

Key committee passes bill for tougher Bay Area smog tests

By JIM WASSERMAN Associated Press Writer

Bakersfield Californian

SACRAMENTO (AP) - A proposed crackdown on millions of Bay Area motorists, blamed for the wind-blown smog that spills into an already-polluted Central Valley, cleared a key committee Tuesday on its way to a Senate vote expected this month.

The Senate Transportation Committee voted 12-1 for a bill to force tougher, more costly Smog Check II tests on Bay Area car owners in hopes of curbing Central Valley air pollution by up to 10 percent.

The bill, AB2637, could cost Bay Area residents \$10 million to \$14 million a year, said Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch. It could also cost smog test businesses up to \$75 million for new equipment, according to Larry Armstrong, owner of Bay Area tuneup shops.

But valley legislators, representing one of America's fastest-growing, poorest and smoggiest regions, insist they can't clean up their own air if Bay Area smog keeps blowing in through the Carquinez Straits and Altamont Pass. A California Air Resources Board report has estimated that 27 percent of smog in the northern San Joaquin Valley comes from the Bay Area, compared to 11 percent in the middle and 8 percent in the southern valley. Meanwhile, the American Lung Association lists Sacramento, Merced, Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield among its 10 smoggiest American metro areas.

"The American Lung Association finds asthma rates skyrocketing all over the valley," said Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza, an Atwater Democrat and author of the bill, which passed the Assembly 61-6 in May.

The Bay Area received an exemption from the tougher smog test during a brief time when it complied with federal air quality standards. Cardoza, meanwhile, has gotten a green light for the bill so far after providing a critical vote last month for an Assembly bill that begins regulating carbon dioxide emissions from auto tailpipes in 2009.

Bay Area opponents to the bill say the valley's ever-worsening air pollution is largely self-inflicted, and accuse the region of not adequately regulating its own dust and open-air burning by farmers. The valley also accounts for some of California's largest increases in population growth and driving.

Numerous valley political and air pollution officials testified for the bill Tuesday, including Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, who said, despite occasional doubts about the effectiveness of Smog Check II, "If it's good, it ought to apply to everybody."

Smog Check II is a more extensive and tougher check than the traditional tailpipe probe and visual inspection. The newer test costs about \$10 extra and puts some cars on a treadmill to check for nitrogen dioxide, a key element of ozone formation.

The bill also exempts more cars statewide from the tougher smog test. Presently, cars less than four years old are exempt. The new law extends that exemption to cars less than six years old.

Panel OKs Bay Area smog checks

Some say tougher regulations will cut Central Valley smog, but others question the science behind air study.

By Lesli A. Maxwell

Bee Capitol Bureau

SACRAMENTO -- A Senate panel approved legislation Tuesday that Valley lawmakers hope will help solve air pollution woes.

The Senate Transportation Committee voted 12-1 to approve a measure that would require Bay Area motorists to adhere to the stricter vehicle emission standards every other urban area in the state follows. Valley air officials and politicians blame some of the region's air pollution on smog that drifts from the Bay Area into the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valley basins.

AB 2637 by Assembly Member Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, would require vehicle owners in the nine-county Bay Area to pay for the more expensive Smog Check II emissions test on cars and trucks that are more than six years old.

"If Smog Check II is good, it ought to apply to everybody," said Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, who voted for the bill.

The bill received support from four Bay Area lawmakers on the committee, despite their skepticism over how much smog actually migrates to the Central Valley.

It still must be approved by the Senate appropriations committee and the full Senate before going to Gov. Davis for consideration.

Cardoza introduced the bill last spring as a response to the San Joaquin Valley's escalating air pollution problem.

Valley politicians and air officials point to a study by the California Air Resources Board that showed 27% of the smog that hangs over Stockton, Modesto and Merced comes from the Bay Area on the worst summer days. The study concluded that 11% of Fresno's smog floats in from the Bay Area and in Bakersfield, the amount drops to 9%.

But even state air officials have cast doubts on that study, saying it was done on a few bad smog days in August more than a decade ago.

The San Joaquin Valley is one of the five dirtiest air basins in the nation and faces smog-reduction deadlines and stiff federal sanctions if it does not eliminate about 300 tons of smog-producing chemicals from the air.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is weighing whether to voluntarily move the Valley into the nation's worst-polluter category.

Smog bill advances in Capitol

Law would impose tougher Bay Area checks

By Audrey Cooper

Stockton Record Staff Writer

Legislation to require Bay Area vehicles to undergo more costly and tougher smog checks cleared a key Senate committee Tuesday, a sign that the bill is close to passing the Legislature.

However, Bay Area air-quality officials say new data indicate that imposing Smog Check II there could at times worsen air pollution in San Joaquin County, where pollution often exceeds federal health levels and has been blamed for increased cases of child asthma and cancer.

For several years, Central Valley politicians and air regulators have argued it is unfair that almost all California drivers must undergo Smog Check II while the Bay Area was exempted under state law. Up to 27 percent of smog in San Joaquin County is thought to come from the Bay Area.

The more elaborate smog checks required in all of California's major urban areas, including San Joaquin County, simulate driving conditions with treadmill-type machines. Smog Check II also orders some motorists to test-only smog stations. Those are designed to bypass unscrupulous mechanics who fake smog tests to avoid having to redo repairs.

Attempts in previous years to impose Smog Check II on Bay Area motorists were squashed by powerful Bay Area politicians. But now the bill has passed the Assembly and Tuesday was approved by the Senate Transportation Committee on a 12-1 vote with support from those same Bay Area politicians. Gov. Gray Davis has said he will sign the bill if it gets to his desk.

"This is huge. It's the first time we've ever got this far with this bill, and I think we're about 90 percent there," said Will Gonzales, a lobbyist for the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

"We got it, but they made us work for it today," he added.

That's because the bill's backers had to accept an amendment Tuesday that orders the state Air Resources Board to form a peer review team. That team of scientists would study new models that indicate Smog Check II in the Bay Area could increase pollution in parts of San Joaquin, Contra Costa, Solano and Santa Clara counties.

Smog is formed by two main emissions: nitrogen oxides, or NOx, and volatile organic compounds, VOC. The two gases mix in the sunlight to form unstable ozone molecules. Ground-level ozone is also called smog.

But when too many NOx emissions are in the air, they bump into ozone molecules and break the molecules apart. That temporarily reduces smog. But as the emissions float downwind, smog can re-form in other areas, explained Teresa Lee with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Modeling by researchers at the University of California, Riverside, Center for Environmental Research and Technology shows better smog checks could change where smog forms, decreasing it in some areas, such as near Tracy, but increasing smog in others, such as north Stockton.

Under the amendment accepted Tuesday, the state peer review team will determine if those UC Riverside models are accurate. If they are, then the state must recommend ways to reverse the damage.

Officials from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District say they don't know if the models will pass muster.

The models weren't designed to simulate such small emission decreases, Valley air regulator David Jones said.

"I have to say I was surprised by how much (smog) reduction it showed with just this one program. Usually, we model with many new programs," he said.

Jones added that Smog Check II will not solve the Valley's smog problems, and other Bay Area programs are needed to reduce migrating smog.

Tougher Bay Area Smog Check II bill advances

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, August 7, 2002

SACRAMENTO - A proposed crackdown on Bay Area motorists, blamed for some of the air pollution in the Central Valley, cleared a key hurdle Tuesday.

The Senate Transportation Committee voted 12-1 for a bill that would force tougher, more costly Smog Check II tests on Bay Area vehicle owners in hopes of cutting Central Valley air pollution by up to 10 percent.

The bill, AB2637, now goes to the Senate Appropriations Committee and, if approved, to the full Senate. If approved there, it will return to the Assembly for one more reading. If it passes, it will go to the governor.

The measure, introduced by Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, cleared the Assembly 61-6 in May.

State Sen. Dick Monteith, R-Modesto, one of 15 members of the Transportation Committee, did not attend Tuesday's two-hour hearing.

Jake Harless, a spokesman for Monteith, said the senator was unable to attend because of a "personal matter." Harless declined to elaborate, but he said, "We will have an opportunity to vote on the Senate floor."

Cardoza expressed frustration over Monteith's absence from the committee on Tuesday. "I am sort of incredulous of the fact that he didn't bother to show," he told the Merced Sun-Star Tuesday evening.

Cardoza and Monteith are running for the 18th Congressional District seat now held by Rep. Gary Condit.

Although the Transportation Committee approved the bill, it attached an amendment addressing concerns over a UC Riverside study that suggests air in the Bay Area would get worse as a result of the Smog Check II compliance.

Cardoza said officials with the California Air Resources Board testified that the study was incomplete.

The amendment calls for peer review of the study, and if it is determined that Bay Area air would get worse, mitigation measures would be required.

Cardoza said the amendment includes specific language stating "the mitigation can in no way affect air pollution transport" to the Valley.

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Concrete recycling plant blocked

By Justin Stoner

Visalia Times-Delta

You win some. You lose some.

On Monday, street paver Lee McClatchey got a win and a loss on the same night.

He had hoped the Visalia City Council would endorse his asphalt and concrete recycling business.

But the council turned him down 4-1 in a late-evening vote.

But earlier, the council awarded McClatchey a more than \$700,000 contract to repave streets throughout the city.

He said he appreciated the work but didn't consider it a consolation.

"People were saying 'If the city changed its industrial plan for me, it would have to change it for others,' " McClatchey said. "It put the council in a bad situation. They pretty much had to vote against me because of the pressure on them."

This was the second time McClatchey sought approval for the project.

He needed a conditional use permit to operate what is considered heavy industrial equipment in a light industrial zone.

He was turned down more than two years ago by the City Council after several surrounding businesses complained that his operation would be too noisy and dusty.

Mayor Jesus Gamboa and Councilman Don Landers previously voted against the project and didn't change their minds Monday.

Councilwoman Wendy Rudy also voted against the project, reversing her position in favor of the project as a planning commissioner in 1999.

Councilman Phil Cox, a former planning commissioner, cast the lone vote in favor of the project.

"There's a simple issue here: The property he's on is zoned for that type of use as long as you have a conditional use permit," Cox said Tuesday.

McClatchey said he's exploring the possibility of setting up the plant at the Tulare County Landfill along Road 80 north of Visalia. If that doesn't work out, he said he has several people interested in buying the equipment.

He said he decided against relocating the plant to land in the heavy industrial zone, where he could operate without special permission.

"It wouldn't matter," he said. "They would fight me there too."

The heavy recycling operation would have been on part of McClatchey's existing paving business site -- a landlocked parcel of land near Plaza Drive and Goshen Avenue with a driveway easement onto Plaza.

McClatchey's latest application called for the construction of a 12-foot wall along the east property line to cut down the effect of noise from the recycling operation.

The north property line was planted with redwood trees that are now 10-feet high and act as a buffer against dust and noise.

'Green' fuel fires up local firm

By ERIN WALDNER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian

Grease from fast-food restaurants can make the wheels on a bus go round and round.

Fuel derived from used vegetable oil or fat is called biodiesel, which can be used with any diesel engine. Advocates say it's better for the environment because it's made from renewable resources and it produces less air pollution.

And, when it burns, it smells like french fries.

That doesn't seem to be deterring interest in this "green" fuel.

The number of national fleets that use biodiesel commercially doubled this year to 200, according to the National Biodiesel Board in Missouri.

A Bakersfield company hopes to have a hand in the growing biodiesel industry.

Bryant Fuel Systems has formed an alliance with Las Vegas-based Biodiesel Industries Inc. to develop and test a prototype of the equipment that makes biodiesel.

"These are going to go all over the world," said Bryant spokesman Michael Nommensen.

The first unit will soon be shipped to a client in Australia.

Bryant Fuel Systems, which has been around for about 20 years, has traditionally manufactured fuel tanks at its Bakersfield factory.

Nommensen said the company wanted to diversify and, through its work in fuel tanks, came in contact with the president of Biodiesel Industries, Russell Teall.

Teall, recently in town, said he admired Bryant's fuel tanks and thought the company's factory was in a good location to build and transport biodiesel equipment.

The small units produce pure biodiesel in a chemical process that takes three to five hours.

The biodiesel is then mixed with regular diesel fuel. B20, as it's called, is 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent diesel.

Diesel engines can run on 100 percent biodiesel, but the fuel thickens in the winter. A biodiesel-diesel blend poses fewer cold weather problems.

Biodiesel Industries and Bryant Fuel Tanks collaborated on the design of this equipment. Teall said it's an improvement over what he's been using in Las Vegas, where around 1,000 school buses run on biodiesel fuel.

A patent for the design is pending.

Teall said other countries are interested in acquiring biodiesel equipment because they want to make a fuel that uses regional recycled materials and labor.

"We're moving products all over the world," said Teall, a Santa Barbara resident who once worked for the state attorney general's office in the environmental division.

Teall said four projects are on line following the Australian deal.

It costs \$300,000 to purchase one of the units, with another \$200,000 for site preparation, Teall said.

If the partnership between Biodiesel Industries and Bryant Fuel Systems is successful, the latter could hire more employees to manufacture the units, Nommensen said.

"Next year, we hope to produce six of these," he said.

The two companies believe biodiesel fuel could benefit the San Joaquin Valley because of its air pollution problem.

Nationally, the Bush administration just approved stiff penalties for the makers of diesel engines that do not reduce their emission pollutants by October.

The ozone-forming potential of biodiesel is nearly 50 percent less than regular diesel, according to the National Biodiesel Board.

Biodiesel is more expensive than regular diesel. It sells for \$1.50 to \$2.25 per gallon wholesale. Fuel taxes add 50 cents per gallon.

"As the market emerges, we can keep the price reasonable," Teall said.

News brief in the Bakersfield Californian 08-07-02

HOLLISTER, Calif. (AP) - The city has been cited for the foul odors emanating from its industrial sewage pond.

The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District gave the city a public nuisance violation notice for the stench, which has been bothering residents for days.

The city's utility manager has asked the City Council for \$100,000 to buy new devices called aerators that keep the smell down.

The aerators float on the sewage ponds, churning the water and adding oxygen to it. That keeps the odors at the bottom of the ponds from finding their way up into the air.

San Benito Foods has agreed to pay 80 percent of the cost of some new aerators because it uses the ponds during certain times of the year to dispose of waste from the tomato canning process.

Some new aerators should arrive in two weeks, but it could still be days after that before the smell is reduced.

Hollister has had previous problems with its sewage facilities. In May, 15 million gallons of treated sewage spilled into a dry riverbed after a levee broke. The city could still face fines for the spill.

The city has stopped issuing building permits until a new treatment plant is built.