

(Note: The Modesto Bee has been informed that the following article is incorrect. There are no restrictions on wood burning for Jan. 26. Wood burning was discouraged on Jan. 25 in Stanislaus County.)

### **Stanislaus urged not to burn today**

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2006

People in Stanislaus County are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive people, such as those with chronic breathing problems. The voluntary "burning discouraged" advisory comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The next step is a mandatory prohibition on burning.

[In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, Jan. 26, and the Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2006, Politics:](#)

### **Dan Walters: Air quality feud shows how government lobbying has grown**

By Dan Walters -- Bee Columnist

Thousands of interest groups spend tens of millions of dollars each year to hire hundreds of lobbyists to influence California's legislators and administrative officials on tens of thousands of specific issues, ranging from a single word in an obscure departmental regulation to multibillion-dollar budget appropriations.

It's a perpetual political game played for high stakes. State officeholders and their appointees directly control at least \$400 billion a year directly -- the \$100 billion-plus state budget, another \$50 billion-plus in federal funds, and perhaps \$100 billion a year each in insurance premiums and utility rates, just for starters. And they indirectly decide where countless billions more dollars wind up in decisions involving land developers, unions, gambling casinos, personal injury lawsuits, pesticide makers, building standards, medical care, insurance, ad infinitum.

Interestingly enough, government itself -- hundreds of local and regional governmental entities -- has become the most prolific employer of lobbyists in Sacramento, as a simmering feud between state and regional air quality regulators illustrates.

Last summer, the state Air Resources Board's staff reached agreement with California's two major railroads, Union Pacific and BNSF Railway, on reducing emissions from the railroads' diesel locomotives throughout the state. While ARB officials hailed it as a breakthrough and a model, those at the South Coast Air Quality Management District bristled, seeing it as an end run around their efforts to impose tighter smog-control rules on the railroads to protect public health.

It's the most obvious example of a larger conflict that's partly philosophical, partly technical and partly territorial. Other interest groups and legislators have lined up on the debate over how aggressive California should be in controlling smog, pitting environmental and health advocates against business' contentions that were regulation to become too costly, it would drive job-creating commerce out of the state. The long-running friction flared publicly last year when the state Senate rejected Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's appointment of Cindy Tuck as chairwoman of the ARB after critics complained that she was too closely identified with business.

The ARB has favored negotiated agreements over adversarial regulation while the South Coast district has strenuously pushed for tighter restrictions on commercial and industrial sources of pollution in smog-prone Southern California, fostering a cadre of friendly legislators to push its case for more aggressive pollution regulation. The lawmakers have introduced a flock of bills to bolster the district's authority over railroads and other corporate interests, backed up by the district's costly squad of Sacramento lobbying firms and high-powered media consultants.

Recently, district directors expanded the lobbyists' contracts, including those with firms headed by former state Sen. Richard Polanco and Bob White, who was one of Schwarzenegger's political mentors. An internal South Coast document outlining the need for the lobbyists cites the "close relationship with the office of the governor" of White's firm, California Strategies. The third firm is headed by ex-Capitol staffer Allan Lind and collectively, the three will be paid more than \$400,000 a year, with several hundred thousand more dollars committed to media "outreach."

The railroad conflict appears to be nearing a climax. The South Coast board is pressing ahead with its own regulations, spurning assertions that it lacks the authority; the ARB staff has issued a new report saying its agreement is being implemented according to plan; the South Coast district has published a critique saying that the agreement has too much "vague language"; and the ARB is scheduled to decide this week whether to formally ratify the agreement.

Earlier this month, the South Coast board staff proposed that it spend \$15,000 to transport "residents or representatives of organizations" to Sacramento for this week's ARB meeting to protest the agreement. That proposal was scotched, but it illustrates the depth of the smog conflict and how government-on-government lobbying -- all with public funds -- has escalated.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, January 26, 2006:](#)

### **'Be tough on all polluters'**

I appreciate the continuing coverage by Mark Grossi and The Bee on air pollution issues. However, I was disappointed that the article "Smog status remains clouded" [Jan. 20] missed one of the most important parts of the study, which discussed what Valley residents believe to be the answer to our unhealthy air: "75% of residents agreed that tougher regulations are needed to reduce the air pollution caused by manufacturing facilities, refineries and farms in the region."

Even more -- 97% -- agreed that cleaning our air is everyone's responsibility.

This means the public is practically begging the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to be more proactive about cleaning up our air, and stop buckling under the pressure of business and agriculture.

The district recently adopted the indirect source rule, which will help reduce the amount of pollution caused by builders, but there remain too many sources of pollution. We will each do our part, but we are depending on the air district to do its own. I urge the district to take the advice of the public and fight for cleaner air. Be tough on all polluters, no matter who gets angry.

Sarah Sharpe, Coalition For Clean Air, Fresno

[Los Angeles Times, Letters to the Editor, January 26, 2006:](#)

### **Alternatives to the mow and blow**

RE "Battle Hymn of the Suburbs" [Jan. 19]: My neighborhood is assaulted by the "mow-and-blow" teams that come to cut and shape lawns in to perfect rectangular patches of emerald to yellow-green. On some days we have as many as three different crews working on our street.

I too was one of those suburbanites who needed my lawn to be trimmed razor-straight at sidewalk's edge, every other week, until two years ago.

Knowing that gas-powered mowers were a factor in not only noise pollution, but also air pollution, I searched online and found a wonderful alternative. Peoplepoweredmachines.com offers a German-engineered cordless electric reel mower by Brill, which is reasonably priced, quiet, lightweight and has sufficient battery life.

Now, I mow my own lawn, burn calories and chat with neighbors whom I normally wouldn't see if I weren't out doing my own yard work.

ESTHER MCLEMORE  
*Lakewood*

It is one of the ironies of modern life that the most environmentally friendly method of cutting grass -- the manual reel mower -- is also the most economical and the best for the health of the lawn.

The time it takes to mow the lawn with a manual mower is about the same as with a motorized reel mower.

The greatest side benefit of the lack of noise is that it invites neighbors and passers-by to pause for a conversation. Mowing my lawn on Saturdays has become one of the happiest hours of my week.

JEFFREY WILSON

*Inglewood*

I still use an old "unmotorized push job" reel mower; it's good and quiet, except for that "comforting click." And it even gives me good exercise!

Years ago I bought a gas-powered machine that I despised immediately, especially when it started spewing not only grass but the good earth. The air around me and that machine made it hard to breathe.

I never used it again. Going back to my old mower was a joy!

BARBARA KOWALSKI

*Alhambra*