

## **Health leaders work to clean air Fresno meeting aids them in organizing.**

By Barbara Anderson

The Fresno Bee

(Updated Saturday, February 21, 2004, 5:18 AM)

Dirty air damages lungs and shortens lives, creating a public health problem in the smoggy San Joaquin Valley, health experts said Thursday at a meeting to address air quality.

"Fresno County and the Central Valley is an important region in the state for air pollution and the impacts on health," said Paul Knepprath, vice president of government relations at the American Lung Association of California.

The lung association picked three cities -- Fresno, Berkeley and Los Angeles -- for meetings to lay the groundwork for a statewide Health Network for Clean Air program, Knepprath said. "We're hoping to create an environment for health professionals to come together to advocate ... for policies that do clean up the air," he said.

The San Joaquin Valley has some of the worst air quality in the country, falling only slightly behind Los Angeles for bad air.

Some of the health implications: Fresno County has the third highest asthma mortality rate in the country and nearly twice the state level of childhood asthma. Air pollution is known to aggravate asthma symptoms, damage lungs, boost the risk for heart attacks and contribute to premature death. At Thursday's meeting, Valley health leaders vowed to work together to clean the air.

Dr. Edward Moreno, Fresno County's health officer, said the meeting was a chance for officials such as himself to organize their efforts.

"I'm here to figure out where we fit and where our strengths can best be utilized," Moreno said.

Knepprath said he was encouraged by those attending Fresno's meeting. In addition to doctors, the group included nurses and health educators.

"Just by who is attending, it's clear the community's health leaders remain concerned about the impact of air pollution on the health of people," he said.

The reporter can be reached at [banderson@fresnobee.com](mailto:banderson@fresnobee.com) <<mailto:banderson@fresnobee.com>> or 441-6310.

## **Farmworkers discuss health care**

The Bakersfield Californian

LUZ PEÑA, Special to The Californian

February 21, 2004

Section: Local; Page: b8

About 100 farm workers and their families attended a conference to hear about access to health care and the effects of breathing polluted air as part of the Farm Worker Health Ombudsman Program. The workers are members of the Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, Inc. Ombudsman Program and attended the half-day conference Saturday at Hodel's Restaurant.

Estela Casas, executive director of Legal Assistance said the event was a success. The conference was linguistically and culturally appropriate for the farm workers, she said.

She said it was rare to have healthcare providers, doctors and policy makers sit, listen and discuss the issues that concern the farm-working community in Kern County.

During the presentation about Kern County's air quality, the attendees learned about the importance of car-pooling, how dust particles enter the lungs and how air-pollution damages the lungs and other organs in the body.

Melchor Cabrera, of Delano, attended the meeting. He is an undocumented immigrant and neither he nor his family has access to health care.

"I came here today to tell policy makers there's a need among farmworkers to have access to health care. There's a lot of us who don't have health insurance or can seek medical treatment because we're undocumented and low-income," he said. "My children can't go to the doctor or the dentist. My wife has heart problems and needs to see a heart specialist, but can't because she doesn't have any insurance."

Kern County Supervisor Pete Parra, Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, a representative from the office of Rep. Cal Dooley, D-Hanford, and Democratic congressional candidate Lisa Quigley all attended and listened to people's concerns about not having health insurance.

Supervisor Parra said there are 6,000 children in Kern County who don't have access to health care. He said the First 5 program will begin as soon as a health care agency is found to run the program.

The First 5 program uses tobacco taxes to pay for early childhood development programs. The First 5 Commission will use the money to provide health service to any children up to 5 years of age who don't qualify for any other health care program.

Legal Assistance's guest speaker Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America gave a brief speech about the importance of voting and taking care of one's health.

Rosa Magaña, another member of the Ombudsman Program, conducts group outreach sessions with others in the community.

She said all the issues discussed go hand in hand.

"I think poor air quality is just as important as accessing health care for farm-working adults and their children," Magaña said. "If you get sick because of bad air, you're going to have to go to the doctor. These are issues we have to deal with every day."

#### [Letter to the Editor – The Fresno Bee](#)

##### **'Reduce our smog'**

By Kenneth Cribari, Fresno

(Updated Sunday, February 22, 2004, 7:00 AM)

We are not moving fast enough in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on our smog problem. I have two suggestions that will help reduce this problem.

We love our nightly fireplace fires when allowed. However, more must be done regarding the present restrictions. The "unhealthy for sensitive groups" range should be reduced to 100/125. The "unhealthy" range should be increased to 125/200. All of us must do more if we are going to win the smog battle.

Any owner of grass lawn (private, business, government, water district) should have enough electric equipment (mowers, edgers, blowers) to care for their lawns.

There are several choices to replace grass that would reduce or eliminate the use of water -- another precious commodity. In addition, the cost and work of upkeep would be greatly reduced by using rock gardens, desert gardens (after all, we do live in a desert), colored crushed rock, gravel and ivy "lawns." I'm sure this would require new laws and a timetable for compliance. Since farmers must stop the burning in their fields, then all landowners should do their part. It is past time for all of us to help reduce our smog.

#### [COMMENTARY – published in the L.A. Times](#)

##### **In the Fight Against Air Pollution, Diamonds Are a Hybrid's Best Friend**

##### **A gas-electric car should be a ticket to drive in the carpool lane.**

By Laurie David and Al Meyerhoff

February 19, 2004

California's "diamond lanes" — designed in the early 1970s to encourage carpooling, reduce traffic congestion and cut air pollution — have, by most measures, been a great success. Today,

there are 1,112 miles of diamond lanes in California, and in Los Angeles alone they're used by about 700,000 people each day.

But rather than rest on that success, it's time to take the next step against pollution by opening diamond lanes to single- occupant gas-electric hybrids.

Hybrid cars, which use about half the gasoline of the average car, fight smog just as carpooling does, and they too should be encouraged by the state. True, there's already a tax credit (though meager) and rock-bottom monthly gas bills for hybrid owners, but by opening diamond lanes to single-occupant hybrids, California would score a double whammy, with an environmental benefit far greater than the sum of its parts. Given the state's increasing population (of both people and cars), the air needs all the help it can get.

Consider that we Californians now burn about 1 million barrels of gasoline daily, an amount likely to skyrocket because the rate of vehicle ownership is keeping pace with our burgeoning population. By 2020, there will be 30% more cars on our roads, and if the current trend continues, the majority will be bigger and less fuel-efficient. American cars and trucks already consume more than 8 million barrels of oil daily, putting the tab for foreign crude at about \$200,000 per minute.

Then there is pollution. Southern California smog levels last year were the worst in five years, and our three-decade trend of air quality improvement is in reverse. The air we breathe contains 188 different toxic substances, including carcinogens such as benzene, dioxin and chromium. Southern California's cars and trucks spew millions of tons of smog-forming chemicals, causing eye, ear, nose and bronchial irritation, asthma and respiratory disease.

Which brings us back to hybrids. Though these low-emission, fuel-efficient vehicles are increasing in popularity, especially in California, their sales are still only a drop in the bucket. Just last week, a General Motors spokesperson said demand for hybrid cars in the United States "is so marginal that American car companies can't afford to make them." Gas-electric vehicles need incentives to push demand past the tipping point. Allowing single-occupant hybrids into diamond lanes would be just the nudge that's needed.

Existing federal laws inexplicably hold light trucks (including pickups, SUVs and mini-vans) to lower fuel economy standards and often give their buyers huge tax breaks, thus increasing our dependence on foreign oil. On the other hand, a fuel-efficient fleet could save California 340,000 barrels of oil per day. Why not increase incentives for vehicles that sip gasoline instead of guzzling it?

Consider that a Cadillac Escalade with a driver and single passenger has full access to most diamond lanes, whereas a single-occupant hybrid using one quarter the gas and emitting far less pollution does not. That's why both Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, and state Treasurer Phil Angelides, a Democrat, are championing access to diamond lanes as an incentive to go hybrid.

Such a policy wouldn't congest existing diamond lanes. There are only about 20,000 hybrids on the road in California, compared with 29 million other vehicles, and over the next 15 years hybrids will make up, at most, 2% of the state's total vehicle traffic, according to former Caltrans Director Jeff Morales.

Changing the rules requires federal approval. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta should grant California authority to give residents this extra incentive, along with a three-year "sunset provision" — if diamond lanes become congested (a problem to welcome) the policy could be terminated.

Opening diamond lanes to hybrids obviously is not the only way to get cleaner cars on the road.

But it is one way to reduce air pollution and cut our reliance on foreign oil without government mandates. All it takes is a small reward for an intelligent choice. And what better reward could there be than a diamond?

*Laurie David is a trustee of the Natural Resources Defense Council. Al Meyerhoff, formerly director of the council's public health program, is a lawyer in Los Angeles.*