

Something in the Air

POLLUTION
LEVELS MAY
REQUIRE
STRINGENT
CONTROLS

by David Klein and Mary Bryant



Ken McGrath

Heavy traffic is a common sight on Highway 1. Under a new smog check program, cars must pass inspection every two years.

We may not have the smog thickened air of Los Angeles, or the brownish sky that often hovers over the Santa Clara Valley, but Monterey Bay isn't exactly

the clean air capital of the world. The "we live by the ocean and the breezes keep our air clean" stance probably isn't going to work forever; many southern California

cities are built on the coast. Nobody down there is saying the ocean breezes keep the air clean.

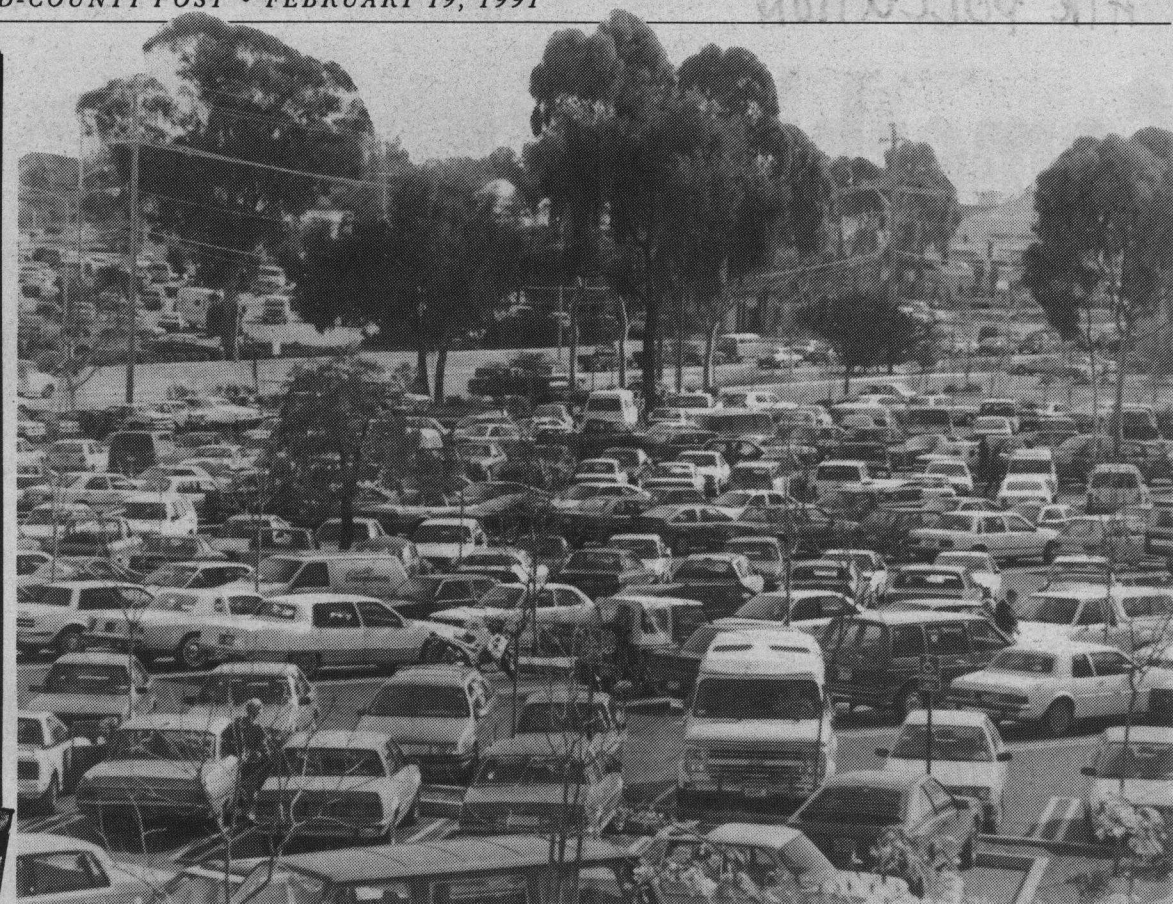
Granted we don't have, nor will we be likely to con-

struct, the factories and industry that account for many problems in major cities throughout the nation. But we do have cars. And, agricultural operations also con-

tribute their share to air pollution.

With this in mind and as a result of publicity surrounding recent public hearings on the

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Ken McGrath

Would retail parking lots be less crowded if the spaces were metered?

AIR

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issues, two questions have been circulating around town these days. How bad is the air pollution in the Monterey Bay area, and what should be done to clean it up?

What Causes Air Pollution?

Almost anything can cause air pollution. Cars, gasoline fumes, barbecues, pesticides, motors on anything from boats to refrigerators, and even graveyards. But what contributes the most?

In this area cars are the big culprit. Vehicles are responsible for 50 percent of the air pollution in urban areas, and 36 percent of all reactive organic gas (ROG) emissions. Pesticide use accounts for 28 percent, and solvents contribute 18 percent.

One of the reasons cars make up such a big proportion is that we don't run them 'right.' Idling the motor in heavy traffic, at traffic lights or in parking lots makes for poor engine performance and more emissions. Neglecting or tampering with emission control devices also creates problems.

Air pollution is also made up of different elements. None are good, but some are worse. Some you can see and some you can't even smell.

Ozone is a major contributor to smog and is commonly measured to determine safety levels in an air basin. Besides being a health hazard, ozone does not dissipate, unlike other types of pollutants. Janet Brennan, an air quality planner for the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, said

that standards for ozone are violated "five or six times a year" in this area.

But ozone is not the only concern. Six pollutants are monitored under the state's Clean Air Act. They include carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, particulates, sulfates / lead, and ozone.

Jerry Martin, of the Air Resources Board (ARB), said that next to ozone, particulates present the most serious dilemma in the state, including the Monterey Bay area. Particulates are also called PM-10s, which refers to their size — 10 microns in diameter. In comparison a human hair ranges from 50 to 100 microns in diameter.

These small pollution 'specs' can slip through our natural filtering processes and embed in our lungs, and can weaken our immune system.

How Bad Is It and Where Does It Come From?

This area's level of pollution is certainly not what you'd find in major urban settings. In the north central coast air basin in 1987, when the state standard for ozone was .10 parts per million, there were seven violations. In 1989, when the standard was lowered to .09, there were four violations, the highest a .13 reading in Carmel, which was also the only time the less stringent federal standard of .12 was violated.

Some people claim that the air pollution here is being transported in from the Bay Area. But that may be provincialism showing its face. Brennan said that naturally the air

basins are not closed systems and that "although some pollution may be transported in, we generate enough of our own and some is transported out."

Who Cares and What Do We Have To Do?

With very few people willing to give-up the convenience of driving their cars, the situation might have to get much worse before anyone would support many changes. However, this kind of thinking has gotten some of the state's metropolitan areas into a deadly predicament.

Many people die each year because of exposure to air pollution and, as a result, the current legislation is written to strictly enforce previously ignored standards. Accordingly, even if we don't care, we really don't have a choice.

The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (air district) is a tri-county regulatory agency overseeing Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. The air district shares responsibility with the state's Air Resources Board to ensure that all state and federal ambient air quality standards are achieved and maintained within our area, by implementing the "best available control technology." In other words, the air district makes sure we do everything we can do, and if we can't find ways to clean-up emissions, then we have to consider stopping them at the source.

Currently, our district is not meeting air quality standards as outlined by the California Clean Air Act of 1989. The pollution level is considered moderate, which means state

standards should be met by 1994, with a reduction of five percent of the emissions per year.

"Our focus is to achieve the standards as quickly as possible so that we don't fall into the next degree of severity. If we don't meet the standards by 1994, we automatically become a serious area," Brennan said.

Any area considered serious, such as Los Angeles, is not expected to meet state standards until 1997, and imposed measures will be much more onerous. Things like outdoor barbecues could be a thing of the past if that was to occur.

"Los Angeles must show an average vehicle occupancy of 1.5 overall, which means they must do a tremendous amount of car pooling, transit use, and telecommuting [working at home by modem]. Their measures are much more stringent than we show in our plan," said Greg Koert, associate planner for the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG).

What's the Plan?

The recent technical report prepared by AMBAG addressing possible transportation control measures (TCMs) that would help reduce air pollution has been received with outcries of protest.

Even though it is AMBAG that has held the public hearings and prepared the report, the agency is merely a contractor completing a study on ways to reduce emissions from vehicles for the air district.

The air district will consider proposals from AMBAG will be considered along with about "40 other proposed controls over industrial and other stationary sources of emissions" said Brennan.

AMBAG's proposed TCMs concerning parking management aroused the most opposition in this area. According to the report, this measure "would raise parking fees or reduce parking in downtown areas, at major commercial complexes and shopping centers, at tourist attractions, and for all new commercial and industrial projects."

At a recent County Board of Supervisors meeting, residents attacked many of these measures — such as a fee for parking at shopping centers. In addition to discouraging shoppers from getting to retail stores by car as AMBAG proposes, some cities are concerned they might not get there at all. Scotts Valley city's council went as far as proposing their own clean air plan to replace AMBAG's.

Some of the measures aren't as controversial. The reports also suggest such ideas as: measures requiring businesses with 100 or more employees to institute car pooling programs; improving commuter transit service (buses and over-the-hill service) and tourist shuttles; and implementing a Trip Reduction Ordinance for schools so no more than 50 percent of students are driving alone.

"We've never tried to accomplish a goal this ambitious," Koert said. "There is a lot of reduction per day [two tons] as opposed to the smaller amounts claimed in other plans we've completed over the past years. And in this case you must implement everything you say you will do."

The final decision on the parking management program was made at AMBAG's February 13th Board of Directors meeting (see accompanying story).

The Future

In some ways the future is already here. Beginning this year, cars must now be smog checked on a biennial basis, rather than only when they are sold. The checks will be made using a new computerized monitoring system that is designed to put a damper on the spirits of those people interested in defrauding the state by faking or forging the result. Each computer throughout the state is connected to Sacramento, where spot checks are made on every dealer.

And although diesel powered vehicles are now exempt, Mary Ann Nuberry, of the Bureau of Automotive repair, said it is only a matter of time before sufficient technology will permit proper monitoring of those vehicles as well.

Also beginning January 1, 1992, Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito Counties will begin a vapor recovery program. Some gas stations already use it—those rubbery attachments at the end of fuel hoses that make pumping gas a bit more of a chore.

Martin, of the ARB, said this program is dollar for dollar one of the most cost effective and efficient ways of reducing hydrocarbons (pollutants) in the air.

Other measures are sure to follow once the air district forwards a final plan to the ARB. Some of AMBAG's proposals are bound to be included. And since no one seems ready to junk their cars and start walking or taking the bus, everyone should prepare for some type of change in their driving habits in the future. □

POLLUTION CONTROL MEASURES APPROVED

by David Klein

The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) approved a plan that would reduce reactive organic gas (ROG) emissions from vehicles by an average of 1.64 tons per day by 1994.

AMBAG's hotly debated Transportation Control Measure technical report had originally called for reductions of two tons per day to meet state air quality standards that were set in 1989. The lower than expected reduction rate is due to several changes in the proposed measures.

The most controversial measure, parking management, which called for metered parking at retail shopping outlets, was deleted from the proposal.

Excessive costs for installing and enforcing meters, and large public opposition to the measure, were reasons for the deletions, said Greg Koert, of AMBAG.

Another change included deleting the Trip Reduction Ordinance for companies with over 100 employees, a measure which called for employers to reduce to 60 percent the number of its employees that drive alone to work. A similar proposal for schools was deleted.

Instead, AMBAG proposed a region-wide network of Transportation Management Associations, which would be organizations of all employers in a geographic area working together to reduce the number of driving trips. These TMA's will be implemented and evaluated for effectiveness before measures are imposed specifically on larger companies or schools.

AMBAG's report will be forwarded to the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, which will consider these measures along with many others to be levied against standing sources of ROG emissions. All measures taken together must reduce emissions enough to meet the state standards of .09 parts per million by 1994.

Janet Brennan, of the air district, said the state standards are determined by health hazards. Any pollution above .09 can be harmful. □