

Radio ads slam council members

Spots raise complaints about pensions; officials call claims cowardly

By JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Oct. 18, 2005

The radio advertisements drip with sarcastic venom.

"Hello, you've reached the Bakersfield Pension Jackpot Hotline. If you're over 50 years old, and work for the city, you may qualify," the announcer says.

He goes on to blame Bakersfield City Council members Sue Benham, David Couch and Mike Maggard for voting for lucrative public employee pensions -- pensions that have drained millions out of city coffers.

Couch and Maggard called the ads cowardly and misleading political hit pieces.

"There's never been a hit piece born that didn't have a political agenda behind it," said Maggard, who recently announced he will run for county supervisor next year. "My hunch is that I've really angered someone either in my efforts to [clean up the air](#) or in my efforts raise the standards of development in Bakersfield."

The ads were placed on four local radio stations by the Consumer Alliance for a Strong Economy, a Sacramento nonprofit that, a year ago, attacked state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, on his voting record.

Florez, at the time, said a legal loophole allowed the Consumer Alliance to avoid reporting who contributed money to fund the \$315,000 in radio and television ads that targeted him.

He called the Consumer Alliance cowardly too.

But group spokesman Chris Wysocki said his group has 10,000 members and isn't a front for local political groups or enemies of the three council members.

"There is no one donor here that is looking to do anything," he said.

There are Alliance members in Bakersfield, he said, but the decision to spend around \$20,000 against Benham, Maggard and Couch was made by Alliance leaders.

Wysocki and his firm have also worked for the campaigns of prominent state Republicans and worked on the successful recall battle against Gov. Gray Davis.

So why should a state political group target three council members in Bakersfield for a decision made unanimously by the full seven-member City Council?

Like many other communities in the state, Bakersfield approved lucrative pension packages in 2001, and then struggled to pay for them when the tech stock bubble burst and employee pension funds lost tens of millions of dollars in value.

Maggard, Couch and Benham voted for the pensions.

But so did Councilwomen Irma Carson and Jacquie Sullivan, Councilman Harold Hanson and retired Councilman Mark Salvaggio.

"We all voted for that," Carson said. "At the time we voted for that, we had money. It was the trend in the state."

Wysocki said Benham, Couch and Maggard didn't try to reverse the pension decision, even though they had a chance a couple of months ago.

"Those three seem to be the drivers of the council. It would seem to me that those three, if they acted as a block, could facilitate positive change," he said.

The recent pension discussion Wysocki mentioned was actually a debate over what council goals would say about controlling pension costs.

The heated discussion was launched by Councilman Zack Scrivner, the only member of the current council who wasn't around to vote on pensions in 2001. Changes to city pension programs must be negotiated with city unions.

"I can't imagine that they would go to this trouble over some council goal-setting language," Benham said of the Alliance's attacks.

Maggard and Couch said there is only one reason to criticize select council members for a decision all members made: politics.

There are many ideas about who could be behind the political attack -- developers, building industry officials and rival politicians.

"My guess is it's coming from the same person who sent out the untruthful e-mail about me and Mike and Sue earlier," Couch said.

The anonymous e-mail, sent in mid-September, accused Benham, Couch and Maggard of "seizing, without payment, vast private lands" in northeast Bakersfield.

Maggard has proposed stricter rules for city development on the sensitive Kern River bluffs. Benham and Couch support the new rules in committee meetings.

The e-mail went out after a meeting in which Maggard and Couch talked about property rights.

Brian Todd of the Building Industry Association said he saw the e-mail and said it was inaccurate in its attack.

"I have nothing to do with the e-mail. It's a hit piece. I deleted it and didn't give it a second thought," he said. "It showed that whoever wrote it didn't attend, because it contained factual inaccuracies."

Property owners have clashed with Maggard about the new rules.

Couch, Benham and Maggard said the radio attack ads are in the same vein as the e-mail.

"I guess they're trying to stir up trouble and create division on the council," Benham said.

But the council, increasingly, is becoming divided on its own.

Benham, Couch and Maggard have clashed philosophically with Scrivner and Sullivan over pension reform, credit for the battle against graffiti and, most recently, council ward reapportionment.

"We've had some split votes and some differences of opinion," Scrivner said. "If I'm bringing debate to the city council now I think it's a good thing."

But Sullivan said the radio ads are unfair to attack only half the sitting council members who made the pension decision.

Scrivner said he didn't know how much, in the world of politics, people should expect things to be fair.

From the Consumer Alliance for a Strong Economy:

"Hello, you've reached the Bakersfield Pension Jackpot Hotline. If you're over 50 years old, and work for the city, you may qualify.

"A pension deal passed by council members Sue Benham, David Couch and Mike Maggard means if you retire today you could earn nearly 100 percent of your current salary for the rest of your life.

"To learn more about the sweetheart pension deal, press 1 now.

"The Bakersfield Californian reported the city had to put an extra 14 million dollars into the pension fund to pay for benefits passed by council members Benham, Couch and Maggard.

"Even liberal San Francisco had enough sense to avoid bankruptcy and reject this type of deal.

"If you would like to get the same jackpot council members Benham, Couch and Maggard gave to the public employee unions, press 2 now.

"We're sorry, the sweetheart pension deal passed by council members Benham, Couch and Maggard is only available to public employee union members.

"Please call city hall at 326-3767 today. Thanks for calling.

"Brought to you by Consumer Alliance for a Strong Economy."

Residents protest weed abatement

By Lee McKay

Madera Tribune

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

More than 20 property owners gathered in the Madera County Board of Supervisor Chambers Tuesday to protest what they feel are unwarranted and excessive weed abatement fees, charged without sufficient notice.

Tuesday's agenda on weed abatement did not include hearing requests from property owners on this issue.

After discussion, Max Rodriguez suggested, "Let's hear the people."

They agreed to be heard by the board with the understanding that no action could be taken at this meeting.

"The Weed Abatement issue was improperly agendized by the fire department," Supervisor Vern Moss said. "All we could do was listen today and forward the issue to a future meeting."

Madera County resident Sharon Tuck, in speaking to the supervisors, waved a statement from the fire department, charging her \$25,000 for weed abatement. "Ridiculous, some of this property is County owned road easement."

Sixty-four lots that had been held by the building moratorium lifted several weeks ago were involved in the \$25,000. That is \$390 per lot. Tuck maintains she was told by the planning department that she could not plow her lot because of complaints from neighbors about the dust. Tuck said it is her property and she does not understand why she would be told she could not disc the area.

"We are not out to earn money for the county with these fees," Fire Marshal Jeff Hartsuyker said. "Our sole purpose is to limit the number of fires and the damage they cause. We have limited resources for fire fighting in this county and this program helps to cut the number of fires.

Contractor service for actual weeding of a lot is \$80, administrative cost is \$60 and the remaining \$250 is an actual fine, just as parking ticket.

When asked about notification, Hartsuyker said, "Advance notification is included in the tax bill, which is mailed in late October or early November," which is a five month warning.

The Fire Department advertised in the Madera Tribune, Fresno Bee, Independent Ranchos, and Chowchilla news. In addition, last year, the Tribune ran two extra articles concerning the weed abatement.

"We offered alternate protection measures that were not accepted by property owners," he said.

Neighbors aren't standing idle on diesel pollution Communities sick of exhaust plan to remind truckers of rules

By Douglas Fischer, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald Tues., Oct. 18, 2005

Wafaa Aborashed's San Leandro neighborhood shares a wall with Costco superstore, but that wall can't keep out the pollution from idling diesel delivery trucks that wafts across her yard from dawn till dusk.

She has tried calls to the local police, to no avail. Today she and others in similarly afflicted neighborhoods across the Bay Area will take to the streets to tell the truckers themselves of a year-old rule limiting idling to five minutes or less.

"We want to teach them that diesel pollution really exacerbates asthma and keeps children home," said Aborashed, president of the Davis West Neighborhood Coalition. "We are constantly dealing with kids who miss out on school. ... That is affecting their lives."

Diesel pollution and its associated ailments, notably asthma, long have shown a tendency to hit poor and minority communities harder than affluent and white ones.

Studies of local communities by Oakland-based Pacific Institute found 90 times the diesel emissions in West Oakland than the average for the rest of California. Portions of West Contra Costa County have 40 times the emissions.

"That's where the ports, the truck transfer facilities, the infrastructure for goods movement are," said Meena Palaniappan, program director at the Pacific Institute. "It's in the flatlands, it's where the people of color live, it's where the poor communities are."

That exposure has consequences, Palaniappan said. Communities along the Interstate 880 corridor, a major truck route, have twice the asthma hospitalization rates as communities fronting the Interstate 580 corridor, where trucks are prohibited. A child in West Oakland, she said, is seven times more likely to be hospitalized for asthma than an average California kid.

For these reasons, activists will be closely watching two votes concerning diesel emissions expected Thursday by state air regulators.

The most controversial would weaken a state rule requiring sharp reductions in nitrogen oxide emissions — or NOX, a smog precursor — from bus engines by 2007.

Diesel engine manufacturers say they cannot meet that standard. Natural gas engine manufacturers say they can. The Bay Area is alone among the state's urban areas with a diesel-based fleet, and scientists at the California Air Resources Board are expected to urge directors to ease off on the requirement.

That would allow agencies such as AC Transit to buy buses that meet a more lax federal standard that allows six times the NOX.

The air board views that as best among several unsavory choices, agency spokesman Jerry Martin said — particularly as the federal standard requires manufacturers to meet California's lower emissions target by 2010. Keeping the standard in place likely means transit agencies would not be able to buy a new diesel engine for those three years, as none would be available that meet California's law.

On the truck side, the board is expected Thursday to close a loophole that allows sleeper cabs to idle indefinitely if the driver is resting.

"What happens is residents wake up with soot on their walls," said Linda Weiner, director of air-quality advocacy for the American Lung Association of San Francisco and San Mateo Counties.

But even if, as expected, the board closes the loophole, enforcement remains a concern. Which is why community activists in Oakland, San Leandro, San Francisco, Sonoma and western Contra Costa County today will be out distributing fliers to truckers and residents.

"We need to find ways to wake people up," Aborashed said. Truck drivers "are on our streets constantly, and they have no idea how it's affecting our children."

Runoff goes into the ozone

A new Dana Point facility relies on highly reactive oxygen to cleanse water.

By KENDRA MARR

The Orange County Register

Tuesday, October 18, 2005

DANA POINT - A new water-disinfecting system targeting Salt Creek and Monarch Beach has city officials and environmentalists bubbling in excitement.

Dana Point on Monday introduced the country's first water-treatment plant to exclusively use ozone bubbles to cleanse urban runoff. The Salt Creek Ozone Treatment Facility is designed to kill bacteria in the water draining from Salt Creek to the ocean during the dry season without leaving a chemical residue.

"Everyone diverts the problem to sewage plants instead of going upstream and fixing it," said John Robertus, executive officer of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board. "It's a different attitude here."

Both Salt Creek Beach and Monarch Beach have received F grades in water quality from various ocean-water monitoring programs. During the 2004 dry season - April through October - health-warning signs were posted at Salt Creek Beach on 108 days. The goal is for the \$6.7 million facility to fix that.

"It was getting worse," said Pat Fuscoe, chairman of Miocean, a nonprofit dedicated to cleaning up Southern California beaches. "It scares me that in just a few years it has gotten this bad."

Dana Point hired a consultant to explore options for cleaning up its beaches.

The consultant ruled out ultraviolet radiation because the water was too murky. Chemicals, such as chlorine, left residue in the water and are hazardous to store.

Ozone treatment was the most reliable and cost-effective for this site, said Brad Fowler, director of public works.

Environmentalists also said ozone was the best solution for the ocean.

"Even though ozone is hazardous, it breaks down into oxygen very fast, so it's relatively safe," said Rick Wilson, coastal management coordinator of the Surfrider Foundation.

Ozone in the upper atmosphere protects the planet from ultraviolet radiation, but it is harmful to breathe at ground level. The ozone used in the plant is either contained or destroyed in the chemical-reaction process, said Paul Cooley, vice president of PBS&J, the engineering company that designed the facility.

The creek water is captured at the river mouth and pumped 1,000 feet to the plant, a small building on the edge of the golf course at the St. Regis Monarch Beach resort.

The water then runs through a set of filters before it undergoes "ozonation."

Disinfection occurs when ozone, a highly unstable gas that breaks down bacteria, comes into contact with the polluted water.

The quick reaction kills pathogens and reverts ozone to oxygen.

"It's a very strong oxidant - better than chlorine," Michael Stenstrom, a UCLA civil and environmental engineering professor, said. "It's the best disinfectant we have."

The high cost of running an ozone facility prevents others from building ozone-only facilities, Stenstrom said.

Dana Point received a \$4 million state grant and a \$150,000 donation from Miocean, Fowler said.

"We can't afford to have an ugly beach that looks like coffee and smells bad," Fuscoe said. "It would be an economic catastrophe."

Dana Point will pay the South Coast Water District \$90,000 a year to run and maintain the plant.

Several water-treatment facilities in Southern California use the disinfecting ozone bubbles as one stage in a multistep cleansing process, but they are nothing like Salt Creek.

"This project is the next step in water-treatment technology," Cooley said. "We really think it'll set the trend."

Prop 76 could block surplus spending by state

Lynda Gledhill, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
SF Chronicle Tues., Oct. 18, 2005

Sacramento -- Teachers and education groups have led the charge against Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget control initiative, Proposition 76, on the grounds that it would reduce school funding guarantees.

But advocates for the poor, environmentalists and transportation officials who have studied the measure -- though not universally opposed to the initiative -- say Prop. 76 could produce scenarios in which benefits for the medically indigent expire suddenly and road construction money accumulates with no legal authority to spend all of it.

The ballot measure touches on almost every aspect of how the state can spend money. It would require that the state spend no more than the previous three year's average revenue and the governor would be given new powers to make cuts if the states finances fall out of balance.

"The longer I look at the measure, the more I think I don't really know what would be happening," said Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project. The nonpartisan group, which analyzes policy with the goal of helping low- and middle-income families, has not taken a position on the measure, although Ross said she has a lot of concerns about its impacts.

Proponents for the poor are worried the governor could unilaterally cut money from the budget that would then cause critical programs -- such as Medi-Cal -- to go unfunded.

That's because while the governor would be allowed to cut money from a program, there would be no authority for him to lower monthly benefit checks.

For example, if the governor cut the budget by 1/12, the program would continue to pay full monthly payments for 11 months, but "the spending reduction would probably result in recipients receiving no state-funded benefits during the last month of the fiscal year (June)," said Elizabeth Hill, the nonpartisan legislative analyst.

"Does that mean that all seniors who have Medi-Cal will be kicked out nursing home for the month of June? That seems ridiculous, but it's the only possible answer given the way (Prop.) 76 is drafted," said Anthony Wright, executive director of Health Access, which is a statewide advocacy group working for health care for all California citizens.

Wright, who is the proponent of a labor-backed prescription drug measure on the special election ballot, said he sees Prop. 76 as the most important initiative affecting health care in the state.

"If a child breaks their leg in the wrong month, are they just out of luck?" Wright wondered. "There are a lot of unanswered questions and real concerns about Prop. 76."

Both sides acknowledge that these issues might ultimately be decided by the courts if the measure is approved by voters.

Tom Campbell, who is on leave as the director of finance to campaign for the governor's initiatives, said program shortfalls won't happen if lawmakers and the governor work together.

"The Legislature can provide how the cut is accommodated," he said. "There is nothing to prohibit them doing a percentage reduction."

Counties could also get hit by this provision because under state law they are the partly responsible for funding benefits through CalWorks, the state's welfare program. Counties use a combination of federal, state and local money for these payments, and if state money runs out, counties would have to make up the difference, the legislative analyst warns.

"Clearly, that is a potentially unintended consequence of how the measure was drafted and a real life concern for county government," said James Keene, executive director of the California State Association of Counties. That group narrowly endorsed Prop. 76.

Another area of concern is for some programs that rely on special funds. The state's nearly \$100 billion budget contains \$23.3 billion in special fund money, which is separate from the general fund. These funds are usually self-supporting, so that specific fees are dedicated for specific purposes.

For example, the gas tax is dedicated for transportation programs, and environmental special funds use fees that are collected from industry and consumers to pay for things like air pollution control and waste recycling. California State University fees are sent into a special fund.

Also included in special funds are special taxes voters have approved over the years, including a tobacco tax dedicated for children's programs and a tax on upper-income earners set aside for mental health programs.

Under Prop. 76, special funds are subject to the same spending limit as the general fund. So if a special fund takes in more than the cap allows to be spent, that money would have to remain in the fund. (The surplus could be spent in a future year when overall revenues are higher and more spending is permitted.)

Ross said their estimates show that \$43 million in tobacco tax money would not have been able to be spent this year if Prop. 76 had been in place since 1987, along with \$88 million in CSU fees and \$246 million in gas taxes.

"You could end up in a situation where the fund is up against the cap for several years running and there builds up a large reserve," Ross said.

Paul Mason with Sierra Club California said the measure would handcuff environmental programs.

"A lot of these are essentially user fees. People are creating the problem, so they pay money to address the problem," he said. "Why would we want to artificially hamstring that?"

Transportation officials also acknowledge that state taxes people pay at the pump would not necessarily get to be spent right away on road projects, something that could frustrate voters.

"The expectation when people pay the tax at the pump is that in return they want the money used for transportation improvements," said Michael Lawson, executive director of Transportation California. "The money could at least temporarily can be held hostage because of the spending limits."

But Lawson said a Prop. 76 prohibition on raiding the transportation account to balance the budget as the governor and lawmakers have done in years past far outweighs any concern that some transportation money may be held temporarily in limbo.

Campbell said special funds were not exempted from Prop. 76's spending cap out of concern that lawmakers would try to shift more general fund money into those accounts as a way of sidestepping spending limitations.

"The Legislature could have decided that any program should be paid out of special fund, thereby getting out of the cap," he said.

Bay's water grab tough to swallow

Modesto Bee, Tues., Oct. 18, 2005

By JEFF JARDINE - BEE LOCAL COLUMNIST

San Francisco wants more water. San Francisco wants more power.

San Francisco always wants more of everything. And if history tells us anything, San Francisco usually gets what it wants unless Los Angeles wants it more.

The Bay Area's gluttonous appetite for the resources of the Sierra and the San Joaquin Valley constitute a study in struggle, as much among its own residents as with the southern half of the state.

We here in the valley, as usual, are left caught in the crossfire, with little ability to influence the debate.

San Francisco has the best drinking water of any major city in the United States and probably the world, and gained it by damming picturesque Hetch Hetchy Valley through what amounted to a real estate scam in the early 1900s.

Yet, the Sierra Club wants to tear down the dam that holds back the very water that pours through the pipes at its San Francisco headquarters.

San Franciscans oppose any pumping out of the San Joaquin River, even during good rainfall years, because pumping hurts fish populations.

"But it's OK for them to build a fourth pipeline (for Hetch Hetchy)," said DeeDee D'Adamo, an aide for U.S. Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

That idea died last week simply because it cost too much, officials said, while environmentalists claimed credit. See? There they go again.

Instead, San Francisco's Public Utilities Commission voted to rebuild the three aging lines that cross Stanislaus County. The city takes 265 million gallons daily from the Tuolumne River system and wants 25 million more per day.

Meanwhile, Modesto and Ceres plan to spend \$25 million on the Tuolumne River Regional Park based upon current flows - not a river diminished to a trickle if San Francisco gets the additional water. And it will eventually get the water, simply because it has the power to do so.

The Bay Area's political clout is such that the state wants - to the delight of valley developers - the world's agricultural mecca to become one big house farm. The vision of the valley seems to be as a place where folks can sleep for a few hours before returning to their higher-paying jobs over the hill, one person per car.

Clearly, there's a do-as-we-say-and-not-as-we-do thing going on there, and because the Bay Area has the numbers, the money and the lawyers, it usually wins.

Even our one notable "victory" came from a falsehood, said Jerry Martin of the state's [air](#) resources board.

In 2002, a bill by then-Assemblyman Cardoza became law requiring Bay Area motorists to join the \$40-a-pop, get-your-vehicle-smogged party. The legislation was based on 1990 study that showed air pollution in Modesto spiked 27 percent for one hour of a 24-hour period, Martin said. Somehow, he said, that morphed into the misconception that 25 percent of the valley's smog - all the time - blows over from the Bay Area.

"It's a political issue, not a smog issue," Martin said. "It's never been duplicated since that one time. You folks create the lion's share of your smog."

The legislation played only a small role toward air quality improvements over the past few years, he said.

The real battleground is, and always will be, water. An appellate judge recently told CalFed, which controls water from the bay and delta, to rethink its plan because it didn't consider decreasing the amount of water that could be shipped to Southern California.

With San Francisco jockeying for the additional water, and south valley farmers selling some of their allotments to Southern California, we're always going to be the red rag in the middle of the tug-of-war rope.

The valley's political clout reigned strongest when politicians such as Tony Coelho and Gary Condit were in office during times of Democrat control.

Now, the Republicans control Washington, with Democrat Cardoza representing much of the valley.

And the Democrats running the state Legislature aren't rushing to our aid with Republicans Jeff Denham and Chuck Poochigian representing the valley in the Senate and Republicans Dave Cogdill and Greg Aghazarian in the Assembly.

Consequently, the Bay Area has the population, representation and money to get the best of all worlds: All the cultural advantages of the big city, the best water that turn-of-the-century back-room dealing could buy and the opportunity to argue with itself about our landscape.

[Modesto Bee, visiting opinion columnist, Tues., Oct. 18, 2005](#)

More fuel-efficient autos are in our best interest

By U.S. Representative, Dennis Cardoza, 18th Congressional District

Since the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s, Americans have been keenly aware of the need to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil. The supply disruptions and price spikes caused by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina highlight just how vulnerable our domestic oil supplies are.

In addition, America's addiction to foreign oil is threatening our national security. The leading exporters of oil in the Middle East -- Saudi Arabia and Iran -- are hotbeds of Islamic radicalism and anti-American hatred. The sad truth is that our addiction to oil means Americans are funding both sides of the war on terrorism.

To address this growing challenge, our nation needs a comprehensive energy strategy that combines responsible exploration with investment in new technologies, such as fuel cells, solar, wind and biomass. Innovation and technological developments offer the promise of energy independence. In the immediate term, the best way to reduce America's dependence on oil is to raise federal fuel economy standards for cars and trucks, which account for almost half of U.S. oil consumption.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, technologies exist that allow cars and trucks to go much farther on a gallon of gasoline without sacrificing vehicle performance or safety. The NAS found that automakers could achieve higher fuel economy at relatively low cost by designing more energy-efficient and aerodynamic vehicles. And because the NAS report didn't even consider the newest technologies coming on line, such as hybrids and clean diesel engines, the potential for increasing fuel economy is even greater.

The savings to consumers would be enormous. Buyers of large sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks would save \$2,000 in fuel costs over the life of the vehicle, even after paying the additional costs of the new technologies. Families buying minivans would save more than \$1,000. And these savings were calculated assuming gasoline cost \$2 per gallon. At today's prices, the savings would be even greater.

The time to act is now. That's why I've co-sponsored legislation that will raise the Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards from today's average of 25 miles per gallon to 33 mpg by 2015. This bill would reduce the nation's oil needs by 2.6 million barrels a day by 2025.

Increased energy efficiency will decrease U.S. reliance on imported oil; reduce greenhouse gas emissions; improve our air quality; slow the depletion of fossil fuels; and ease the transition to new and innovative energy technologies such as fuel cells.

If this is such a good idea, why hasn't Congress acted? The simple answer is that many lack the political will to take on the powerful auto industry, which claims that it is impossible or too expensive to raise fuel efficiency standards. This is the same argument that was made in the 1960s, when seat belts were required, and again in the 1970s, when catalytic converters were first mandated.

The truth is, the technology now exists to insist that higher fuel efficiency standards are met. With these advancements in technology, the U.S. should be leading the way rather than lagging behind the rest of the developed world.

Earlier this month, the House of Representatives voted on a second consecutive energy bill that fails to address fuel efficiency standards. This comprehensive bill included a giant giveaway for big oil, including subsidies, tax breaks and weakened environmental standards, but no increase in fuel economy standards.

Instead of setting a course for energy independence, Congress and the White House have punted. At this critical juncture in our history, America should be leading the world to smarter energy strategies, not stubbornly clinging to the past. Raising the fuel economy standards is a long-overdue first step in the right direction.

[Published in the Op-Ed section of the Madera Tribune \(not clearly attributed to any author or as an editorial\), Oct. 15, 2005](#)

Heating with wood no energy cure-all

It turns out the increasing prices of heating oil and natural gas have people once again looking at wood as fuel for heating their houses, but if people think heating with wood will solve their heating-cost problems, they should think again.

Many places, such as the Valley, no longer allow heating with wood stoves or fireplaces if a gas or electrical device is available. That's because wood-burning stoves contribute to air pollution, and we have enough of that.

The price of wood has gone up to where it costs more than oil or gas on a BTU basis, unless you happen to own your own forest. At \$250 a cord, wood can't beat natural gas cost-wise. Unless you cut your own wood - cutting up almond trimmings, for example - you might as well stay with gas.

When you cut your own wood, it is said, you are twice warmed. First, when you cut the wood you stay warm by working up a good sweat. Then, when you burn the wood, you are warmed again. You might also be warmed a third time when cleaning your wood stove or fireplace after the fire has gone out.

My experience with heating with wood was almost all negative.

The stoves aren't necessarily a bargain, especially if you buy one that has some style and doesn't look like an old oil drum. Then, you have to have it installed, which often means your hearth and/or chimney have to be modified. Then you have to have your chimney cleaned. Then you are always carrying wood and ashes, and getting soot all over everything.

The ambiance of wood burning in fireplaces or stoves is wonderful. But it won't save you money.