repeal, or it promises severe sanctions against the state.

SB 701 (approved by the Senate Air Quality Committee) would create low-interest loans to help farmers pay for equipment or other measures to limit air pollution.

SB 704 (approved by the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee) would require biomass energy facilities to regularly burn agricultural waste -- at least 30% of their total fuel -- to produce electricity.

SB 707 (approved by the Assembly Natural Resources Committee) would establish buffer zones between dairies and cities by blocking new dairy construction within 3 miles of an urbanized area or school, and conversely, would prevent schools or homes from being built within 3 miles of an existing dairy.

SB 708 (approved by the Assembly Transportation Committee) would require older cars and trucks to comply with state air emission standards through the Smog Check II program, but would continue an exemption for vehicles more than 45 years old.

SB 999 (by Sen. Michael Machado, D-Linden, from San Joaquin County) will now go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee. SB 999 would expand the membership of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board from 11 to 15 members, with the new posts filled by the governor and the Legislature. It's a useful effort to introduce a more regional quality to the board's deliberations.

All of this adds up to a gratifying inertia building for cleaner air -- the principle task facing this generation of Valley residents.

