

Ferdie J. Deering

AUG. 10 1978

# Air We Breathe Isn't Free Anymore

**F**REE as the air we breathe once represented the ultimate in liberty. We never thought air would become an item of expense on our lists of necessities and luxuries, but it has.

We now pay for the air we breathe, both in taxes and cost of purchases. Nobody has invented an air meter for us to wear, but we are "paying through the nose" to keep our inhalations pure.

The price tag became visible when Congress passed the Clean Air Act of 1970 and created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate any suspected contaminator.

The annual cost of EPA has risen to around \$5.5 billion, but of course not all of that is spent to purify the air. And administrative costs of EPA really are only the beginning of the price we pay to keep the air we breathe pure by federal standards.

Government-mandated features on automobiles, including pollution controls, add hundreds of dollars to the retail prices of all new vehicles

sold. Used car prices go up accordingly.

Air quality officials have estimated that at least one Oklahoma car in three has faulty pollution control devices or is not properly tuned. If adjusted to meet specifications, somebody will have to pay the cost so the air may be cleaner.

This summer, a 20 percent reduction in refinery and chemical plant output to control smog in the Los Angeles area is estimated to cost businesses up to \$5 million a day.

True, we don't live in the Los Angeles area, but these extra costs ultimately are paid by consumers. We buy fruits and vegetables from that region, and part of the cost may be paid by us.

Many chemicals useful in control of plant and livestock insect pests and diseases have been banned in the interest of pure air. We pay the cost of changing to less effective or more expensive substitutes whenever we buy a sack of groceries.

EPA is compelling utility companies to install scrubbers, devices

which spray water and chemicals into gas streams to remove pollutants. A current report says 31 utility scrubbers are in operation and 100 more are on the way.

These scrubbers cost around \$20 million each and the cost will show up in utility bills, the price of pure, free air.

In spite of our almost continually blowing winds, EPA has warned Oklahomans to "show progress" in controlling air pollution or face a cutoff of federal funds. Oklahomans will gripe but spend whatever it costs to avoid such an economic disaster.

Free air and water at gasoline stations may be on the way out. An Indian firm is marketing a gadget to make customers pay 25 cents for use of an air hose to pump up a tire.

A town on Long Island, N.Y., voted to outlaw the devices, but this uprising in defense of free air isn't likely to stop the trend. We are taxed and charged for the "pure air" we breathe and indications are that inflation will make us pay even more.