

Residents make green a priority

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Newspaper Editorial

If the just released Inland Empire Annual Survey is any indication, residents of San Bernardino and Riverside counties are highly committed to protecting and improving the region's environment and to reducing its traffic congestion. The two are linked, of course, in that reducing traffic congestion would improve air quality, which is the most obvious environmental challenge in the Inland Empire.

The survey, which is conducted each year by researchers at Cal State San Bernardino, found that only one in four San Bernardino County respondents thought that "the government is doing enough to improve air quality." Two-thirds categorically supported fees on goods moved through the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports to help pay for less-polluting cargo trucks and trains.

Presented a lit of ways to reduce pollution from trucks and trains, 78 percent favored more stringent regulations on emissions; 60 percent favored taxes on diesel fuel to pay for air-quality improvements; 53 percent said funding should come from gasoline taxes and 51 percent said from sales taxes.

And 79 percent were willing to have tougher air pollution standards imposed on new cars, light trucks and SUVs, even if the standards made it more costly to purchase their next car.

Now this survey was conducted late in 2007, and the economic climate has worsened considerably since then. So, as the researchers admit, people might be less willing to pay extra for environmental protection right now than they were seven months ago. Still the depth of support for air-quality improvements in the survey is impressive.

Similarly, respondents expressed a willingness to take action and bear expense to improve the environment in answers to survey questions from the Green Valley Initiative, a two-county coalition of public- and private-sector leaders promoting sustainable development.

Fifty-three percent of San Bernardino county respondents said protection of the environment should be given priority over economic growth, while 29 percent said the opposite; 16 percent said they are equally important. Again, rough economic times could shift the balance a bit.

Forty-one percent of Inland Empire respondents "strongly agree" and 54 percent "agree" that it is "important for regional leaders to balance economic development with quality-of-life." And 81 percent agreed or strongly agreed that "government should take a role in providing incentives for companies to adopt environmentally-friendly technology."

Ninety-eight percent said they do something to protect the environment, led by recycling, conserving water and turning off lights and appliances when not in use. Only 10 percent said they avoid driving a car alone, but that figure should be rising along with the price of gas.

Sometimes people talk a better game than they play. Still, these results show Inland Empire residents face a premium on the environment and quality-of-life issues that should be heeded by our elected leaders.

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