

Critics dust off an EPA panel

Plan would roll back monitoring of soot, dust in small cities.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, March 9, 2006

SAN FRANCISCO - Carolina Simunovic on Wednesday gave federal bureaucrats a live reason why San Joaquin Valley residents worry about a proposed rollback of dust rules for rural residents.

The Fresno-area resident held her 7-month-old daughter, Isabella, in front of a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency panel and asked: "How much can her little lungs take? What you're proposing is a crime against the San Joaquin Valley."

Simunovic, environmental health director for Fresno Metro Ministry, was among dozens of witnesses, most of whom opposed the EPA's proposal to drop federal monitoring for dust and soot in communities with fewer than 100,000 people.

The EPA hearing in San Francisco was one of three Wednesday, the other two occurring in Philadelphia and Chicago. The hearings were intended only to gather response to the proposed adjustment in the dust standard.

Scientists, medical experts, environmentalists and many air regulators across the country assailed the proposed change in so-called PM-10 standards. More than a dozen doctors spoke, many saying that 2,000 studies link particle pollution to asthma, heart problems and even early death.

Activists said the proposed change would protect only 65 million of the 165 million people who live in areas where dust and soot are a problem. The EPA's own scientific review panel opposes the proposal, they said.

"Your position is a little like an ostrich burying its head in the sand," Dr. John Balmes of the American Thoracic Society said Wednesday.

Other medical groups at the hearing included Physicians for Social Responsibility and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Activists from Environment Justice Advocacy, Environment California, Sierra Club and Environmental Defense also testified.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association stood firmly behind the EPA proposal, which also would exempt agriculture and mining industries from federal dust monitoring. The cattlemen's group said the research on rural dust is insufficient.

The dust, soot, chemicals and other specks of pollution are called PM-10, which is one-seventh the width of a human hair. Medical science has established that the particles trigger asthma, heart problems and even early death.

Under a court settlement, the EPA is supposed to set a new standard by Sept. 1. The agency startled the scientific community in December by announcing the proposed relaxing of the standard for rural areas, saying there was no conclusive evidence that the rural particulates are as bad as urban particulates.

Lydia Wegman, one of the EPA hearing officers in San Francisco, said the most extensive research focuses on city pollution, which contains many kinds of toxics such as diesel particles.

"But there is much less science available about rural areas," she said. "There are a couple of studies suggesting rural particulates do not have an impact as significant as urban particulates."

A large part of the Valley would be affected by the change, said planning director Scott Nester of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The district and state dust rules would still apply, but they do not have financial sanctions as federal rules do.

The federal sanctions, such as withholding billions of dollars in road-building funds, are persuasive, officials have said.

"Forty-three percent of the district's population would be left unprotected," he said. "That's 1.4 million people. This would include two entire counties - Kings County and Madera County."

The EPA proposal would provide increased protections for urban areas, an idea criticized by the California Manufacturers and Technology Association.

"It adds more cost than benefit," said representative Dawn Sanders-Koepke.

The rural rollback and the industry exemptions created the most fireworks at the hearing. The rollback, coupled with the exemptions for farming and mining, would make life miserable in the Valley, where agriculture spreads over millions of acres, speakers said.

The Valley's PM-10 problem has improved in the last three years, air officials have said. But activists worry that the air quality will deteriorate if federal protections are lifted.

Rey Leon, representing the Latino Issues Forum, said his hometown of Huron, population 6,000, is a place where the dust is laced with chemicals.

"Diesel pollution is a big issue when the lettuce harvest happens two times a year," he said. "There's asbestos in the soil all around the community. There's pesticides. But there's no effective assessment of cancer because we're a small town."

Ideas on improving valley life sought

BY RYAN SCHUSTER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thurs., March 9, 2006

If a group of state and local officials and members of the private sector get their way, Highway 99 may be in for a major face-lift.

In December, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, which has members from eight counties including Kern, recommended \$6 billion in improvements to Highway 99 in the next decade.

"It is the main street in the San Joaquin Valley," said partnership chairwoman Sunne Wright McPeak. "It is the gateway to all the large cities. It is a symbolic connector to all the communities in the San Joaquin Valley."

Improvements to Highway 99 will be one of a variety of topics discussed today when the group holds a board meeting and solicits opinions from local officials and the public in Bakersfield. An open forum will be held from 2-5 p.m. today at the UC Merced Center at 2000 K St. to get feedback on how to improve the region's economy and quality of life.

"This is their opportunity to have their voice heard on these important subjects," said retired local banker Ray Dezember, who is a member of the 26-person group.

Dezember and City Councilwoman Sue Benham were appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who formed the group with an executive order in June 2005.

The partnership has examined everything from transportation, the economy, education, air and water quality, renewable energy, land-use issues and health and human services. The group will give its final recommendations to Schwarzenegger in November.

One of the biggest issues the partnership has tackled so far is how to upgrade Highway 99, which extends from the foot of the Grapevine north to Red Bluff.

McPeak said potential improvements could include getting rid of cross traffic, upgrading on- and offramps, landscaping and adding amenities like wireless Internet hookups to transform rest stops into gateways for tourism.

Another possibility would be widening Highway 99 to at least six lanes in the route's 274-mile stretch through the San Joaquin Valley.

Earlier this year Schwarzenegger announced an infrastructure plan, earmarking \$1 billion toward the partnership's \$6 billion recommendation for Highway 99 upgrades.

Where the remaining \$5 billion would come from is still up in the air. McPeak, who also is the secretary of the state Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, said the rest could come from a variety of sources, including state transportation, local and federal funds.

Dezember, who headed the partnership's transportation work group, said any changes to Highway 99 would also help tourism and encourage business growth.

"Highway 99 isn't just a Kern County situation," he said. "It's valleywide. It's a state of California situation."

Governor invites public ideas at Friday forum

By Tracey La Monica, Staff Writer
Visalia Times-Delta, Thurs., March 9, 2006

The governor is inviting all area residents to a public forum Friday where their input is needed for the future growth and stability of the San Joaquin Valley.

In an effort to facilitate growth in an area that is expanding rapidly, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed an executive order in June to bring together local government officials and business people to generate ideas about the Valley's future.

In continuing with the governor's plan, Friday's public forum is expected to pool ideas about the Valley's future from residents who might have a different outlook on the situation.

"We are inviting the public to tell us what they think the priorities are for action," said Sunne Wright McPeak, secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.

Schwarzenegger appointed a board that is the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. It is made up of eight cabinet members, eight local government officials, eight civic leaders and two deputy chairs.

The individuals are grouped into economic development, education, workforce development, telecommunications, health and human services, water quality, land use, agriculture, housing and [air quality](#) and environmental protection.

Supervisor Connie Conway, an appointed deputy chair, will sit in on the Friday meeting to hear public comments.

In addition, the mayor of Farmersville Paul Boyer and Hanford City Councilwoman Marcelyn Buford are appointed to the governor's partnership.

The individuals, appointed by Schwarzenegger after he signed the executive order on June 24, 2005, were deemed the best and brightest people to come up with a solution to ensure smart growth in the Valley.

The appointees have met previously in September and December.

The 26-member board will not only meet Friday but will convene the public forum where everyone is welcome.

"This is the first public forum to ask the public's input and to make action to ensure the vitality of the San Joaquin Valley," McPeak said. "We are all listening."

The governor's executive order requires a board's action proposal to be submitted to the governor at the end of October and McPeak hopes that the public forum will include area resident's plans.

S.D. leads in slashing of ozone violations

Metro area's reduction since 1990 tops U.S. list

By Mike Lee, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

San Diego Union-Tribune Wed., March 8, 2006

The San Diego metropolitan area topped the nation in reducing the number of bad ozone days between 1990 and 2004, according to an analysis that county leaders plan to unveil today.

During that period, the region slashed its violations of the federal eight-hour ozone standard from 96 days per year to eight. The figure dropped to five in 2005; comparative figures from other areas weren't immediately available.

Several of the nation's 90 largest metropolitan zones brought their number of days in violation down to zero or one in 2004, giving them a percentage reduction greater than San Diego's. Among the 25 worst ozone polluters in 1990, four decreased their ozone violation days in 2004 by a larger percentage than San Diego did.

San Diego County air-pollution officials said yesterday that the region shouldn't take a breather from programs aimed at reducing air pollution. Rather, they said, it's time to acknowledge the progress that has been made on myriad fronts. They cited examples such as exchanging old gas lawn mowers for electric models and upgrading pollution-prevention equipment at power plants.

Twenty-five years ago, "smog was something you could feel in your eyes, and it was frequent," said county Supervisor Ron Roberts, a veteran member of the state Air Resources Board. "That is why I feel pretty good about what we have been able to do."

State documents confirm the San Diego region's status as an ozone-reduction leader among California's major air basins. California sets standards different from the federal government's, but it reports a similarly sharp downward trend for San Diego's ozone violations starting in the early 1980s.

Nevertheless, the local branch of the American Lung Association regularly issues failing grades to the San Diego region in its annual air audits. The next report, which doesn't grade on a curve, is due in April.

Yesterday, association spokesman Ross Porter applauded the county's progress.

"But it's important to note that we are still falling short of meeting" the federal government's ozone standard, Porter said.

Ozone is one of the six most common air pollutants; the others are nitrogen dioxide, particulates, carbon monoxide, lead and sulfur dioxide.

Ozone is formed by a chemical reaction between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds when they are exposed to sunlight. It is beneficial in the upper atmosphere because it shields Earth from the sun's rays.

At ground level, ozone is the main component of smog. It is linked to a variety of health problems, including lung damage and asthma. Ozone also damages the leaves of plants and decreases their ability to produce food, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Vehicles are the largest source of ozone-forming pollutants, followed by ships, planes and boats.

California has suffered from heavy ozone pollution for decades. But the most recent national numbers show that several air basins in the state are among the most improved since 1990. The San Diego region's air officials did their analysis of federal data after EPA officials told them their area's efforts were among the best.

Robert Reider, planning manager for the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District, said the achievement is particularly impressive in light of the county's population growth during the past few decades. Since 1990, the number of vehicle miles traveled each day in the county rose from about 60 million to more than 80 million.

District director Richard Smith said the agency aims to eliminate ozone violations by 2009 and that the county and state will continue pushing ozone-reduction programs.

Besides lowering car emissions, those efforts include decreasing the amount of gasoline vapor that escapes at gas stations, regulating the amount of solvents in house paints and forcing manufacturers of water heaters to sell low-polluting units.

Ozone violations plummet

The Environmental Protection Agency counts the number of days each year that air basins violate its eight-hour ozone standard. The San Diego metropolitan area led the nation by having the biggest drop in days that violated the EPA limit between 1990 and 2004.

Rank	Metro area	Ozone violations		Reduction in	Pct. change
		1990	2004	violations 1990-2004	
1	San Diego	96	8	-88	-92%
2	Los Angeles-Long Beach	120	35	-85	-71%
3	Riverside-San Bernardino	152	85	-67	-44%
4	Ventura	70	11	-59	-84%
5	Orange County	38	1	-37	-97%
6	Atlanta	42	9	-33	-79%
7	Fresno	56	23	-33	-59%
8	Philadelphia	39	9	-30	-77%
9	Houston	51	22	-29	-57%
10	Nashville, Tenn.	29	1	-28	-97%

SOURCE: EPA

UNION-TRIBUNE

Pacific Ethanol moving ahead with Madera plant construction

By Cal Tatum - Tribune Writer / Photographer
Madera Tribune Sat., March 04, 2006

Maderans have been hearing about an ethanol manufacturing facility being built by former Secretary of State Bill Jones. Construction is still in progress and should be completed by late fall of 2006, Jones said.

"The timing is good for renewable fuels," he said.

Concerns over EPA rulings that eliminate the requirement for two percent oxygenated fuels in areas where pollution is high doesn't seem to have affected investors in the ethanol plant. Shares have soared from less than \$17 per share to more than \$20 per share since the EPA announcement. In the past 52 weeks, shares have increased from more than \$7 per share to current prices. As of yesterday morning, Pacific Ethanol's trading volume was 443,662 and valued at about \$576 million.

Decisions made by the federal government last summer to increase renewable fuel standards counters the EPA's requirement for reformulated gasoline, Jones said.

"Ethanol prices are higher than they have been historically because the use of ethanol is increasing," Jones said.

Getting to this point has been dramatic, and clever. Acquiring the capital necessary to build a \$50-plus million facility has taken some very creative management.

Jones agreed that one way to quickly raise capital is for a company to go public and enter the stock market. The most common method of entering the stock market is a long and difficult process, but Pacific Ethanol, the company founded by Bill Jones, followed a route less traveled and more creative.

In March of 2005, according to forms filed with the SEC, Pacific Ethanol was purchased by Accessity Corp., out of Delaware. Accessity Corp. purchased Pacific Ethanol through a share exchange agreement. Accessity Corp., who started out as an auto repair broker and then entered the insurance industry, was already a publicly traded company.

After the purchase of Pacific Ethanol, the CEO of Accessity Corp. and other board members left the company, according to releases on Pacific Ethanol's Web site. They also took with them Accessity's business ventures. The board of Pacific Ethanol assumed the management position of Accessity Corp. and then reincorporated the company in Delaware with the name Pacific Ethanol.

"This type of reverse merger is one way for a company to go public," Jones said. "It gave us access to capital and allows the public a more advantageous way of investing in alternative fuels.

Another reason Pacific Ethanol wanted to go public was to maintain more control of the business, Jones said.

"New companies can lose a lot of control and give away too much of the company through private investors," Jones said. "Going public gives us more control, but a public company is a lot of work, but we feel it's worth it."

Cascade Investments in the state of Washington has promised to invest \$84 million to purchase stocks in the company, press releases from Pacific Ethanol have stated. But, the same releases have stated that the money will not be invested until Pacific Ethanol has the construction financing in place for the Madera facility.

Pacific Ethanol entered into an agreement on Jan. 26 with Hudson United Bank and Comerica Bank for debt commitment letters that collectively equal \$34 million in debt financing for the Madera facility. The company will not be able to draw down on the debt until it has obtained \$22 million in equity capital, a release from Pacific Ethanol said. The company will try to use a portion of the \$84 million in equity capital expected to be provided by Cascade Investments to satisfy the bank's condition.

Farmers in the San Joaquin Valley have voiced concerns about their ability to sell corn to Pacific Ethanol. At present time, shipping corn from the Midwest would be less expensive than purchasing corn from local farmers.

"We can ship corn in from the Midwest for less than what we can purchase corn for in California," Jones said. "But, the Midwest is very sensitive to weather because they don't irrigate. The years when the Midwest is having a shortage of rains their price will go up so we will setting up plans to purchase corn locally to hedge against the prices in East."

Jones said corn is currently the primary source of ethanol, but as new technologies develop, other materials can be used.

"As we move forward we will find green waste and other types of products will be used to make ethanol," Jones said. "It's closer than people think. We can develop ethanol today with corn, but the market will move to more cellulostic ethanol."

In August, 2005, Pacific Ethanol announced its plans to purchase another ethanol facility in Goshen, owned by Phoenix Bio-Industries LLC. The purchase was never completed but Kinergy, a wholly owned subsidiary of Pacific Ethanol, did get the contract to market ethanol manufactured at the plant.

"The timing just wasn't timely," Jones said. "We did get the contract to market their ethanol and Western Milling has the contract to market the wet distillers grain from our plant."

Wet distillers grain is a byproduct of a corn-based ethanol plant that makes an excellent addition to the diet of dairy cattle, a release for Pacific Ethanol said.

"We are very pleased to be in Madera," Jones said. "It's great to be building the largest fuel refinery built in California in a generation right here in Madera. Everyone has been very supportive."

The lessons to be learned from air

Students scour campuses, learn how to clear up the atmosphere

By Edie Lau - Bee Science Writer
Sacramento Bee Thurs., March 9, 2006

Trees and shrubs are such a part of the landscape at Sheldon High School that Sunhee Kim assumed they were an asset in every respect.

Besides being pretty, the trees surely help to clean the air, thought Kim, a junior at the school.

So it was with dismay that she learned last week that most of the trees - the ones with bare branches and no leaves this time of year - may be of little help in battling particulate matter, the Sacramento region's predominant wintertime air pollutant.

It's just one of the eye-opening lessons Kim has learned as the leader of her school's air-quality assessment team.

Sheldon High near Elk Grove is one of five schools participating this year in a project by Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails to teach young people the ins and outs of air pollution science.

The Breathe California chapter, formerly the local chapter of the American Lung Association, is working with Kennedy High, Natomas High, River City High and Sacramento Country Day School, as well.

Working in teams of five to 10, the students learn how to survey their campuses for air pollution sources, looking at everything from the placement of Dumpsters and cleaning chemicals to the number of cars and trucks driving by.

They learn how to synthesize and analyze their results. They learn to brainstorm ideas for preventing air pollution or dampening its effects. And along the way, they learn how pollution harms health, how scientists measure pollutants and how to advocate for change in their communities.

"They will forever be well-informed citizens in air quality," said Tom Cahill, an atmospheric physicist at the University of California, Davis. Cahill, an international authority on air pollution, is serving as the scientific backbone of the project.

It is succeeding in opening minds: "I had no clue it was as bad as it was," said Kristin Correa, a Sheldon High air-quality team member.

Now in its second year, the program originated from an accidental discovery by Cahill and colleagues in a 2002 study of particle pollution in Sacramento.

The study, commissioned by the local branch of the American Lung Association, uncovered this startling fact: Arden Middle School, located at the busy intersection of Watt Avenue and Arden Way, faced levels of particle pollution equal to or greater than levels generated by traffic on Interstate 5.

The study spurred the clean-air advocacy group to look deeper into Arden Middle's plight.

Follow-up monitoring uncovered another surprise, this one happy: A daily spike in pollutants comparable to what was spewed by Watt Avenue traffic was caused by a poorly adjusted gas-fired locker room water heater.

"Somebody went in and within 30 minutes retuned the boiler, and it all went away," Cahill said happily, clearly tickled. "That was an easy, cheap fix." It underscored the truth of the saying, "If you do not look, you cannot see," Cahill said, which made him think about how to look more expansively.

Thus was born the project to measure air quality at area schools, tapping students themselves to do much of the work.

Drawing largely from youth advisers already involved with the lung association, organizers inaugurated the project in 2004 on three campuses: Davis Senior High in Davis, and Mira Loma High and Luther Burbank High in Sacramento.

From the start, the project focused on particle pollution, a dynamic area of research, and less studied than well-documented causes and effects of ozone pollution - a summertime bane of the Central Valley formed when the sun's ultraviolet rays mix with tailpipe and industrial emissions.

While governments have long regulated dust and soot, only recently have scientists come to understand the dangers of invisibly small particles, specks so light that they're called aerosols because they float in the air, too light to succumb to gravity.

A growing body of studies shows that the tiniest particles can slip past the body's defenses - hairs in the nose, cilia in the lungs - to reach the bloodstream, potentially causing heart attacks and death.

Many of the smallest specks are produced in the exhaust of gasoline and diesel engines.

Looking at the locations of last year's participating schools, Cahill figured Davis High, tucked in a residential neighborhood in the smaller of the two cities, clearly would be the "clean air" school. Air monitoring, however, proved him wrong.

Overall particulate measurements at the three schools last winter were remarkably similar - to each other and to the Sacramento region as a whole.

"The high schools are embedded in a regional aerosol mix," Cahill said.

There were notable differences, as well. For example, the mass of the smallest particles at Luther Burbank was twice that at Davis High. That finding, Cahill said, probably reflects Burbank's location on busy Florin Road.

While none of the school measurements violated government clean-air standards, Cahill noted standards don't exist for the smallest particles, which may be the most toxic.

Cahill was able to separate and measure particles by size using a "DRUM sampler" air monitor his lab developed.

The sampler is one in a batch of monitors that Cahill has sent around the world to measure particulate matter in such locations as New York City after the collapse of the World Trade Center, Greenland's ice cap, Kuwait, and Augustine volcano in Alaska.

Learning about the various particle sizes was a revelation for Kaitlin Kelly-Reif, team leader at Mira Loma.

"What I found most surprising is that different sizes of particulate matter have different effects on human health," she said.

Beyond learning the technical end of pollution monitoring, students became sharply aware of their schoolmates' habits.

During a campus traffic count, Kelly-Reif said, "We noticed a much higher ratio of cars to pedestrians and cyclists. We had hundreds of cars and maybe five pedestrians at most (during the 30-minute count). It was a pretty staggering ratio, if you ask me."

She and her teammates also realized that many cars idled when drivers picked up students at the end of the day.

The project inspired Kelly-Reif to start a school club, cheekily named Pass Less Gas. The club, with about 20 members, promotes walking, biking and carpooling.

Pass Less Gas members also give away tire gauges to encourage drivers to keep tires inflated properly, and windshield visors to help cool car interiors in the summer, boosting fuel-economy.

Now the club is in the early stages of drafting legislation that would require the state driver-education curriculum to include lessons on motor vehicle emissions, said Kelly-Reif, a senior who aspires to become an environmental policy analyst.

At Davis Senior High, team leader Kaitlin Louie said her group presented its findings to the district administration last year, recommending things such as placing barrier mats at the entrances of classrooms to prevent people from tracking in dust, adding more bicycle racks and encouraging carpooling.

So far, Louie said, nothing has come of it. She said when she asked the principal about it, she was told that the issue was "not a priority at the moment."

The principal, Michael Cawley, did not respond to a request for comment.

At Luther Burbank, a full agenda likewise has impeded plans to plant trees to buffer the school from Florin Road traffic.

"We have so many things going on here. We've been focusing on getting our test scores up," said health teacher Cary Farley, last year's student team adviser.

"Nevertheless, I think it would be a great project....," he said. "I definitely want to do it, it's just a matter of getting it set up."

Regardless of whether schools take the project beyond the monitoring stage, Cahill is optimistic that the students take away lasting knowledge.

"They will be active and vote with insight and intelligence that they would probably never have gained without this project," he said.

Trees' impact varies

By Edie Lau - Bee Science Writer
Sacramento Bee Thurs., March 9, 2006

The tree is a beloved symbol of environmental health, but when it comes to combating pollution, not all trees are equal.

Just as some provide better shade than others, some types apparently are superior at filtering particulates from the air.

In the Central Valley, where particulates are a wintertime scourge, evergreens are considered more useful than trees that drop their leaves in fall.

Pines and deodar cedars, with their abundant needles, are favorites of Tom Cahill, a University of California, Davis, atmospheric physicist who has studied particle pollution around the world.

Deodars especially are suited for the dry summer climate of Sacramento, he said: "They have a low water requirement, a lot of surface area and are very pretty."

In keeping with the thinking that evergreens are better filters, Arden Middle School last fall planted a row of pines at the edge of the soccer field by Watt Avenue to shield students from traffic exhaust emissions.

The schools' PTA has set aside \$10,000 for additional landscaping to be planted later this year.

The science behind trees' abilities to counter particle pollution is young. Greg McPherson at the UC Davis Center for Urban Forest Research said little work has been done here on the subject, though British scientists have published a few studies.

One, which appeared in the Journal of Arboriculture in January 2000, found bushy conifers were better than broad-leafed trees at capturing particles.

The ability to snag pollutants is just one factor in choosing the right tree type, McPherson said. "You don't want trees that will drop big cones," he said. "You want to avoid trees with dangerous or messy fruit. And they also need to be pest and disease resistant. There's a whole long list of things."

Tree health is another consideration. "Picking species that can tolerate high levels of particulates and ozone (pollution) would be critical," McPherson said, adding that keeping a tree's soil environment healthy - with ample water and nutrients - may help it endure heat and foul air.

Besides acting as particle filters, it's possible trees could blunt people's exposure in another way: Cahill hypothesizes that trees planted tightly in a row might act like a wall, forcing airborne particles upward, away from where people breathe.

Such a system would be served best by yet another characteristic of some trees - the ability to grow tall fast, like, for example, certain cypresses and junipers.

Cahill and McPherson plan soon to test the idea by experimenting with various trees in a wind tunnel on campus.

Air quality: Is it making the grade?

By Edie Lau - Bee Science Writer
Sacramento Bee Thurs., March 9, 2006

Here is a shortened version of the air quality checklist used by schools in the Breathe California project:

ROADS: Look at major roads surrounding your campus. Is there a lot of traffic? How close is the traffic to school buildings?

Why: If traffic is low and not near the windows and doors of your buildings, then you will not breathe exhaust from passing vehicles.

BIKE LANES & RACKS/CROSSWALKS: Are bike lanes around your school? Do they feel wide enough to be safe? Are there enough racks to securely store bikes? Are there enough crosswalks to meet student needs?

Why: Sufficient and safe bike lanes, bike racks and crosswalks encourage students to ride bikes or walk to school rather than drive.

BUS STOPS: Are there are enough buses, bus stops and school-bus terminals to meet student needs? Are buses idling, especially near windows and doors? If so, for how long?

Why: If riding buses is convenient, students will be encouraged to use them rather than drive. Buses that limit idling conserve fuel and emit less exhaust.

PARKING: How many lots does your school have? How many cars can they accommodate?

Why: The fewer the parking spaces, the less convenient it is for students to drive.

TREES: Does your campus have a few trees or many? Do they provide adequate shade for students and buildings?

Why: Trees provide shade that can cool the campus in warm weather, making it more energy-efficient.

CLEANING/MAINTENANCE SUPPLIES: When walking the perimeter of your school or looking inside classrooms, do you smell chemicals or other cleaning supplies?

Why: Chemicals properly stored will not expose students to unhealthy fumes.

DUMPSTERS: Are garbage bins located near outdoor air-intakes? How often are they emptied?

Why: If bins are located away from windows and doors and emptied frequently, students will not breathe garbage fumes.

SUMMARIZE YOUR FINDINGS, THEN ASK YOURSELF:

- What can you or your school do to improve air quality on campus?
- What is your school already doing right?
- Go the extra mile and present your findings to the principal and other school leaders.

Judge Rules U.S. Gov't Violating Fuel Law

S.F. Chronicle, Thurs., March 9, 2006

San Francisco (AP) -- A federal judge ruled that the Bush administration is violating a 1992 law aimed at increasing the country's use of alternative fuel vehicles.

The Department of Energy has ignored a requirement to set long-range goals for converting a percentage of the nation's cars and light trucks to natural gas, ethanol, hydrogen and other nonpetroleum fuels, U.S District Judge William Alsup said in a ruling this week.

Anne Kolton, a spokeswoman for the Department of Energy, said Wednesday the department had no comment since litigation is ongoing. Two environmental groups sued the Bush administration last year for failing to comply with the law.

The Energy Policy Act of 1992 was designed to reduce [air pollution](#), global warming and the country's dependence on foreign oil. The law required the Energy Department to consider imposing alternative fuel vehicle purchasing requirements on private and municipal fleets. Judge Alsup ordered the agency to revise the law's petroleum reduction goal to an achievable number, then decide whether to impose purchasing requirements on the fleets.

EPA Soot Rules Said Not Strict Enough

By Dan Robrish, Associated Press Writer
In the S.F. Chronicle, Thurs., March 9, 2006

PHILADELPHIA (AP) -- Proposed federal regulations for soot, although stricter than current standards, are not strict enough, dozens of environmental and public-health advocates said Wednesday at a public hearing.

Many speakers said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency should adopt the toughest regulations it had considered, or at least the regulations that had been recommended by its own expert clean [air](#) scientific advisory committee.

Debbie Shprentz, a technical consultant to the American Lung Association, cited an EPA study of premature deaths attributed to soot - or "particulate matter," as regulators call it - in nine major U.S. cities.

Shprentz said current standards result in 4,729 premature deaths per year; the standards the EPA proposes would cut that to 3,697; the standards recommended by the advisory committee 2,368; and the strictest standards considered by the EPA 644.

Many of the speakers described personal experiences with asthma.

Natalie McClosky of Delran, N.J., who has asthma along with three of her six children, said she used to think it was simply a condition that was treated with an inhalator. But she described taking her daughter Erin, now 11, to a doctor some years ago expecting to get a prescription for cough syrup. Instead, she was admitted to a hospital for 24-hour nebulizer treatments.

"Long gone was the fantasy that asthma was no big deal," McClosky said, speaking to the panel next to her husband and children. She described "countless" visits to emergency rooms and doctors' offices for Erin and her other two asthmatic children.

Scott Segal, the director of an industry group called the Electric Reliability Coordinating Council, said he was sympathetic to people in situations like that, but said it was unfair to blame, for example, the soot from coal-fired power plants.

Segal said air pollution has dropped dramatically since measurements began in earnest in the 1970s, yet childhood asthma is on the rise. He said the increase in asthma must be caused by something else, such as children spending less time outdoors, where air is cleaner than inside buildings.

Tougher regulations also can have unintended consequences, Segal said. He said if regulations get tough enough, many coal-fired plants will switch to more expensive natural gas. That would not only bring up the price of electricity, he said, but also the additional demand for gas would drive the price up.

"You're making it more expensive for the poor, people living on fixed incomes and the elderly to heat their homes," Segal said, adding that there would be serious public health consequences to people not being able to heat their homes adequately.

Segal described the EPA's proposal as a good compromise between economic and environmental interests, but the American Chemistry Council opposed any changes to the standards. The group noted that state governments enforce EPA mandates and said the EPA should let states focus on bringing plants up to current standards before requiring them to plan for stricter standards and new deadlines.

The EPA held similar hearings Wednesday in Chicago and San Francisco. The agency is continuing to accept written comments but is not planning any more hearings.

John Bachmann, the EPA official who served as chairman of Wednesday's hearing in Philadelphia, said he found it interesting that many of the speakers chided his agency for not following the advice of its expert advisory panel on the maximum level of soot to allow.

He noted that the advisory panel had recommended exempting mining and farm operations, finding a lack of evidence that that type of dust caused health problems. Yet many of the same speakers wanted the EPA to ignore the expert panel's advice on that issue, he said.

On the Net: EPA proposal:

<<http://www.epa.gov/air/particlepollution/actions.html>> www.epa.gov
<<http://www.epa.gov>>/air/particlepollution/actions.html

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, March 9, 2006:](#)

Measure C plan's flaws

In response to your Feb. 25 Measure C article, the Valley Taxpayers Coalition position was misrepresented. We support Measure C, but oppose this proposed expenditure plan.

The Measure C plan doesn't fix basic needs in our area, such as Herndon Avenue, Freeway 41 and Highway 99. Money goes to Freeway 180, which carries one-sixth the traffic Herndon does; nearly half a billion dollars to fund buses, farmworker van pools and free taxi service for seniors; and nearly \$30 million to developers for "transit oriented developments," whatever that is. Is this really the best use of more than \$2 billion of our money?

If we are going to pass a tax that carries on for the next 20 years, we need a plan that solves current and future congestion, air and transportation problems.

Because the plan must still be approved by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors and cities throughout the county, there is still time to make improvements. We urge all citizens to join us as we let our local elected officials know that the plan needs to change to meet our needs. Fix Herndon Avenue, Freeway 41 and leverage state monies to deal with Highway 99. This plan doesn't.

Ken Steitz, Valley Taxpayers Coalition, Alternate Member, Measure C Extension Steering Committee, Fresno

[Commentary published in the LA Daily News](#)

Legislators must vote to back repair bond

By Jerry Brown, George Deukmejian, Pete Wilson and Gray Davis, Guest Columnists

Beginning in the 1960s, California's population explosion necessitated giving priority attention to growth in our schools, health and welfare case loads and prisons. Now is the time to shift our attention to our state's most critical transportation and water-supply infrastructure needs. They demand immediate attention. Inaction risks serious health hazards, job loss, and quite literally disaster to our state water supply.

But only three days remain in which to craft a statewide strategic infrastructure bond measure for the June ballot. As four former governors, we'd much rather stump for a ballot initiative now than raise funds for disaster relief or the treatment of life-threatening diseases caused by harmful air pollution.

California's trade transportation infrastructure, notably the ports, freeways, railroads and grade-crossings, needs priority attention. The levees throughout Northern California must be strengthened to avoid the loss of life and property.

Our state has serious infrastructure deficiencies, some of which threaten a genuine crisis that may be invisible to the voters. The urgency of strengthening our levees is a good example. It can be summed up in one place: New Orleans. Levee failure in California would mean the flooding and destruction of Northern California neighborhoods and a disastrous loss of drinking water in Southern California for an estimated 18 months.

The swelling volume of export and import traffic moving through the state's ports and transportation corridors could well produce a different kind of potential environmental hazard. Without public investment to provide the curative infrastructure improvements, which can avoid it, the continued rapid growth could further clog our already congested rail and freeways. The resulting congestion would produce worsening diesel pollution, threatening a serious toll on public health.

The state needs to put a catalytic converter on this vital but polluting economic engine. We must take drastic action to curtail harmful diesel emissions, starting with an outright ban on the older, dirtier 25 percent of unregulated diesel engines, which account for 65 percent of truck particulate matter pollution.

We need a bond initiative now to pay for securing levees and funding public projects that will make needed trade and job growth attractive to the communities traversed and adversely impacted by transportation corridors. We must eliminate at-grade rail crossings, and hasten the adoption of cleaner diesel engines to provide their neighborhoods relief and remedies from the trains and trucks moving goods through them. Then they will welcome the jobs they bring jobs, which we will need to keep pace with California's historically relentless population growth.

We strongly urge all policymakers in Sacramento to send an infrastructure bond measure to the voters in the June primary election to repair our levees and provide the needed transportation corridor improvements.

Whatever the partisan and philosophical differences that divide our officials, our urgent infrastructure needs demand that they act now.

They have 72 hours to decide.

Jerry Brown, George Deukmejian, Pete Wilson and Gray Davis are former governors of California.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial Thurs., March 9, 2006](#)

Groups strike a blow for collaboration

Two events this week give us hope that our region may not be so willing to be steam-rolled by the forces of change after all.

On Monday about 200 people gathered at the Holiday Inn for the inaugural Tulare County Land Use Forum sponsored by the Tulare County Farm Bureau and others. Those who attended heard a morning-long presentation of data, opinions, options and scenarios on how our area might develop over the next 40 years or so.

On Friday, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley will hold a public hearing at the Visalia Convention Center. This entity was created by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to improve the economic, social and environmental quality of life here in our Valley.

The common characteristics of both events are that they employ a regional approach and that any action taken by either one will require collaboration of many different entities, including some who have been traditional enemies in the San Joaquin Valley.

Even talking like that is enough to provide some hope that the Valley can make progress on what have often been thought to be intractable problems - our typically depressed economy, lack of opportunity, demand on natural resources and social problems such as childhood poverty, teenage pregnancy, illiteracy and poor quality of health care.

On Monday, the issue was only how Tulare County was going to cope with growth that is expected to double the population of the 17 Central Valley counties by 2040, from about the present 6 million people to more than 12 million. One thing that every speaker could agree upon, whether they were talking about farm preservation, water issues, land use planning, [air quality](#), urbanization or transportation: No county can work on those issues by itself. Those kinds of issues can only be dealt with on a regional basis.

That led the participants to the next inescapable conclusion: Collaboration is a must. Different counties, cities and interests must join together in dealing with those issues. The traditional antagonisms of rural vs. urban, agriculture vs. commercial, big city vs. small town, must be set aside.

This has already led to some interesting partnerships. It's evident in California already, for instance, that environmental, urban and agricultural interests are coming closer than they ever have in coming to a meeting of minds on water issues.

In the same vein, Monday's meeting had a healthy representation of farmers, real estate developers and builders, urban planners, environmentalists and advocates for rural interests. There were even some jokes about how some traditionally antagonistic interests have surprised each other by finding themselves on the same side of issues.

Clearly, the most profound realization of the morning was that all those distinct and competing interests really are in it together.

That leads to one further conclusion that is not so easy for everyone to accept: In any collaboration of competing interests, everybody must give up something so that everybody can get something. Traditional ways of doing things will not work. The standard response of agriculture, or the building industry, or cities or real estate developers, will not be enough to foster that collaboration. They have to be willing to sacrifice and compromise on their positions.

Monday's meeting ended with the sentiment, "Let's not let this end here." Unfortunately, so many Valley initiatives have died on the vine for lack of follow-through. We hope these initiatives flourish, because they are our best hope. They will succeed as long as everybody keeps in mind the first two rules of collaboration among competitors: Check your guns at the door, and keep an open mind.