

31 states target global warming

They form a climate registry that will measure and track greenhouse gas emissions by industry.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Wed., May 9, 2007

Led by California, 31 states representing more than 70% of the U.S. population announced Tuesday that they would measure and jointly track greenhouse gas emissions by major industries.

The newly formed Climate Registry is the latest example of states going further than the federal government in taking steps to combat global warming. State officials, along with some industrial groups and environmentalists, say the registry is a crucial precursor to both mandatory and market-based regulation of industrial gases that contribute to warming.

All agree that the most important part of the new registry is subjecting emissions statistics to third-party verification — unlike a Bush administration program that does not require verification.

"You have to be able to count carbon pollution in order to cut carbon pollution," said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"The registry gives business and policymakers an essential accounting tool for tracking the success of the many emerging global warming emission reduction initiatives that are blossoming across the country."

The registry participants range from states that are moving aggressively to impose mandatory greenhouse gas reduction policies to others that are just beginning to examine whether to take even voluntary steps.

"This includes a lot of deeply conservative states who have signed on that we weren't expecting," said Nancy Whalen, spokeswoman for the California Climate Action Registry, the only current statewide emissions tracking system, which helped develop the multistate program.

"We're all going to be measuring in the same way, so there's not going to be a patchwork of different programs out there."

California registry officials worked closely with New England states to develop the system.

The new registry will be based in Washington, D.C., and will have regional offices. It will begin tracking data in January.

Bob Malone, chairman and president of energy giant BP America, said: "We believe a credible reporting system of greenhouse gas emissions is the first step in developing government policy and corporate programs."

BP produces and sells fuel to power plants, cars and trucks, the main contributors to greenhouse gases. The company is among several that applauded the creation of the registry, believing that in time they can profit from accurate reporting and reduction of their emissions.

Joining the registry is easy. A governor just needs to sign off on its principles, which include agreeing to "provide an accurate, complete, consistent, transparent and verified set of greenhouse gas emissions data ... supported by a robust accounting and verification infrastructure."

The registry will be funded by industry fees, foundation donations and public money.

Some Democrats criticized the Bush administration for not doing more, leaving states to act.

"The Climate Registry is another example of how states are taking the lead in the absence of federal action to address greenhouse gas emissions in this country," said Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, a Democrat, whose state is a charter member.

White House Council on Environmental Quality spokeswoman Kristen Hellmer responded:

"Apparently the critics are not paying attention to what has been happening in Washington. In 2002 President Bush called for the creation of a national reporting registry, and the federal government followed that call by creating state-of-the-art reporting protocols where businesses and institutions submit comprehensive reports on their greenhouse gas emissions, sequestration and reductions."

Hellmer added, "We welcome this action by the states as it is supplementing the extensive work already done at the federal level."

But industry, environmental and state officials said that although the U.S. Department of Energy has a registry, it did not require independent verification of data, among other key differences.

Energy Department spokeswoman Megan Barnett said the department in April 2006 strengthened its reporting guidelines by recommending, but not requiring, that they be third-party verified.

Kerry E. Kelly, a lobbyist for Waste Management, a national trash hauling firm that owns landfills that emit methane, another greenhouse gas, said that although there was nothing wrong with the federal program, the multistate approach would work better because of its uniform reporting standards.

"I would think that it would become a model for the federal government to look at," said Kelly.

Dale Bryk, an attorney for the NRDC, criticized the DOE registry for allowing participants to "cherry-pick and just report emissions data from facilities that are reducing pollution, without disclosing the emissions data from other facilities that are increasing pollution."

Some said the registry was an improvement over the federal effort, but imperfect because it was still voluntary.

"A mandatory registry would be better," said V. John White, head of a Sacramento-based energy and environment group.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said of the new registry: "I'm proud that [it] was modeled after California's Climate Action Registry and trust that the rest of the nation will join our fight to protect the environment and secure a sound economy."

In addition to the 31 states, the Campo Kumeyaay Nation of Native Americans in Campo, Calif., near the Mexican border, has joined.

Two Canadian provinces, British Columbia and Manitoba, also have signed on.

31 states to form greenhouse gas emission registry

Move will create nationwide measurement standard -- but reporting will be voluntary

Mark Martin, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, May 9, 2007

Governors and environmental officials from 31 states announced Tuesday that they would create a national registry to measure greenhouse gas emissions, a key first step toward reducing emissions and another illustration of states moving ahead of the federal government in addressing climate change.

The announcement Tuesday does not mean that any state other than California has agreed to lower the greenhouse gases that scientists believe are causing rising temperatures around the world. And industries in the states will not be required to join the registry and report the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases they emit; it will be voluntary.

But proponents of the idea said the new Climate Registry is critical to eventually reducing emissions because it will be a way to measure the starting point in each state.

"This historic milestone establishes a critical and credible 'common currency' that will help us succeed as we move forward with efforts to reduce these missions," said Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

"This is a precondition to mandatory national carbon limits," said Ralph Cavanaugh of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

States that agreed to help found the registry include most Western states, including California, Washington and Oregon, most Northeastern states, and some in the Midwest. Also included are two Canadian provinces -- British Columbia and Manitoba -- and the Campo Kumeyaay Indian Nation in San Diego County.

Most Southern states are not members of the new registry, which is based on an existing registry in California.

The registry will require companies and state and local governments that volunteer to report their emissions to calculate them in the same way. It will be a nonprofit corporation run by a board of directors with representatives from each of the states, provinces and tribes. The registry will be public and would be critical in measuring future emissions reductions and the development of a market-based system allowing companies to buy and sell emissions credits.

"We'll have some verification and accounting protocols that could help ensure that a ton of carbon dioxide reduction in California is the same as somewhere else," said Bill Magavern, a California lobbyist for the Sierra Club.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation last year making California the first state in the country to require lower greenhouse gas emissions. The law first requires industries that will be affected to report their emissions on the state registry, and Schwarzenegger noted Tuesday that a national registry signals a move toward reducing emissions.

"Developing a common standard for reporting and recording greenhouse gases is an essential component to a national climate action policy," he said.

While no other state has the limits California does -- state law requires a 25 percent reduction in emissions by 2020 -- other states are beginning to enact global-warming-related laws. Northeastern states have already moved to lower emissions from power plants, and Washington state enacted a new law to do that this year. Lawmakers in Hawaii passed emissions limits similar to California's this month, and the bill is now on the governor's desk.

Cavanaugh of the Natural Resources Defense Council noted that both Republican and Democratic governors agreed to help develop the registry, a sign that sentiment across the country toward reducing greenhouse gases is now strong. He said the registry could provide more pressure on the Bush administration to shake its reluctance to address global warming.

"This is a very strong indication that most of the country, excluding the White House, is ready for emission limits," he said.

Senate panel OKs bill to boost fuel efficiency standard

By Richard Simon, Times Staff Writer

in the L.A. Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wed., May 9, 2007

WASHINGTON — In a sign of congressional concern over near record-high gasoline prices and global warming, a Senate committee Tuesday approved legislation calling for the most significant increase in vehicle fuel efficiency in decades.

The measure would boost the fleetwide average fuel economy standards to 35 mpg by 2020, up from 25. It now goes to the Senate, where a similar measure was defeated two years ago after heavy lobbying by automakers.

This time, however, the bill was being backed by a number of lawmakers who previously opposed tougher standards. And it comes when congressional Democratic leaders have pledged to pass legislation to address climate change.

Cars and light trucks, including sport utility vehicles, pickups and vans, account for about one-fifth of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions.

"This marks a pretty significant change in the Congress," said Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.), who has voted against tougher fuel-economy rules but is now sponsoring legislation to raise the standards.

The bill's approval by the Senate Commerce Committee marked only the opening round, with lawmakers from vehicle-manufacturing states vowing to fight a measure they believe could hurt the struggling U.S. auto industry. Environmental groups also assailed the bill, contending that it contained loopholes that could lead to lower increases than promised.

The bill represents the first major revision of the fuel-economy program established during the oil price shocks of the 1970s. It would require the nationwide fleet of cars and light trucks sold in the country to average 35 mpg by 2020. A 4% annual increase in fuel economy would be required for vehicles made from 2021 to 2030.

The legislation, however, would give the Transportation Department latitude to permit a lower standard if it determined that the costs of imposing stricter rules outweighed the benefits.

Currently, each automaker's car fleet must average 27.5 mpg, a requirement that has not changed for about 18 years, and light trucks must average 22.2 mpg, which will go to 24 by 2011.

The action came as gas prices moved back to center stage on Capitol Hill, with Democrats and Republicans sparring over each other's record in seeking to bring down energy costs.

Rep. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on oversight and investigations, announced that his panel would examine the causes behind fluctuations in fuel prices.

During Tuesday's Senate Commerce Committee meeting, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) recalled

driving past a filling station in San Francisco last weekend.

"We couldn't believe our eyes — \$4.25 a gallon!" she said.

Desperate to do something to respond to the high prices, the committee attached to the fuel-economy bill a measure that would establish new federal penalties for gas price-gouging.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), among the leading advocates for stricter fuel economy rules, cheered the committee vote.

"Legislation to improve fuel economy has been bottled up for more than two decades," she said. "Now we have a realistic chance at a strong bill that increases fuel economy by 10 mpg over 10 years — and 4% a year beyond that."

Environmentalists were less enthusiastic.

"On the one hand, it's a start," said Dan Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming program. "On the other hand, it's a pretty weak start. It doesn't actually require the administration to act, so there is no guarantee that fuel economy goes up."

Joan Claybrook, a former administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration who is now president of the watchdog group Public Citizen, called the bill "a political compromise that now compromises the very purpose of the fuel economy program."

They pledged to work to strengthen the measure as it moves through Congress, though that could set up a veto showdown with President Bush. Bush has called for tougher fuel economy rules, but opposes Congress mandating a standard.

Feinstein, however, said the only way that the full benefits of the bill would not be achieved was "if the government shows that the costs to the country as a whole would be greater than the benefits." And she added: "I believe this would be highly unlikely given the spike in gasoline prices, the national security and environmental costs of our oil dependency, and the huge fuel savings that would be achieved as a result of this bill."

Auto industry officials called the tougher standards "unattainable" and contended that they would deny consumers the SUVs they cherish.

"If higher standards make vehicles less attractive to consumers, vehicle sales will drop, negatively impacting auto dealers, suppliers, automakers and the U.S. economy," the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, an industry trade group, said in a letter to lawmakers.

The United Auto Workers also opposed the measure.

Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska, the committee's top Republican, said the bill was "not perfect, but it is a constructive step toward addressing the nation's energy crisis and reducing our dependence on foreign oil."

Board approves mine site report

Supervisors vote to OK Kaweah gravel project's environmental review.

By Erik Lacayo / The Fresno Bee

Wed., May 9, 2007

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors paved the way Tuesday for the creation of a sand and gravel mine in the Woodlake area.

Supervisors tentatively approved an environmental impact report for the project and denied an appeal filed by a local environmental group.

The Kaweah River Rock Company has been seeking approval for a 280-acre mine on land between the Kaweah River and Avenue 332 for several years.

Kaweah River Rock officials argued Tuesday that the company's current gravel and sand mine on the St. John's River has become depleted and that local builders now have to get supplies from outside the area.

A new mine will help lower the cost of building the county's infrastructure, company officials said.

Representatives of a local environmental group called Valley Citizens for Water said the project could have adverse effects on the area's ground-water resources.

A Tulare County Superior Court judge ruled last year that the project's original environmental impact report failed to address some of the possible impacts the project might have on the area.

The newly revised environmental report adequately addresses concerns over the project's effect on air quality, ground water and flooding, said Whit Manly, a lawyer representing Kaweah River Rock.

Yet one Woodlake resident said he still had concerns about the project.

Del Strange said the quarry would be near an aquifer, which is a source for ground water.

"While demand for water in our county continues to increase at an alarming rate, supplies are shrinking," he said. "That's why it is more important than ever to protect our water resources and use [water] wisely."

Strange said the company should look to the nearby foothills for sand and gravel to avoid any possible risks to the aquifer system.

Manly said using the foothills would have an even greater economic and environmental cost.

Bruce George, general manager of the Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District, said he was originally concerned about the project, but now supports it because the mine will create a basin that can be used to store water.

While Strange showed concern about the supply of water, others supported the project and said they are worried about the dwindling supply of sand and gravel for making concrete and asphalt.

Having a local supply of sand and gravel is important for the economy of the county as it continues to grow, said Bob Keenan, executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Tulare and Kings Counties.

Supervisors tentatively approved the environmental impact report 4-0 vote. Supervisor Mike Ennis abstained from voting.

"I am convinced that [concerns] have been adequately addressed," Supervisor Steven Worthley said.

Worthley said county staff needs to review written comments submitted to the board Tuesday before the project could be formally approved, which he called a "formality."

Julie Bigham, chairwoman of Valley Citizens for Water, said she will wait until the project is formally approved before the group decides what its next step will be in opposing the creation of the sand and gravel mine.

Quarry gets tentative OK

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wed., May 9, 2007

A rock-quarry company's 21-year battle to expand its operations has inched closer to an end.

Tulare County supervisors voted on Tuesday to tentatively approve an environmental impact report and surface-mining permit. They denied an appeal from a group representing concerned neighbors.

The 4-0 vote takes Kaweah River Rock Company one step closer to a new sand-and-gravel mine in the Woodlake area. Supervisor Mike Ennis abstained.

Supervisors will meet May 22 to make a final decision.

Kaweah River Rock Co. has tried for two decades to expand its operations over the objections of neighbors. Opponents say mitigation measures for groundwater supplies, the potential effects on the flow of groundwater-fed wells and the effects on air quality have not been addressed.

The new quarry would be on a 280-acre site east of State Route 245 between Avenue 332 and the Kaweah River.

Supervisors approved the project once before, but a lawsuit challenging their decision put the project on hold. Tulare County Superior Court Judge Paul Vortmann invalidated the supervisors' decision, citing several errors the county made in granting the permits.

Kaweah River Rock Co. officials came back Tuesday and presented what they called a revised environmental impact report. During the meeting, supervisors agreed that Kaweah River Rock Co., which supplies a third of the county's aggregate materials, addressed all environmental concerns.

Representatives for Valley Citizens for Water, the rock company's main opponent, asked the supervisors to delay a tentative decision until air- and water-quality issues could be addressed. Supervisor Steve Worthley said the permit process has been lengthy and complete.

"We started with many issues, now we are down to a few," Worthley said. "I'm convinced that they have been adequately addressed."

Other supervisors echoed Worthley's comments.

Del Strange, a representative with Valley Citizens for Water, disagreed. He said documentation provided to supervisors outlined new concerns.

"We've shown supervisors that there are significant issues that have been side-stepped and not addressed straight on and not given a good, true, honest answer," Strange said.

Dave Harrald, general manager with Kaweah River Rock Co., did not rule out the possibility of another delay.

"Well, there's always an appeal available," Harrald said. "[But] my sense is the opposition isn't as strong as it once was."

Railroad offers to buy trucks to serve LA-Long Beach ports

By ALEX VEIGA, AP Business Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, May 8, 2007

Los Angeles (AP) -- Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp. said Tuesday it would invest more than \$75 million to buy cleaner-burning trucks for hauling cargo containers from the nation's largest port complex to a proposed rail transfer hub.

The Fort Worth, Texas-based railroad operator has been trying to generate community support in favor of building the facility, dubbed the Southern California International Gateway.

Some residents have raised concerns over the potential for pollution and noise from truck traffic moving between the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and the proposed facility, north of Terminal Island and about four miles from the adjacent ports.

To help ease those concerns, the company said it was prepared to purchase a fleet of new trucks to reduce fuel emissions. The trucks would be limited to travel on nonresidential routes, the company said.

"We anticipate needing about 400 trucks," said Lena Kent, a Burlington Northern Santa Fe spokeswoman.

A clean air initiative approved last year by the ports includes a measure to replace diesel trucks at the port terminals with clean-fuel vehicles within five years.

Other measures proposed by the company include giving local residents priority for new jobs at the facility; building a wall to reduce the impact of noise from freeway traffic; and installing landscaping to improve air quality and aesthetics.

Martin Schlageter, spokesman for the Coalition for Clean Air, said the move by Burlington Northern Santa Fe represents a significant commitment on the part of the company but added that it shows there are problems with the project.

"We've got grave concerns about the location of this facility and the pollution that it's going to bring to a neighborhood that's already overwhelmed with port-related pollution," Schlageter said.

The company said the proposed facility is needed to help accommodate the volume of cargo container traffic from the Far East, which is expected to at least double during the next 15 to 20 years, by some estimates. The port complex handles 44 percent of all U.S. import cargo containers.

Rail capacity at the ports is nearing full capacity. Cargo that cannot be loaded on rail cars at the ports is trucked to downtown Los Angeles to another facility for transport.

The rail-transfer hub would connect directly to the Alameda Corridor, a stretch of railway separated from street traffic that carries cargo from the Los Angeles ports to destinations across the U.S.

The company estimates the gateway facility would divert at least a million truck trips annually from Interstate 710.

An environmental impact report on the project has yet to be completed. The ports' harbor commissioners are expected to vote on whether to approve the project early next year, Kent said.

[\(Note: The following commentary erroneously attributes the Air District's Clean, Green Yard Machines lawnmower trade-out program to the state Air Resources Board.\)](#)
[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Wed., May 9, 2007:](#)

Price column: Alternatives to mowers of traditional kind needed

By Robert Price, Californian Columnist

If you were thinking about trading in your old, foul, rackety, smoke-spewing lawn mower for one of those new, cordless electrics that the California Air Resources Board has been offering at a drastic price reduction, forget it. You're too late.

CARB had been offering 1,000 of the \$420 electric mowers for \$150 and an operational gas-powered trade-in. But you had to hurry: the program was to last just six weeks. Well, a week later, all the mowers have been snapped up -- and the greatest number of them found new homes in the northern part of the San Joaquin Valley.

This matters because the southern San Joaquin Valley -- that's us -- has the poorer air, especially when it comes to particulate matter. The reasons are well-documented from topographical to industrial, but our suburban lawn culture is high on the list. Mowers (and their evil cousins, leaf blowers) send dust and fuel exhaust into the air by the ton, and they do so noisily.

Electric mowers aren't going to make a huge difference anytime soon. Every little bit helps, but manufacturers need to build more powerful versions with stronger, more efficient charging systems. A one-hour charge -- about the best you can expect from an electric these things -- does professional gardeners no good whatsoever.

The short- and medium-term solution is greater efficiency in the gas-powered mowers Americans still overwhelmingly favor.

That's been the plan in California for years. The state is finally in a position to act.

The EPA has granted California long-awaited permission to implement emission controls on lawn mowers and other small-engine machines -- a step that should enable California to cut smog emissions from those big-time polluters by about 35 percent.

The EPA's decision to allow California to impose tougher pollution standards ends several years of political stalemate between U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and U.S. Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., who's been blocking the change in order to protect Briggs & Stratton Corp., the nation's largest small-engine maker, which is based in his state.

Specifically, Briggs & Stratton had resisted California's efforts to require catalytic converters in small engines. Bond put the company's ledger book ahead of Californians' lungs -- claiming, among other things, that catalytic converters put the mowers at greater risk for fire. An EPA study last year found the converters posed no such safety problem.

The Feinstein/Bond skirmish isn't the only example of governmental foot-dragging when it comes to clean air. Just last month, the Supreme Court rejected the Bush administration's argument that it had no legal authority under the Clean Air Act to limit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases released from new cars. Since then, Bush has given no indication he will direct the EPA to take action.

Lawn mowers might seem like small potatoes next to automobiles, but it all adds up. And, fact is, a single gas mower can emit as much pollution as 40 new or late-model cars running over the same period of time, according to the state Air Resources Board.

Electric mowers produce no emissions and are lighter, quieter and easier to use, but until they're adaptable to heavy-duty use, low-emission gas mowers are the only logical alternatives short of no-mow landscaping. If they're efficient enough, low-emission gas mowers may be better solutions even after better technology is available for electric models.

In either case, we need to get the old smoke-spewers out of circulation as quickly as possible. The San Joaquin Valley air basin isn't just battling particulates, it's also in "serious nonattainment" for the national eight-hour ozone standard, according to the EPA.

Widespread interest in electric mowers bodes well for the future of our lungs, even if the northern half of the valley snapped up more than its share.

The move to cleaner-burning gas mowers, which are already available at your local hardware and home improvement store, is even better news. Here in the land of perfectly manicured lawns and low, thick smog, we need all the help we can get.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, May 9, 2007](#)

Air quality is better, not worse

The air quality and vision is better in Merced County today than it was in the early 1980s! There are many days when the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Mountain range can be seen. In the early 1980s, if you saw one, you could not see the other. And there were many places where you could not see either one!

In the early 1980s, I was in commercial agriculture tractor work in Merced and Madera counties. In 1998, I was in El Nido and when walking a grower's field, I suddenly realized I could see both ranges! I then told the farmer what I saw, he looked and he was surprised by what we saw.

The entire crap about asthma caused by air pollution is BS! The rise in the suffering of people with asthmas is from backpack air blowers, used by gardeners, blowing more and more pollen into the air blowing the lawns and sidewalks of grass and leaves! And of course you can't believe that! You have to blame agriculture for burning too much diesel and making dust!

I am so glad that when they are not doing either job, again, I will have passed from the earth.

Wayne R. Stickles, Merced

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., May 9, 2007:](#)

Bad air means job security for health workers

The recent article about putting off cleaning up the air for our area made me very unhappy at first reading. After some thought I changed my mind.

As a respiratory therapist, I realized I have job security due to all the illness and disease caused by poor air quality and pollution.

It is very unfortunate that a number of people will have to die from all the disease and illness attributed to and caused by air pollution. The millions of dollars spent annually on the treatment of those diseases could certainly be put to better use.

Oh well, at least all the health care providers are assured of work for years to come.

Cal Crane, Madera

[Letter to the Editor, Visalia Times-Delta, Wed., May 9, 2007:](#)

Air board action did the Valley a disservice

It was business as usual April 30 at the San Joaquin Valley Air District, as they voted 9-2 to subject residents of the Valley to 11 more years of dirty air. For many the result was expected. Nonetheless, there was a hope that the board would heed the requests of dozens of concerned

residents - doctors, mothers, businessmen, farm workers, young, old - to reject this plan, and demand a plan that cleans the air by 2017. That hope was crushed as the lead agency for cleaning up our air showed the public through their action that they are more concerned with the economic cost to industry than the health of Valley residents.

However, not all was lost. The two dissenting votes by Councilwoman Brar of Arvin and Councilman Perea of Fresno, illustrate that when urban and rural communities, most impacted by air pollution are given a voice, they will stand up for what is right.

Additionally the testimonies of the many doctors, who spoke of the negative health consequences of a 2024 delay, show the need for medical expertise on the board.

This kind of decision reiterates the importance of efforts to reform the board to add a voice for public health and diverse communities. I urge everyone disgusted with Monday's decision to support State Senate Bill 719 which would expand the Valley Air Board membership from 11 to 15 members, including 2 public health experts, and balance the representation.

Daniela Simunovic, Delano

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Wed., May 9, 2007:](#)

Breathe easier, expand board

Expand valley air board to include medical and air quality specialists.

A proposal to make the governing board of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District's less responsive to political and parochial concerns, and more focused on cleaning up the valley's polluted air, recently cleared a political hurdle.

On a 4-0 vote, the Senate Local Government Committee passed the measure on to the Appropriations Committee.

The bill by Sen. Michael Machado, D-Linden, is a long way from being approved by the entire Senate and Assembly, and signed by Gov. Schwarzenegger. A companion bill by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, which ties funding and fees to passage of Machado's bill, also faces a long road ahead.

But an optimistic sign is the bipartisan support the effort is drawing this time around. The committee's Democrat chairwoman, who voted against similar measures in the past, and a Republican senator on the committee, gave the initial nod.

Machado has tried and failed in the past to change the make-up of the regional air board that sets rules and adopts plans to clean up the valley's polluted air. Efforts failed primarily over arguments that it eroded "local control."

It's a common argument tossed out. Often it means that political and special interests -- in this case polluting industries -- can exercise more "control" over "local" officials who rely on campaign contributions.

After a long-fought legislative battle, the eight-county district itself was created in the early 1990s over "local control" objections. Before, the boards of supervisors in each of the valley's counties served as the local decision makers over air rules and air quality in their counties.

The idea was ludicrous. Air pollution did not stop at a county's border. Breezes swirl pollution around in the big, mountain-lined tub that forms the valley's "air basin."

Repeated failures of valley counties to meet federal air cleanup deadlines and the obvious inability counties to develop effective air cleanup strategies on a piecemeal county-by-county basis prompted the

Legislature to approve creation of a unified valley air pollution control district.

While the district has made cleanup progress, the valley's polluted air still does not meet federal standards. Just last week, the air district board requested a nearly two-decade extension of the federal deadline for cleaning up the air.

The district's 11-member board now is comprised of representatives of each of the counties' boards of supervisors and selected city representatives.

Machado's bill would expand that to 15 members, give major cities in the district, including Bakersfield, permanent seats, and allow the governor to appoint two air quality or medical specialists to the board.

This minor tweaking of the governing board should lessen the lock-grip local political and economic interests have on cleanup decisions. It should give a voice to the fears valley residents have about the quality of their air, which is making many people sick and prematurely killing others.

Opponents argue that expanding the board will slow cleanup efforts.

They must be kidding. Efforts and cleanup to this point could hardly be slower.

[Stockton Record editorial, May 9, 2007:](#)

MORE BREATHING ROOM

DEADLINE DELAYS WON'T MAKE THE GRADE FOR SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY'S AIR QUALITY

Suppose your child came home from school with a report card that included one C, one F and one passing grade.

Would you spin cartwheels or ground the youngster?

That's the bad-news, good-news dilemma facing San Joaquin County officials after checking out the American Lung Association's annual report card on air quality.

The county received a C for smog, an F for soot (short-term) and a "pass" for yearly particulate matter.

So, we're not going to make the dean's List.

We fared better than Stanislaus or Sacramento counties in the group's annual State of the Air report. Both counties received F's for smog.

Air quality is an ongoing issue in the Valley, where thousands of people suffer from asthma and the politics of breathing sometimes also can be choking.

Lung Association officials released their report the day after Valley air regulators debated a program that would allow them more time to meet federal standards for ozone.

Critics of the report note that ozone can vary from location to location in a county and that the grades aren't reliable.

They also are critical of the data, gleaned from 2003 to 2005, noting the air is much cleaner since 2005.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials have been criticized by environmentalists for their desire to extend the deadline for meeting ozone standards until 2023.

We're on record as agreeing with that demand. Sixteen years is too long to wait for those guidelines to be met.

We're more concerned with making the final grade than with incremental progress reports that might or might not be valid.

Report card

Air-pollution grades issued by the American Lung Association:

- San Joaquin County: C for ozone (smog); F for short-term particulate matter (soot); passing grade for yearly particulate matter standard
- Sacramento County: F for ozone; F for short-term particulate matter; passing grade for yearly particulate matter standard
- Stanislaus County: F for ozone; F for short-term particulate matter; passing grade for yearly particulate matter standard
- Calaveras County: F for ozone; A for short-term particulate matter; passing grade for yearly particulate matter standard.