

Borate mine seeking to expand pit

The Bakersfield Californian

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Section: Local, Page: b1

The world's largest borate mining pit may be getting larger if the pit's owners agree to control dust levels from production. The U.S. Borax Inc. mine in eastern Kern County wants to more than double the depth of the pit from 600 to 1,250 feet.

Kern County supervisors will be voting on the plan at their Tuesday board meeting.

The company has run into opposition from some surrounding Boron residents who say the dust kicked up by trucks in the area is exacerbating their health problems as well as lowering their property values.

"Who wants to purchase a home with a 450-foot dirt wall less than a quarter-mile from our homes?" Boron resident Mary Ann Miller wrote in a letter to then-Gov. Gray Davis.

Open pit drill and blasting techniques are used in mining borate, a mineral used in the manufacturing of fiberglass, ceramics, glass, fertilizers and wood preservatives.

The area for "overburden piles," large piles of dirt leftover from drilling, would increase from 4,629 acres to between 6,502 and 7,141 acres. North and east overburden piles would extend northward and southeastward, respectively. Their heights would increase from 300 feet to 650 and 450 feet, respectively.

Many area residents use evaporative coolers due to the region's dry air, said Boron resident Robert Tubb. He's concerned that an increase in mine activity would add more dust to the air to flow through the coolers and throughout local homes. This heightens his concerns about allergies and respiratory problems.

"Besides the interior of our homes being dustier, as well as vehicles, lawn furnishings and outside around houses, it is becoming a health hazard," Tubb said.

In an environmental impact report prepared for the project, it is noted that the operation's particle emissions don't exceed national ambient air quality standards.

A health risk exposure analysis shows that the operations do not exceed Kern County Air Pollution Control District standards.

Some neighbors disputed those findings at the county's Dec. 11 planning commission meeting; however, some voiced support for the expansion.

The planning commission recommended that Borax Inc. more frequently water down the roads where trucks haul waste rock from the pits in order to reduce dust.

Other items on the supervisors' Tuesday agenda include:

* A proposed \$700,000, three-year agreement with Central Valley Occupational Medical Group to perform new-hire exams, annual medical exams, specialized tests and a physical fitness program for the county.

* A resolution to uphold the planning commission's decision to allow a Mennonite congregation to build a church and accessory cemetery in Lebec.

A neighbor appealed the commission's decision to the board. Neighbors were worried the extra traffic would create a driving hazard. The planning commission is recommending that the congregation install guard rails at narrow spots along Lebec Oaks Road.

The group was also advised to enter a road maintenance agreement with the Los Padres Estate Property Owners Association to share the financial burden of road upkeep.

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Lode airs EPA protest Feds may add foothill counties to Valley district

The Stockton Record

By Francis P. Garland, Lode bureau chief

Monday, Jan. 5, 2004

ANGELS CAMP -- A proposal to add four Mother Lode counties to the nation's second dirtiest air basin has area officials and businesses choking over potential repercussions that could include costly business changes and regular smog checks for cars and trucks.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency wants to add Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne counties to the San Joaquin Valley air basin, a zone which includes San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, as part of a district overhaul throughout California.

The EPA is taking comments on the proposal, which it expects to finalize in April.

The four Lode counties in question have been meeting federal smog standards for years, but when stricter standards take hold this year, those counties will fall short.

Foothill officials say their counties aren't producing the bad air. Instead, it is wafting up from the Bay Area and the Valley, officials say -- and adding the Lode counties to that tainted Valley basin will only make the Lode guilty by association.

That could cost the counties money, as millions of federal transportation dollars are tied to meeting air-quality standards.

"I'm very suspicious of being asked to join an area that's already (failing to meet federal smog standards)," Calaveras County Supervisor Paul Stein said.

Some, particularly those in the all-important tourism industry, worry that would-be visitors might make other travel plans if they believe the foothill air isn't as pure and clean as they thought.

And that could hit local businesses -- and, ultimately, residents who work at those businesses -- in their respective checkbooks.

No one knows exactly what changes would occur if the Lode counties become a part of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Jim Harris, Amador County's air-pollution control officer, said he's not sure if he'll need to impose fees on local businesses to pay for new programs or implement vehicle smog-check programs like the Valley.

"They can't tell me at EPA or the (state air-resources board)," he said.

Matt Haber, acting deputy director of EPA's regional air division, said mandatory smog-checks are "a possibility, but I can't say it's a certainty."

Another potential consequence, Haber said, would be businesses having to add emission-control equipment if they grow or move.

Currently, Lode vehicle owners must have their vehicles smog-checked only during an ownership transfer or when they are imported from out of state.

Forcing vehicle owners to have their cars and trucks smog-checked every two years certainly wouldn't hurt Campbell's Service Center in Jackson.

But Dave Conrady, the manager, head mechanic and certified smog technician, opposed such a requirement, because it would be a financial hardship on too many of his customers.

"We're mainly a retirement community," he said. "You're going to be forcing older folks and those on low income to get this done every two years -- and it costs \$59.20 for that."

Some Lode residents fear they would lose their voice if the four counties were forced to join the Valley district and implement regulations meant to address problems in more pollution-prone areas, such as the Valley's larger urban centers.

Just the idea of partnering with the Valley -- which has its unique ozone issues -- rubs some the wrong way. "It's ridiculous," said Jacqueline Lucido, the Amador County Chamber of Commerce executive director.

"It's a whole different environment up here. We're the mountains and they're down in the Valley -- and we don't have problems with smog. We'd be putting wasted effort into something that doesn't exist."

Harris said if everything -- cars, businesses, factories -- shut down for a year in Amador County, local air-quality monitors still would register ozone-standard violations.

"And it's because of the ozone transported from the Valley," he said. "We're a downwind receptor."

When asked by the EPA for its input, the California Air Resources Board suggested pairing the Lode counties in two groups -- Amador and Calaveras in one and Mariposa and Tuolumne in the other.

The EPA, though, said that to allow the Lode counties to try to fix their air-quality problems alone wouldn't be fair because they couldn't address the source of much of those problems -- the Valley.

"The only way to effectively reduce emissions and get to healthy air -- which is the point of this process -- is to control emissions from the more-urbanized and industrialized areas in the Valley," Haber said.

"Our thinking was, we probably need to group those areas together, because if we kept them separate, we could saddle the (Lode) counties with an impossible task -- writing a plan to show how to get healthy when they don't have any control over things."

Harris said he could see the logic in that but still is looking for answers on what it would mean to his county.

"I don't think we can show compliance with the (new standards) without having the assistance of the San Joaquin basin, because if they're not in compliance then we're not going to be in compliance, because of the transport issue," he said.

"We have to look for a practical solution, and the bottom line is: Who's going to help us do what we're going to be required to do?"

Workshops will shape new plan to stifle ozone

The Bakersfield Californian'

MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer; email: mweiser@bakersfield.com

Sunday, Jan. 4, 2004

Section: Local, Page: b1

A new plan to control ozone -- the main offender in valley smog -- is under development, and the public is urged to contribute smog-control ideas to the plan. Two workshops will be held next week to discuss the plan, which aims to bring the valley into compliance with federal clean-air standards. It will include a host of new rules to reduce air pollution, and it will probably subject some businesses to smog controls for the first time.

The plan is one of the most important tools in reducing ozone pollution in the valley. It is a comprehensive strategy for controlling thousands of pollution sources.

"It's very important in terms of laying out the road map to get the emissions reductions we need to meet the ozone standard," said Don Hunsaker, plan development supervisor for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Ozone is an invisible gas formed when exhaust from vehicles, factories and consumer products cooks together in the presence of sunlight. Exposure is common on summer days in the valley and can cause lung tissue damage, chest pain, coughing and nausea. It also causes millions of dollars in health care costs and lost work days every year.

Hunsaker said the valley needs to eliminate 200 to 300 tons per day of air pollution to meet the standards. That means eliminating 20 percent to 30 percent of existing emissions.

A large part of this reduction will come from federal and state mandates for cleaner fuels and vehicles that take effect over the next three years. The valley air district only has authority to regulate stationary sources of pollution, such as factories and farms.

"You look at the magnitude of the emissions reductions you need, and then you look at those we can get by ourselves, and it turns out we do need those federal and state reductions to kick in," Hunsaker said.

But new local smog controls are still needed to close the gap.

One proposal is an "indirect source fee" that could be charged on every new house built in the valley to target the vehicle trips associated with housing development. A new state law, written by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, requires the district to adopt such a fee. The money would be used to pay for other smog-reduction strategies, such as better public transit and low-polluting garbage trucks.

New regulations on agriculture are expected, some in response to other Florez bills, as well as rules aimed at limiting pollution from oil-field pumps, valves and pipelines.

"We're also hoping to get suggestions for control measures that haven't been brought up before," said Hunsaker.

The valley has not had a valid ozone attainment plan in force since 2001, when the federal government ruled that the earlier plan failed to attain the ozone standard. The air district expects to adopt the new plan by May 2004.

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County continues to clean up potentially toxic burn dumps

The Bakersfield Californian

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In the 1930s, cities in Kern County and statewide commonly burned their trash and covered it. With environmental awareness heightened and burning restrictions in place, counties are cleaning the dumps up before they become environmental hazards.

Kern County officials have been remediating their old burn dumps since 1967. There are 54 sites they've been investigating, cleaning up and, in some cases, returning to usefulness.

Another nine dumps operated by area cities or oil companies have also been scrutinized.

A 2000 county burn-dump report shows nine sites have been deemed major environmental risks and are being tackled first. They are China Grade, College Heights, Greenfield No. 1, Mojave No. 2, Rosedale, Ridgecrest No. 1, Mojave No. 1, Shafter and Taft. Arvin's old burn dump is next to be cleaned.

"Anywhere there was a pocket of population, there was a burn dump," said Nancy L. Ewert, a technical resources manager at the Kern County Waste Management Department.

The residual ash was put in landfills or stockpiled. Passage of the Clean Air Act of 1970 prompted closure of all such dumps by the end of 1971.

County officials describe the step as proactive.

"It's something the county's done right even though it's not an ideal situation," Ewert said.

A call for consultants to submit proposals for the next round of dump-site restoration was approved by the Kern County Board of Supervisors Dec. 16.

Depending on site conditions, the ash is either left in place and capped with two feet of soil, consolidated by earthmoving equipment and capped, or removed entirely and closed.

The priority was to clean up sites where housing developments were encroaching or the public could get to them and be exposed to hazardous metals.

Some of the properties, however, are reusable after cleaning.

Liberty Park, near Brimhall Road and Jewetta Avenue, is one such site. All the ash is under the parking lot, Ewert said. Another is the first Mojave site, where a radio station is located.

A third has almond trees growing on it.

The county typically spends \$700,000 annually dealing with the next phase of sites. State grant money and county Solid Waste Enterprise Fund dollars have added to the effort.

Officials at some nearby counties say they have not set up similar programs and have no plans to do so.

Curt Batson, director of San Luis Obispo's Environmental Health Department, says his area's sites are simply covered and not remediated.

"There is no active program at this point," Batson said. "What may drive that would be (the need for) development."

Lisa Sloan, a Santa Barbara County senior environmental health specialist, said remediation there is only done on a case-by-case basis.

"Some have been remediated, some have been clean closed," Sloan said.

That county does perform inspections to ensure its sites meet state standards of safety, she said, but there is no organized effort like Kern County's to clean them up.

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Smog Levels Held in Check in 2003

Ventura County is on track to meet federal standard, a marked improvement from the heavy pollution of the 1970s, officials say.

The Los Angeles Times

By Amanda Covarrubias, staff writer

Saturday, Jan. 3, 2004

Despite fluctuating weather conditions that included stagnant air and light winds last summer, Ventura County skies were mostly smog-free in 2003 and remained on track to meet federal clean-air standards by 2005.

Only two days of unhealthy air pollution occurred last year, one in Ojai and the other in Simi Valley, according to Ventura County Air Pollution Control District officials. The smog season runs from May through October.

The low smog levels allowed the county to meet a key federal air-quality benchmark, the standard that prohibits more than 0.12 parts per million of ozone in the air for any one-hour period.

To reach the federal "attainment" level for ozone, air quality must not exceed the one-hour ozone standard more than three times in three consecutive years. With only two violations in 2003 and one in 2002, the county is on track to meet its goal, officials said.

"Since the early 1970s, when we averaged 122 bad air days, our air quality has improved to such a degree that we've only experienced one or two [unhealthful] days each year for the past several years," said Michael Villegas, air pollution control officer.

"That's healthy news for Ventura County residents."

If the trend continues, Ventura County, once one of the smoggiest counties in the nation, is on schedule to achieve healthful air by November 2005, the deadline established under the federal Clean Air Act. The county faces sanctions for noncompliance.

Ozone, an invisible gas, is formed when carbon-based chemicals mix with other emissions and are warmed by sunshine. The concentration of ozone fluctuates from year to year depending on weather conditions.

While ozone high in the atmosphere protects the Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation, near the surface it is a powerful lung irritant and the main ingredient in smog. It can cause headaches, coughing and dizziness, and long-term exposure can lead to permanent loss of respiratory function.

Active adults and children who spend a lot of time outdoors engaged in physical activity are at particular risk from ozone exposure. Those with asthma or other respiratory illnesses are also vulnerable to its effects.

Despite the progress, the county continued to violate other smog standards.

The county exceeded the more stringent California smog standard - which prohibits more than 0.09 parts per million of ozone in the air in any one-hour period - 41 times last year in Simi Valley, Piru, Ojai and Thousand Oaks. Smog collects in those valley cities because emissions generated along the coast are blown inland by sea breezes.

In addition, there were 31 violations of a federal eight-hour ozone standard in the same four communities.

Deadline for aid in improving air quality is Jan. 31

Saturday, Jan. 3, 2004

Special to the Madera Tribune

Applications for federal cost-share assistance to help reduce air quality emissions are now being accepted from agriculture producers in California counties where air quality is classified as the worst in the state.

The deadline to sign up for 2004 EQIP funds in most counties is Jan. 30.

The funds are being offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through its Environmental Quality Incentives program (EQIP).

Farmers interested in participating in the EQIP air quality program should contact their local NRCS office or USDA service center to learn the exact date.

The Natural Resources Conservation Services Madera offices are at 425 N. Gateway Drive. The phone number is 674-2108.

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that helps agriculture producers install conservation practices that minimize air quality emissions.

EQIP funds can be used to defray the cost of chipping annual orchard prunings from almonds and walnuts instead of burning them, as well as chipping any orchard or vineyard that has been completely removed. Cost-share assistance is also available when applying dust control to

unpaved roads, or implementing conservation tillage, which reduces the number of trips a tractor makes across a field.

Only producers in California counties where air quality has been classified as serious non-attainment for PM-10 as defined under the Federal Clean Air Act are eligible for EQIP air quality funds. PM-10 is particulate matter ten microns or less in size. High levels of PM-10 contribute to human health problems and visibility concerns. The eligible counties are: Fresno, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Merced, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare.

Additionally, funds are available to offset the cost of purchasing cleaner burning stationary diesel engines used for irrigation in counties where air quality has been classified for ozone as severe or extreme non-attainment. All or a portion of the following counties are eligible for diesel engine incentive payments: western El Dorado, Fresno, western Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Merced, Orange, western Placer, Riverside, northern and western San Bernardino, San Joaquin, eastern Solano, Stanislaus, southern Sutter, Tulare, Ventura, and Yolo.

The NRCS will evaluate each application and give highest priority to those that provide the most environmental benefits. Once 2004 funds have been exhausted, eligible applicants will remain on file until additional funding becomes available. In 2003, California received \$5.5 million in EQIP air quality contracts with more than 500 farmers. In the San Joaquin Valley, participants have eliminated more than 2,000 tons of air emissions since 1998.

Ethanol era begins with little impact

The Modesto Bee

By Tim Moran, staff writer

Saturday, Jan. 3, 2004

The gasoline additive MTBE was banished from the Golden State as of Thursday, replaced with corn-based ethanol.

Despite the dire predictions of shortages and price spikes as gasoline producers struggled to bring ethanol into California from the Midwest, the switch has so far been invisible to the consumer.

"We have no problems with supply at this point," said Chris Davis, a spokesman for the California Energy Commission. "So far, so good."

Cynthia Harris, a spokeswoman for the American Automobile Association of Northern California, agreed. "As of yet, there are no significant shortages," she reported. "The situation is being monitored quite closely, and it's not that big an issue for the moment."

MTBE, short for methyl tertiary-butyl ether, was added to California gasoline to make the fuel burn cleaner, [a federal requirement to clean up the air](#).

But the additive was found to contaminate groundwater. Four years ago, Gov. Davis ordered that it be removed from gasoline by 2003.

Davis later extended the deadline to 2004 to allow oil companies time to make the switch to ethanol.

"A big part of the reason he delayed the ban was concerns about the infrastructure of getting it (ethanol) here," Chris Davis said. "It gave us time to get our feet under us."

Most gasoline producers switched from MTBE ahead of the deadline, Davis added.

Predicted price increases do not seem to have occurred either.

Projected gasoline prices for February look a few cents per gallon higher, Davis said, but it is hard to know if that is related to ethanol.

"Ethanol is used in a 5 percent concentration, one gallon of ethanol for 20 gallons of gasoline," Davis said. "We don't see any big effect on price."

Harris commented that there were predictions of gas price increases of 4 to 5 cents a gallon. But the price is affected by many factors, Harris said, including Middle Eastern events, demand from driving patterns and local competition among gasoline retailers.

A study done by the California Energy Commission staff in October said the state has become the nation's largest market for ethanol fuel. The state is expected to use between 760 million and 990 million gallons of ethanol this year.

Most of that will come from Midwest corn-producing states, and arrives here by train. A small amount comes from foreign producers by barge.

U.S. ethanol production has grown 38 percent in two years, to more than 3 billion gallons per year.

California's water agencies are delighted with the MTBE ban. The additive has contaminated scores of drinking water sources and will cost as much as \$29 billion to clean up, according to the Association of California Water Agencies.

"This is a big day for all drinking-water consumers and water districts throughout California," Steve Hall, the association's executive director, said in a statement.

The association is fighting to prevent Congress from protecting MTBE manufacturers from liability for water cleanup.

Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Jan. 5, 2004:

Bank the fires

New rules will reduce fireplace pollution, make winter air cleaner.

(Published Monday, January 5, 2004, 5:26 AM)

New rules governing how and what we may burn in our homes went into effect last week, and the early returns -- very early -- suggest no problem. We hope it stays that way.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District adopted the new rules last year to govern wood burning in stoves and fireplaces that contributes heavily to winter-time air pollution.

Sellers of homes must now make sure wood-burning equipment meets federal pollution standards. Otherwise, the equipment must be removed or permanently disabled before the sale.

With some exceptions, only equipment that meets those federal standards is now permitted. Homes in which natural gas is unavailable, where there is no other heat source or at elevations above 3,000 feet are exceptions to the wood-burning restriction.

But those homes must also meet the new certification requirement before being sold.

Wood stoves and inserts that meet current requirements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are listed at the EPA Web site, (www.epa.gov <http://www.epa.gov/Compliance/monitoring/programs/woodstoves/index.html>).

The new wood-burning rules are not an outright ban on wood burning, as some misinformed complaints allege. Nor do they amount to an onerous mandate.

They will help cleanse the winter air of deadly soot and other particles, and that's an outcome to be cheered by everyone, from asthma sufferers to those who simply enjoy a chilly breath from time to time.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

With new wood-burning rules in effect, we can all look forward to cleaner winter air.

Modesto Bee editorial, Sunday, Jan. 4, 2004:

Think Differently in 2004

Good ideas that should, but aren't, being discussed

Business as usual will not suffice to meet the challenges facing California. It's time to consider some different approaches, to talk about some ideas that haven't been getting serious thought.

Tuition at state universities

California's continuing budget crisis will inevitably force the state to reduce its support for the University of California and California State University. That makes this the right time to ask why taxpayers are deeply subsidizing the education of undergraduates and professional and graduate students who can afford to pay for their own education.

For decades California has fulfilled its promise of access to higher education for all who qualify by holding university fees well below the level charged by comparable public institutions or private universities around the country.

The state can't afford to do that anymore. It should set tuition for UC and CSU at market levels and use state tax dollars to give financial aid to students based on their need. Access could still be assured, and the quality of the state's universities would be protected. The state would cut spending not by reducing the number of professors and classes, but by reducing the tuition subsidy that goes to high-income families and professional students that don't need taxpayer assistance.

Make environmental act smarter

The California Environmental Quality Act has become a full employment act for lawyers and their client neighborhood groups who tend to object to the most environmentally benign kind of housing -- that inside an existing community, particularly compact housing (town homes and apartments).

Frequently, CEQA provides the only hook to stop a project: the bogus allegation that the developer and the local government did not provide enough paperwork to analyze the traffic impacts of the project. The result is that CEQA doesn't protect the environment but promotes sprawl. The solution: Exempt from CEQA "infill" housing projects, especially those with a compact design that makes the most of the available land.

Universal preschool

California has a newly minted set of academic standards for public school children. But these high aspirations ring hollow when so many students -- perhaps as many as half -- start school without the most basic skills. It's time for this state to catch up with others around the country that have established part-day, voluntary "universal preschool" for 3- and 4-year-olds. Such programs aren't cheap. But solid, long-term research has shown a big return on investment -- in lower rates of grade retention, dropouts, special education, welfare dependency and crime, and in higher college attendance and earnings.

Modify 'three strikes'

Even as crime rates have fallen, California's prison population has grown in 10 years from 115,000 to a little more than 160,000. More than half those inmates have been incarcerated for nonviolent offenses, drug-related and property crimes mostly.

Approximately 6,500 inmates are 55 years or older; 1,200 are over 65. Because they are more likely to suffer from serious health problems, older inmates are more expensive to house. When paroled, they represent a significantly lower crime risk. Only 1.4 percent of inmates paroled after age 55 are sent back to prison because they commit new crimes.

With prison guards costing close to \$100,000 each and a mushrooming corrections budget, California can no longer afford to lock up felons who pose no serious threat to public safety. Three strikes needs to be modified to allow nonviolent and elderly inmates to earn parole faster.

Teacher quality

How can California ever expect its poorest children to meet high standards if it doesn't give them effective, experienced teachers? The state and local districts have to get serious about making low-income schools more attractive to the most capable teachers. That includes not just pay incentives but the resources to improve working conditions. It also includes more meaningful pay differentials for teachers with expertise in shortage areas, such as science, math and special education. And it means putting an end to union agreements that encourage senior teachers to opt for comfortable jobs in the wealthiest neighborhoods.

Raise the gas tax

The price of gasoline includes a state tax of 18 cents a gallon. This tax now generates more than \$3 billion a year. No tax is popular, but the vehicle license fee was much-loathed because it represented a large financial pill to swallow at one time. The gas tax comes in small doses every visit to the pump. It is proportional: The motorist who drives more or drives a gas-guzzler pays more tax. A higher tax would encourage fuel efficiency, carpooling and fewer trips overall. Doubling this tax would put a small dent in the unmet needs of California's sprawling development patterns.

A bigger Legislature

Although California is the most populous state and easily the most complex society and economy, it has one of the smallest legislatures: only 80 members in the Assembly and 40 members in the Senate. Each member of the Assembly represents about 450,000 people, almost nine times the average in other states; each senator represents about 900,000 people, seven times more than the national average for upper houses and larger than U.S House districts.

The Legislature doesn't have the diversity and range of talent and knowledge that it should. Campaigning costs a fortune in large districts. Furthermore, citizens have a hard time getting the attention of their legislators. Increasing the size of the Legislature would address many of these problems.

Change state pension plans

A defined benefit pension is a binding promise made today to pay a particular benefit tomorrow. The problem is that the politicians making these promises to public employee groups today won't be around tomorrow to pay the bills, but the taxpayers will.

Over the last several years, state and local governments, under pressure from the public employee unions that provide dollars and workers for politicians' campaigns, have handed out lavish pension benefits that will impose large and growing burdens on future budgets and taxpayers. To protect future taxpayers, the law needs to change to require all future retirement benefits for public workers to be paid in defined contribution plans, such as the 401(k) plans that have become the primary retirement-saving vehicle for private-sector workers.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2004:](#)

Why wait?

By David Dickie
Fresno

(Published Saturday, January 3, 2004, 5:37 AM)

Having purchased a new 2004 Toyota Prius in October, I was pleased to learn that Motor Trend Magazine just honored the car as the 2004 Car of the Year, based on spectacular fuel economy (60 mpg), ultra-low emissions and exceptional performance. Scientific American named Toyota as the business leader of the year and estimated that if all new vehicles did as well, it would save

the United States 1.5 billion barrels of oil annually. After driving the car to Los Angeles and then to Grant's Pass, Ore., and back, I fully concur with their findings.

But why haven't American car companies moved toward this technology? If our government, both state and federal, gave economic incentives to individuals to buy such cars and pushed our automotive companies to produce them, I believe we would move much faster toward energy independence, cleaner air and a reduction of global warming. This could be done quickly at a fraction of the cost of the energy policy now proposed by our government.

And what about our Valley air? The technology is clearly here. Why do we need to wait 10 to 15 years to develop hydrogen fuel cells and the huge infrastructure they need?

Setting it straight

(Published in the Fresno - Saturday, January 3, 2004, 5:25 AM)

Homes located higher than 3,000 feet in elevation, have no other source of heat or have no available natural gas service are not exempt from a new rule requiring home sellers to certify that their wood stoves or fireplace inserts meet federal standards. A story on Page B1 of Friday's Bee was incorrect.

It is The Bee's policy to acknowledge errors promptly. Mistakes should be called to the attention of the editors involved.