

Valley-linked bills survive final days

But others don't make cut as Legislature wraps session.

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger / Bee Capitol Bureau

[The Fresno Bee, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2005](#)

SACRAMENTO - State lawmakers sorted through hundreds of bills in the final few days of this year's session, giving thumbs up and thumbs down to legislation of interest to the central San Joaquin Valley.

Bills to extend a rural crime prevention program and allow California State University to offer Doctor of Education degrees got the final OK and are on their way to the governor.

But some didn't advance, including one to retool the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board and another to require local voter approval of off-reservation American Indian casinos.

In all, the Legislature sent an estimated 740 bills to Gov. Schwarzenegger in the last days of the session, which wrapped up late Thursday. The governor has until Oct. 9 to sign or veto the bills.

As of Friday, Schwarzenegger had signed 231 bills into law and vetoed 27.

"We got a lot done this legislative session," Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, said Friday, trying to discredit talk that the Legislature accomplished little this year because attention was focused on the special election in November.

Senate Bill 453, which would extend the Central Valley Crime Prevention Program until 2009, received final legislative approval Thursday. Without an extension, the program will end this year.

The program gives sheriff's departments and district attorneys resources to specialize in agricultural crimes such as thefts of machinery, animals, chemicals, fuel and other materials.

Opposition by the California Public Defenders Association, which wanted a cut of the money, threatened to kill the program.

"It created in the minds of a few legislators on the far left an opportunity to toy with this program. In the end, the cooler heads prevailed and the bill passed with overwhelming majority," said Sen. Chuck Poochigian, R-Fresno, sponsor of the bill.

Said William Yoshimoto, project director and supervising attorney with the Tulare County District Attorney's Office: "We've had to fight quite a bit just to make people understand the importance of this program."

Poochigian expects Schwarzenegger to sign the bill.

California State University campuses could independently offer education doctorates under Senate Bill 724 by Sen. Jack Scott, D-Altadena. The goal is to prepare administrative leaders for California's community colleges and K-12 public schools.

Fresno State President John Welty said the bill, if signed by Schwarzenegger, would help more educators in the Valley get doctoral degrees. Fresno State currently has a joint program linked with University of California at Davis, but its enrollment is limited.

"This is a very important piece of legislation because it will allow for the important preparation of education leaders in the state," Welty said.

Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden, decided late Thursday to hold back his bill to shake up the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board. Machado worried his bill wouldn't have enough support in the Assembly.

Senate Bill 999 would have added two city and two public representatives to the 11-member board, making it more reflective of the Valley's changing demographics, Machado said.

Opponents said the state shouldn't decide the membership of a board that has only local impacts. Machado plans to work on his bill and try again next year.

A bill that Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, called "emergency" legislation to require local public approval of off-reservation casinos stalled in a policy committee. Senate Bill 1013, introduced less than a month ago,

was in response to a Madera County Board of Supervisors vote to support a \$250 million resort casino west of Freeway 99 at Avenue 17.

The bill was referred to the Senate Governmental Organizational Committee, which Florez chairs, but time ran out to move it through the Legislature.

The bill lists criteria for off-reservation casino plans to move forward -- the local government and voters must support the project and there must be a proven benefit to the community other than monetary gain.

Florez will revisit the bill in January when the Legislature reconvenes.

Wrapping up the legislative session

[Los Angeles Times, Sunday, Sept. 11, 2005](#)

The California Legislature recessed for the year just before midnight Thursday, after lawmakers had handled more than 3,000 bills. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has until Oct. 9 to sign or veto most of the measures that passed both the Senate and Assembly. If he takes no action on a bill by the deadline, it automatically becomes law.

Some bills awaiting action by the governor:

Alcohol - Would change the state's definition of beer to include flavored malt beverages. Such products are taxed at a lower rate than distilled spirits. (AB 417 by Assemblyman Greg Aghazarian, R-Stockton)

Batteries - Would require certain retailers who sell rechargeable batteries, including those in computer laptops and power tools, to accept those used batteries for recycling. (AB 1125 by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills)

Cosmetics - Would require cosmetics makers to inform the state of any ingredients in their products that are linked to cancer or birth defects. (SB 484 by Sen. Carole Migden, D-San Francisco)

Dependents - Would require private health insurance companies to allow parents to extend benefits to their children up to age 26. (AB 1698 by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, D-Los Angeles)

Doctorate - Would allow the California State University system for the first time to issue doctoral degrees, specifically the doctorate in education. (SB 724 by Sen. Jack Scott, D-Altadena)

Dogs - Would allow cities and counties to pass ordinances to regulate the spaying, neutering and breeding of specific breeds, such as pit bulls, so long as no breed is declared vicious or a nuisance. (SB 861 by Sen. Jackie Speier, D-Hillsborough)

Driving - Would ban people who are at least 16, but younger than 18, from driving between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. for the first year they hold provisional driver's licenses. (AB 1474 by Assemblyman Bill Maze, R-Visalia)

Exit exam - Would allow school districts to create an alternative to the state high school exit examination to test proficiency in English and mathematics. (AB 1531 by Assemblywoman Karen Bass, D-Los Angeles)

Exotic animals - Would impose reporting requirements on people who own exotic animals, including lions and tigers, and require the Department of Fish and Game to write a policy for capturing such animals if they get loose. (AB 820 by Assemblywoman Audra Strickland, R-Thousand Oaks)

Fingerprints - Would repeal the requirement that adults applying for food stamps be fingerprinted. (AB 696 by Assemblywoman Judy Chu, D-Monterey Park)

Greenhouse gases - [Starting in 2009, would require auto manufacturers to display information about air pollution and emission of gases linked to global warming on all new cars and sport utility vehicles for sale in California. \(AB 1229 by Assemblyman Joe Nation, D-San Rafael\)](#)

Health food - Would impose calorie, fat and sugar standards on foods sold in elementary and high schools. (SB 12 by Sen. Martha Escutia, D-Whittier)

Health insurance - Would require health insurers to explain in writing why they have denied an individual coverage or granted coverage at a rate higher than standard. (AB 356 by Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, D-Alameda)

Health insurance - Would extend coverage to some of California's estimated 800,000 uninsured children by raising the income at which families qualify for state-provided healthcare. (AB 772 by Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, D-Alameda)

Human trafficking - Would make trafficking of people for forced labor or services a felony punishable by up to eight years in prison. Would also allow victims of human trafficking to sue for damages. (AB 22 by Assemblywoman Sally Lieber, D-Mountain View)

Incest - Would eliminate the discretion of judges to order therapy or probation instead of prison for people who sexually abuse their children or stepchildren. (SB 33 by Sen. Jim Battin, R-La Quinta)

Gasoline Emission Standards Relaxed

State allows early use of 'winter gas' to help avoid hurricane-related price hikes, shortages. Some clean air groups object.

By Tim Reiterman, Times Staff Writer

[Los Angeles Times, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2005](#)

SAN FRANCISCO - State air quality officials Friday temporarily relaxed gasoline evaporation standards to help avoid shortages and price spikes resulting from hurricane-related disruption of Gulf Coast oil operations.

Taking emergency action, Catherine Witherspoon, executive officer of the California Air Resources Board, gave the green light to the sale of gasoline formulated for winter use, which officials predict will increase the availability of gas but will also increase pollution.

The decision waived the requirement that only "summer gasoline," with less evaporation, can be sold during the high-ozone season, which ends Oct. 31 in most of the state.

During a hearing Thursday in Sacramento, oil industry representatives endorsed the agency's proposed response to hurricane damage to oil rigs, refineries and distribution facilities.

But environmental groups called for conservation to make up for reduced imports. And some challenged the wisdom of easing gasoline standards at a time of year when heat and air stagnation can produce severe air pollution.

"Public health is being sacrificed to keep us on the road," said John White, representing the American Lung Assn. of California and a number of environmental groups, including the Coalition for Clean Air.

Regulators expect that changing the evaporation standards will put an additional 50 tons of hydrocarbons into the air each day, an increase of 6% to 7%. Ozone would increase by about 1%.

Board officials acknowledged the relaxed rules could lead to violation of federal ozone standards on hot, still days. But they said they were faced with an emergency situation that could seriously disrupt gasoline supplies and hurt consumers and businesses.

Board spokesman Jerry Martin said Friday that the emergency rule change was not aimed at cutting the current pump prices but at improving supplies. "We have no control over price, which is determined by the market forces and refiners," he said. "We're eliminating the supply shortage, and hopefully that will stabilize prices."

California's action follows a recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announcement that it would allow the nationwide distribution of gasoline with a lower evaporative standard than some states require. This state joins several others in adopting those standards.

The air board's staff warned this week that California could lose 5% to 10% of its gasoline supplies because of increased difficulty in importing so-called finished gas and blended stocks. They proposed increasing the allowable Reid Vapor Pressure - a measure of evaporation - from about seven pounds per

square inch to nine, meaning more gasoline vapor would escape into the atmosphere from gas tanks and fuel lines.

During Thursday's hearing, Teri Shore of Blue Water Network argued that recent events, including President Bush's move to release oil reserves and a drop in wholesale prices, indicated that board action was unnecessary. "There is no emergency in California to justify weakening of the law," she said.

But Jay McKeeman of the California Independent Oil Marketers Assn. said the livelihood of mom-and-pop gas stations was threatened by the state's gas supply problems. "If conditions get worse, unbranded fuels are the first to disappear from the market," he said. "Our members stand to lose a lot.... It would mean employers would have to lay off employees and curtail their [health] benefits."

By disrupting Gulf Coast supplies, the hurricane has caused about a 10% loss of the nation's oil refining capacity.

Oil companies say that relaxing the evaporation rules will help expand gas supplies. For one thing, chemicals removed from summer gasoline and stored can be blended back into gasoline.

Air regulators relax gas pollution standards to conserve supply

Greg Lucas, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
[San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2005](#)

Sacramento -- Air quality regulators temporarily relaxed gasoline pollution standards Friday in an attempt to prevent supply shortages -- and possible price hikes -- caused by hurricane damage to Gulf Coast oil producers.

Opposed by some environmentalists, the action by the California Air Resources Board allows refiners to switch to the so-called wintertime blend of fuel now instead of waiting until Oct. 31.

"In addition to California's aggressive efforts to conserve fuel, this emergency action is the only alternative immediately available to allow California to balance the supply of gasoline with our daily demand," said Michael Scheible, the board's deputy executive officer, who held a public hearing on the issue Thursday.

The action will increase the volume of gasoline in the state by 10 percent, the board estimates, because hydrocarbons removed from the summertime blend would be restored. That will make up for the 10 percent of gasoline California was receiving from Gulf Coast producers before Hurricane Katrina damaged refineries and rigs.

California's move is similar to one by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which announced last week that it would allow gasoline to be sold nationwide with a more relaxed pollution standard than California and several other states allow.

Some of those other states, including Arizona, Nevada and Washington, have already reduced their standards to those set by the EPA.

But some environmentalists question the need for the move.

"Californians aren't looking for relaxing air standards. We know this will make our air smoggier in September and October, which, in much of the state, are still warm months and sometimes smoggy months," said Bill Magavern, a Sacramento lobbyist for the Sierra Club.

In the summer, when heat and sunlight react with emissions to form ozone, the state has standards that reduce the gasoline's ability to evaporate.

During summer months, to meet state standards, refiners remove evaporating butane and pentane hydrocarbons from gasoline.

After Oct. 31, when the weather is colder and atmospheric pressure stronger, which discourages evaporation, hydrocarbons are restored, increasing the gasoline's volume.

The board estimates its decision will increase hydrocarbon emissions by motor vehicles from 800 tons to 850 tons per day.

The decision does not affect diesel fuel, which does not have different seasonal blends.

California relaxes pollution rules

Move enables state's refineries to produce 10% more gas from each barrel of oil.

By Chris Bowman

[Sacramento Bee, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2005](#)

SACRAMENTO - California's top smog regulator traded cleaner air for more stable gasoline prices Friday in an emergency action prompted by the loss of oil shipments from the hurricane-crippled Gulf Coast.

Catherine Witherspoon, executive officer of the state Air Resources Board, decided to temporarily relax gasoline pollution standards to help avert anticipated supply shortages and continued price spikes.

The action enables California refineries to produce about 10% more gasoline from every barrel of oil.

That's enough to compensate for most if not all of the expected shortfall in Gulf imports and keep prices in check, said Michael Scheible, the air board's deputy executive officer.

The result will be an estimated 1% increase in production of ground-level ozone, the gas in smog that inflames airways and impairs breathing, according to an air board staff report available online at www.arb.ca.gov.

The higher-polluting gasoline will reach service stations in about two weeks, the report says.

The added pollution could tip air quality to unhealthy levels in portions of the Central Valley and Southern California on very hot and stagnant days, said Jerry Martin, a board spokesman.

Friday's action effectively waives the state requirement to sell lower-polluting "summer gasoline" for the balance of the smog season, which ends Oct. 31 in Sacramento and most of California.

Environmental groups did not oppose the temporary weakening of air standards, which were discussed at an air board staff hearing Thursday.

But some representatives said California gasoline producers should be required to compensate for the added pollution, for example, by subsidizing the replacement of old school-bus engines with cleaner models.

"The refiners are earning extra money off this extraordinary situation, but the breathers of California have to suffer," said Roland Hwang, vehicle policy director for the environmentalist Natural Resources Defense Council.

Week in Review: Got money?

[Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 11, 2005](#)

The first big dairy project to tap controversial state bond funds in nearly a year -- ever since a political uproar temporarily shut off access to millions in cheap loans -- successfully received its preliminary OK earlier this month.

A Fresno County facility is in line for \$8.4 million in low-interest, tax-exempt bond money approved by the California Pollution Control Financing Authority. The decision to allow dairies access to bonds meant for pollution-cutting equipment got a split vote from representatives of three of the biggest names in state politics: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Controller Steve Westly and Treasurer Phil Angelides.

Angelides' representative cast the only "no" vote on the three-member authority. Dairymen say their industry shouldn't be excluded from access to the money. Environmental critics say rules don't require dairies to cut pollution and the public-financing mechanism is effectively being used to increase air and water pollution in the Central Valley, including Kern County.

What's next: A backlog of dairy projects is expected to come out of the wings. Two bills could eventually tighten requirements for issuing the loans, although both are expected to remain quiet until next year's legislative session begins.

Building green always made sense -- now it's beginning to pay off

Valerie Fahey, Special to The Chronicle

[San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, Sept. 11, 2005](#)

Building green -- even remodeling green -- has come a long way from being just an expensive novelty.

The added cost of using sustainable materials and design is starting to pay for itself within a few years, not the decade that has been the rule of thumb in the past.

Because petroleum-based products are not green, the trend can only speed up as the price of oil skyrockets.

"Everyone supports sustainable development to preserve natural resources, but the question has always been the cost," said Matt Anderson of Oakland's Foresight Analytics, a real estate research group.

In simple terms, green building uses design techniques, materials and technologies meant to minimize a building's impact on the environment, both in its construction and its continuing operation, said David Hobstetter, principal at KMD, a San Francisco architectural firm that embraces green design.

A green building lowers both environmental impact and costs by using sustainably harvested or recycled materials durable enough to last generations. Green buildings also avoid toxic materials and are designed to minimize construction debris and indoor pollutants.

It doesn't stop there. When done properly, green building also uses design and operational systems that reduce energy and water consumption and other maintenance costs.

The payoffs can accrue to both the planet and the owner. On a macro-scale, green building is part of move toward a more sustainable economy. Americans are energy and resource hogs, consuming about 28 percent of the world's oil to sustain 4.7 percent of its population, according to the United States Green Building Council.

It turns out that much of that energy goes into our buildings. The Department of Energy's Center for Sustainable Development says buildings consume 40 percent of the world's total energy, 25 percent of its wood harvest and 16 percent of its water.

Martin Samuels, a businessman with a track record in real estate and other ventures, said he has long wanted to show his commitment to sustainability. "I wanted more than just to build a green house for myself. I wanted to build a largely green multifamily housing development."

The project, 62 condos on the Oakland/Emeryville border, is nearing completion. The first models opened last month. (See the Model Home review on Page K1).

Samuels conceived GreenCity Lofts after meeting Jerry Brown during the 1998 Oakland mayoral campaign. Samuels found that Brown was passionate not only about downtown development, but about green development in particular.

"Brown challenged developers to build green projects to revitalize the city and provide a green standard for development in the 21st century," Samuels said.

"To save dwindling landfill space, our city laws require that all demolition projects in Oakland recycle at least 50 percent of their debris," Brown said. Samuels did them one better. GreenCity sits on the site where a paint factory stood for 80 years. Ninety-five percent of the demolition waste was recycled.

If Samuels could do it, why doesn't everybody? "For multiple reasons," said Marc Richmond, of What's Working, a team of green design consultants.

"Builders are used to meeting codes, not exceeding them. It requires extra effort in separation of materials and in finding a demolition contractor who has sources for the recycled materials. And it takes more time than just tearing down and hauling away, and time is money on the construction site."

Samuels said building green on a large scale pays off.

"Because they squeeze more units onto less land, apartments and condos are more friendly to the environment than single-family homes in the 'burbs. Shared walls, floors and ceilings keep heating and cooling costs down, and it's easier to spread cost efficiencies across multiple units."

"We wanted to be as green as we could be," Samuels said. "To make sure the development was truly green, the design team followed the strict Energy Star Program guidelines from the U.S. Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency. We also followed the multifamily green building guidelines set by the Alameda County Waste Management Authority."

Samuels said Energy Star qualifications require a home to be at least 15 percent more energy efficient than California's energy code requirements, which are already 20 percent higher than in most of the rest of the nation.

"I largely credit the gas-fired hydronic radiant floor heating system in each unit for the development achieving the Energy Star qualifications," Samuels said.

"It heats the floor rather than the air. Once heated, it saves energy by continuing to release heat even after the thermostat is turned off."

Because the hot water circulates through plastic tubing embedded in concrete, any finish surface -- tile, stone, carpet, wood flooring -- can be placed over it.

"With radiant heat, recycled building materials, energy-efficient design and high indoor-air quality, GreenCity Lofts demonstrates many state-of-the-art construction and design techniques that are bringing green building into the mainstream," said Richmond, who was a consultant for the project.

"In terms of large-scale green features, the five buildings within the project are all framed with steel instead of wood. Steel framing is durable, long-lasting and doesn't deplete the forests."

The GreenCity Lofts also collect water runoff for use in landscape irrigation, and the parking garage wiring to accommodate three electric vehicles.

The project also replaced up to 25 percent of the concrete foundation's cement with fly ash, a recycled material from the smokestacks of coal-fired power plants. Using fly ash in the mix increases durability, reduces costs and reduces cement demand; therefore, it also reduces carbon dioxide emissions.

"Most ready-mix suppliers already use 15 to 20 percent fly ash in their standard mix. Higher percentages of fly ash take longer to cure, which can create scheduling problems, and it gives it a different consistency, so it becomes a training issue for concrete finishers," Richmond said.

Last, the interior finishes were chosen to provide better indoor air quality. No-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints were used, thus reducing the off-gassing that comes with traditional paint.

The cabinets in each unit are made from wood stalk, an engineered board made from wheat straw fiber, a byproduct typically discarded by wheat growers.

Because the cost of solar energy on such a large scale is still prohibitive, GreenCity doesn't have it. "We tried for nine months to figure out how to bring solar in, but we just couldn't make the math work," Samuels said.

Green building practices can also show a big payoff in commercial construction.

Meeting green standards "adds no more than 1 percent to the cost of a commercial project," said Hobstetter, the KMD architect. The long-term payoffs are even bigger. Clients save energy and operational costs and reap the benefits of greater employee health, productivity and comfort.

Hobstetter points to the KMD-designed and recently completed San Luis Obispo County Government Center, which, he says, is 35 percent more efficient than a conventional building.

The center has a raised floor design, similar to a computer room, that allows the concrete floors and ceilings to cool off at night, then keep the interior cooler during the day. "This type of design uses the climate, similar to San Francisco's, for thermal comfort," Hobstetter said. "It reduces the need for air conditioning by half each day."

Motion sensors turn off lights when offices are empty. "The savings in electricity is expected to range between 45 and 55 percent," Hobstetter said.

"The payback for the system will take an estimated seven to nine years, after which the power-saving dollars increase dramatically." That's real money in the taxpayers' pockets.

Employers are beginning to embrace green buildings because they reduce absenteeism, Hobstetter said.

The costs of poor indoor air quality -- including higher absenteeism and increased respiratory ailments, allergies and asthma -- are generally hidden in sick days, lower productivity and medical costs, according to "Green Building Costs and Financial Benefits," a 2003 report by the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, the state's development agency for renewable energy.

Four attributes of green building design -- increased ventilation, temperature and lighting control, and increased natural light -- have been correlated with workforce productivity gains averaging 7.1 percent, according to the report.

Recent Dutch studies showed that a healthy indoor climate led to a 2.5 percent drop in absenteeism.

It seems that, if done right, green building is better for everyone and everything, even the bottom line. That might be what really spurs the masses to go for the green.

Samuels hopes to build more projects like GreenCity. "It's taken me 61 years at it," he said, "but I've finally found what I want to do when I grow up. "This is it. I love it."

How to get green

How do consumers know if the products they are buying are reducing the impact on the environment or whether they're just being served a slick marketing campaign?

One answer is to look deeper into the product than the packaging and find out how it sets itself apart from others on the market. This may be as easy as reading the small print on the box or as complicated as asking in-depth questions of the retailer or manufacturer.

The key is knowing what questions to ask, such as:

- Does the product contain recycled materials?
- Is the material recyclable in the future?
- What potentially hazardous chemicals does the product contain?
- Will off-gassing diminish indoor air quality?
- If using new wood, is it sustainably harvested? (Look for certification by the Forests Steward Council.)

A green glossary

Glass tiles: Recycled glass is collected, crushed, mixed with metal oxides, then cooked at high temperatures before being poured into tile molds. Can be used anywhere indoor-type tiles are used, such as on backsplashes, countertops or shower stalls.

Bamboo flooring: Bamboo, actually a grass and not wood, produces new shoots each year. Individual stems are harvested from controlled forests every three to five years.

FSC products: Wood bearing the FSC (Forest Steward Council) logo guarantees that it was sustainably harvested from a certified, well-managed forest.

Zero- and low-VOC paints: These paints, stains and varnishes are water-based instead of petroleum-based, so they don't release volatile organic compounds. The levels of harmful emissions are lower than in solvent-borne surface coatings. These certified coatings also contain no or very low levels of heavy metals and formaldehyde.

Hydronic radiant floor heating: Uses a gas-fired boiler to heat water up to 130 degrees and a pump to circulate the water through plastic pipes embedded in the concrete sub-floor. The pipes conduct the warmth to the surface of the floor, where it radiates heat into the room, saving 20 to 40 percent of the cost over conventional methods. Radiant heat systems eliminate the noise and draft of forced-air systems, so dust and germs aren't blown around.

Formaldehyde-free products: Formaldehyde is a colorless gas compound (HCHO) used in manufactured products such as the adhesives used in wood products, some fiberglass insulation, construction adhesives, paints and finish products. It can be inhaled or absorbed through the skin and can irritate eyes, mucous membranes and the upper respiratory system.

Improvement plan could increase traffic downtown

Monday is deadline to submit comments

By Martin Stolz

[San Diego Union-Tribune, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2005](#)

A plan intended to improve downtown San Diego and guide development over the next 25 years could lead to more noise and traffic and worsening air and water quality.

Those findings are included in a draft Environmental Impact Report prepared to accompany the proposed update to the Downtown Community Plan.

The 45-day period for submitting written comments on the draft report to the Centre City Development Corp. ends at 5 p.m. Monday.

All comments will be incorporated in the final document, along with official responses to the questions, criticisms or praise.

Future legal challenges to development projects would likely cite the environmental review or the comments.

The Centre City Development Corp., the city's downtown planning and redevelopment arm, has spent two years preparing the plan. It aims to improve the quality of life downtown, where populations are projected to grow from 27,000 residents to 90,000 and from 75,000 workers to 165,000 in 2030.

The current community plan, adopted in 1992, never envisioned such growth.

The new plan aims to create a "world-class" downtown with a diversity of building types and people, who can enjoy a pedestrian-friendly environment.

To achieve those objectives, the plan update would introduce San Diego to new programs and incentives for creating affordable housing and parks, building more environmentally sustainable projects and saving the area's architectural heritage.

In preparing the plan, officials conducted dozens of community meetings and considered a range of allowed or potential land uses throughout the downtown redevelopment area, a 1,450-acre swath from Little Italy to East Village.

The plan update and the environmental review go hand in hand.

As a "smart growth" planning document, it lays out goals and identifies policies to achieve them. It cannot specify or predict development projects or designs.

The environmental review is required by California law. It predicts the effects of planning changes. Whenever the plan's effects may be negative, the environmental review proposes mitigation.

An example of a worsening problem would be greater congestion at 62 of downtown's 275 intersections with traffic signals, the author of the environmental review, Bruce McIntyre, said.

But the congestion at all but nine of those intersections could be alleviated with parking restrictions and restriping, he said. The remaining nine intersections would require costly design changes.

The plan does not foresee a significant impact on freeway access points and may alleviate downtown's parking shortage, he said.

On other issues, the effects would be mixed.

The plan would promote public transit and decrease vehicle use. But it would worsen air and water pollution overall, as the number of vehicle trips grows with the vast increase in workers and residents.

Two public comments were received as of yesterday, though more are expected Monday, said Alexandra Elias, a senior planner at the Centre City Development Corp. Critics would likely question McIntyre's methodology, conclusions or mitigation proposals, she said.

McIntyre has conducted numerous environment impact reviews, including the 1999 study for Petco Park.

"A lot of people who comment have axes to grind," McIntyre told the corporation's board Wednesday. "Many attempt to slow down the process."

In the coming weeks, the plan update will likely be refined, Elias said. The Centre City Advisory Committee, a community group, is expected to make recommendations to the corporation board. The board of the Centre City Development Corp. is also expected to make recommendations before sending the documents to the City Council.

A series of public hearings on the plan update and environmental review will be scheduled after all comments have been answered.

The environmental document would become final when the City Council votes to certify its findings. A timeline is not known, though the council would likely consider all the documents at one meeting sometime later this year or early next year.

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Sunday, Sept. 11, 2005](#)

A little at a time

Valley's summer smog readings fall to lowest level since 1998.

A summer marked by a record run of triple-digit heat is not the place you might look for good news about air quality, but there it is: The Valley may be on its way to the lowest number of federal health violations since 1998.

It isn't clear why this has happened, and despite old folk wisdom about not looking a gift horse in the mouth, this one bears close examination, if only to learn more about the mechanism of Valley air pollution and what we may finally be doing right.

The Valley has recorded fewer than 65 violations to this point. The norm for September is around 90, and the annual average is 116 violations. The record low of 84 was set in 1998.

Before we start cracking open the champagne bottles, remember this: Federal standards permit just three violations over a three-year period. The Valley had nearly 370 violations between 2002 to 2004, the worst performance in the nation. We have such a very long way to go.

Still, it's encouraging to have hard evidence that we have started down that path.

One factor in this year's numbers is clear. A lengthy and wet rainy season postponed the arrival of the annual heat and the ozone-forming chemical reactions that accompany it. The summer sun cooks the various emissions from our cars, businesses, fields and homes into a toxic brew of smog.

The resultant foul air poses dangers to residents, animals and crops alike - and especially to the one child in six in the Valley who already suffers from symptoms of asthma. Economic damage is significant, and even the once-pristine forests of the nearby Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks are being hurt by bad air.

Experts speculate as well that rising awareness of the depth of our air pollution problem have caused a sufficient number of us to begin making changes in the way we live and work, changes that are now showing up, after several years, in the air quality measurements. It would be gratifying to think so.

We have to keep building on that progress. More and more government agencies, businesses and individuals are shifting to cleaner fuels, in cars, buses and trucks, on the job and in the fields. New fuel standards are coming that will help even more. More funding for research will help us understand the problem even better, and suggest even more solutions. Let's keep it up.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2005](#)

New state panel seeking solutions to valley's woes

Air pollution, disappearing prime ag land, traffic congestion, lower wages, fewer opportunities -- these are the issues every resident of the San Joaquin Valley would like to see solved. Starting next week, a blue-ribbon panel with members selected from the valley will begin developing solutions.

Wednesday, Gov. Schwarzenegger appointed 18 people to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley -- a group charged with bringing regional solutions to many of the valley's most vexing problems. The Great Valley Center, whose president is former Modesto Mayor Carol Whiteside, will play a critical role in establishing the format for this group when it convenes at the University of the Pacific in Stockton on Friday.

Among the appointees are Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff Grover and Modesto businesswoman Sheila Carroll. They join Stockton's Fritz Grupe, Los Banos Mayor Michael Amabile, Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Stockton's Victor Mow, Jose Rivera of Woodbridge and Merced businesswoman Sharon Thornton on the panel. Other members come from Friant, Parlier, Tulare and Farmersville, among other cities.

They likely will form three working groups to concentrate on issues such as transportation, land use and telecommunication. Their first task is to give the governor a blueprint for progress.

We're not sure how this group -- or any other -- can confront the issues bedeviling our region. But we recognize that it is a start.

Finding solutions, said Whiteside, "will require looking at air quality, water, transportation, growth, health care -- and how they all fit together.... This is an opportunity to think more broadly; this is the first time we've ever had the chance.... The chance is right in front of us."

The group contains 13 Republicans and four Democrats and is heavy with people tied to business and development interests. While it is not our only shot at summoning regional solutions to major issues, it is certainly an excellent opportunity.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Sept. 12, 2005](#)

We need dairy initiative

Because of the recent unwanted meddling of the powerful dairy industry with the regulatory standards of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the scandalous dairy slush fund grants of the California Pollution Control Financing Authority, it is time for us to take action locally as concerned citizens.

Gov. Schwarzenegger and some of our local politicians seem to be mesmerized by this power group that has had a history of significantly affecting the air and water quality of every area in which they have operated.

In order to get the right local action and control for our community, we need to ask Sen. Dean Florez to help us place a dairy referendum or initiative on the next ballot, along with his sewer sludge initiative.

He seems to be the only official honestly concerned about our community's health, safety and welfare. Time to stop them before our weak local governments allow them to get out of control in our own backyard.

-- STEVEN C. HOOKER, Bakersfield