

## **6 dairies cited for unauthorized building in violation of air law**

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, August 10, 2005

An inspection sweep to enforce controversial new farm air rules has revealed illegal construction or expansion at six dairies in the San Joaquin Valley, authorities said.

The resulting violation notices are among the first air enforcement actions against the multibillion-dollar dairy industry. With 2.5 million cows, dairies are considered the Valley's leading source of one smog-making gas, called volatile organic compounds.

Among the six alleged violators discovered this summer is the Tulare County operation owned by Fred Schakel, whose dairy is the target of a \$15 million federal lawsuit by community activists.

Schakel and other owners face a possible fine of up to \$75,000 each day they operated without required permits. Though fines rarely reach that level, authorities have levied fines of many thousands of dollars to businesses in the past.

The owners are expected to meet at some point with air officials and dispute the violation notices.

"We went through a list of dairies for the inspections," said Rick McVaigh, director of compliance for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "Not all cases involved the building of an entire dairy. Some are modifications."

The cases revolve around the date when agriculture's historic exemption for air permits was eliminated. The exemption was removed by state law on Jan. 1, 2004.

Valley authorities, battling pollution in one of the country's dirtiest air basins, say the building took place without a permit after that date.

Schakel's lawyer contends construction began on the 9,000-cow dairy northeast of Alpaugh, near Highway 43, while the loophole was still in effect.

"We are saying we did start construction before Jan. 1," said lawyer David Albers. "We did about \$600,000 of on-site preparation work in the third and fourth quarters of 2003."

Activists sued Schakel in June over the same issue. The Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, representing the activists, said Schakel received his county construction permit five days after the new law took effect. County records confirmed the permit was issued Jan. 6, 2004.

Albers said a lot of work took place before the permit was issued, meaning the project already had begun before Jan. 1. The dairy currently has about 4,800 cows, well below the planned capacity but also easily large enough to be considered a major source of pollution.

Activists contend Schakel must get an air permit, which requires accounting for pollution and the latest technology for reducing emissions.

Because dairy air pollution control still is in its infancy, there is no set of standard practices to control emissions yet.

Schakel's violation notice seems to support the views of the activists, the Association of Irrigated Residents, said lawyer Brent Newell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

"It's great that the district is taking these steps," he said. "It's just a shame that it comes after a lawsuit had to be filed."

Any fine resulting from the activist lawsuit would be paid to the federal treasury. Air district fines from violations go into the district's general fund, officials said.

The other five dairies receiving violation notices are in Tulare and Kings counties.

Most owners would not comment.

One owner, John Roeloffs of JR Dairy near Tipton, said his case concerned construction of his "hospital barn" for sick cows and cows that needed close attention during milking.

"I'm not even adding cows," he said. "This is a minor modification. This is not a big deal."

## **Funds on way to clean up school buses**

### **Lawmaker visits to talk about \$25m for retrofitting smog-spewing transport.**

By Felicia Cousart Matlosz

The Fresno Bee, August 10, 2005

Standing in front of five yellow school buses, state Sen. Dean Florez emphasized the need for cleaner-running buses by holding up a large, round container partially filled with ugly black specks of soot.

The specks are particulate matter, Florez said. Particulates, which can lodge in the lungs and trigger health problems, are found in the emissions spewing from older school buses transporting thousands of youngsters to school every day.

On Tuesday, Florez, D-Shafter, was in Fresno to talk about a \$25 million school bus program that he and state Sen. Don Perata, D-Oakland, spearheaded. The money is earmarked to replace or retrofit older buses that violate federal or state air quality standards.

"The goal is to try to make sure we can eliminate these [particulates] as much as possible for our children," Florez said during a news conference at the Fresno Unified School District transportation department. He acknowledged much more money will be needed and called the \$25 million "a first installment."

California has one of the oldest school bus fleets in the nation. Nearly 1,000 of the state's school buses were manufactured before April 1977 and are a prime target for health and environmental officials because the buses don't meet federal standards. Thirty percent of the older buses operate in the central San Joaquin Valley, which has some of the dirtiest air in the country.

"We know that one out of six kids [in the Valley] are suffering from asthma," Florez said.

Students riding these buses have twice as much exposure to pollution inside a pre-1977 bus, Florez said, "as ... if they were standing in the middle of the freeway."

Tens of millions more dollars are needed, not only for the pre-1977 fleet but also for school buses built between 1977 and 1987. Those buses don't meet state air quality standards, either.

Still, transportation officials and others welcomed the news Tuesday. They want to replace older buses with those that run on cleaner fuels, such as compressed natural gas, and are on the lookout for state and federal money and grants.

In this case, Valley school districts' chief competition will be districts in Southern California, which this year has the nation's worst pollution.

Luisa Medina, president of the Fresno Unified governing board, said the district transports 9,500 students daily by bus, and any legislation that can help upgrade the district's fleet will help students.

Daniela Simunovic, acting environmental health director of Fresno Metro Ministry, also expressed gratitude that funds were set aside for public school buses. The organization advocates cooperation among religious and service groups.

Simunovic said the organization hopes the Valley receives an ample share of the funds "to help reduce the burden our kids have been carrying for so long."

## **Goodbye to triple-digit weather**

### **Officials say high temperatures will drop by Saturday**

By Laura Florez, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, August 10, 2005

As temperatures inch closer to normal this week, Tulare County residents might be able to enjoy going outside a little more and they might be able to breathe better, too.

Triple digits will be gone by Saturday, say weather officials with AccuWeather.

While it won't be much cooler, residents could enjoy some weather that's still hot but a couple of degrees closer to normal, said Jeffrey Nesmith, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

Temperatures forecast through Tuesday are a degree or two higher than the average normal high of 96 degrees, he said.

Those cooler temperatures will be the result of a move by a high-pressure system that has hovered over the Central Valley, he added. Such systems have been largely responsible for the 24 days this summer of 100-degree-plus weather in Visalia.

And as those triple digits head out of the Valley for at least a week, Tulare County residents could breathe easier, said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

When temperatures are hot and air is stagnant, conditions are prime for creating ozone and unhealthful air, she said.

"Some people may have asthma attacks [and] hospitalizations do go up in that time for people who have breathing problems," she said. "It depends upon the person but the person could experience shortness of breath, watering eyes, just feeling like they can't breathe as well, especially if doing any kind of exercise outside."

To warn residents about unhealthful air this summer, the district has called 16 Spare the Air Days since July in Tulare County, she said. That's one more day than was called during last year's entire Spare the Air Day season, which runs from June through September, she added.

Ryan Marshall, an assistant coach for an American Youth Soccer Organization team, said his players are looking forward to a drop in temperatures.

They've had to be careful this summer, practicing only an hour in afternoon heat at Seven Oaks Park in Visalia.

Marshall has had to keep an eye on his players.

"We don't want them to overdo it. We don't want them to get dehydrated," he said, noting the cooler weather could mean extending practice for the team.

And while hot weather has at times meant suffering heat stroke or heat exhaustion for some, not many cases have been seen at area hospitals this summer.

"We haven't had the classic heat stroke or exhaustion. We've been fortunate," said Martha Heavrin, an emergency room nurse at Tulare District Hospital. "It seems like people are pretty much educated on how to avoid it -- avoid being out in the heat, drink lots of fluids and wear light clothing."

But the heat this summer has taken its toll on crops, said Don Borges, an ag inspector with the Tulare County Agricultural Commissioners office, adding that heat will likely damage about 10 to 15 percent of the table grapes crop.

Stonefruit, such as nectarines and plums, can also be damaged in the heat, he said. But if farmers water trees enough, the damage can be kept to a minimum.

"Dark plums ripen quick in the heat and the tree can shut down," Borges said.

But, Borges said, the damage is estimated to be minimal, especially when compared with the \$8.6 million in damage the late-season rain and hail did to the cherry crop earlier this year.

## **Valley's growth causing concern**

**Regional cooperation suggested to address farmland loss, other issues**

By MICHAEL G. MOONEY, TIM MORAN and GARTH STAPLEY - BEE STAFF WRITERS  
Modesto Bee, August 10, 2005

By 2040, the population of the San Joaquin Valley - assuming projections are accurate - will have grown by 7 million to 8 million people.

"That's the equivalent of building 10 more Frenos in the next 35 years," former Modesto Mayor Carol Whiteside told a high-powered "town hall" audience Tuesday.

With three of Gov. Schwarzenegger's Cabinet members looking on at Modesto Centre Plaza, Whiteside noted that the valley's population already is larger than 20 states. We are, she said, certain to be pummeled with additional "astronomic, unremitting and constant growth."

So, the question becomes not whether the valley will grow, but how, participants agreed. Consensus proved hard to achieve.

Several said the best hope is regional cooperation - which would require require dramatic, systemic change in the valley's approach to development.

"We need to attack these things on a regional basis," said Ben Duran, president of Merced College.

Historically, power over growth policies has rested with local politicians in each city and county. An audience member Tuesday said such agencies are easily controlled by building interests contributing heavily to their election campaigns.

The governor's Cabinet members - Environmental Protection Secretary Alan C. Lloyd, Resources Secretary Michael Chrisman and Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura - politely listened but offered few answers to prickly questions. They were joined at the fact-finding session by several state Environmental Protection Agency executive officers.

Lloyd said the meeting was designed to elicit comments, criticism and suggestions.

"The Central Valley is an important part of the California economy, and protecting its environment is critical in sustaining the farming and agriculture industry," Lloyd said. "Gov. Schwarzenegger believes strongly in the health and well-being of the Central Valley's environment for the future of California, and I will ensure the concerns and questions are being heard."

Farmers, dairy farmers and builders said they feel overregulated, with rules that frequently don't seem connected to adequate science. "We want meaningful regulation. We don't want to spend money that won't do the job," said Turlock dairyman Ray Souza.

But Maria Jaime of California Rural Legal Assistance in Modesto urged the state EPA to be more aggressive in enforcing regulations to protect low-income workers and farmworkers.

"We are all facing these issues," Jaime said. "Twenty-two thousand people in the San Joaquin Valley have asthma. Twelve thousand children have asthma. These aren't numbers that should be taken lightly."

Agricultural interests bemoaned the loss of farmland and Oakdale Mayor Pat Kuhn complained that the valley is building homes for the Bay Area. "We are providing housing for an area that has a lot more money than we do," she said.

Michael Teitz, senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, said studies suggest population densities will go down even as the valley's population rises, as cities rapidly sprawl outward. California loses about 32,000 acres of farmland per year, he said, "and the principal hit is (to) prime farmland."

An option that could slow that loss, he said, would be focusing growth in areas to be served by high-speed railways. Another would be to "wall off" cities, permitting no development in areas outside cities as suggested by some controlled-growth advocates.

"That's probably truly unrealistic," Teitz said, "and we all know that."

Whiteside said developers are happy to build wherever policy-makers let them. "They just want to know what the rules are," she said. "The best thing we can do is to have a strategy."

Bill Zoslocki, president of the Building Industry Association of Central California, said housing prices could be more affordable if more homes could be built.

Shelter is a need just as breathing and eating are, Zoslocki said, and sprawl can be avoided with zoning.

Farm and building industry representatives criticized the California Environmental Quality Act, while people representing poor and minority groups and health agencies defended it.

Looking for common ground, several speakers said they hope for reasonable regulation based on sound science - but finding agreement on what that means is likely to be difficult.

Speaking of the governor's state-valley partnership, Whiteside said, "It's my fervent hope that this will be a vehicle to developing a strategy for the region. We've never had a strategy. We've never functioned as a region."

Rey Leon, senior policy analyst with the Latino Issues Forum, said the time for talk has passed.

"We've been dialoguing on this for a long time, and we could dialogue for a few generations to come," Leon said. "If we don't put pencil to paper and roll up our sleeves and get out in the field, we'll just be talking about it forever."

## **PG&E using new technology to control natural gas**

Bakersfield Californian, August 10, 2005

Pacific Gas and Electric is holding a news conference at 11:30 a.m. today at the intersection of South Union Avenue and East Bear Mountain Boulevard to announce new natural gas cross-compression technology that will be used during upcoming construction work.

The new technology is expected to keep 520,000 pounds of methane out of the air as PG&E strengthens a natural gas line through the city starting Thursday.

## **Tunnel Vision May End Freeway Fight**

**An idea to finish the 710 has backing from both sides. But more years of hurdles would remain.**

By Hector Becerra, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, August 10, 2005

It's an elusive missing link in Los Angeles' freeway system: A 6.2-mile dotted line on the map that transportation planners have for decades hoped would connect the Foothill Freeway in Pasadena with the Long Beach Freeway in Alhambra.

But that dotted line runs through a historic neighborhood of California Craftsman homes and tree-lined streets in South Pasadena. For nearly 50 years, residents there have fought the freeway. Just as tenaciously, residents of nearby traffic-weary cities, particularly Alhambra, have battled to have it built.

Now, some officials believe the solution to the standoff might lie beneath their feet. Earlier this month, they persuaded Congress to approve \$2.4 million to study the possibility of extending the freeway through a five-mile, \$2-billion tunnel that would run under South Pasadena and part of Pasadena.

The idea of building the longest continuous highway tunnel in the United States by digging under one of the country's most crowded metropolitan regions may seem far-fetched.

Even if the feasibility study points the way forward, years of environmental impact reports, engineering plans and financial wrangles would remain. But supporters of the tunnel — driven in

part by a near-desperate desire to end the fighting over the freeway — believe that several developments make the idea practical.

One involves the subject that rivals traffic as a Southern California obsession: real estate.

Over the last three decades, the California Department of Transportation has purchased more than 500 homes that occupy the potential freeway right of way. Most were bought a generation ago, many for prices in the \$50,000 range. One was recently appraised for \$780,000. Building a tunnel would allow Caltrans to sell most of the homes, although a change in state law would be needed to sell them at full-market prices.

"We're probably sitting on half a billion worth of property," said Ron Kosinski, Caltrans' deputy district director for environmental planning.

On the other side of the ledger, finishing the freeway above ground would require taking more than 400 homes at a price, including relocation benefits, of about \$1 million each, Kosinski estimates. "That's \$400 million right there for real estate," he said. "That's a substantial chunk of money."

Combine the real estate with new techniques pioneered in Europe that lower the price of tunneling and the cost to taxpayers of putting the road 100 feet to 200 feet below ground may be not much more expensive than building on the surface, Caltrans officials say.

The tunnel idea has won surprising, though guarded, support from both sides of the battle — preservationists who see the tunnel as a way to avoid destroying the neighborhood, and traffic-weary residents from Alhambra and surrounding cities.

"At this point in history, the tunnel alternative is the only viable way to explore completion of the 710 Freeway," said Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard, "keeping in mind the environmental, political and fiscal difficulties with a project that is approaching its 50th anniversary."

It's just possible, said Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Burbank), who sponsored the \$2.4-million study, "that the elusive common ground for the 710 Freeway gap after all these years may be underground."

South Pasadenans have long suspected that a traffic light on Fremont Avenue and Alhambra Road is kept on green for a long time to usher an inordinately large number of cars into their city.

Their opposition to the freeway extension has become a national symbol of historic preservation.

For their part, Alhambra a few years ago put up street barriers to divert traffic from their streets to South Pasadena — a move that ended after city officials realized it was hurting their own businesses.

"It's like the Hatfields and McCoys," Kosinski said. "They've been on opposite sides for generations or more, so they have that kind of blood pressure-raising perspective on each other."

In South Pasadena, an upscale suburb of 24,000 people located eight miles north of downtown Los Angeles, the tunnel idea is being embraced — to a point.

"I think the tunnel idea shows a lot of promise," South Pasadena Councilman Mike Ten said. "It addresses age-old concerns about the destruction of neighborhoods and the uprooting of families and loss of very needed housing. It may be the solution all of us can live with."

But some of the staunchest freeway opponents said they smell a trick.

"I think the whole idea of a tunnel is a Trojan horse to get the freeway," said Joanne Nuckols, 62, who drives around town in a Volvo with a "NO 710" license plate. "There are those in town, those who have been around and part of the freeway fight for many years, who believe that this is a bait and switch."

Down the road in Alhambra, a middle-class city of 85,000, resentment still runs high about South Pasadena's unwillingness to compromise on the freeway. More than 100,000 cars that might otherwise be on the freeway drive through local streets in Alhambra and neighboring cities, according to Caltrans.

"They're just very selfish people," Barbara Messina, an Alhambra school board member, said of her neighbors to the north. "All they care about is trees and their beautiful homes. What about all the kids in my communities affected by all the [pollution from stop-and-go traffic](#)?"

For Messina and other Alhambra supporters of the freeway, a tunnel looks like a feasible alternative.

Similarly, a representative for El Sereno, a district of Los Angeles just west of Alhambra, also said a tunnel is better than a freeway even though the tunnel plan still could mean the removal of 100 homes there.

As for Caltrans officials, they just hope the fragile detente holds.

"There are folks who have been living for a large portion of their adult lives fighting the freeway, so they don't want to say, 'This works, never mind, go ahead,' " Kosinski said. "There's an institutional, mental framework that has to be broken."

The five-mile tunnel, if built, would begin where the freeway ends in a stump on Valley Boulevard in Alhambra. It would surface between California and Del Mar avenues in Pasadena before connecting to a mile strip of the freeway that already exists south of the Foothill Freeway.

Engineers said the tunnel would be unbroken, except for a possible interchange at Huntington Drive in El Sereno.

The route would be nearly twice as long as Boston's Big Dig or a similarly long passageway in Alaska, the longest road tunnels in the United States.

Exhaust from the underground roadway would be released and filtered through an elaborate venting system at ground level. The so-called air scrubbers would filter enough of the exhaust that it could actually result in [cleaner emissions](#) than with a surface freeway, said Mark Pisano, executive director for the Southern California Assn. of Governments.

Engineers said the tunnel could have two levels — one for northbound traffic, the other for southbound traffic.

It is one of several huge tunnel projects under consideration across the country, including ones in Kentucky and Colorado and another that would connect Riverside County with Orange County by digging under the Cleveland National Forest.

The estimated \$2-billion cost of a Long Beach Freeway tunnel at first looks considerably higher than the \$1.4 billion price tag to build a surface freeway.

But the cost comparison does not include what Caltrans might be able to get for the houses it owns. Under current state law, if Caltrans were to resell the homes, it would have to do so at affordable-housing rates, with existing tenants getting right of first refusal, Kosinski said.

The agency is hoping to win changes in state law that would allow officials to sell them at full price, with the proceeds going to the tunnel project.

"We just had one home that was appraised at \$780,000 and that we no longer need for the route," he said. "We sold it for \$68,000. It seemed not fair."

The tunnel idea has already been the subject of a study by the Southern California Council of Governments, which enlisted help from consultants who built the Chunnel that links England and France below the English Channel.

Pisano said the consultants believed the tunnel could be built using a technique popular in Europe in which a large machine bores through the Earth and coats the tunnel way with a steel membrane, he said. That technique is considered less expensive than other tunnel-digging methods, he said.

Even though the costs of the tunnel are looking increasingly attractive, the \$2-billion figure is still hefty considering that all of Southern California usually receives about \$4 billion for all road improvements.

So Pisano said the tunnel would probably require some private financing and would likely require a toll. But for longtime freeway supporters, a toll might be a small price to pay to have the route finally complete.

"It's going to happen, it's going to happen in my lifetime," said Messina, the Alhambra school board member. "I really believe that. If a tunnel is what it's going to take, then that's the answer to everybody's problems."

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Going underground

Caltrans is considering building a tunnel between the 710 and 210 freeways to avoid displacing the following number of residences in these cities:

Pasadena: 143

South Pasadena: 299

Los Angeles: 509

Alhambra: 25

Total: 976\*

Caltrans owns approximately 500 of those residences.

Sources: Caltrans, ESRI

The longest dig

The proposed tunnel connecting the Long Beach and Foothill freeways, if built, would be nearly twice the length of any existing road tunnel in the United States. Longest tunnels (in miles):

Proposed 710 tunnel: 5

Massachusetts (Ted Williams): 2.6

Alaska (Anton Anderson): 2.6

New York (Brooklyn Battery): 1.7

Colorado (Eisenhower Memorial) 1.7:

New York (Holland): 1.6

Sources: The World's Longest Tunnel Page website, Caltrans, ESRI

## **Trade panel rejects Canadian firm's challenge to Calif MTBE ban**

By TERENCE CHEA, Associated Press Writer  
in the S.F. Chronicle, August 10, 2005

San Francisco (AP) -- An international trade tribunal has rejected a Canadian company's challenge to California's ban on the gasoline additive MTBE under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Methanex Corp., which produces an MTBE component called methanol, had filed a \$970 million claim against the United States under NAFTA six years ago. The Vancouver-based firm claimed the state ban was aimed at removing foreign competition for American makers of ethanol, a potential substitute for MTBE, or methyl tertiary-butyl ether.

The U.S. State Department has not officially announced the ruling and declined to comment on the case, said spokesman Steven Pike.

But Methanex, California Attorney General Bill Lockyer's office and Oakland-based Earthjustice said Tuesday they had received notification about the NAFTA trade tribunal's decision to dismiss

all of Methanex's claims. The ruling should be available later this week on the State Department's Web site, according to Lockyer's office.

"Today's decision is a resounding victory for the rights of Californians to keep their drinking water safe and clean," Lockyer said in a statement. "This sends a message to all foreign investors who would challenge the environmental and labor laws that are the fabric of our democracy."

Methanex was still reviewing the tribunal's ruling and would not comment, said spokeswoman Diana Barkley.

In March 1999, Gov. Gray Davis ordered a phase-out of MTBE - a gasoline additive designed to lower air pollution - because it contaminated drinking water and studies showed it may cause cancer.

Three months later, Methanex filed a claim under Chapter 11 of NAFTA, seeking almost \$1 billion in compensation for lost profits and business opportunities that resulted from the ban, which went into effect last year. Its product, methanol, is one of MTBE's main ingredients.

The Canadian firm claimed there wasn't any credible evidence that MTBE caused health problems, and that several international bodies have declined to list it as a carcinogen.

"California did not have to ban MTBE and nor did the scientific data available support such a ban," the company argues on its Web site. "The decision to ban MTBE is certainly related more to the political influence of those who produce ethanol, MTBE's and methanol's heavily subsidized competitor."

Martin Wagner, an Earthjustice attorney who wrote a legal brief supporting California's right to regulate MTBE, applauded the tribunal's decision, but warned that free trade agreements like NAFTA were undermining the United States' ability to protect public health and the environment.

"Trade agreements like this are trading away our sovereignty over our environmental protection in order to give corporations guaranteed profits," Wagner said. "This case should be a wake-up call to all Americans."

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On the Net:

Methanex Corporation:

U.S. State Department's Methanex Web page:

<http://www.methanex.com/newsroom/mtbe.html>

<http://www.methanex.com/newsroom/mtbe.html>

<http://www.state.gov/s/l/c5818.htm>

<http://www.state.gov/s/l/c5818.htm>

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, August 10, 2005:](#)

### **A cleaner ride**

#### **Replace, retrofit old school buses to make children healthier.**

(Updated, August 10, 2005, 5:55 AM)

School buses have emerged in recent years as one of the biggest problems facing those who are trying to clean up the Valley's polluted air. They are a special concern because of the precious cargo they carry. Children inside older buses are often exposed to greater amounts of dangerous particulate matter than are found in the open air adjacent to busy freeways.

The older buses are also less safe from other hazards of the road.

That's why a Tuesday press conference displaying newer, cleaner buses and retrofit technology for older diesel-powered buses was such welcome news. Best of all: There's finally a little funding available to start the job.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, held the press conference in Fresno, in conjunction with the Fresno Unified School District, to talk about money for replacing and retrofitting old school buses. The state budget has \$25 million for those purposes. Half will be spent replacing buses built before 1977; they are worst polluters and can't be brought up to today's standards. The other half will be spent retrofitting newer buses with devices that will dramatically reduce their emissions.

Much more money is needed. The state has more than 1,000 of the oldest buses, and they cost about \$150,000 each to replace. And the older, dirtier buses are concentrated in the Valley - about a third of the total - where school districts are chronically less well-funded than their coastal counterparts.

Unfortunately, the Valley is where the air quality problem is greatest.

A bill by state Sen. Chuck Poochigian, SB698, would do much more to address the funding problem. It would spend \$50 million a year for five years, and replace or retrofit all the offending vehicles. It's stalled in the state Senate, but Poochigian is still pushing it.

Ironically, one of the problems with diesel engines is that they are so rugged. A properly maintained engine has a useful life of decades - but that's a drawback as we learn more about the fine particles in diesel emissions that cause so many health problems.

Farmers who use diesel engines to power irrigation pumps and other equipment have already run into this problem. Legislators have answered by appropriating funds to help pay for switching to newer engines, and utility companies are being persuaded to offer lower rates to subsidize a shift to cleaner - but more expensive - electric motors.

Schools need help as well. Few districts - perhaps none locally - can bear the full burden of this essential change. The more help they get, the better - and as soon as possible.

## **Forward-Looking Measures May Help Reduce Cow Emissions**

[Washington Post, August 7, 2005](#)

The vast agricultural San Joaquin Valley in California is home to 2.5 million dairy cows -- many, apparently, with serious gas.

The valley is ranked with Los Angeles and Houston as one of the three smoggiest spots in the nation. Valley air pollution officials said volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, cause about half its smog problem. Last week they released a report blaming cows for producing most of them.

Dairy industry lobbyists say the findings are based on bad science. They also question regulations that could require dairy farmers to spend millions treating cow manure.

Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen, said most cow gas comes from cows chewing and rechewing their food. Building feedlots and mixing new food formulas would be cheaper than cleaning up cow patties.

Marsh cited an experiment in which scientists placed cows in "bovine bubbles" and measured the air quality in front of and behind the animals. "I know it sounds funny," Marsh said, "but 80 percent of the emissions of the cow are coming out of the front end as she's chewing her cud, rather than the back end. I don't know how to say that delicately."

-- **Sonya Geis**