

## **News from the San Joaquin Valley**

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, December 13, 2006

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — A nonprofit group wants to raise money to hold biweekly car cleanup events to help curb air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley, which ranks among the smoggiest regions in the nation.

Valley Clean Air Now currently runs an occasional program called "Tune-in and Tune up," which provides motorists with \$500 coupons to repair their cars so they can pass the state's smog test.

For three years, group members have voluntarily checked vehicles throughout the valley with technology that sometimes finds polluters missed by the state's test. Through the repairs, Clean Air Now has cut more than two tons of pollution produced by Fresno-area drivers in the past year, said Doug Lawson, an air researcher.

The organization now wants to launch a campaign to raise \$3 million to \$5 million in private grants to sponsor the cleanups more regularly.

"We feel like we have the most cost-effective program out there," said Paul Betancourt, chairman of the group's board.

The organization's goal is to help upgrade 10,000 of the dirtiest-running cars on valley roads. If it were held biweekly, the program could remove 450 tons of smog-making pollution per year from the dirtiest-running vehicles by repairing them, Lawson said.

## **RMP gets a green light**

By Corinne Reilly and Leslie Albrecht  
Merced Sun-Star, December 13, 2006

Riverside Motorsports Park moved from plan to reality early Wednesday morning when the Merced County Board of Supervisors approved the raceway complex in a series of votes that spanned eight and half hours.

With Supervisors Deidre Kelsey and John Pedrozo dissenting on two key votes, plans for the 1,200-acre racing venue earned just enough support to move forward.

The board's 2:30 a.m. decision followed hours of emotional public testimony from raceway supporters and opponents, and nearly four years of countywide debate over a project that many say will set the course for the county's development for decades to come.

More than 300 people filled the board chambers and nearby overflow rooms at the meeting's 6 p.m. start. When the final vote was cast just before 2:30 a.m. the crowd had thinned to a weary three dozen.

While racetrack supporters hailed the decision as an economic boon for the county, opponents called the project's approval an assault on both the environment and local agriculture.

"By approving this project ... you are pushing development to my doorway," said Karen Crane, whose family runs a farm near the raceway's proposed site. "Our land will never be the same, and that rests in your hands."

Proponents pointed to the raceway's economic benefits, which are projected to include hundreds of jobs and \$180 million in annual business.

"The bottom line in Merced County is we need jobs," said Carl Pollard, a Merced City Councilman who spoke in support of the raceway. "We have too many people on welfare...We have to diversify our economy. We have to change with the times."

After the final approval, raceway CEO John Condren tallied the many benefits he says his racing venue will bring to the county.

"I'm very pleased with the way things went," said Condren. "It means a diversified job base, it means increased tourism and revenue, it means entertainment and recreation." Of the supervisors, Kelsey voiced the strongest opposition to the raceway -- at one point reading a 35-minute statement condemning the project as a disaster for taxpayers and an attack on farmers and ranchers near the raceway's future northern Merced County site.

Kelsey slammed environmental reviews of the project as inadequate and rushed, urging the board to delay its vote until more studies on the project's impacts could be completed.

She said approving of the project would damage the public trust and disgrace the supervisors.

"As this project sits in front of me today, it's terrible," said Kelsey. "...The credibility of our board is on the line with this." Pedrozo cast the only other votes against the project.

"I know what it is to be a farmer and I know what it is to have cars coming down your country roads," said Pedrozo. "I can't support the (environmental impact report), not until I am totally confident that all the people that live out there are taken care of."

The board voted on six motions that collectively allowed the project to move forward. By the end of the meeting, the board had voted to approve the project's environmental reviews, to allow traffic and noise from the raceway to exceed current county standards, and to overrule a finding by the Airport Land Use Commission that the racetrack's site is too close to Castle Airport's runway.

Condren first proposed the project in 2003. Since then, the raceway's location has been the subject of much of the debate.

Condren and raceway backers say the project's future site makes perfect sense -- a stone's throw away from an airport and within 100 miles of 10 million potential race fans.

Those opposed to the raceway say its valley location means the air pollution it generates will remain trapped in the area. They say a more remote location would make noise and traffic from the raceway less burdensome.

Environmental reviews have confirmed the raceway will contribute considerably to air quality problems the county already faces.

More recently, the controversy has centered around a plan to manage traffic to the site which proposes to route the majority of out-of-town traffic from Highway 99 through a rural neighborhood just west of the track.

The \$250 million raceway complex is planned to contain eight different racing venues, a shopping mall, restaurants, an arcade and a lake. In addition to professional racing events, the park will host amateur racing, drag racing, motocross and go-kart racing, concerts, car shows and festivals. It is not planned to host NASCAR events.

While typical Saturdays and Sundays are estimated to bring 5,000 to 15,000 visitors to the raceway, big-name events held one weekend a month could draw daily crowds between 20,000 and 50,000. The Merced County Planning Commission voted in favor of the project's approval in October.

## **Illinois: New Rules on Mercury Emissions**

By Libby Sander

N.Y. Times, Wednesday, December 13, 2006

Coal-fired power plants in Illinois will be required to reduce their mercury emissions by 90 percent by 2009, according to strict new state rules. The rules, which exceed federal standards requiring

a 78-percent reduction in mercury emissions by 2018, are part of a plan intended to reduce toxic air pollution introduced by Gov. [Rod R. Blagojevich](#) earlier this year.

## **Warming trends**

### **Lodians can find fireplaces to fit home, budget, style, needs**

By Jennifer Gokhman

Lodi News Sentinel, Wednesday, December 13, 2006

Thick smoke floating out of chimneys no longer characterizes a cold day in winter. Yet many Lodi area homeowners still have a lively fire going. And not just in their living rooms but offices, bedrooms, kitchens and even bathrooms.

Lodians have a plethora of styles and kinds of fireplaces from which to choose, depending on their budgets, the size of the space to heat, and their needs and wants.

A fireplace provides ambiance, whether it's an electric, gas, pellet or wood stove. People can save money on electricity, as well, by not running the central heat, but by heating individual rooms instead.

"The industry has changed dramatically," said Tom Ahling, of Fireplace Products and More in Lodi. He's been in the fireplace business for 25 years. "(Fireplaces) are decorative now, beautiful to look at and much more efficient."

#### **Plug-in warmth**

Electric fireplaces can simply be plugged into the wall and turned on. In a way, they are considered space heaters, said Jim Walz, owner of Jim Walz Distributing in Lodi. No matter what size they are, electric fireplaces are 1,500 watts and heat up the same amount of space — about 400 square feet.

They are available as small corner units, free-standing units and inserts. They can be made to look like a real fireplace with a mantel, screen, tool rack and other accessories. They can be tucked away in an entertainment center or put in a bedroom.

"You can wake up to a nice, toasty room," Walz said.

Electric fireplaces should not be put in the bathroom because they are not waterproof or UL approved, he added.

"What people like most is instant ambiance," Walz said, adding that with electric fireplaces, people can turn on the fire without the heat.

Or, people can keep them in the house for the cold months and put them away in storage the rest of the year.

Gas fireplaces are more involved than electric ones. Inserts are available for existing fireplaces. But gas fireplaces are easiest to install while a home is being built, Ahling said.

They can be put in pretty much any room of the house, as well as outdoors. The bathroom, office, kitchen cupboards and bedrooms have become popular places to put a gas fireplace.

"The problem is most people don't have the space," Ahling said.

One in the kitchen cupboard — also known as a bed and breakfast — is still rare in homes, but it's an up and coming trend.

If people want one in a place other than where a previous fireplace was, remodeling has to be done. The wall has to be stripped down to the frame, and gas has to be run to the room.

Gas fireplaces can heat 1,500 to 2,000 square feet, Ahling said. He added that it's cheaper to run the fireplace than central heating because of the zone heating concept; you're only heating the room that you're in, where with central heating, the heat goes to all rooms of the house.

"Gas fireplaces probably matches our lifestyles better," said John Osburn, of Ben's Appliance in Lodi.

### **Almost like wood stoves**

Pellet stoves are another option. Pellets are small pieces of wood made of sawdust. They are loaded into the fireplace and fall into the front area where they are ignited.

Osburn said that pellet stoves are a good option for those who can't get natural gas. They are less work than wood stoves.

"You've got a wood fire, basically," Osburn said. "People like the feel."

One bag of pellets may cost about \$5 and last for 24 hours, said Jan Royce, of Fireplace Products and More.

"They all are very efficient," she said.

An advantage to pellet stoves is that they use a renewable resource.

### **Real wood fires**

For those who still like a real wood fire, EPA-certified wood-burning fireplaces are available.

"Wood stoves today are pretty clean," Walz said.

Older wood-burning fireplaces probably are not EPA-certified, and on no-burn days, they may not be used.

Gas fireplaces surged in popularity after the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District mandated that changes in fireplaces had to be made, Ahling said.

In addition, in most new construction, only gas fireplaces are installed.

### **The look, accessories**

With gas and electric fireplaces, you can get a big flame, a brick interior and a variety of facades in copper, pewter or nickel. Gold is less popular than it used to be, Osburn said. Three-sided and multi-sided windows, freestanding or inserts, cabinets and mantels are all options. Even see-through gas models can be installed between two rooms for twice the ambiance.

They can come with remote controls or thermostats. Some gas fireplaces allow for aromatherapy oils to be added.

Depending on budget, people can add bricks, stone or marble to make the fireplace a focal point in a room.

"It's really a piece of furniture as much as a heater," Osburn said. "People want it to become part of the room."

### **High efficiency heat**

#### **Wood burning**

- When the Air Quality Index is greater than 150, wood burning is prohibited, whether it's wood, pellets or manufactured logs.
- When the AQI is between 101 and 150, people are encouraged to voluntarily refrain from wood burning, except for pellet stoves, manufactured firelogs and EPA-approved fireplaces.
- Before selling a home, homeowners must take out any wood burning heaters that are not EPA-certified or pellet-fueled.

#### **Tips for cleaner burning:**

- Make sure that firewood is clean and dry, and not green.
- It is illegal and hazardous to burn trash, magazines or newspapers in the fireplace.
- A manufactured firelog may be a cleaner alternative to wood.
- Burn denser woods such as oak.
- Keep the fireplace properly maintained.

For burn status or more information, contact (800) SMOG-INFO or visit <http://www.valleyair.org>.  
Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

## **New Delay on Allensworth Dairy**

by Miles Shuper

Valley Voice Newspaper, Wednesday, December 13, 2006

Allensworth - Once again, a last minute wrench has been tossed into the decision-making process for two huge dairies proposed near the edge of Allensworth State Park.

Following more than 90 minutes of passionate testimony, including presentations by school children urging Tulare County Supervisors to reject plans for the dairies near the historic African-American landmark near Earlimart, the board voted 4-1 to delay a possible decision for two more weeks. Supervisor Phil Cox was the only vote against the delay.

The action also came in the wake of information that a potential compromise between the owner of the dairy site land and the California Department of Parks and Recreation, which has proposed purchasing land use rights to operate a dairy on the land.

Board Chairman Steve Worthley, expressing extreme frustration, took dead aim at the last minute presentation of information which its proponents claim was not considered in county staff findings.

The documents, citing potential public health dangers pertaining to dairy operations, were handed to Supervisors by Avinash Kar, staff attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, a San Francisco-based organization. The documents, Kar said, pertain to U.S. Department of Health studies related to potential health concerns including possible increased resistance to dairy cattle antibiotics.

Worthley called the last second presentation a "bad faith move in my opinion," with its only purpose being to halt the establishment of the two dairies 1.2 miles from Allensworth State Park.

Supervisor Allen Ishida, who will take over as board chairman in January, also cited his frustration after the session saying that the last minute presentation is an often used tactic to attempt to delay or sway a decision. Both Ishida and Worthley expressed concern for those who have twice traveled from Bay Area by chartered bus to voice their concerns and see a decision only to be thwarted by a delay.

Worthley told the audience that no more public testimony would be taken at the December 19 meeting. He said county staff and counsel will study and evaluate the new information and that a vote on the dairy use permit may be made at that meeting.

The board had continued the public hearing from October 31 after deciding that new information, mainly the potential impact on the habitat of an endangered lizard species, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation's consideration of possible expansion of the park acreage. Again this week, potential "new issues" were raised, forcing the county to see if those issues are actually "new issues" which have not already received consideration.

At Tuesday's meeting, Scott Wassmond of the State Department of Parks and Recreation said the passage of state Proposition 84 has made funds available for the purchase of property use rights to protect land uses. He cited talks this week between his agency and attorneys and representatives of Visaliam Sam Etchegaray who has been working for several years to build the dairies.

Wassmond said the department and the property owner and his attorneys and representative will continue to discuss the possibility of a buffer area which would involve the state's purchase of land usage rights. Wassmond said he does not know of any other case where the purchase of land use rights is involved in a dairy use issue. Mostly, he said purchases of use rights have

involved protecting land from construction of housing or other projects, not agricultural uses. He said that the Etchegarays have indicated they will continue their dairy permit process but are open to discussion on the potential sale of the land use rights. Most of the 2,700 acres on which the dairies are planned is in hay production.

Those who chartered the bus from the Bay Area bringing several dozen African Americans to plea for the protection of Allensworth from the construction of the dairies, were adamant in asking the board to do "what is right" and to protect the residents' and visitors' safety and health.

As before, they pointed out that Allensworth State Park is one of the few in California where children and others can learn first-hand about black history and the importance of the efforts of Col. Allensworth who founded the community in 1908.

There was talk during the hearing and outside board chambers that a decision to approve the dairies would be an act of discrimination against African-Americans.

Supervisors also heard claims that economic considerations were being given more weight than the importance of the ecological and health concerns of the community residents. Etchegaray estimates 60 new jobs will be created and that multi-million dollar construction would also provide construction jobs along with other economic boosts.

The Earlimart Ranch Dairy and the Phillips Ranch Dairy facilities each would be on 160 acres. Together they would contain 7,500 milking stock and total of more than 12,000 cows, including support stock.

#### **Warning on auto exhaust**

#### **Study: Results shock researcher -- Findings: Air better at Roseville railyard than Arden school**

By Chris Bowman - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, December 13, 2006

Students at Arden Middle School, smack next to busy Watt Avenue, are breathing higher levels of toxic particles than people immediately downwind of the Roseville train yard, the single largest generator of such pollution in the Sacramento area, according to an air pollution study scheduled to be release today.

"It shocked us all," said Thomas Cahill, a University of California, Davis, atmospheric physicist who led the study.

The find has health and policy implications far beyond the Arden school, one of four sampling sites in a three-year regional air pollution study sponsored by the Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails, formerly the local chapter of the American Lung Association.

The report suggests that planners for new schools sites, elderly care centers and residential developments alike should take into account proximity not only to freeways but also heavily traveled secondary highways, such as the six-lane Watt Avenue.

"Just because people may live along residential streets instead of freeways doesn't mean that they're safe from the harmful effects of car exhaust particulates," Cahill said.

They also point to a critical research gap on the health effects of toxic particles in automotive exhaust, as opposed to smog-forming tailpipe gases or the much-studied diesel soot.

And the data underscore the need to repair or replace oil-burning cars that spew white clouds of smoke.

The study already has Arden school officials laying plans for a new ventilation systems that can filter out as much as 75 percent of the most harmful particles pollutants. The Sacramento

Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, which helped guide the study, has approved a grant to upgrade the school's air system.

The Sacramento-area study is the third and final report on three years of volunteer research on the health effects of air pollution specific to the Sacramento region.

Cahill and colleagues at Davis compared concentrations of the invisible vehicle exhaust particles along a line between Davis and the foothills community of Shingle Springs.

In the first report, researchers announced a startling find: The daytime pollutant levels next to the Arden school at Watt and Arden avenues are at least as high as those near Interstate 5 in downtown Sacramento. Traffic along that stretch of I-5 averages 285,000 vehicles a day, about four times the volume on Watt Avenue at Arden.

Those findings spurred Cahill to look deeper. How could particle pollution that is normally associated with diesel soot be just as high along residential Watt as a freeway, with all its soot spewing trucks and buses? The most likely answer, the scientists concluded, was that the particles near the Arden school came mostly from run-down cars burning engine oil.

"A small fraction of cars dominates the automotive pollution," Cahill said. "That's a small fraction of cars putting out very toxic stuff."

Smoke from burned motor oil contains benzo-a-pyrene, the most prevalent cancer-causing air pollutant in California, Cahill said.

For the study released today, the UCD scientists returned to Arden school in late January with their tripod-mounted air samplers and monitored vehicle exhaust particles for two weeks. The next two weeks, they set up samplers at the Denio's flea market lot across from the Union Pacific train yard in Roseville.

About 100 locomotives occupy the 780-acre yard at any given time, according to UP officials. About one quarter are attached to trains passing through en route to Portland, Reno or Sacramento. Others stop to switch tracks, reassemble cars or crews, refuel or undergo inspection, repair or testing.

The monitor at the Arden school picked up a total of 7 micrograms of "very fine" and "ultra-fine" airborne particles per cubic meter of air in the sampling period, compared with 6.6 micrograms per cubic meter of air near the UP train yard.

Scientists, however, do not know how much exposure to benzo-a-pyrene it takes to cause cancer because so few pollution measurements have been conducted on smoking cars.

But, Cahill, an international authority on air pollution said, "We have every reason to be worried that people living next to these highways should take steps to protect themselves."

The good news, he said, is that those protections can be relatively inexpensive. Installing electrostatic air filters and lowering the flow of air pumped inside home and school heating and cooling systems significantly cuts the pollution.

Also, tall evergreen trees such as redwoods can filter out many of the tiny oily particles that attach to the needles and leaves.

"There are inexpensive strategies we can take to minimize the health risk, and that's the good news coming out of this study," Cahill said.

## **Older cement kilns get EPA pass on mercury**

By Janet Wilson

Los Angeles Times, Tuesday, December 12, 2006

The Environmental Protection Agency announced Monday it would not require cement manufacturers - including the nation's largest emitter, in Tehachapi, Calif. - to upgrade plants to control mercury.

Cement kilns are an integral part of the building boom in Southern California and elsewhere, turning raw limestone and waste ash from coal plants into the material used to build highways, tract homes and commercial developments.

Mercury, which can be emitted when stone or coal ash is processed, is a potent neurotoxin that can harm developing brains. The emissions also pollute water bodies.

Environmental groups that sued under the federal Clean Air Act to force tighter controls said the decision ignored two court orders.

The EPA's ruling will require kilns built in December 2005 and onward to limit and measure actual emissions. The agency said that would reduce emissions by as much as 3,000 pounds, in an industry estimated to emit 6.6 tons of mercury annually. But the regulators said that upgrading existing plants would be too costly for industry and the resulting air-quality improvements would be too scant.

Parts of the decision, signed late Friday by EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson, closely follow industry requests to the agency. Industry officials also met with White House staffers Nov. 30 to discuss the pending decision, and EPA staffers phoned in to the meeting, records show.

The decision sparked outrage from environmental groups and residents downwind of kilns, who have fought for years to get stricter emission controls.

"The news today is not good. EPA has decided to let every existing cement kiln in the country emit as much mercury as it likes," said James Pew, an attorney with Earthjustice, which twice has won a court order requiring the EPA to set mercury standards for cement plants under the Clean Air Act. Pew said the agency had ignored the court orders and issued "the same measures rejected as unlawful more than five years ago.... EPA clearly thinks it can just thumb its nose at the law."

Eleven of the 94 factories with cement kilns in the United States are in California, including in Colton, Mojave and the Lucerne Valley. The single worst mercury polluter in the country is the Lehigh Southwest cement kiln in Tehachapi, which reported in 2004 that it had emitted more than 2,500 pounds of mercury, according to the federal Toxic Release Inventory. A company environmental officer declined comment.

Under the new rules, existing plants still must control dust containing mercury. Cement manufacturers will continue to be allowed to emit coal ash produced by power plants, as long as they do not use a certain type of boiler technology. No kilns in the U.S. currently use the technology, but some of the estimated 25 plants that may be constructed in coming years could use it.

"I think the bottom line is that we reviewed all the information that we were required to under the law," EPA spokesman John Millett said. "We weighed the information and came to a decision about what was feasible for existing plants under the regulation - and we also issued stringent regulations on new sources."

EPA environmental engineer Keith Barnett, of the agency's air-quality planning and standards office in North Carolina, said it would cost a cement manufacturer "\$1.5 million per year per kiln for a wet scrubber" that might reduce emissions by 42%, which he said was not a large enough reduction to justify the cost.

Marti Sinclair of the Sierra Club said \$1.5 million would be a small price to protect the public, noting that one of the nation's leading cement producers had reported revenue of \$1.1 billion last year and had already installed such technology in Switzerland, where it was required.

California and several other states had asked the EPA to require cement factories to monitor and accurately measure mercury emissions. Although federal law requires cement plants to report emissions, it does not require those reports to be based on actual measurements. Both industry and environmental groups noted that mercury content could vary widely in raw materials.

"There is no law or rule on the books that requires cement kilns to measure mercury emissions," Barnett confirmed. "They are required to report their mercury emissions.... They use whatever data they can find."

But when kilns have tested emissions, the data have shown earlier reporting to be "gross understatements," according to the Sierra Club. A cement plant in Alpena, Mich., reported annual mercury emissions of about 50 pounds, but when the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality required the plant to test actual smokestack emissions, the kiln was found to be emitting more than 10 times what the plant had reported.

"If reporting from the rest of the cement industry is as inaccurate as the reporting from Alpena, this industry could be putting out between 25 and 50 tons of mercury every year," said Jane Williams, chairwoman of the Sierra Club's Air Toxics Task Force.

"That would put cement kilns in the same category as coal-fired power plants, which have long been recognized as the worst culprit for mercury contamination."

Representatives of three California cement plants declined to comment Monday, and staff for the Portland Cement Assn. did not return phone calls. Portland cement is the mostly widely produced and used type of cement.

In a statement, the association said it was studying the impact of the rule on the industry and on its plans for a \$3.6-billion expansion - including constructing plants and modernizing and enlarging existing ones - to meet "record demand for cement."

"The industry will continue to conduct research to identify strategies for addressing mercury emissions and will share its findings with the EPA to ensure that industry standards are based on sound science and support our shared mission to protect human health and the environment," the statement said.

It continued: "PCA-member plants use state-of-the-art technologies to continuously minimize emissions ... while costeffectively producing a high-quality product."

["In yesterday's clips there was an editorial "Top Ten List" from the Fresno Bee that needs to be correctly characterized to avoid any confusion on the part of our News Clip Readers. The Fresno Bee runs a satirical Top Ten List every Sunday in their Vision section in the vein of the \*Daily Show\* or \*National Lampoon\*; it is meant to be humorous only and does not represent a critical analysis of any issue."](#)

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Wednesday, December 13, 2006](#)

### **Tough job lies ahead for valley's air board**

A busy and difficult year lies ahead for the valley's air district. A number of issues demand attention, and much work and persistence will be needed to address them.

There have been gains since the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District was formed in 1992. Our air has gotten cleaner with fewer harmful particles and less contamination. But there's a long way to go.

The most important task for the board is to help find ways to reduce dependence on private vehicles. That falls in line with President Bush's call to end our addiction to imported oil — the bulk of which goes to fuel our cars.

To help, elected officials are looking for funding from state and federal sources. Members of the valley's congressional delegation asked Office of Management and Budget Director Rob Portman for \$100 million in new annual funding. They want President Bush to include the money in his next budget. It's probably a long shot, but it's worth the effort.

On another tack, air quality officials and legislators are trying to create an "air quality empowerment zone" that would provide tax breaks, grants and other advantages. It's another long shot, but California is now home to the new speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, and that could help. It won't hurt that Sen. Barbara Boxer — who is well-acquainted with the valley's problems — will chair the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Before our hopes get too high, it should be noted that powerful new committee chairs come from other states and have other priorities.

The air district must deal with a nagging problem concerning representation on its governing board.

Five of the board's 11 members will be replaced this year, and there are serious questions about how they should be chosen. Should the district's major cities — Fresno, Bakersfield and Stockton — have permanent seats? Should scientists and health experts be included, as suggested by Sen. Mike Machado in 2005? Absolutely. We supported Machado's failed efforts and we believe he should try again.

But under the legislation that established the district, the California League of Cities chooses some of the air board members. It's a curious arrangement. We worry that the process offers too little opportunity for public input and deprives the board of the political clout needed to implement often controversial policy initiatives.

Meanwhile, we have again been reminded of the cost of dirty air. California State University, Fullerton, researcher Jane Hall put the figure at a staggering \$3.3 billion annually. Other scientists call that figure conservative. Worse, up to 1,400 people die prematurely each year because of our bad air.

Social scientists say Latinos and blacks suffer more. For instance, the city of Arvin has the valley's worst air. Most of Arvin's residents are Latino or black. Yet Arvin will not be represented on the air district board.

The air board has a lot to do; it needs all the help it can get to get the job done. We all must help.

Our Point

The Valley Air Board has a lot of work to do, and it could use additional political clout to get it done.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, December 13, 2006:](#)

### **Making a dent**

### **Efforts aimed at gross polluters help clean up air we all breathe.**

A private effort to get the worst air-quality offenders off the Valley streets and highways is making headway. The group behind the effort has plans to do much more, and deserves public support.

Valley Clean Air Now is addressing the problem of gross polluters, older cars that spew much more than their share of smog-causing gases into the atmosphere. The non-profit organization — under the sobriquet "Tune-in and Tune-up" — is paying people \$500 to help make repairs on their vehicles so they can pass the state's mandatory Smog Check exam.

The group is also using a high-tech method for gauging the emissions from the cars — one the state has declined to adopt despite evidence that it is more effective than the technology now in use at smog testing stations.

Though small in number by comparison with the total of cars and light trucks on the road, gross polluters are responsible for as much as 20% of the smog-making emissions that are produced by vehicles in the Valley. And vehicle emissions are the biggest single culprit in our filthy air.

Cleaning them up — or getting them off the road altogether — is a very cost-effective way to make a serious dent in the Valley's air pollution.

Valley Clean Air Now wants to do much more. The group has ambitious plans to raise \$3 million to \$5 million from private sources to help fix or remove the 10,000 dirtiest-running cars on Valley roads. That could remove as much as 450 tons of smog-making pollution each year from our skies.

It's a promising effort that could pay off big in terms of healthier residents and a healthier Valley economy.

Also promising is the remote sensing technology the group is employing. Experts believe the system is more accurate than the equipment now in use, but the state has been slow to warm to the devices, which use a laser to sense the content of vehicle emissions.

The technology has been around for a couple of decades, but concerns about "Big Brother" invading people's privacy have led, in part, to a reluctance to use it. Valley Clean Air Now hopes to finesse such concerns by making the program voluntary.

More power to them. Cleaning up gross polluters is really getting the biggest bang for the buck when it comes to the fight for better air quality.