

72% say smog is a major problem

Poll also shows
52% back cleanup
regardless of cost

By Alina Tugend

The Register

O.C. Register - 12-5-89

As he pumped gas into his pickup Monday afternoon, Steve Andersen observed that smog seemed to be getting worse in Orange County and said he wants to do his part to clean it up.

"People notice smog, but they don't want to do a whole lot about it," said Andersen, 24, a construction worker from Orange. "They want to leave it up to someone else."

But when asked if he would voluntarily give up his gas-powered lawn mower, Andersen hesitated. "I could if I had to," he said. "I wouldn't want to. It's hard to push around those hand ones."

Andersen's ambivalence typifies that of Orange County residents in the quality-of-life survey. Most view smog as a major problem; few are willing to change their lifestyles to reduce it.

In the 1989 Orange County Annual Survey conducted by the University of California, Irvine, 72 percent of the 1,085 residents questioned agreed that air pollution is a big problem in Southern California, and 52 percent support cleaning up the air at any cost.

But only 36 percent favor a ban on gas-powered lawn mowers and only 39 percent think imposing parking fees is a good idea. Both proposals are part of the South Coast Air Quality Management District's sweeping 20-year regional anti-smog plan.

And although more than half — 62 percent — prefer a regional agency to a county agency for



Elaine Isaacson/The Register

A car's emissions are tested at a Smog Check station at a Shell gas station on Edinger Avenue in Santa Ana.

managing air-quality issues, 58 percent of those surveyed said they were not at all familiar with the district's controversial plan to clean up smog in Los Angeles basin.

"I think as a general reaction, people like to do what they like to do in the way they like to do it," said Henry Wedaa, an air-quality board member and mayor of Yorba Linda.

Wedaa added that he was disappointed by the apparent lack of public awareness of the smog plan.

Dorothy Roberts, 73, a crosswalk guard in Santa Ana, said she is one of those who know nothing about the plan.

"If I heard about it, I haven't paid any attention," she said. And although she supported the concept of reducing air pollution, she said, "I don't know how a person could change their life."

This year marks the first time specific questions about air pollution were put to Orange County residents as part of the survey. Mark Baldassare, the UCI social-ecology

professor who conducted the survey, said they were included because environmental issues are gaining increased attention locally and worldwide.

"(Soviet President Mikhail) Gorbachev and (President) Bush were busy talking about it at the (Malta) summit meetings," Baldassare said. "We had a big oil spill in Alaska. We have continuing concerns about burning forests in the Amazon. We have concerns about the hole in the ozone layer above Antarctica. And close to home, we have this continuing problem of air pollution."

The survey did find that more than 70 percent of the people questioned strongly favor or somewhat favor restrictions that would affect businesses, such as encouraging ride-sharing, requiring a balance of jobs to housing and banning commercial use of chlorofluorocarbons.

Higher-income groups were more opposed to parking fees and clean-fuel requirements, while lower-income groups more strongly opposed banning aerosol sprays and encouraging ride-sharing, the survey found.

And in a county that traditionally fears perceived controls on economic growth, only 17 percent believe the efforts to improve air quality will hurt the Orange County economy.

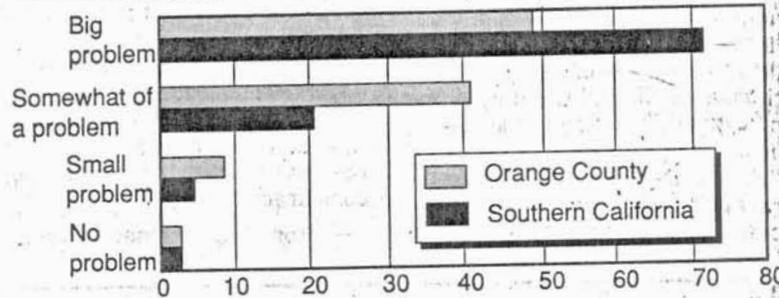
O. Clifton Taylor, acting director of the Statewide Air Pollution Research Center at UC Riverside, said he is not surprised by the findings.

"If you just ask people what they'd be willing to give up in life to have cleaner air, they don't usually respond favorably," he noted. "But they will respond if (a regulation) is put into action."

Staff writer Marilyn Kalfus contributed to this report.

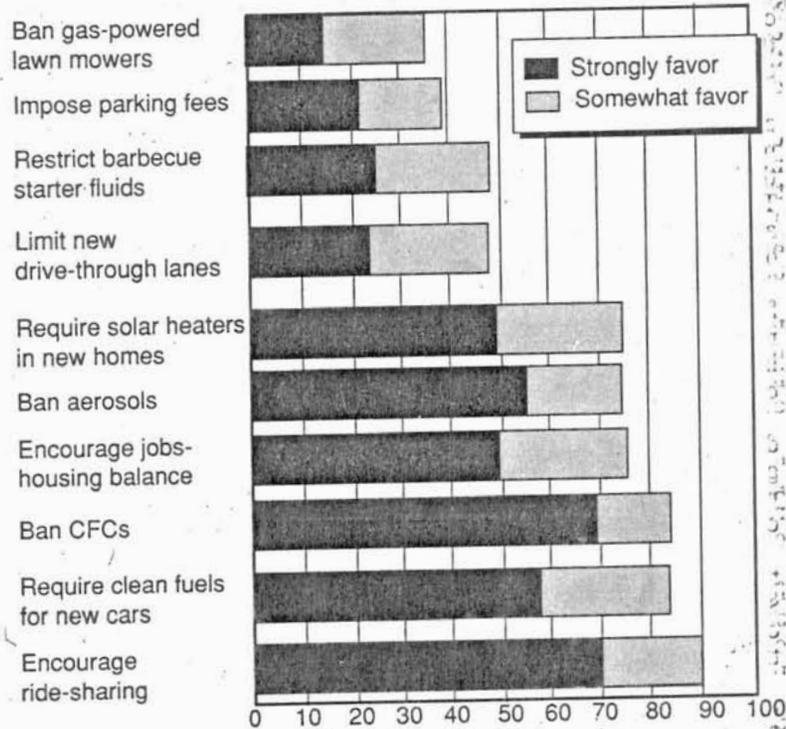
Something in the air

Almost half of Orange County residents believe air pollution is a big problem in Orange County; more think it's a major problem in Southern California.



It's not my problem

Residents don't want to change their suburban lifestyles, including losing backyard barbecues and gasoline-powered lawn mowers, but would support measures affecting business, such as ride-sharing.



Source: 1989 Orange County Annual Survey, UCI