pointed out last week, it will at least compel people to face the consequences of cleaning up Los Angeles air. In effect, the EPA has said to residents in Southern California that this is the cost of bringing air quality to a level at which it no longer presents a hazard to health, and the cost must now be weighed against the benefits.

If the costs are considered unacceptable, the most likely recourse would be to amend the Clean Air Act to give Southern California more time to comply. That would be the responsibility of Congress, and it would open the floodgates to special pleading from other cities having a tough time meeting the standards.

It can be argued, however, that the Los Angeles basin is a special case. For one thing, it is the unfortunate possessor of a sunny climate and for another it is flanked on three sides by mountains—two factors which combine to cause the infamous Los Angeles smog. What happens is that there are frequent temperature inversions over the basin in the summer, and the air hangs over the city, trapped in by the mountains. The six million cars in the basin continue pouring exhaust gases into the stagnant air, and in the presence of sunlight, hydrocarbons react with oxides of nitrogen to form the brown smog of photochemical oxidants which makes the surrounding mountains disappear in the afternoon.

The air quality standards imposed by the Clean Air Act would restrict the concentration of photochemical oxidants to 0.08 parts per million, but in 1970 that standard was exceeded in the Los Angeles area on more than 250 days. And the growth of the automobile population in the area—between 3 and 4 per cent a year—is continuing to exacerbate the problem.

In most areas in the United States, the air quality standards can be met by placing emission controls on stationary sources of pollution and by the stringent emission standards required for cars by 1975. But it soon became clear that in Los Angeles such measures would hardly make a dent in the air pollution problem and that some form of transportation controls would have to be imposed. The EPA reckons that by 1977, even with controls on stationary sources and automobile exhausts, some 691 tons of reactive hydrocarbons would be poured into the atmosphere each day; to achieve the national standard of 0.08 parts per million of photochemical oxidants, the agency calculates that hydrocarbon emissions must be reduced to 161 tons a day.

As for the petrol rationing proposal, the EPA has not spelled out how it should be implemented, but suggests either that motorists should be given coupons or that production should be

rationed. In addition, catalytic converters must be fitted to the exhaust systems of all cars made since 1965, to convert carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons into carbon dioxide and water, devices must be attached to prevent the escape of fumes from the petrol tank and carburettor, and all cars and lorries in fleets of ten or more must be converted to run on low polluting fuels such as natural gas.

What happens next? It seems that two avenues are open if it is decided that the EPA's scheme would result in unacceptable social and economic dislocation. Either the EPA can propose a less drastic scheme, on the basis of submissions to the public hearing, which would only go part of the way towards meeting the standards, or Congress can amend the Clean Air Act to provide an exception for Southern California. Both options would, however, have serious implications for the future of the Act. In the meantime, the state of California, whose original plan for meeting the standards was rejected by the EPA, has until February 15 to draw up a revised plan of its own. Clearly, however, it will be no more successful in devising an acceptable plan than the EPA.

If the EPA decides to relax its scheme

without waiting for Congress to amend the Clean Air Act it would break the law and be liable to a court action. In that case, its lawyers would probably argue that the act is unenforceable in the specific situation in Los Angeles, and if such a plea were successful, the agency could be given some leeway by the courts. The EPA would, however, be skating on thin legal ice. The other alternative—Congressional action to provide relief for Southern California—would probably be instigated by California's two senators, John Tunney and Alan Cranston. Both have denounced the EPA's plan, and Tunney has suggested that more attention should be paid to mass transportation as a means of reducing automobile traffic in Los Angeles. But so far neither has shown any indication of offering an amendment to the Clean Air Act.

Whichever alternative is adopted, Ruckelshaus can be certain that he will be assailed by representatives from other cities pleading for special treatment as well. Twenty-seven other areas in the United States must impose some type of transportation controls if they are to meet the standards imposed by the Clean Air Act, and although their controls would be minor in comparison to the Los Angeles plan, they could

NUTRITION

What's in a Name?

by our Washington Correspondent

THE Food and Drug Administration has proposed sweeping changes in the labelling and promotion of food products in the United States. Described by Dr Charles C. Edwards, Commissioner of the FDA, as "the most significant change in food labelling since food labelling began", their purpose is chiefly to give consumers more extensive information about the nutritional value of the food they eat. The proposals have been greeted with mixed reactions from food manufacturers, some of whom have complained that they will increase the price of foods, and from consumer groups, some of which have suggested that the proposed regulations do not go far enough.

Companies which fortify their foods with nutrients, or which make advertising or labelling claims about nutritional value, will have to specify on the labels the number of calories and the quantity of protein, carbohydrates and fat in each serving. In addition, levels of vitamins and minerals must be specified in terms of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) rather than the minimum daily requirement. RDA levels have been established by the FDA largely on the basis of advice from the

National Academy of Sciences. They are higher than the minimum daily requirement levels, and should be less misleading.

Aware of the fact that many companies now list ingredients in the most inconspicuous manner possible, the FDA is also proposing that nutritional labelling should be standardized and placed in a particular location on the package.

The agency has also proposed that all products marketed as dietary supplements must contain between 50 and 150 per cent of the RDA for certain specific vitamins and minerals. If they contain less than 50 per cent of the RDA for these vitamins and minerals, they must be classified as foods, or if they contain more than 150 per cent, they must be marketed as drugs and meet stiff tests of effectiveness.

The regulations have taken ten years to draw up, and manufacturers have been given until December 31, 1974, to comply. The most severely affected companies will be those which are attempting to cash in on the present "health food" fad in the United States by making false or exaggerated claims about the nutritional value of their foods. No longer will they be able to claim that natural vitamins are more effective than synthetic vitamins, or that inadequate or insufficient diet is caused by the soil in which a food is grown.