

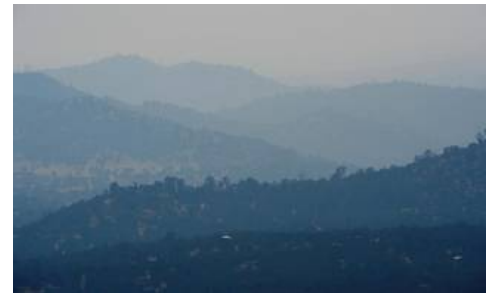
Oliver L. Baines III, Buddy Mendes and J. Steven Worthley: Revision to Clean Air Act is good for Valley air and business

By Oliver L. Baines III, Buddy Mendes and J. Steven Worthley

The Federal Clean Air Act, signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1970 and last amended by Congress in 1990 under President George H. Bush, has served the nation well.

However, over the last 25 years, important lessons have been learned from implementing the law, and it is clear now that a number of well-intentioned provisions in the act are leading to unintended consequences.

Levels of ozone and soot typically are high during the summer in the San Joaquin Valley, especially when there are wildfires in the Sierra. This photo was taken July 31, 2013, during the Apen fire. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA Fresno Bee File Photo



The antiquated provisions of the Clean Air Act are creating confusion, and a lack of updated congressional directive has rendered courts and non-elected government bureaucrats as policy makers. We urge Congress and the president to take bipartisan action to modernize the act.

Failure to correct the structural deficiencies in the act will lead to economic devastation for San Joaquin Valley residents and businesses without commensurate benefit in improving the region's air quality.

We support and want to retain the core elements in the act that serve to protect public health through the establishment and pursuit of science-based ambient air quality standards.

Over the years, residents and businesses have made significant investments and sacrifices in an effort to reduce air pollution and improve public health throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

With an investment of over \$40 billion, air pollution from San Joaquin Valley businesses has been reduced by over 80 percent. The pollution released by industrial facilities, agricultural operations, cars and trucks is at a historical low, for levels of all pollutants. San Joaquin Valley residents' exposure to high smog levels has been reduced by over 90 percent.

But the new standards established under the act approach the background pollution concentrations in many regions throughout the nation, including the San Joaquin Valley. As currently written, the act does not provide for consideration of technological achievability and economic feasibility in establishing deadlines for attaining the associated federal mandates.

When enacting the last amendment to the act over 25 years ago, Congress did not contemplate the reality that we face. Even after reducing pollution levels by over 80 percent, meeting the standards cannot be done under the formula-based deadlines prescribed in the act. This sets up regions such as the San Joaquin Valley for failure leading to costly sanctions and severe economic hardship.

The 2015 Federal Clean Air Act Modernization Proposal presented to Congress by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will preserve the federal government's ability to routinely reevaluate and set health protective air quality goals based on sound science while avoiding current duplicative requirements and confusion.

The proposed changes would require strategies that lead to the most expeditious air quality improvement while considering technological and economic feasibility. In addition, regions such as the San Joaquin Valley would be able to focus efforts on meeting new air quality goals in the most expeditious fashion through deployment of scarce resources in a manner that provides the utmost benefit to public health.

The changes proposed by the district will provide necessary economic and regulatory certainty while retaining public health safeguards. As logical as this approach is, enacting change in the current political climate in Washington, D.C., will not be easy. We ask all San Joaquin Valley residents, businesses and policymakers to join us in our efforts to bring about these commonsense changes to the Clean Air Act.

See details at www.valleyair.org/2015-Clean-Air-Act-Modernization-Proposal.pdf.

Fresno City Council Member Oliver L. Baines III, Fresno County Supervisor Buddy Mendes and Tulare County Supervisor J. Steven Worthley are board members of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. This commentary additionally was authored by Madera Council Member Sally J. Bomprezzi and Madera County Supervisor Tom Wheeler. They are also members of the air board.