

Importance Of Clean Air

Members of the California State Senate gave the automobile industry a rather distinct message this past week when they approved a bill which would outlaw the sale of new internal combustion automobiles in the state after January 1, 1975.

We certainly hope the industry got the message.

It's somewhat doubtful if the Assembly will pass the Petris bill in the waning days of the 1969 session, but there should be no doubt about the fact that the legislature was again serving notice that Californians demand clean air.

They are sick and tired of smog.

If it takes a revolutionary approach like the banning of internal combustion engines to get the automobile industry working harder to curb pollutants, then we agree with the senators.

Only recently in a report to the State Air Resources Board, Chairman A. J. Haagen-Smit said the industry's program to reduce emissions of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide is a success, but that emissions of the oxides of nitrogen, a principal component of photochemical smog, is increasing.

Haagen-Smit said the average emission of nitrogen oxides has risen 50 per cent since 1960. He added:

"It is obvious that in controlling hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide the automobile manufacturers have given little

attention to oxides of nitrogen. Rather, they have waited until they were forced by law to do something."

When the Senate approved the Petris bill by a vote of 26 to 5, Petris said it "will be a tremendous incentive to the industry to purify its current engines or come up with an alternative."

Of course, this is just what the Senate intended to do: make the industry give more attention to improving control devices to reduce or eliminate the emission of pollutants. It isn't very likely that an alternative to the internal combustion engine is going to be mass-developed within the next five years.

It isn't good enough that we manage to reduce the pollutants from motor vehicles slightly in California for the ever-increasing number of vehicles defeat such a project from serving the purpose.

For example, since 1960 the state has gained nearly 5 million vehicles, an increase of more than 50 per cent.

It's pretty obvious that unless we make drastic changes in automotive engines we face an almost impossible challenge to improve the air quality.

Here in the Monterey Bay Area we have been blessed by relatively clean air. The establishment of the Joint Monterey-Santa Cruz County Unified Air Pollution Control district gives us an agency to protect the vital bay area air shed.

However, even though we may be able

to make definite improvements in industrial pollutants, we are not going to assure the purity of our air unless we can do something about the motor vehicle problem.

Naturally, the number of automobiles and trucks in the county isn't a disastrous factor today, but here, too, the registration increase is growing at a much faster rate than our population growth.

All you have to do is to get caught in miserable traffic congestion to get an idea of what the automotive pollutant problem can be. It doesn't take a bus or a diesel truck to make you realize that the motor vehicle pollution problem can be dangerous.

In our metropolitan areas the problem is much more severe because of the extraordinary amount of vehicular traffic. Nevertheless, it also is obvious that we can ill afford to let the present trend continue.

The basic responsibility must lie with the automotive industry as only the manufacturers can really reduce the problem. It probably isn't possible to make an engine which won't provide some sort of pollution, but the issue of drastically lowering the amount of pollution is vital to all of us.

Automobile travel is essential to our society, so we must successfully attack the pollution issue.