

LOIS HENRY: Wishes for the new year

By Lois Henry

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, December 31, 2016

At the start of last year, my hope for 2016 was that folks would apply a little more critical thinking to how they view the valley's air.

I should have known that hope was DOA from the start.

Information about our air quality is so politically entrenched, most people buy the "bad air" mantra without really looking at what's been happening the last 20 years or so.

Our air has improved vastly since the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District first started reigning in emissions a generation ago.

Even as we have grown, the amount of ozone and PM2.5 (tiny bits of dust and soot) in our air has decreased.

The number of unhealthy days has dropped and the number of healthy days has gone up.

Even during the worst drought on record, we hit several milestones in terms of cleaning up our air, according to numbers released by the Air Pollution Control District.

I understand if you're skeptical.

Several groups make a lot of money off of scaring you about the valley's air quality.

Chief among them, of course, is the American Lung Association with its phony baloney "air report card" that comes out every year and which invariably gives us an "F."

You can read my column for more on that.

Even without all the numbers and monitoring that back up the assertion that our air has been improving, you can just apply basic logic.

If we've been at this for the past 30 years and our air is getting worse then we've either done something terribly wrong, or the premise that our air is worse is just flat wrong.

The answer is our air is better.

So improved, frankly, that stricter regulations are now creating a situation of diminishing returns.

We will soon be spending far more on tackling pollutants than we will receive in health benefits.

But such facts don't play for groups that have a vested interest in perpetuating the bad air myth.

Groups like regulators who need to justify their jobs.

Or researchers who need regulators to continue paying for more research that, in turn, justifies regulators' jobs.

Or nonprofits that need numbers from regulators to convince the public the air is so bad they should send the nonprofits more money to keep reporting on numbers that mean nothing.

Sigh.

OK, so instead of more critical thinking, here's my hope for 2017 — spay/neuter.

We've had some good momentum in recent years in fixing (ha, get it?) Kern's pet overpopulation problem.

This is much, much easier than understanding air quality numbers.

Just know that every dollar you contribute toward spay/neuter in Kern County saves even more money (shelter costs) down the line.

More importantly, supporting spay/neuter efforts saves lives.

Let's make 2017 the year we turned the tide on this very fixable problem.

Happy New Year, everyone!

Valley air district seeks Merced County advisory group member

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, December 21, 2016

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is accepting applications to fill open seats on its Environmental Justice Advisory Group.

The 13-member group has two vacancies, one to represent Merced County at large and another to represent Madera County at large, the district said in a statement Tuesday.

As part of the district's commitment to integrating environmental justice principles and goals into its programs, policies and activities, it looks to the advisory group for advice and guidance. By doing so, "the district ensures all San Joaquin Valley residents benefit from healthier air," it said.

To qualify, applicants must live in the San Joaquin Valley and have experience and interest in air-quality issues and in representing ethnic and low-income communities, it said.

Applications can be submitted by 5 p.m. Jan. 13 to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726.

For more information about the air district or to request an application, call a regional office: in Fresno, 559-230-6000; in Bakersfield, 661-392-5500; and in Modesto, 209-557-6400.