

[Fresno Bee Editorial](#)

Separate but equal?

Be very careful with proposals that may dilute Valley's clean air efforts.

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The northernmost counties in the Valley's air district think they're getting unfairly labeled by being lumped in with counties farther south, where air quality problems are worse. They may have a point, insofar as they claim to have less severe problems than the rest of the district. But Balkanizing the existing district is not a step that should be taken lightly.

San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties tried last year to break themselves away from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District altogether and set up their own air quality agency. That fizzled in the face of resistance from the southern counties, not to mention state and federal agencies.

Now the three counties will ask the district next month to consider creation of a separate clean-up plan for themselves. Their motivation is the stigma they say they feel being attached to counties, such as Fresno and Kern, where air quality problems are much worse. The fear is that businesses may not wish to locate, or to remain, in those northern counties if they are lumped in with the southern areas.

They have a case: There are far fewer bad air days in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties than in Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern. Does that rise to the level of separate treatment? Perhaps, but we remain to be convinced.

This move might not look so sinister to others if the northern counties hadn't first tried to secede. And there is more than a little suspicion that the northern counties are really seeking to avoid responsibility and its attendant costs. Economic concerns are valid and important, but so is cleaner air.

We are all responsible for making the Valley's air better -- all of us in California, not just in the Valley. Coastal Californians have never had trouble making Valley residents responsible for building freeways in Los Angeles and repairing Bay Area bridges -- we are owed the same aid with our problems.

And we don't have a bigger problem right now than dirty air.

Why can't the Valley district have a single plan that takes differences in each area into account? Why not pursue that possibility before hauling out the bigger guns of separate treatment and separate status? There is far too much at stake in this effort for false steps.

[Letters to the Editor Visalia Times Delta, August 15, 2003:](#)

Air quality: Everyone can do something

A recent survey shows that Californians are concerned about air pollution but don't connect it to their own vehicles. Considering that on-road vehicles account for 37 percent of the Valley's smog problem, it's important to plan activities to help reduce air pollution.

Simple things such as banking at the grocery store, packing a lunch and combining errands reduce trips and emissions. So does postponing single-destination trips until you can do them with other outings. Sharing shuttle duties to school and youth activities gives busy parents -- and our air -- a break. Amtrak lets you work or enjoy family time while sparing the air.

The way you drive impacts emissions. Hard accelerations use extra gas and pollute more. Cruise control keeps the speed constant, allowing the engine to operate more efficiently. Typically, new vehicles are cleaner than older ones. But before you buy, consider the mileage and emission

ratings, which can be found on new car stickers and the Internet. Larger vehicles usually have worse emissions and mile-age.

Look for "super ultra-low" or "ultra-low" emission vehicles. Electric-gasoline hybrid cars are affordable, get great mileage, run clean, don't need to be plugged in and generate their own electricity. They also get up to highway speed quickly. No plug, little pollution, but plenty of zip. It's encouraging that most Central Californians recognize vehicle emissions as a serious problem. But it's also important to understand how our daily decisions impact air quality. If we want to breathe clean air, we must make wise choices.

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